

All EU Needs Is Love

Only Georgia's Charm Offensive, Not Pragmatic Geopolitics, Can Have the EU Head over Heels

Welcome to the grand romantic drama of Georgia and the European Union – a tale where Georgia and the EU are courting each other, not through the sparkle of riches or the promise of might, but with the timeless allure of love.

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hope, shared aspirations, values and visions for a future.

This engagement heralds a period of preparation and alignment as Georgia embarks on the path to full European integration, embracing reforms and values that resonate with the EU's foundational principles.

Why, one might ponder, did the EU swipe right for Georgia? What treasures does this gutsy nation bring to the high-stakes matchmaking table of the EU?

If you are looking for the usual suspects – a mammoth market, a hefty wallet, a bastion of defense, a crossroads of commerce or the size of the country – think again.



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With a population of 3.5 million, a GDP per capita of a humble USD 8,800 and a geopolitical ‘It’s complicated’ status, even Georgia’s most die-hard wingmen might stutter for a pitch. As for size, well, it does not matter.

In the grand chessboard of European politics, the savvy plays for EU enlargement have often echoed the power moves of ancient European nobility where the wooing was all about the size of the estate, the weight of the purse and the strength of the bloodline. Medieval courtships were a downright mercantile affair. Think less of hearts and flowers and more lands and towers.

But the winds of courtship have shifted, at least in Europe. In modern days, tying the knot is less about the size of the dowry and more about the butterflies in the belly – yes, we are talking about LOVE.

And is this notion of EU membership as a marital vow not quite apt? It is all about sharing the duvet of resources, the occasional squabble over which direction the family must steer but ultimately cuddling up in the shared bed of values and conjuring up dreams for future generations. It is true, parting ways is as messy as it gets – just whisper ‘Brexit’ for chills.

So, when one pops the question, “Why should the EU and Georgia be together?” – maybe it is time to ditch the abacus and the calculator. The real spark might just lie in the warmth of camaraderie, the clinking of democratic glasses and the slow dance of shared ideals – yes, LOVE.

As we wander through this semi-humorous but still pertinent narrative, we will not dare to nail down the definition of ‘love’ – that is a path many a brave soul from Camoes to Rustaveli has traversed with trembling hearts, and not entirely successfully.

Instead, we can still muse how to make the EU fall head over heels for Georgia. Maybe the magnetic pull Georgia must exert should not be in terms of corridors, security, economy and stability but values, democracy, human rights and identity.

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Georgia should not be looking to be the EU’s rebound or a marriage of convenience. But rather a full-blown, sweep-you-off-your-feet epic romance. The lifelong partnership must be based on the sweet taste of democracy, the whispered tender vows of human rights and the shared collective European values. As Georgia and the EU

tango in the grand ballroom of geopolitics, Georgia should not just present pragmatic, rational arguments but rather pen down the love sonnets about “together is where we belong.”

The Marriage of True Minds

In the grand dance hall of European integration, where every step and twirl counts, the European Union has laid out a dance card for Georgia, a series of steps and gestures in the form of nine conditionalities. These are not just motions to be performed; they are an intimate waltz of values, a duet of shared beliefs and mutual trust.

The EU desires Georgia to craft a mosaic of honesty, safeguarding its media landscape from the misleading harmonies of external meddling and anti-Western factions. This is a vow to cleanse the communication channels, guaranteeing that the only echoes drifting through are filled with genuine and pro-western echoes. Similarly, regarding disinformation and propaganda, in a partnership as intimate as that of the EU and Georgia, it is only natural to anticipate a harmonious dialogue free from accusations of ensnaring one’s ally into unwarranted conflicts, particularly with Russia.

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To harmonize with the EU, Georgia is prompted to fine-tune its foreign policies, reflecting the EU's diplomatic stance with other countries. It is about synchronizing foreign policy moves that embody a confluence of vision and reciprocal esteem. The EU's plea for Georgia to adopt a foreign policy that resonates with its own is a call for unity in perspective regarding the relations with neighbors, Russia, Ukraine, the observance of global human rights and the approach to other global and regional issues. Such an alignment transcends mere practicality; it is rooted in shared principles. Although Georgia may hold unique stances, especially concerning the non-recognition issues with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, when it concerns critiquing human rights practices in Russia, challenging authoritarian inclinations in surrounding regions or advocating for minority groups, the notion that practical concerns should overshadow values is untenable for the EU or a value-based marriage.

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In a dance, every participant must feel the rhythm. Georgia is asked to include all political parties and civil society in the choreography of legislation and domestic politics, especially those tunes that lead toward European integration. The prosaic name for this conditionality is depolarization. It is an invitation to a harmonious assembly where the diverse expressions of the populace contribute to the democratic pulse. The EU holds the conviction that its ally should avoid radical rhetoric and should realign its domestic governance to reflect the democratic ideals of Europe.

Marginalizing opposing viewpoints, denouncing critics as traitors and repressing opposition through force starkly contradict the shared vows of European unity.

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For the EU, democracy needs free and fair elections where every vote counts. By refining its electoral process and following EU and OSCE recommendations, Georgia is requested that the elections rightly capture the will of its people which means lowering the electoral barrier and allowing migrant Georgians to vote. Traditional problems with Georgian elections, such as vote-buying, fraud and violence, have

nothing in common with European values. Thus, for Georgia and the EU to remain engaged, the 2024 parliamentary elections must be held according to the highest standards.

The EU also would like to see Georgian democratic institutions perform in tune. Like a conductor ensuring every instrument plays its part, Georgia is asked to enhance its parliamentary oversight, letting each branch of government perform its solo flawlessly. This includes ensuring the autonomy and impartiality of critical institutions and harmonizing the melody of governance. Previous perils, such as ostracizing the opposition and having a rubberstamp parliament, where no real debate takes place and only opponents are downgraded, are as far from European values and practices as they get. So is the inclination to control the independent regulators and the Central Bank – the rules from the EU playbook that go back to the 1990s.

For the EU, the judiciary is the backbone of fairness and Georgia is tasked with sculpting it according to the highest standards. By adopting comprehensive reforms, Georgia is expected to ensure that justice is delivered with integrity and by independent courts. This is a mammoth task for Georgia, requiring the fundamental reform of the High Council of Justice.

In the grand orchestra of European gov-

ernance, where every instrument's timbre contributes to the collective opus, corruption strikes a jarring chord, threatening to spoil the concerto. Georgia is tasked with meticulously tuning its institutional ensemble, ensuring that each section plays in key, unsullied by the dissonant clang of corruption. This noble pursuit calls for relentlessly refining the state's apparatus, a commitment to silencing the persistent hum of high-level corruption and establishing stalwart, independent agencies that stand as vigilant conductors, ensuring that every note of governance rings clear and true. In this endeavor, pretending and window-dressing – favorite dance moves for the current government, can no longer suffice.

The kind of intimate relations that the EU and Georgia have established since December requires full transparency and predictability. For this reason, Georgia is beckoned to the task of deoligarchization, a sweeping motion to cleanse the dance floor of any lingering whispers of undue influence. It is a resolute stride towards a ball where the music of democracy plays freely, where each step and turn is made in the light and the embrace of the dance is open to all, uninhibited by the grasp of concealed hands of puppet masters.

At the heart of this Georgian-European alliance beats a deep reverence for the sanctity of human rights and respect for civil society. Georgia is asked to be the

guardian of these rights to ensure that the halls of assembly are filled with voices that can speak without fear. It is the creation of a sanctuary where each actor is cherished, every opinion is heard and individuality can flourish in the safety of shared respect and liberty. Free media, strong civil society and a civilized European attitude from the Government toward them are what the EU wants to see from its lifelong partner.

As Georgia rises to meet these challenges, it is not merely ticking off tasks on a pragmatic agenda. It is entering into a rhapsodic courtship with the European Union where each conditionality is a verse of a profound love ballad about democracy and collective unity. These steps are more than mere movements; they are the strides on a path paved with shared principles. In unison, Georgia and the EU are not just participants in a transient waltz but co-authors of an epic saga of camaraderie, a love story to inspire future generations.

Prosaic Conclusion

The EU and Georgia can only have a common future if they truly share common values and identity.

On a serious note, all this means that the EU and Georgia can only have a common future if they truly share common values

and identity. The EU-Georgian romance was given a chance by the EU because of geopolitics, not because of love, except for maybe Georgian cuisine. However, for Georgia to only count on *khachapuri* and *khinkali* in the future would not be wise, just like counting on another episode of geopolitical credit would be an illusion.

The only chance this union could work is if the Government of Georgia takes the EU requirements seriously and delivers on them fully in the remaining few months. Furthermore, the EU must see that these reforms are genuine, not shallow or simply for presentation purposes. The next steps in EU-Georgia relations are about opening the accession talks and then opening and closing extremely challenging and complex 30-plus chapters, requiring the transposition of the EU acquis. But most importantly, the EU must have no doubts about Georgian democracy, values and allegiances.

Whether the current Georgian Government can make this transformation happen is anybody's guess. So far, the game that the Georgian Dream played was about maintaining power, window-dressing the reforms, counting on geopolitics and keeping its fingers crossed that this strategy worked. This was far from LOVE.

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But, as in any relationship, both sides bear responsibility for the success of future co-existence. The EU can no longer close its eyes to half-baked reforms, empty promises, inconsequential action plans and anti-Western actions and rhetoric from the Georgian Dream. The EU must also make it clear to the highly pro-European Georgian population that the next next step - accession negotiations, is within reach only if the prescribed reforms are genuinely implemented. The EU must also ensure that the interim assessment of the nine conditionalities is published before the 2024 parliamentary elections so that the Georgian public knows what to expect from the current government or other possible alternatives.

The LOVE between the Georgian public and the EU is almost unconditional. However, for the EU to reciprocate, Georgia must use its charm offensive; that is, do everything it is asked to and more. Only in such a case will the EU take relations with Georgia seriously, basing its feelings on genuine emotions of love and respect and not just simple, pragmatic, short-term geopolitical and strategic considerations.■