



**EURASIA
PARTNERSHIP
FOUNDATION**

**Georgian Public Opinion
ATTITUDES TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

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The survey was conducted by
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Introduction

In many discussions of Georgia's political, economic, and social future, there are regular references to Europe. It is often argued that there is a proximity of history, values, and culture across the Black Sea region. Politically, the Georgian government has set a course of convergence with Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the European Union. Visually, this is expressed by the flag of Europe flying next to the Georgian national flag outside official buildings. Now, the newly launched Eastern Partnership (EaP) affords Georgia new possibilities for EU integration through enhanced cooperation under the auspices of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan (ENP AP).

Until now, there had been no comprehensive studies about Georgians' perceptions of European integration. What do Georgians themselves value about Europe? What do Georgians expect from convergence with the European Union? What are their concerns in this process? And what do they want to know more about?

To answer these and other questions about Georgia's relationship with Europe, Eurasia Partnership Foundation has undertaken a comprehensive survey of the Georgian population. The results can serve as the basis for formulating policies related to increasing Georgia's cooperation and integration with the EU, and further policy-specific studies in this regard will inform design making and refining of existing integration strategies.

The findings show that Georgians are enthusiastic about Europe and European integration, with both high expectations and a realistic appraisal of the obstacles that need to be overcome. The survey revealed that there is limited information in some fields, but also showed that Georgians generally are well-informed and freely admit when they don't know about particular issues.

This report summarizes the key findings. The instrument, however, is much more comprehensive than can be synthesized in a few pages. Its purpose therefore is to encourage a more detailed analysis, and additional findings are attached in the appendix. All the results can be analyzed by various dimensions, including settlement type, age, sex, education, socioeconomic grouping, and many more. The survey was fielded in August 2009, reaching more than 1,800 respondents in face-to-face interviews. It was conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRCC), a program of Eurasia Partnership Foundation, with extensive input from Georgian and international experts.

Positive Attitudes to EU Integration

Georgians are enthusiastic about Europe. Seventy-nine percent of respondents would vote for EU membership in a referendum, and close to 70 percent believes that the majority of the public also supports this idea. Only two percent say they would vote against EU membership if there were to be a referendum.

In general, Georgians have a positive perception of the EU, with 16 percent of the respondents rating the EU as "very positive" and another 35 percent as "somewhat positive." A negative attitude accounted for just 4 percent. At a rate of over 50 percent, Georgians' trust in the EU is the highest in the South Caucasus (compared with approximately 30 percent of the population in Armenia and Azerbaijan).

An overwhelming majority (78 percent) of the interviewees basically agree with the statements that the EU is a democratic institution, that it provides peace and security in Europe (76 percent), and promotes democracy and economic prosperity for non-member countries (70

percent). Although a quarter of the respondents fear that EU integration could be a threat to Georgian traditions and more than 20 percent think that the EU is a new form of empire, almost half of respondents disagree with these notions.

Furthermore, a majority of the public sees EU–Georgian relations as positive rather than negative, rating them as “somewhat good” (40 percent) or “neutral” (39 percent). Remarkably, only four percent characterized the current relationship between the EU and Georgia as “very good”, and among the well educated that number is even lower. Nevertheless, sixty-one percent of Georgians believe that strengthening ties with the EU is very important for the Georgian government. The EU should be among the main political and economic partners for Georgia, according to more than half of the respondents. This view reflects a desire for good complementary partnerships throughout the region, as 51 percent of respondents also consider it very important to improve the relationship with Russia.

More than half the population think Georgians are Europeans, with 54 percent of respondents agreeing with the statement “I am Georgian, therefore I am European,” made by Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in 1999. This message resonated especially strongly with well-educated respondents in the age group between 18 and 35, who were more likely than other respondents to agree with that statement. While there is a link of Georgian identity to Europe, in a separate question only 2 percent of Georgians identify as “European only;” 13 percent identify as “Georgian and European,” 10 percent as “Georgian and Caucasian,” and 61 percent as “Georgian only.”

Optimism regarding EU Integration

Georgians look forward to EU integration as a tool for resolving major problems, and think that integration is a realistic prospect. More than 80 percent of respondents consider Georgia to be a potential member of the EU, and just 5 percent think it should not belong to the EU. Close to 40 percent of respondents think that EU Member States support Georgia in its efforts to become an EU Member, with 10 percent thinking that there is no such support in Europe, and the remainder saying that they don’t know.

A majority of the public believes EU accession will take up to ten years, while over 30 percent says Georgia will be ready to join the EU within five years. This underlines that there is a sizable proportion of the population with high expectations. Only thirty respondents (1 percent) doubt that EU membership would ever be feasible for Georgia.

Nevertheless, there is a wide variety of opinions on Georgia’s current eligibility for EU membership. Over 45 percent of respondents think Georgia is not quite ready for EU membership in terms of available democratic institutions (43 percent), human rights protection (46 percent), rule of law (47 percent), and a competitive market economy (47 percent). Across these issues, only 10 percent think that Georgia is absolutely ready to join, and between 15 and 20 percent believe Georgia is somewhat ready to join the EU.

Contributing to Conflict Resolution

Most Georgians (56 percent) believe it is primarily the unresolved territorial conflicts that hinder the process of EU integration. They also cite both Russia and an unstable internal political environment as factors in slowing EU integration.

Although close to 50 percent of respondents expect another military confrontation with Russia in the next five years, 52 percent of respondents want to have Russia as a valuable economic and

political partner. Furthermore, a majority of the public is afraid EU integration will further deteriorate Georgian–Russian relations.

All the same, respondents associate EU membership with the resolution of the problems of territorial integrity and national security. Sixty-eight percent of them think that EU membership would provide tools for securing Georgia’s territorial integrity, and only 11 percent think that EU membership might have no or a negative effect on Georgia’s territorial integrity. Approximately the same scores were received with regard to national security factors. Further, Georgians give priority to EU membership over joining NATO, but only slightly, 37 percent to 35 percent.

Moreover, 51 percent of the respondents think that upon eventual membership responsibility for foreign and defense policy should be shared between the EU and Georgia. Sixty-one percent of the respondents also think that policies for fighting terrorism should be shared.

Improving Democracy and Good Governance

Georgians also acknowledge that the lack of stability and democracy in the country hinders its integration into the EU. Forty-two percent of the respondents believe that Georgia is not a democracy yet, but developing in the direction of becoming a democracy, while 21 percent think it is not on a democratic track now; 23 percent believe Georgia is a democracy already, but acknowledge that there is room for improvement. A majority says they can express their opinions freely and can establish and join political parties or NGOs. Still, a lack of freedom in the media and the need for the court system to be fully independent remain problems in the views of almost half of the respondents. Overall, between 50 percent and 60 percent of the respondents say they would expect a better environment for fair elections, freedom of speech, independent courts, and the protection of property and minority rights from EU membership.

Economic Integration and Alleviating Social Pressures

Almost half of the respondents (47 percent) think that Georgia’s underdeveloped economy and its poor level of harmonization with the EU *acquis* (42 percent) would prohibit it from joining the EU.

Furthermore, nearly 25 percent of the respondents indicated that poverty is one of the three most important issues facing the country. Eighty percent of the respondents say their income is hardly or not at all sufficient. Unemployment was also cited as a major social concern by more than half of the respondents. Moreover, Georgians do not have full confidence in their healthcare system, with only 15 percent indicating their full trust. Between 16 percent and 30 percent of the respondents would expect significant improvements in terms of job opportunities, personal income, poverty alleviation, and affordable healthcare in the event of Georgia’s EU accession.

Mobility toward the EU

Georgians want to have more freedom to move across EU borders. Thirty percent of the Georgian population (and 42 percent of those under the age of 35) say they would be interested in working in the EU. Since 1993, at least one member from 8 percent of Georgian households has had a chance to live in an EU Member State for at least three months, primarily in Germany (23 percent), Greece (21 percent), Spain (10 percent), and France (9 percent), as well as 6 percent in other Member States such as the UK, Italy, Romania, the Czech Republic, Belgium, the Netherlands, Latvia, Austria, Bulgaria, and Sweden. At least one member from 11 percent of Georgian households said they have traveled to the EU.

Thirty percent of the respondents say Georgia's EU accession would increase emigration; however, another 30 percent believe that the effect would be the opposite. Illegal migration is considered an obstacle to EU integration by 4 percent of Georgians.

Mobility trends toward Russia and Turkey were more significant. Since 1993, at least one member of nearly 25 percent of Georgian households has traveled to Russia, and in the case of Turkey, it was 16 percent. Two-thirds of the respondents speak Russian, broken down into intermediate (43 percent), advanced (32 percent), and beginning (16 percent) levels.

Overall, 42 percent of the respondents under 35 expressed interest in working in the EU (29 percent total), and 37 percent of those under 35 would like to study in the EU. Germany was chosen as the preferred destination for work by 20 percent of the potential labor migrants, while the UK was the most popular choice for study (40 percent). Five percent of respondents declared to have an intermediate level in German, and 10 percent a beginning level. Sixteen percent speak English, with 5 percent at advanced, 11 percent at intermediate and 13 percent at beginning levels.

Furthermore, 8 percent of the respondents would like to live in the EU permanently, a choice determined by high living standards, cultural aspects, and job opportunities.

Limited Awareness and Sources of Information

On the question of whether Georgia is currently an EU Member State, 71 percent of the respondents gave the correct response (i.e. "No"), 10 percent answered incorrectly ("Yes"), and the remaining 19 percent did not know or refused to answer. Georgia's membership in the Council of Europe (CoE), by contrast, caused more confusion: almost 40 percent of the respondents answered incorrectly ("No"), 33 percent answered correctly ("Yes"), and 28 percent did not know or refused to answer.

There is a lack of information on the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as only 9 percent of the respondents actually expect economic integration from it, while more than 30 percent think that the EaP is either an EU accession tool or an initiative for the restoration of territorial integrity, and 44 percent did not know or refused to answer.

Forty-seven percent of respondents, however, say they have heard of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Georgia, while 30 percent had never heard of it, and 23 percent did not answer the question.

Sixty-six percent of the respondents say they would like more information on the EU. In particular, a majority wants to know how the EU deals with conflict resolution. Around 30 percent are interested in the social protection system, rule of law, and trade issues with the EU. Furthermore, EU salary rates (22 percent), obtaining an EU visa (13 percent), the job market (18 percent), as well as educational and cultural programs (16 percent and 8 percent, respectively) are the main points of interest. In addition, between 25 percent and 40 percent of the respondents say they receive no information at all on EU matters from the government, NGOs, education institutions, workplace, radio, or newspapers.

Most of the public still prefers TV and newspapers as sources of information on the EU. Ten percent of the respondents think that they receive a lot of information on the EU from TV, while 60 percent consider this information as "some" or "little." Newspapers fail to provide the majority with enough information on the EU, with 32 percent saying they provide "little" and 26

percent saying they offer no information. Around 20 percent of respondents said radio and Internet would suffice as sources, and fewer than 10 percent would like the government, EU information centers, posters, and friends to be more utilized. Five percent are satisfied with using the Internet as a source of information on the EU.

Future Surveys on Specific Issues

This survey serves as a baseline tool for assessing public knowledge and perceptions on European integration, as well as their personal experience with Europe. It also captures respondents' social and economic situation, as well as some of their views, allowing for rich in-depth analysis beyond the scope of this summarizing report.

As any public opinion survey, this instrument does not seek to examine complex public policy in nuance, but rather capture broader trends and views. Further studies (involving policy analysis, targeted surveys, focus groups, expert interviews, and comparative cross-country research) would be required to better understand practical policy implications and expectations regarding environmental protection, energy security, food safety, labor legislation, consumer protection, as well as other thematic platforms of the EaP initiative.

Survey Methodology

This survey was undertaken by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers from August 1-10, 2009, with 1,886 full interviews. Response rate was 70%, and the sample size included a total of 2,423. To draw the sample, the country was stratified into three macro-strata (capital, urban, rural), and subsequently 102 clusters were selected throughout the country. Clusters coincided with electoral districts. Households were selected by random route sampling, and the respondent within the household was selected using a Kish table. Nonresponse arose primarily from not being able to locate the selected respondent within the survey time frame, and is not expected to have a major impact. As other surveys done according to international standard, this survey has a 95 percent confidence interval, with a 5 percent margin of error.

Survey language was Georgian, since the survey targeted those following Georgian public discussions on the European Union, in politics and the media. (For surveys including Armenian and Azerbaijani interviewing language, please check the annual CRRC Data Initiative.) Nevertheless, 11% of the respondents self-identified as belonging to a minority group.

The questionnaire was developed with extensive input from local and international experts, through a series of three stakeholder meetings, so as to ensure that it met the interests of all relevant constituencies. The report has been put together by Nikoloz Jashi (EPF) and Jesse Tatum (CRRC), who received structured feedback at various stages of the drafting process. The report reflects a consensus view, but as in all analysis of data, divergent interpretation is possible.

To facilitate independent analysis, CRRC provides an appendix presenting the main frequency tables from the survey. Other survey findings not directly pertaining to the European Union have been omitted, and are available separately. The data set will be made available online in the coming weeks. This will allow for a detailed analysis according to age, location of residence, education, sex, employment, and many other variables. Additional presentations or targeted analysis can be offered on request. Please address your requests for more information to nana+eu@crcccenters.org.