

GEORGIA'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION: A SYNERGY OF MUTUAL INTERESTS

Masclanis François 

Ph.D., Professor-Researcher in Economics and Geopolitics, ISG Toulouse, France

 fmascclanis@free.fr

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the mutual interest of both parties in working together today, with a view to Georgia's full integration into the European Union. This objective is rooted in a long-standing relationship that has progressively deepened over the years, driven by shared values and a common aspiration for peace and stability in the region. To this end, we propose to examine the various points of convergence, from both a Georgian and a European perspective. These include political alignment, economic cooperation, security collaboration, and cultural exchange. Georgia has made significant efforts to align its institutions and policies with European standards, while the European Union has expressed consistent support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. By exploring these elements, this article seeks to highlight not only the benefits of stronger cooperation but also the strategic importance of Georgia's full accession for the development of the European Union itself.

KEYWORDS: GEORGIA, EUROPEAN UNION, INTEGRATION, MUTUAL INTERESTS.

INTRODUCTION

Some European countries are not part of the Union for various reasons (neutrality in Switzerland, fiscal freedom in Andorra, etc.), while others are applying to join. Georgia is one of these new countries eager to join the European Union, a desire marked by the Georgian population itself (82%¹), and by the decision of the Union's institutions to recognize the validity of Georgia's

application for enlargement on December 14, 2023.

Founded after the Second World War to promote peace, prosperity, and solidarity between its member states, the European Union today is much more than just the economic and customs union it was at its inception. Today, it occupies a central position in the world's political, economic, social, cultural, diplomatic, and strategic landscape. What's more, it embodies an ambitious project to support and encourage democratic values, human rights, and cooperation on an international scale.

¹ National Democratic Institute. (2023, May). Taking Georgians' pulse: Findings from March 2023 telephone survey (Conducted by CRRC Georgia, p. 50).

In the current and prospective context, the European Union is facing a series of complex and interconnected challenges: the scale and recurrence of international economic and financial crises; the sometimes uncontrolled migration at its borders; the renewal of security policies against cybercrime and terrorism; the return of symmetrical conflicts in Europe (war in Ukraine); the erratic international policy of Donald Trump; the necessary revolution in the face of threats to climate and biodiversity.

To achieve this, the Union is implementing institutional and pragmatic internal measures, and participating in international cooperation, but it must also rethink its global influence: the United States is no longer Europe's unconditional ally, and the rise of new players (China, India, Russia...) demonstrates the need to re-examine its place and role on the world stage. Does Europe want to close itself off like a besieged fortress, to deny itself by returning to a selfish, individualistic Europe of Nations, or to continue to expand with new members bringing new opportunities?

To meet this challenge, on June 14, 2022, in Brussels, the European Council held a strategic debate on the European Union's relations with its partners in Europe, focusing on the proposal to launch a "European political community". The aim is to provide a platform for political coordination for European countries across the continent, with this platform potentially involving all European countries with which the Union maintains close relations.

The aim would be to foster political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest, to strengthen the security, stability, and prosperity of the European continent.

In its conclusions (June 23-24, 2022), "The European Council recognizes the European perspective of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. The future of these countries and their citizens lies within the European Union".²

The European Council was thus ready to grant candidate country status to Georgia once the priorities set out in the Commission's opinion on

Georgia's application for membership had been taken into account. This will be done in December 2023, with Georgia officially acceding to candidate country status.

What benefits can the European Union expect to derive from the future integration of these new countries, specifically Georgia, which is not directly attached to the geographical territory of existing Europe? The analysis must be carried out at several levels, each of which corresponds to specific and plural expected benefits.

1. POLITICAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND SECURITY LEVEL

A – Expanding the European Union's Sphere of Influence

Generally speaking, the addition of new members can only widen the EU's geopolitical scope and strengthen its role as an international player, giving it a stronger voice in world affairs. Enlargement is therefore one of the major strategic elements of the European Union's foreign and neighborhood policy.

From a practical point of view, the example of Croatia's accession in 2013 is a perfect illustration of how the integration of new members enables the EU to strengthen its regional influence and promote stability. Indeed, Croatia's accession has enabled the EU both to strengthen its influence in the Western Balkans and to help stabilize the region.³ Indeed, the Western Balkans is a historically fragile region, marked by ethnic and political conflict, and as such, represents a strategic area for the EU. Croatia's accession symbolized the EU's strong commitment to the stabilization and integration of this region. By becoming a member of the EU, Croatia has also served as a model for the other countries of the Western Balkans, demonstrating two important points: firstly, that economic, political and social reforms can lead to full membership, and secondly, that Croatia's accession has strengthened the EU's credibility as an actor capable of promoting democratic and eco-

2 Consilium. (2022). Conclusions of the European Council, 23-24 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57452/2022-06-2324-euco-conclusions-fr.pdf>;

3 European Monitor (2013, Friday 28). Croatia's accession to the European Union – Q&A – Main contents. Available at: <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gvxp/vjavfyp3hcy0>.

conomic reforms. The countries of the region, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, see the EU, through this example, as a key partner for their development and stability. The EU's commitment through enlargement also encourages these countries to adopt European standards of governance, human rights, and the rule of law, and thus demonstrates the Union's ability to promote its "soft power" values internationally.

Expanding the EU's area of influence by integrating Georgia, in a fragile and dangerous geopolitical and strategic context, is therefore in line with strategic geopolitics: Georgia, situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Asia, occupies a strategic geographical position of particular importance to the European Union. By considering Georgia's integration, the EU could considerably extend its area of influence in the South Caucasus, a region marked by geopolitical tensions and the competing ambitions of powers such as Russia and Turkey.

Georgia's geographical and geopolitical location would be of great benefit to Europe: among other things, it would position Georgia directly on the northern border of Turkey and Armenia (another candidate for EU membership), and the northeastern border of Azerbaijan and the southern border of Russia. The European Union's area of influence would thus be multiplied by Georgia's accession to the Union alone.

B – Promoting Peace, Security, and Long-term Stability

By encouraging cooperation and economic, political, and social integration, EU enlargement can help to promote long-term peace and stability throughout the European region and on the southern border of the Caucasus. Thus, by integrating Georgia, the EU can only strengthen its ability to shape regional orders and to guarantee the collective security of its space and the new integrated territory. Indeed, this enlargement process is not only beneficial for the new member but also for the Union as a whole, by strengthening its geopolitical position and ensuring the harmonious and stable development of its neighborhood.

Here, too, the Croatian example is conclusive: stabilization of the Western Balkans is crucial to the security of Europe as a whole. Croatia's integration has reduced the risk of conflict in the region by anchoring the country in European structures of security and cooperation. It has also sent out a strong signal against the influence of outside players such as Russia and China, who are seeking to extend their influence in Eastern Europe and the Balkans in particular. Croatia's accession has also encouraged greater regional cooperation. By becoming a member of the EU, Croatia has actively participated in regional cooperation initiatives, helping to resolve bilateral disputes and promote reconciliation in the Western Balkans. This has helped to create a more stable and cooperative environment in the region.

Georgia's integration into the EU would therefore help stabilize a region often shaken by conflict. Georgia's proximity to trouble spots such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its recent history of war with Russia in 2008, make the promotion of peace and security crucial. By integrating Georgia, the EU could play a more active role in resolving regional conflicts and promoting reconciliation, or at least stabilizing a highly critical geopolitical situation. Indeed, Georgia's integration into the EU would drastically weaken Russian influence in the South Caucasus, as Russia wields considerable influence in the region and takes a dim view of its Georgian and Armenian neighbors' attempts at European and Atlantic integration. By offering Georgia a path to membership, the EU could reduce Georgia's dependence on Russia, strengthen the country's sovereignty and independence, and represent a major step in expanding the Union's sphere of influence. The EU would thus strengthen its ability to shape the regional order in the South Caucasus, promote stability and security, disseminate its values, and reduce the influence of external actors.

A number of concrete examples demonstrate that enhanced cooperation between EU member states in the field of defense and security has made it possible not only to combat direct and indirect military threats (cyber threats) more effectively, but also to coordinate responses to international crises.⁴ Similarly, several studies have

⁴ Consilium. (n.d.-a). Defence and security policy.

shown that EU enlargement has had a positive effect on peace and stability in the candidate countries, and even more so in the integrated countries.⁵

In this respect, the Ukrainian example is also quite conclusive: any country bordering a power aiming at expansionism (conquest of territory, human colonization), in this case, Vladimir Putin's Russia, can suddenly be invaded under the pretext of ethnic regrouping or reconstitution of a "historically" homogeneous territorial unit. Georgia underwent this expansionist policy in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and the eastern part of Ukraine in 2022. Yet, Putin is not attacking any of the NATO and/or EU member states on which he might also have conquering designs: Poland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. European membership and the common military defense shield of NATO member countries are sufficient deterrents to prevent any direct military aggression. Finland, for example, after decades of neutrality, urgently joined the Defense Organization on April 4, 2023, protecting itself from any expansionist vision on the part of its Russian neighbor. The integration of new members into the EU is therefore undeniably an essential factor in maintaining security and stability, both for these territories and for the Union as a whole.

2. IDENTITY AND CULTURE

A – Strengthening the Cohesion of the European Identity

Europe is made up of 27 heterogeneous states (level of economic and social development, specific cultures and languages, etc.). It is this diversity that makes it so rich. Any additional contribution based on "present consent, the desire to live together, and the will to continue to make the most of the heritage we have received" (Ernest Renan), underpins the ideal of a "European nation".

It's not a question of creating a "United States of Europe". The United States is a country populated by conquered natives, successive waves of

migrants, and descendants of slaves, who ended up creating a "melting pot" of diverse populations, mostly from outside the territory, creating a sovereign and unified state. Europe, on the other hand, is made up of locally existing nations, of countries built up throughout history, which continue to exist in the community formed by the European Union. Far from denying linguistic and cultural differences, Europe claims to be a juxtaposition of autonomous entities, freely linked by a new common destiny, enjoying the richness of its differences. There is no desire to create a "European" in the sense of an "American", there is no attempt to acculturate or dominate one culture over another, but on the contrary, a desire to build a common project on these specificities and disparities.

In this way, each new arrival enriches the diversity of the European Community, and helps to continue building a European "identity", this richness being the very foundation of its existence: "strengthening the European identity is a necessity for the future of Europe".⁶

But how can we define Europe in terms of identity, to promote common European values? In other words, which countries not yet integrated into the Union can be "naturally" defined as "European", and therefore "legitimately" accessible to full integration? A single criterion is not enough. For example, if we take only the geographical aspect into account, it may seem incongruous to refuse Turkey's application but to integrate Georgia and Armenia, which are located further to the east. History would lead us to consider territories long conquered and dominated by European empires (the Maghreb, for example), and the linguistic aspect alone to consider access to Europe for French-speaking, English-speaking, or other peoples. Religion is an aspect often evoked, through the fantasy of a "Christian" Europe, which does not stand up to the undeniable presence of other religions on the continent, and to the dominant secularism in the powers and cultural life of many contemporary European countries. A multiplicity of objective and subjective criteria must be taken into account: to the north and west, the Atlantic Ocean marks a geographical boundary; to the

Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/>.

5 Consilium. (n.d.-a). Defence and security policy. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/>.

6 Cairn.info. (2004). L'Europe et ses frontières. Études, (6), 729. Available at: <https://www.cairn.info/vue-etudes-2004-6-page-729.htm>.

south and towards Turkey, history, religion, and customs form a second frontier. To the east, another criterion needs to be added: if history, religion and customs are shared (as in the case of Russia), the Union can only admit states that have voluntarily decided to claim, assume and apply the political and institutional consequences of their membership of the common project that is the European Union.

The enlargement of the EU to include Georgia meets all the criteria mentioned here: the country's history is European, its religion has been dominant in Europe for two millennia, its culture is in no way oriental or Asian, and its desire to anchor itself institutionally in Europe is strong. Moreover, Georgia's accession would reinforce the spread of European values of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in the South Caucasus and motivate Georgia to pursue and intensify its political and economic reforms, aligning its standards and practices with those of the EU.⁷ Finally, membership would serve as an example to other countries in the region, encouraging similar developments.

There is also a kind of "moral duty" Europeans owe to Georgia: it was one of the first countries to disengage from Russia after the collapse of the USSR. In 2004, Eduard Shevardnadze was overthrown by the "Rose Revolution", ushering in a pro-European and reformist government. In 2008, former president Mikheil Saakashvili applied (along with Ukraine) for NATO membership. It was supported by George W. Bush, but rejected by Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel to avoid offending Putin's Russia... Two months later, in August 2008, Russia attacked the capital Tbilisi and moved into the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. NATO membership would have prevented this, as would EU membership today. Finally, as we have already mentioned, Putin is not currently attacking any NATO and/or EU member country: the moral duty of Europeans is therefore matched by the geostrategic necessity of containing Russian influence.

B – Boosting Tourism and Cultural Wealth

Tourism is a crucial sector for the European economy, making a very significant contribution to the GDP of EU member countries: in 2019, tourism accounted for around 10% of EU GDP and generated over 27 million jobs, or almost 12% of total employment in the EU.

The addition of Georgia to the EU can only stimulate intra-European tourism, encouraging citizens of the current Union to discover new places, traditions, and cultures.

Indeed, Georgia, with its rich history, unique culture, diverse landscapes, and natural heritage, would add a new dimension to the EU's tourism offering, attracting tourists interested in lesser-known, more "authentic" and original destinations. In 2019*, Georgia welcomed over 9.3 million international visitors, so it's a safe bet that the country's accession would lead to a sharp rise in tourism on its soil. There are many compelling examples:

Hungary and Poland joined the European Union in 2004. On average, these two countries received 9.6 and 14.3 million travelers a year, respectively, before their accession. By 2019, these figures will have risen to 16.5 and 21.4 million tourists, an increase of over 70% for Hungary and around 50% for Poland. The growth of the sector, thanks to accession, is therefore quite significant.

The same applies to Bulgaria (5.2 million tourists in 2007, versus 12 million in 2019, an increase of 130%), Romania (1.9 versus 2.7 million, a 42% increase in inflows), and Croatia (12.4 million in 2013, when it joined the EU, 19.5 million in 2019, an increase of 57% in just six years).⁸

These figures show that EU membership has had a positive impact on tourism in member countries, particularly in terms of increasing the number of foreign visitors. This is due to a number of factors, including easier travel, greater political and economic stability, better integration into European transport networks, and greater visibility of destinations for foreign tourists. But

7 EEAS (07.09.2023). The EU and Georgia. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/georgia/europe-an-union-and-georgia-en?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

8 *We have deliberately chosen this reference date, so as not to take into account the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic from 2020 onwards. Eurostat. (n.d.). Tourism statistics. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tourism_statistics.

it's undeniable that the effects are also positive for the European Union as a whole, as these tourism-receiving countries contribute to the Union's budget, and encourage their citizens to travel to the rest of Europe too. It also harmonizes quality standards and regulations in the tourism sector, enhancing the tourist experience and boosting confidence: according to a study by the European Commission, some 80% of tourists say they are satisfied with tourist services in the EU, thanks to perceived quality and safety.

Georgia's accession to the EU would attract structural and investment funds to develop tourism infrastructures, thus improving the accessibility and quality of the country's tourism services. At the same time, tourism partnerships based on policies of regional cooperation and joint initiatives would be strengthened: Georgia's accession would enable enhanced cooperation with other EU member countries on shared tourism initiatives, such as cultural itineraries and joint tourism promotion projects.

The tourism sector can rely on the promotion of the country's rich culture and heritage. Georgia is known for its UNESCO World Heritage sites⁹, its ancient wine-making traditions, its unique and varied cuisine, its charming capital city steeped in history, and its remarkable natural sites.

Georgia also has a rich and diverse history and culture, with a long-standing and vibrant artistic, musical, and literary tradition. Its integration into the EU would thus enrich the Union's cultural diversity, bringing new perspectives, traditions, and forms of artistic expression. In the form of a shared cultural heritage, its integration into the EU could both contribute to the preservation and promotion of this common cultural heritage and strengthen the sense of belonging to a diverse and multiple European community. Similarly, the country's integration would facilitate cultural and artistic exchanges between Georgia and the other member states of the European Union. This could take the form of artistic collaborations, cross-cultural festivals, exhibitions, and other events, all promoting mutual understanding and the enrichment of citizens.

Beyond tourism and cultural exchanges, education and research would also benefit from this full integration, in at least three respects: firstly, the promotion and development of multilingualism, with the Georgian language joining European language programs, enriching the language skills of EU citizens. In addition, the development of educational and cultural resources, both in Georgian and in European languages, will facilitate mutual language learning throughout the Union. The second advantage would be the extension of educational exchange programs, such as Erasmus+, to Georgian students and researchers, enriching academic and cultural prospects within the EU. Last but not least, integration would enable the amplification of research between scientists, humanities specialists, academics, and private players. The writing of this article is a prime example of this.

These combined advantages could make the Union an even more attractive, enriching and competitive tourist, cultural, scientific and intellectual destination on the world stage, strengthening the European Union's global appeal.

3. ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC LEVEL **A – Economic Benefits from Expansion of the Single Market**

The accession of new countries increases the size of the EU single market, opening up new opportunities for trade, investment, and growth, both for the newcomer and for existing member countries.

So, for example, if we take the case of Croatia seen above, EU enlargement has opened up new economic opportunities for both sides. Croatia has benefited from European investment (7.7 billion euros in FDI (Foreign Direct Investments) between 2013 and 2019), structural and cohesion funds (12.7 billion euros since 2013), which have stimulated its economic development (gain of over 7 billion euros in GDP).

In return, European companies have gained greater access to the Croatian market, boosting trade and investment in the region: integration has added some 4.2 million consumers to the single European market, significantly increasing the

⁹ UNESCO. (n.d.-a). Georgia – UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ge>.

volume of intra-EU trade. The integration of 10 new countries in 2004 (including Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) led to a significant increase in intra-EU trade: between 2003 and 2008, exports from the old member states to the new ones almost doubled, from 134 billion euros to 247 billion euros.

Similarly, in macroeconomic terms, the accession of new members, even if they are less wealthy and less developed, is a source of growth for the Union as a whole: +2.8% growth in European GDP following the entry of Croatia, +4% following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007.¹⁰

In addition to these quantitative data, there are also positive qualitative elements: the integration of new countries stimulates competition and innovation, which in turn strengthens the overall competitiveness of the EU and the new countries on the world stage.¹¹ Micro-economically, too, the positive data are undeniable: the integration of new members promotes job creation throughout the EU. For example, the 2004 enlargement contributed to the creation of 1.5 million jobs in the new member states between 2004 and 2007. What's more, in a report by the European Commission,¹² detailing the economic impact and benefits of EU enlargement in terms of jobs and economic growth, totaling the jobs created directly in the member states and the additional jobs indirectly created in the old new member states, it is estimated that EU enlargement since 2004 has contributed to the creation of around 4 million jobs across the EU as a whole up to 2019.

EU enlargement also brings economies of scale, particularly in manufacturing and services. EU companies can benefit from lower production costs and a larger market for their products and services. The French example of the "Dacia" car brand is a case in point: this brand could not have been created in France, as production costs

and taxes made it impossible to produce a low-cost, high-quality vehicle. By locating its activities in Romania, the French group directly employs 14,000 people, accounts for 14% of manufacturing jobs in the country, and contributes 3% to the national GDP. In France, Dacia's activities employ thousands of people (dealers, distribution network, indirect jobs) and account for 7.6% of the French automotive market. Both countries benefit from a Win-Win situation.

Finally, in the specific case of Georgia, the European Union would also benefit from an unprecedented advantage, due to the country's geographical position: a further consolidation of its strategic position in a region where it has little presence. Indeed, by integrating Georgia, the EU could also improve regional connectivity, facilitating links between Europe and Central Asia. Georgia, with its Black Sea ports and transport corridors linking Europe and Asia, would play a key role in regional connectivity initiatives such as the New Silk Roads. This would greatly strengthen the EU's strategic position in international trade networks.

B – A Strategic Market for the European Union

For the European Union, Georgia offers a number of strategic (economic) advantages,¹³ three of which seem essential: access to numerous natural resources, the possibility of establishing energy cooperation, and the necessary diversification of the Union's sources of supply.

Georgia has significant natural resources, such as manganese, copper, iron, coal, gypsum, and hydroelectric resources, which could benefit the EU.¹⁴

These natural resources give Georgia economic and geopolitical importance in the region: the country has large reserves of fresh water (rivers), making it independent for agricultural produc-

10 UNESCO. (n.d.-b). Georgia – UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ge>.

11 ENA. (n.d.). Qiao: Les nouvelles routes de la soie. Available at: <https://www.ena.fr/content/download/2826/45682/version/1/file/Qiao.pdf>.

12 European Commission. (n.d.-b). European Economy. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication13389_en.pdf.

13 European Commission. (n.d.-a). Georgia – Trade – European Commission. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/georgia/>.

14 World Bank. (n.d.-b). Georgia Overview. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia>.

tion, hydroelectricity (also an export sector), and human and animal consumption. What's more, the country's fertile farmland is ideal for growing cereals, fruit, and vegetables, making it an important agricultural region, again self-sufficient and potentially export-oriented.

When it comes to energy cooperation, it's worth focusing on hydropower, as enhanced cooperation in the energy field could benefit the EU, thereby contributing to Europe's energy security. Georgia has significant hydropower potential, with over 26,000 rivers, 300 of which are usable for generation, and a total technical potential estimated at around 80 terawatt-hours (TWh) per year. At present, only 20% of this potential is exploited, with an annual production of around 12 TWh.

In 2022, Georgia produced around 10 TWh of electricity from its hydroelectric plants, covering more than 75% of its electricity needs, and exports electricity to its neighbors, notably Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Russia. In 2021, electricity exports reached around 1.4 TWh. Several new hydroelectric projects are underway or in development, such as the Nenskra (280 MW) and Namakhvani (433 MW) hydroelectric power plants, with investments totaling several billion dollars.

In response to these new projects, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and other international financial institutions have invested significantly in Georgia's energy sector to strengthen its infrastructure and export capacity. As a result, Georgia is considered a key partner in the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, an EU initiative aimed at strengthening economic and political cooperation with neighboring countries: the EU has allocated over 500 million euros to energy projects in the region, including initiatives to improve energy efficiency and develop electricity transmission infrastructure.

Georgia's largely untapped hydroelectric potential represents a major opportunity to strengthen energy cooperation with the EU. Such collaboration could diversify Europe's energy sources and contribute to its energy security, while promoting

Georgia's economic development.^{15,16}

Still in the field of energy cooperation, it should also be noted that Georgia also plays a strategic role as a transit corridor for oil and natural gas pipelines linking the Caspian Sea to Western Europe:¹⁷ the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) network and the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline (SCP) reduce Europe's dependence on Russia. The same applies to the Southern Gas Corridor project, which includes the SCP and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), designed to bring natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via Georgia and Turkey, with a capacity of 16 to 31 billion cubic meters per year.

Finally, by integrating Georgia, the EU could diversify its sources of supply of raw materials, energy, and other products, reducing its dependence on certain suppliers or single energy suppliers.

For Europe, this is an important factor in its security and independence: the EU's energy dependence on imports of natural gas and oil is substantial, and even strategically dangerous. By 2021, around 90% of the natural gas and 97% of the oil consumed in the EU will be imported, much of it from Russia. Obviously, following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, from 2022 onwards, Russian gas imports decreased significantly due to geopolitical tensions, accentuating the need to diversify energy supply sources for the European Union.¹⁸

15 GNERC. (2022). Annual Report 2022. Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission.

16 European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. (n.d.). Home. Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/index_en.

17 European Commission. (2013, June 28). EU Commission welcomes decision on gas pipeline: Door opener for direct link to Caspian Sea. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/ip_13_623.

18 European Commission. (2022, Mar 8). REPowerEU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_1511.

CONCLUSION

Today, perhaps more than ever before in its history, Europe is at a crossroads: its post-World War II conception was based on the need for reconciliation between belligerent countries, the maintenance and preservation of peace, and cooperation in the fields of energy, economics, and social affairs. Its ideological guiding principle was to build a common destiny between nations from the same continent and a shared historical and cultural melting pot, in the face of the two American and Soviet blocs.

Chronologically, Europe was first built with six then nine nations, based on technical considerations, pooling energy resources, harmonizing regulations and customs duties, and moving towards the creation of a single market. Then, little by little, its enlargement to 27 countries, the creation of a form of sovereignty of its own (European passport), and common rules of life (right to abortion, abolition of the death penalty), led Europe to evolve towards a supranational conception, sometimes in opposition to the regalian powers of member states. As we said in our introduction, the economic and financial crises, the rise of international competition from new giants,

and the fear of loss of sovereignty felt by many leaders and citizens alike, are jeopardizing the very existence of the European Union: the rise of nationalist powers in virtually all EU countries is challenging the achievements of the current community. Against this tense backdrop, some see EU enlargement as an additional risk of rejection by a section of the population, a rejection often manipulated by xenophobic and isolationist political parties, backed by outside powers intent on weakening the power of the European Union.

However, the enlargement of the Union to include countries that are intrinsically “European”, such as Georgia, is perhaps the best way of saving Europe itself: no one can doubt the positive effects of the accession of ten countries, including eight from Central and Eastern Europe, in May 2004. Over the past 20 years, this contribution to the Union has been one of the greatest driving forces behind its economic development, and its ability to grasp what it means to be “European” in the cultural and social sense of the term. Far from being a danger, the accession of a country like Georgia is essential to (re)give the Union the very meaning of its existence: “Let’s not be English, French or German. Let us be European”. (Victor Hugo, *Choses vues*, 1887).

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