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New Approach towards the EU Studies in Georgia

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the EU Studies development in Georgia is highly actual and important considering the fact that during the last 30 years' path of European integration, the people of Georgia have not lost their faith and hope honorably to find a place in the EU family. The start of the association process in 2014 based on the AA/DCFTA (within the association trio) and the emergence of a European Perspective for Georgia in 2022, required a qualitatively new understanding of the content and methods of EU studies. The article presents one of the innovative attempts and approaches toward EU studies at the Gori State University, which was developed within the framework of the Jean Monnet Module "European Union Explored in Association Agreement".

Sharing and disseminating the experience of a new style of EU studies could be useful for EaP countries and others oriented on European development.

. **Keywords:** *European integration, Curriculum, Teaching Methods*

Introduction

The year 1996, when the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed between the European Union and Georgia, is considered the start of the policy of the European integration and legal approximation in Georgia (22.04.1996, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0804%2801%29>). Since then, continuously, the process of democratization and Europeanization has been ongoing in Georgia. In 2004, Georgia became a beneficiary of the European Neighborhood Policy (12.05.2004, Communication from the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/2004-communication-commission-european-neighbourhood-policy-strategy-paper_en). Initially, Georgia was not included in the European Neighborhood Policy and enlargement goals. ENP (related to the East countries) touched only Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus. However, later, it was finally decided that Georgia,

Armenia and Azerbaijan would also become part of this policy; In 2009, Georgia was involved as one of the participant countries (among 6) within the Eastern Partnership Initiative (Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7.05.2009); In 2009, Georgia signed the declaration with the EU about the Mobility Partnership (Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the European Union and Georgia, 30.11.2009, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-09/mobility_partnership_georgia_en.pdf); in 2010, the EU and Georgia agreed on Readmission and Visa facilitation regime (Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A22011A0225%2803%29>, Agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A22011A0225%2802%29>); In 2013, Georgia started the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/international-affairs/collaboration-countries/visa-liberalisation-moldova-ukraine-and-georgia_en); In 2014 the EU and Georgia concluded the Association Agreement (AA/DCFTA, Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, 27.06.2014, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(02))); In 2017, the EU granted Georgia Visa-Free regime into the Schengen Area (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/23697_en); On March 3, 2022, Georgia made the official application on EU membership. In June 2022, based on the European Commission recommendations, the Council of the EU decided to give the European perspective to Georgia (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_3800), but like Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia was not granted the candidate status.

European choice is the Constitutional choice, strong will of Georgian people and solely future. Constitution of Georgia states: *The constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Article 78, 1995, amendment of 2018). Thus, Georgia's preparation for joining the European Union (obtaining the candidacy) requires changes, reforms, establishment of new standards, awareness raising, approximation of Georgian legislation with the EU legislation, formation of new practices in each sphere of public and state life. The basis and foundation of success and progress lays in education policy. Today, it is essential to strengthen the traditional approaches of EU studies in Georgia, however, it is necessary to search for new and innovative ways and to find, promote and develop original methods of teaching about the EU.

1. Gori State University – Newcomer to Jean Monnet Activities

Within the framework of 2020 Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Activities competition, Gori State University submitted an application (Jean Monnet Module) for the first time and won (Jean Monnet Activities 2020 – results, <https://erasmusplus.org/ge/en/news/jm-results-2020>). Gori State University is located in Georgia, in the Shida Kartli region, in the city of Gori - a few kilometers from the territory of Georgia occupied by the Russian Federation. One of the offices of the EU Monitoring Mission is located in the city of Gori (https://www.eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/hom). Gori University is, in fact, the flagship and center of regional education, where Georgians, Ossetians, and other nationalities live, as well as, internally displaced people (IDPs) from the Tskhinvali region.

Various programs of EU studies were carried out at the Gori State University, among them, the university was involved in the Erasmus+ different programs under the leadership of other HEIs (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/proeqtebi>). However, with the entry into the Jean Monnet space via the module, a new history of EU studies began at the university.

1.1. Jean Monnet Module Goals

Jean Monnet Module is titled so – “European Union Explored in Association Agreement” (EUEAA, <https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module/about-module>). The aim of the module is to strengthen the new angel of EU studies, encourage the European arena within the regional university, develop the innovative teaching content and methods, establish a very new curriculum about the EU studies. The vision was formed by the professor of Gori State University: to teach the European Union via explanation/interpretation of norms of the Association Agreement, through the prism of the implemented and ongoing reforms, by introducing and evaluating the concrete examples of Georgian European integration practices, via describing and analyzing the dynamics of Georgia-EU relations. The traditional way of teaching the European Union in Georgia is to teach the foundation and enlargement of the EU, the EU institutions, EU law and EU values, which is often more like history lessons. (The traditional method of teaching about the EU is crucial for EU studies programs, and the opinion presented here does not mean to diminish or replace this method). In such teaching, there is less of a practical and emotional connection with nationality and usefulness in future daily professional activities. In modern Georgia, any person of any profession must have such knowledge about the EU that will be actually used in practice and that will make any professional competitive in the labor market. Within the framework of the module, exactly this aspect has been taken into account - the combination of academic theoretical knowledge with the development of specific professional skills and practical

efficiency.

The introduction of the Module at the Shida Kartli regional university, aimed, as well, the combating disinformation, popularizing the EU, generating new knowledge and style of thinking among young people, and increasing interest in the EU among the academic personnel of the university.

1.2. Curriculum – “EU, Association Agreement and Legal Approximation”

The curriculum for the new teaching course "EU, Association Agreement and Legal Approximation" was developed within the framework of the module. The course has been integrated into both BA and MA programs (with relevant modifications and differences for the degrees). The course became mandatory for students of the MA Law program and MA of Public Administration program, optional - for students of the BA Law program and BA Business program (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module/activities/curriculum-eu-association-agreement-and-legal-approximation.page>).

The number of contact hours of the new teaching course is 42 per semester (exam and independent work hours are not included).

The following topics are taught within the teaching course:

1. Definition of Article 78 of the Constitution of Georgia; what does it mean that the constitutional bodies of Georgia should act in order to facilitate the full integration of Georgia into the European Union.

2. Association agreement - a unique international agreement; how did Georgia reach this agreement? What purpose does the agreement have for both Georgia and the European Union?

3. What are the mutual interests of the European Union and Georgia?

4. What historic and valuable examples should Georgia take from the unification of European countries and from the establishment of the first European Community till the present day.

5. What are the legal power of those EU primary and secondary legislation which are mentioned in the Association Agreement and what different methods should be used when approximating the secondary law of the EU.

6. Why the structure and design of the Association Agreement are built according to the logic of the Copenhagen criteria (political, trade, sectoral).

7. What is the purpose of the principle of good governance and what is the role of the public administration reform for the Europeanization and democratization of the country.

8. What is the regulatory approximation that ensures the freedom of the EU internal market - from

regulation to freedom of production.

9. What is the policy of sustainable development within the framework of the DCFTA, what does the balance and mutual inviolability of trade, labor and environmental policies mean.

10. What does legal approximation mean (gradual and dynamic) and how many stages does legal approximation consist of? How does harmonization differ from approximation?

11. What are Georgia's practices and examples of approximation with EU legislation (for ex.: right-wheel vehicles, waste management, labor legislation, discrimination, competition, food safety, consumer rights, etc.).

12. What is the purpose of studying the decisions of the Court of Justice of the EU in the process of legal approximation.

13. How did the Council of the European Union adopt the amendment to the legislative act on granting the visa-free regime to Georgia and what procedures does the European Union when making the binding decisions (voting).

14. What is the power of political dialogue formats between the European Union and Georgia (Association Council - European Commission and the Government of Georgia; Parliamentary Association Committee - European Parliament and the Parliament of Georgia; Civil Society Association Platform - the civil representatives of the EU and Georgia).

15. What is the Association Agreement implementation coordination system in Georgia?

16. etc

1.3. Teaching Methods

Teaching of the course, traditionally includes lecture hours, seminars, midterm and final exams, homework.

The teaching of each issue/topic, within the curriculum, is based on the analysis of real facts, case-study, the description and evaluation of specific legal or political examples, frank and open-ended discussion and reflection, and fact/source findings by students.

The following are used in the teaching-learning process:

- group work (for example, students are divided into three groups - the state, business, consumer and they discuss the issue - can Georgia ban right-wheel cars? Students must justify the decisions/opinions in the context of compliance with the EU internal market standards).

- practical component (for example, role-playing and argumentation of decision-making by the European Union institution);

- Critical analysis (for example, It is considered and discussed a specific fact of the information

disseminated by the mass media, which refers to the transposition of the EU standard in Georgian law and practice).

2. Module Implementation

The implementation of the module is scheduled for a period of 3 years. In addition to each semester's teaching, the module provides other activities: meeting with the academic and administrative staff of Gori State University and conducting the training for them regarding the Association Agreement. In the first year of the module, about 40 personnel underwent 12-hour (two-day) training (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module/activities/jean-monnet-module-at-gori-state-teaching-university-seminar-for-academic-and-administrative-staff.page>). The training covered the topics of teaching curriculum, however, in a shortened and relatively reduced volume. The purpose of the training, in addition to awareness rising, was to develop and enrich the teaching and scientific activities in relation to the EU.

The student conference "European Union and Gori" was held within the framework of the module (second year). It was an unprecedented and unique conference, within the framework of which the students researched - what was done in the Shida Kartli region with the support of the EU. At the conference, topics were presented in four directions: infrastructure projects in Shida Kartli; Development of tourism in Shida Kartli; Education, youth and training in Shida Kartli; Cultural heritage in Shida Kartli (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module/activities/jean-monnet-module-gori-state-teaching-university-conference-eu-in-gori.page>). In the process of preparing the conference topics, the students requested official information from public agencies, conducted sociological research, processed other academic and reliable information and discovered for themselves that around them, - in their cities, villages, districts - it turns out that a lot of projects are implemented within the framework of EU assistance. Such an approach aroused great interest among young people. The majority of the public attending the conference heard for the first time how their existence and life conditions were improved with the support of the EU. This conference not only enhanced the research skills of students but also brought to light information that was not properly disseminated to the population of the region (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module/activities/jean-monnet-module-gori-state-teaching-university-conference.page>). Results of the conference were announced at the university, and were spread among families and the community in the region. Conference materials were printed and distributed.

In order to disseminate publicly about the module, presentations were made at different types of events, among: at the Caucasus University dedicated to Erasmus+ days in October 2021; with

Armenian colleagues (at a meeting organized by the National Erasmus+ Office of Armenia); in Shida Kartli mass media, and etc.

Within the framework of the module, the teaching materials/resources were conceptualized and prepared in the form of manual handouts by the professor of the module. These handouts have undergone binding, processing, editing since the first year of the module's inception. In the third year (at the end) of the module, it is planned to publish the curriculum guide/manual and present it at the final event of closing the module and introducing the results.

In the first year of the module, a special website was created for the purpose of informational communication, where any can see/read about the events carried out within the module. The page is bilingual - Georgian and English (<https://gu.edu.ge/en/international-relations1/jean-monnet-module>).

3. Sustainability of Outcomes and Continuity

The implementation of the module and its results should not be fragmented. It should be continuous and sustainable. For this purpose, the teaching course developed within the module became a part of the university curriculums (based on the decision of the university). Thus, after the completion of the module, the teaching will be continued.

Abovementioned is not enough. There should be more and many activities to strengthen EU studies. It is very important to develop the policy of EU studies based on new ideas and approaches, to integrate EU studies into different teaching courses, to enhance EU studies into scientific activities. For this purpose, it is necessary for Gori State University to continue participating in Jean Monnet activities competitions and use various tools to create a sustainable, solid and stable EU studies environment in Shida Kartli region.

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