

Political sciences

GEORGIA-CZECH COOPERATION IN 1993-2023

Maia Manchkhshvili

Assoc. Prof. of Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani University

Maka Benashvili

Assist. Prof. of Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani University

Abstract

This article presents a short version of the authors' work, in which 30 years of diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic are studied.

Multilateral relations between the two countries were established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The trade and economic sphere is the most developed between the two countries, and the Czech side has already implemented a number of infrastructure and investment projects in Georgia.

Cooperation with the Czech Republic is strategically important for Georgia: as a successful economic model, the Czech Republic can share rich experience with Georgia. Also, in the conditions of Russia's hybrid war, the Czech Republic has overcome a number of challenges, and in this regard it can provide great support to Georgia.

Keywords: Czech Republic, Georgia, diplomatic relations, partnership.

The relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic are multifaceted and interesting: these relations have a long history, but their official foundation is laid since 1991, when Georgia freed itself from Soviet domination and began to pursue an independent foreign policy. And since 1993, when Czechoslovakia announced its dissolution and the foundation of two new European states in the heart of Europe was announced, relations continued in a new way.

Diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic began on January 1, 1993. The first stage of relations was not very fast and successful in the diplomatic relations of the two countries, but already from September 14, 2009, these relations became active and extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors began to work actively in the capitals of both countries.

As post-Soviet countries, Georgia and the Czech Republic have no difficulty finding a common language. This past unity somewhat facilitates mutual understanding between countries. The common past influenced the character of the relationship and gave it direction. Since the Czech Republic is already a developed state of NATO (since 1999) and a member of the European Union (since 2004), it well understands the path Georgia is currently taking before becoming a member state of the European Union and NATO. Therefore, it is easy to explain to this state what type of assistance and support, what type of advice Georgia needs.

We manage to find a common language, the cooperation between Georgia and the Czech Republic is strengthened by a number of interesting agreements. Some of them are particularly important:

"On promotion and mutual protection of investments between Georgia and the Czech Republic" (August 29, 2009); The purpose of this agreement is to encourage investments, the protection of which the governments of both countries take responsibility. Here we will say that trade and economic relations are the sphere where the relations between our countries are the most intense. The "Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation" has been operating for years. The Czech Republic is helping Georgia in the process of infrastructural modernization and has already invested millions in agriculture, energy sector and other areas in Georgia until 2023.

"Agreement on air traffic between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the Czech Republic" (November 8, 2010); This agreement promotes the liberalization of flights between the

two countries. In particular, on the basis of this agreement, the airlines of both countries are allowed to carry out flights without predetermined quotas“[4].

"Agreement between Georgia and the Czech Republic on cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science, youth and sports" (June 4, 2014); This agreement is a fundamental agreement and based on it, a number of important measures have been taken. Based on it, exchange programs are implemented between the two countries in many fields of science and the cooperation between the two countries is gradually deepening.

"Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Tax Evasion" (2023); This agreement represents an improved version of its predecessor agreements, which imposes a more favorable regime on Georgia. Its purpose is to promote the deepening of economic cooperation between the countries and the attraction of investments. This agreement text repeats the "Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development" (OECD) model and defines the principles of taxation between countries. In particular, the income received by legal entities and natural persons from activities performed in another country will be taxed in the country where it was received or in the country of residence.

Bilateral business forums have been held for years, in which high-ranking delegations of both countries take part. It is organized by the bilateral Chamber of Commerce and Industry. For example, during the May 2022 forum, the Chairman of the Senate of the Czech Parliament visited Georgia. At this forum, Davit Songhulashvili, Chairman of the Committee of Sectoral Economy and Economic Policy of the Parliament of Georgia, noted: "The Czech Republic is doing a lot of business in Georgia and is interested in increasing Czech-Georgian trade and economic relations. I would like to emphasize the fact that there is a 54% increase in trade turnover compared to last year, which in itself clearly confirms the interest and thus once again emphasizes how fruitful this relationship is. However, of course, we should not be satisfied with all this and try to use as much as possible the potential that Georgian-Czech relations have in the direction of economy. At this forum, support for Georgia on the path to joining the European Union was emphasized, and the Czech side expressed its readiness to share its experience with Georgia.

At the 2023 business forum, Georgia was visited by a delegation led by the Minister of Environmental Protection of the Czech Republic, Petr Hladik, who called Georgia a strategic partner at the forum. Along with other statements, he made a very significant political statement/message: "We welcome Georgia's aspiration towards integration with the European Union. We have also gone through this path and we know what important steps need to be taken. We support Georgia in fulfilling its obligations under the Association Agreement, both in the direction of agriculture and environmental protection, be it waste management, water quality assurance, circular economy development or others. Czech businessmen are already doing business in Georgia in different directions. Georgia is not a new market for us, but we would like to intensify our relations. Therefore, we have brought a strong team of Czech businessmen to Georgia, and I think this forum will be effective"[3].

Integration with the European Union is the main foreign policy goal established by the Constitution of the Republic of Georgia. To achieve this goal, the government of Georgia is obliged to use all its efforts:

Article 78: The constitutional bodies shall take all measures within their authority to ensure the full integration of Georgia in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization[1]. Georgia can successfully achieve this goal with the help of its friendly countries. The Czech Republic is among them a country that provides great assistance to Georgia on this path. On March 21, 2023, at the event celebrating 30 years of diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia noted: "The Czech Republic has always been an unwavering supporter of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which we greatly appreciate. This support is even more important today, in the background of Russia's occupation of two regions of Georgia and aggressive war against Ukraine"[6]. The support of the Czech Republic during the year 2022, when it played the role of the EU Presidency, is especially appreciated.

IX international scientific conference. Vienna. Austria. 28-29.03.2024

In 2022, Ambassador Milos Wistrchil himself voiced the same messages: "We also agreed that another prerequisite for economic cooperation is respect for common European values. A fair state, free media, public institutions, democratic action, we are ready to cooperate with Georgia in all these fields"[11].

There is potential for the development of several interesting directions in Georgia-Czech relations. These are combating disinformation and sharing the experience of the Czech Republic in the framework of regional cooperation of Central Europe;

As a post-Soviet state, the Czech Republic faced great challenges and coped well with this difficulty. The Czech Republic, like Georgia, is a target of Russia. In both states, Russian propaganda is trying to incite nihilism, strengthen distrust in European institutions, and move away from European values. Russia, it seems, works with a similar model in all target states. It has a variety of sources of misinformation. In both states, it finances political parties and publications, media, marginal groups, and incites violence.

It is interesting to share the experience of the Czech Republic as one of the successful Visegrad countries. The point is that if Georgia works with the countries of the South Caucasus region on the establishment and development of a single economic space and this model is successfully implemented, Georgia will become more interesting for the European Union. Successful economic cooperation is often a prerequisite for successful political cooperation. The Visegrad cooperation mechanism was created to overcome the Soviet legacy and carry out reforms. This mechanism worked successfully and these countries became full members of the European Union in 2004. This experience would help Georgia and its neighboring region to strengthen economically and be an attractive partner for the European Union.

References

1. Constitution of Georgia: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>
2. Davit Songhulashvili, let's fully exploit the potential that Georgian-Czech relations have in the direction of economy, May 3, 2022 (last view: 27.03.2024) <https://parliament.ge/media/news/davit-songhulashvili-maksimalurad-unda-avitvisot-is-potentsiali-rats-kartul-chekhur-urtiertobebis-gaachnia-ekonomikis-mimartulebit>
3. Georgia-Czech business forum was held in Tbilisi, September 15, 2023 (last view: 27.03.2024), <https://1tv.ge/news/tbilisshi-saqartvelo-chekhetis-respublikis-biznesforumi-gaimarta/>
4. Parliament ratified the agreement on air traffic between Georgia and the Czech Republic, December 10, 2010 (last view: 27.03.2024), <https://ghn.ge/news/29427-parlamentma-sakartvelo-chekhetis-shoris-sahaero-mimosvli-sheesakheb-khelshekrulebis-ratifikatsia-moakhdina>
5. MULTILATERAL CONVENTION TO IMPLEMENT TAX TREATY RELATED MEASURES TO PREVENT BASE EROSION AND PROFIT SHIFTING, <https://www.oecd.org/tax/treaties/multilateral-convention-to-implement-tax-treaty-related-measures-to-prevent-BEPS.pdf>
6. Khatuna Tortladze took part in the event dedicated to the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic, March 21, 2023 (last view: 27.03.2024), <https://mfa.gov.ge/news/719619-khatuna-tortladze-saqartvelosa-da-chekhetis-respublikas-shoris-diplomatiuri-urtiertobebis-30-tslistavisadmi-midzghvnil-ghonisdziebashi-miigho-monatsileoba>
7. Gechbaia B., Kharashvili E., Zviadadze E., Mushkudiani Z., Tsilosani A., Trade and economic relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic: challenges in export and import of agricultural products, Web of Conferences 280, 11006 (2021), <https://www.e3s-conferences.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202128011006>
8. David Rippel, Czech Visions of Georgia: Three Perspectives, Commentary, March 2017, Georgia Institute of Politics, pdf.
9. Bilateral Development Cooperation Program of the Czech Republic, Georgia, 2018–2023, pdf.
10. Mariam Tsitsikashvili, KREMLIN WATCH PROGRAM 2019, European Values Center for Security Policy, pdf.

IX international scientific conference. Vienna. Austria. 28-29.03.2024

11. President of the Senate of the Czech Parliament, Miloš Wistrčil: For the Czech Republic, Georgia is a privileged, friendly country, and this should be reflected in practical steps, May 2, 2022 (last view: 27.03.2024), <https://parliament.ge/media/news/chekhetis-parlamentis-senatis-prezidenti-milosh-vistrchili-chekhetistvis-sakartvelo-privilegirebuli-megobruli-kveqanaa-da-es-unda-avsakhot-kmedit-nabijebshits>