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## **AVAILABILITY OF EU-RELATED INFORMATION IN GEORGIA'S GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM**



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Bucharest, January 2023

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# **Availability of EU-related information in Georgia's general education system**

## ***Abstract***

*The dissemination of European values in Georgia's general education system together with supporting high-quality education at all levels represent one of the aspirations shared by the Georgian government. According to the official statements, the state is proactively building its institutional capacity, supporting a transition to innovative teaching methods in general education system and fostering the learning of democratic values. Based on this context, the aim of this paper is to offer insights about: (1) the extent to which teaching and learning about democratic values in Georgia are linked to the knowledge about the European Union (EU) in the general education system; (2) whether the Georgian legal system entails teaching about the EU in schools and to what extent; (3) which are the policy gaps concerning the introduction and diffusion of the knowledge about the EU within school subjects and teaching materials. The modernisation of general education system, in line with the constitutional provisions, faces major challenges in practice, one reason could be related to the lack of legislative framework in aiming at promoting the knowledge on the EU and its values. By referring to the constitutional provision of the state institutions to contribute to the European integration of the country, the present work offers insights about the level of knowledge regarding EU-related issues within Georgia's general education system. For this purpose, we have selected several subjects for a brief analysis (Geography, History, and Citizenship) and drawn some recommendations.*

**Keywords:** *General education system, European studies, European integration, Georgia.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The availability of EU-related information in Georgian general education system has been less researched, although being a remarkably interesting topic to explore. It requires multidisciplinary analysis from legal and educational perspectives. The importance of this topic is even more apparent in the context of Georgia's European aspirations.

In this context, the first section will present the relevance of the topic, formulate the research questions and share the methodological aspects. The second section will be devoted to the interpretation of relevant constitutional standards and other legislation pieces of Georgia. Arguably, this might be the first paper where the educational scope of Article 78 of the Georgia's Constitution is assessed. This analysis is required to understand whether Georgia has a legal obligation to make available knowledge about the EU within the Georgian educational system.

The third part will cover the educational aspects of the paper. We shall also discuss the Romanian example of teaching about the EU, while also focusing on the Georgian reality. In addition to this, we shall examine a few textbooks on several school subjects and contextualize the findings.

Lastly, this paper will summarize the findings and offer some recommendations for the European and national decision-makers.

## **2. Relevance of the topic, research question and methodology**

This paper is guided by the vision that effective integration of the knowledge about the EU at school level is the key for the European accession of Georgia on the long term. This includes dynamic learning opportunities for both teachers and students about EU-related topics. Despite the fact that the largest part of the population increasingly supports Georgia's accession to the EU (National Democratic Institute, 2021), the general public does not have a high level of knowledge about the history, values, objectives, and mechanisms of the European Union. Hence, the perceptions, expectations and interests of the society, especially among young people, regarding the European integration may not be well-informed and could possibly be subject to disinformation.

This research is particularly relevant from the perspective of becoming a candidate country (European Commission, 2022). To further support the accession objective, it is important that the society, especially youngsters, has access to reliable, accurate and comprehensive

information about the European Union and its values, including knowledge about Georgia-EU relations.

The purpose of this research is to analyse and explore the availability of knowledge about the European Union, its values and priorities within the general education level. Additionally, this paper will also clarify whether the Georgian general education system is legally obliged to promote education about the European Union in schools. To ascertain these issues, it is imperative to analyse the constitutional provisions, therefore we will also include some references about Georgia's legal system. This paper aims to address the following research questions:

- Are Georgian public education institutions compelled to promote teaching about the European Union at school levels?
- Does the general education system provide an opportunity to integrate education about the European Union in school subjects?
- What type of knowledge about the European Union does the school convey to students and teachers through specific subjects?

The research is based on the assumption that providing minimal information about the European Union to students is insufficient to promote the European integration of the country. To assess the availability of EU-related knowledge in Georgian schools we shall examine several textbooks on History, Geography, and Citizenship Education. Following the content's assessment of the abovementioned textbooks, we will present whether the educational materials, practices, and the National Curriculum diffuse knowledge about (a) the history of the European Union; (b) the European values; (c) the main aspects of the European integration and the EU – Georgia relations. While evaluating the textbooks based on these 'criteria', we shall also consider whether they are conducive to discussion, analysis, and interaction in the classroom. Consequently, we shall be able not only to identify challenges for teaching about the EU, but also offer some recommendations to tackle them.

## **2.1 Constitutional standards: Is Georgia obliged to integrate EU-related knowledge about in schools?**

The Constitution of Georgia had been amended several times after its adoption in 1995. The constitutional reforms initiated in 2016-2017 were of major importance for Georgia's Euro-



Atlantic aspirations (Turava, Phirtskalaishvili, and Kardava 2020, 9-10). According to Article 78 of the amended Constitution: “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.” (Constitution of Georgia 1995, amended, Article 78). This provision changed the constitutional reality of the country, implying broadly formulated obligations for the authorities to boost their efforts for the EU membership. Hence it creates a set of obligations that are autonomous from any other legal acts. However, ‘the educational scope’ of this Article has been addressed neither in the case-law of Georgia’s Constitutional Court nor in the academic literature as a whole. Moreover, neither the Venice Commission addressed the normative aspects of this Article while assessing the draft Constitution (Venice Commission Opinion 918, 2018, 2).

Hence, this paper tries to interpret the meaning of Article 78 in the context of general education system. It is widely recognized that the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union (EU) served as an inspiration for Article 78 (Turava, Phirtskalaishvili, and Kardava 2020, 9-10; Alaverdashvili, 2019, 6).

In this context, it is important to understand why the general education system has a special role in fostering European integration of Georgia. Johansson, in discussing a potential legitimacy problem of the EU, has already, albeit indirectly, addressed this point and noted that “Sometimes the legitimacy crisis is connected to the lack of public support for the European integration process caused by the fact that the European citizens do not understand or feel emotionally attached to the European Union institutions.” (Johansson 2007, 181; Laeken Declaration - The Future of the European Union, 2007, 2). To put it another way, ‘action plans’ and ‘agendas’ need to be translated for general public understanding. Consequently, the general education system is most suited to ensure that the ‘translation’ is widely available for new generations of citizens.

In relation to this, it is important to note that the Association Agreement envisages education as one of the areas of cooperation between Georgia and EU (Association Agreement between Georgia and EU, 2014, Article 358). It further enumerates particular directions and measures of cooperation in education, but textual analysis of Article 359 indicates that those are not exhaustive. In other words, although both the Agreement and the agenda draw special emphasis on higher education, the text of Article 359 is open-ended in that respect (Association Agreement between Georgia and EU, 2014, Article 359; Association Agenda 2017-2020, 53-54). Hence, the obligation of cooperation in general education sector is an implicit part of the normative structure of the Agreement.

In such context, it is noteworthy, that neither the Act on General Education nor the government's decree about the "National Aims of Education" incorporate provisions about fostering EU-related education (Act on General Education 2005, Article 3; Decree on National Aims of General Education 2004). This is logical since both acts are adopted well before the adoption of the Association Agreement. Despite such absence, one of the aims of the national policy in general education is to "form civil awareness based on liberal and democratic values, ensure respect for cultural values by the pupils and facilitate understanding of rights and obligations before their family, society, state and community" (Act on General Education 2005, Article 3, sub.1a). Given Article 78 of the Constitution, we consider that the mentioned provision should serve as a tool to bring the EU closer to Georgian pupils and the other way around, by adopting specific policies and measures.

Moreover, even from a positive law perspective, we are not trying to enhance the scope of the national education policy as provided in the Act of General Education. Instead, we are merely applying the novel constitutional provision which can be directly relied upon even in the context of policy-planning in the general education system. Article 78 of the Constitution could be seen as an incentive for the national authorities to promote the knowledge about the EU in the Georgian general education system. In addition, the authorities are responsible with the methodological aspects.

How and to what extent can the state incorporate knowledge on the EU in the school curriculum? How well is this aspect integrated under current curriculum? Is there any international educational practice that can serve as an example in the process? These issues will be tackled in the subsequent section of this work.

### **3. The place of the EU-related knowledge in the Georgian National Curriculum**

#### **3.1 Methodological approaches**

We have already understood that Georgia *should* include EU-related knowledge within its National Curriculum. Thus, in this section we shall present a couple of methods for supporting this process. One of the methods derives from the Romanian case, which in 2007 became a member of the EU and gradually increased the availability of EU specific knowledge for the curriculum (Ilie, 2016, 81). In doing so, Romania applied a three-tiered approach. Initially, it has integrated such knowledge in some compulsory subjects such as Geography, History and Citizenship Education (Ilie, 2016, 82-83). Then, they used non-formal education to further increase 'the share' of the EU-related information in Romanian general education system (Ilie,

2016, 83-84). Furthermore, the authorities also created an optional subject called “*European Union Citizen*” (Ilie, 2016, 85-87).

In assessing these approaches, Ilie notes: “Due to their compulsory character the subjects of History, Geography and Civics Education, are presented in a systematic way for which reason the students master some basic information about the EU” (Ilie, 2016, 82). In this context the ‘systematic way’ implies that such an approach covers the pre-university levels of general education system. Although the optional discipline ‘European Union Citizen’ did not have a complete curriculum, its overall importance should not be downgraded (Ilie, 2016, 81). Content-wise, the subjects include the EU symbols, the member countries, geographical aspects, Romania’s place in the EU (Ilie, 2016, 82).

Overall, the Romanian example shows that it is essential to have a systematic approach based on educational continuity. Moreover, full EU membership is not a necessary precondition to have an extensive coverage of the EU within its general education system. This conclusion creates a useful landscape to initially identify and assess Georgian approach to the EU-specific education in school system.

### **3.2 Is there any approach in Georgia?**

It should be noted from the outset that this work will only analyse basic and secondary levels of general education. However, the primary level of education will also be considered to assess certain methodological implications. The analysis of Georgia’s National Curriculum shows that Citizenship, Geography and History are the only compulsory subjects that, at least to some extent, incorporate EU-specific information (National Curriculum of Georgia, 2016, Article 71, Citizenship, Geography, History). Furthermore, the textbooks which are in use for 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades in Geography and History were state-approved in 2012. This is significant in two respects: there was another National Curriculum in force at that time, and the level of Georgia-EU cooperation was different. Hence, the overview below will assess the curriculum currently in force and the textbooks that are planned to be reviewed. This subchapter also includes information about whether teachers are required to have knowledge about the EU when delivering on related subjects.

According to the National Curriculum currently in force, **Geography** should address the EU as a major political and economic power. Furthermore, it should also explain the reasons for its creation and why Georgia aspires to become a member (National Curriculum of Georgia, 2016, Article 89). It is noteworthy that the curriculum does not entail a further detailed list of

issues that need to be addressed in the context of the EU (National Curriculum of Georgia, 2016, Article 89).

In fact, examined textbooks in that discipline show a very limited description of the EU and its bodies (for instance see: Bliadze, Chanturia Kereselidze, 2012, 28, 33). This is even more problematic since there are topics/chapters in which the knowledge about the EU could have been introduced. For instance, one of the textbooks in **Geography** includes a chapter called 'US and Georgia' (Bliadze, Chanturia Kereselidze, 2012, 76). Likewise, it would have been beneficial to add a separate chapter about the EU-Georgia relationship. Hence, it is clear that those books do not provide the necessary knowledge to pupils about the nature of the EU and its cooperation with Georgia.

As far as the textbooks in **History** are concerned, the examined materials provide limited knowledge about the founding of EU and its role in the world (Abdaladze, Kupatadze, Akhmeteli, Murghulia 2012, 337). Moreover, the book for 9<sup>th</sup> grade, which was recently approved, includes a short description of the EU-Georgia cooperation based on the Association Agreement. The book simply notes that the Association Agreement and a visa-free regime exist between Georgia and the EU. Similarly, it merely points out the total share of trade with the EU in the Georgian economy (Surguladze, Kekelia, Labadze, Murusidze, Kurdubadze 2021, 321-322).

Apart from the content-related issues, it is also relevant that, while the above-mentioned subjects incorporate EU-specific content throughout 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, there are 'episodic' diffusions in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (for instance see: Abdaladze, Kupatadze, Akhmeteli, Murghulia 2012, 337). In other words, the entire primary education is 'distilled' from the EU-specific content and the remaining two levels of education are unsystematically used for this purpose. This is further problematic since there is no optional discipline in the curriculum specifically addressing the EU-Georgia relationship in the context of the Association Agreement and other tools of bilateral cooperation (National Curriculum of Georgia, Article 49 par. 3).

Although the curriculum of '**Citizenship**' covers 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades, it does not directly mention the EU. However, one of the textbooks for 9<sup>th</sup> grade, approved in 2021, does include a well-written chapter about the organisation (National Curriculum of Georgia, 2016, Article 70, Citizenship; Talakhadze, Kapanadze, Erkomaishvili, Shavadze, Murusidze 2021, 157-164). This book does not only describe the tools of cooperation between Georgia and the EU while providing information about the EU values, it also shows the necessity of the institutional reforms Georgia should conduct in certain spheres (Talakhadze, Kapanadze, Erkomaishvili,

Shavadze, Murusidze 2021, 157-158). This aspect further indicates that the actual conveyance of the EU-related knowledge is introduced much later than expressed in the current version of the National Curriculum.

Moreover, the above-mentioned book gives useful guidance to pupils on how to make use of the concrete benefits of the Agreement such as the visa-free regime between Georgia and the EU (Talakhadze, Kapanadze, Erkomaishvili, Shavadze, Murusidze 2021, 160-161). It further shows, based on specific examples, not only the prerequisites of such agreement, but also the applicable sanctions (Talakhadze, Kapanadze, Erkomaishvili, Shavadze, Murusidze 2021, 161). The same goes with the free trade regime enforced through this Agreement (Talakhadze, Kapanadze, Erkomaishvili, Shavadze, Murusidze 2021, 164). Nevertheless, these aspects are not the most important feature of the book in question. It also includes tasks/assignments about EU-Georgia relationship that is either scarcely provided or are absent from the Geography and History books previously reviewed. Unfortunately, another book for 'Citizenship', approved in 2021 as well, superficially describes the origins of the EU (Gogoladze, Simsvi, Jincharadze, 2021, 124).

As far as the teachers' level of knowledge is concerned, a preliminary remark is required: there are multiple different possibilities to become a teacher in Georgia (Law on General Education Article 22). Naturally, the examination of each one of these is excessively burdensome in the context of this work. Hence, we shall limit the scope of review to the National Curriculum currently in force, because professionals are required to teach according to this document. The Decree on Approving the National Curriculum of Georgia (adopted on May 18, 2016) indicates whether the teachers are required to have certain competences for delivering classes on European subjects.

The general examination of the curriculum leads to the conclusion that social sciences teachers need to only have basic knowledge about the EU to be able to teach the subjects (National Curriculum of Georgia Article 70, History, Citizenship, and Geography). This idea is further reinforced by the absence of any systemic approach on EU subjects' teaching, be it based on a national approach or following certain recommendations from the European Union. Unless a teacher is not particularly interested in EU-related topics and willing to create learning contexts, pupils might experience reduced chances of developing their knowledge about the EU. Hence, it is imperative for the Georgian authorities to put forward a comprehensive plan and assign proper resources to ensure that the EU knowledge will become a clear and self-standing objective.

Although data suggests that Georgia chose to diffuse the EU-specific knowledge in schools through compulsory subjects, by a broad inclusion of EU-related knowledge in textbooks such as ‘Citizenship’, future steps are yet to be undertaken. One example could be that of developing the ‘educational architecture’ (curricula of relevant disciplines) with the purpose of incorporating EU-specific knowledge.

#### **4. Conclusion and recommendations**

This paper explored the level of integration of EU-related knowledge in Georgian general education system. This is a very complex issue that requires a multidisciplinary approach, and this work offers possible avenues for understanding. Firstly, through the systematic interpretation of the Constitutional provision, as well as other legal acts of the country, we ascertained that the government is legally obliged to integrate knowledge about the EU at all levels of the general education system. In making this conclusion, we also discussed the scope of the relevant articles of the Association Agreement. The second conceptual pillar of this paper was to explore the successful approaches of teaching about the EU in other countries and then review the selected textbooks used in Georgian schools. The Romanian example shows that there is a three-tiered approach of integrating the knowledge about EU-related topics in schools: the authorities can integrate that knowledge in the compulsory subjects, increase the role of non-formal education, and create an optional subject focused solely on the European Union.

In fact, a review of the selected textbooks, used to teach Geography, History, and Citizenship revealed that Georgia does not have a systemic policy of teaching about the EU in schools. Moreover, there is not an optional subject that would be specifically directed for that purpose. At the same time, the information about the EU is only taught, albeit superficially, at secondary and upper secondary levels of education.

The last aspect discussed refers to the teachers’ level of knowledge about the EU. It was clearly ascertained that teachers of the above-mentioned subjects are required to have minimal information about the EU to deliver their courses. In other words, unless a teacher is not particularly interested in these issues, pupils can experience reduced chances to learn about the European Union.

Therefore, to tackle the challenges identified throughout this research, implementing the following steps is recommended:

**To the Georgian authorities:**

- Ensure that the knowledge about the EU will be at least a cross-cutting topic throughout the entire period of schooling;
- Create an optional subject about the EU at every level of the general education system including educational opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge about the EU;
- Ensure that teachers have viable educational opportunities to enhance their knowledge about the EU and its institutions;
- Develop frameworks of cooperation with Romanian institutes of education in order to improve teaching about the EU in schools in Georgia.

**To the EU institutions:**

- Assist Georgian authorities with the financial and technical means to ensure that teaching about the EU will be adequately incorporated in Georgian general educational system.

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