

Georgia- USA Political Relations under President Donald Trump Administration in 2017

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Abstract

This article gives the analysis of the consequences of formal visits and meetings of Georgian officials with President Donald Trump, his administration and other U.S. officials. It reviews significant documents and bills signed between the USA and Georgia in 2017.

The main issues of state visits and meetings are chronologically described using official information published on websites of Ministries of Georgia and the Department of States.

It is an attempt to show through formal visits how political activities and involvement of officials in global processes can bring positive results to the country and how significant it is for Georgia to keep the strategic partnership with US and deepen it under any administrations. Simultaneously, the facts described in the paper prove again that US keeps supporting Georgia as one of the loyal partners in the South Caucasus and also keeps its geopolitical interest in the region.

Keywords: Formal visits, new administration, occupation, strategic partner, territorial integrity

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Introduction

A new President of the country and a new administration can bring new challenges and possibilities of changes not only in an inner policy but also in a foreign policy of the country. It does not mean that the President can radically change political relations or long lasting partnership with countries but such collaborations can go to active or passive phase.

The United States of America has a leading and influential role in the world as a highly developed, democratic country that supports other countries not only financially but in many fields as well, therefore, the foreign policy and strategy of the President and a new administration presents a high interest worldwide.

As a strategic partner of the USA, surely, Georgia had also a great interest to continue active collaborations with the USA under Trump administration. Many Georgian experts started talking and predicting how the partnership would go and what positive or negative changes it could bring to Georgia.

Methods

Several methods of the research have been used: firstly, the method of the analysis of the information published on the official websites as the first source. Later, the problematic-logical method of the data analysis was used with the purpose of the presenting the analysis of the possible consequences of various formal visits. The comparative analysis of the different documents and activities are also used as a research method.

Purpose and Tasks of the Research

The purpose of the research is related to the review of the formal visits of Georgian officials to the USA, meetings with a new administration and determination of the possible consequences of activities and participations of Georgian side in different international assemblies.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Met the Officials in the USA

Just in several days after Donald Trump's inauguration, ministries of Georgia continued official visits to the USA to meet representatives of a new administration.

On 9-10 February Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia,

Mikheil Janelidze met the Secretary of States Rex Tillerson and President's adviser on National Security issues – Michael Finn.

The result of the official meeting was the agreement to profound relations between Georgia and the USA in different fields. Washington confirmed its support to Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The collaborations in security and defence issues were discussed as well as the challenges that Georgia had in its conflict zones.

It was obvious that for a new administration of the United States of America the political partnership with Republic of Georgia was very significant. As Minister Janelidze mentioned later, he got all the support from US side about active collaborations in the future.

We have to pay attention to the fact that, in 2017 Russian Federation continued its illegal actions in Tskhinvali region, so called borderization and militarization of the region. Undoubtedly, it caused a negative reaction from the side of Georgia and was one of the main issues to discuss during the next official visits to the USA. On 20-23 March, 2017 Georgian delegation met Congressmen, senators and experts. It is important to mention that Georgia got support from both US political parties. It was clear that the administration condemned a Russian illegal policy in occupied territories belonged to Republic of Georgia.

Minister Janelidze met the Executive Vice President for security and defense policy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States- Derek Chollet, the President of Brookings Institution- Strobe Talbott. They discussed the issue of creating a transatlantic security, collaboration of two countries to enhance the role of Georgia in the region.

According to senators, Georgia is the successful model of democracy in the region. As Janelidze said: "It is very significant that the sides condemned distructional steps of Russian Federation including militarization of Tskhinvali and plan to have referendum there" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2017).

During the meeting with Senator Todd Young, he expressed his gratitude to Georgia for the involvement in international mission in Afganistan. He also spoke about Georgia as a strategic and loyal partner of the USA in the region.

One important meeting should be taken into consideration-meeting with Senator Graham. He supported the initiation of presenting the report about Georgia in front of Senate Assignments Committee by Ambassador of Georgia to the United States Davit Bakradze. Certainly, for Georgia it was a great opportunity to introduce and discuss significant issues.

According to one of the Congressmen, Connolly, Georgia got a high evaluation for reforms and Democratic processes.

As we see, "the congressman reaffirmed the support of the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia highly appraising the

reform and democratization process ongoing in the country. The Minister thanked Congressman Gerry Connolly for his activities as Co-chair of the Georgia Caucus at the U.S. Congress. The sides paid special attention to the situation in Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. Gerry Connolly condemned Russia's occupation of the Georgian territories and reaffirmed his strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He highly evaluated Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration process and pledged further support for Georgia.

Miikheil Janelidze awarded Congressman Connolly with Presidential Order of Merit for his important support for Georgia" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2017).

We should also mention the participation of Minister in the meeting of Global coalition countries against Islamic State. On 22nd March, 68 countries took part in the meeting. The current danger and problems were discussed, also the future steps for security and stability. Georgia could be a convenient corridor for terrorists because of its location, so the country's participation in such an important event was highly appreciated.

This formal meeting brought urgent results, as on 30th March Senator Roger Wiken (Republican) and Senator Ben Kardin (Democrats) presented a resolution to support a territorial integrity of Georgia (S. Res. 106).

According to the resolution, it condemned military invasion of Russia to territory of Georgia, its occupation and illegal activity on occupation lines in Tskhinvali and Abkhazia. Senator Winkins said: "Russian Federation has been trying to destroy Integrity and sovereignty of Georgia for a long time. It is a high time for USA to show again that we do not admit all attempts of Russian to capture neighbouring country's territories. Russian must follow the cease-fire agreement of 2008 and withdraw its troops from the region and let international monitors and humanitarian missions enter occupied territories" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

It was obvious that USA both Houses of Congress support the Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of Georgia.

Illegal Actions of Russia in Georgian Occupied Territories

For Georgia, it is very important how active our politicians are, how appropriate statements they make during formal meetings. Therefore, such visits and meetings show how dynamic the collaborations and political relations between two strategic partners are.

The Abkhaz militia began to integrate into the Russian armed forces in 2015. By 2017, 4,500 local soldiers directly under Russian military command were based in Abkhazia. In March 2017, Russia and the de facto Tskhinvali authorities signed an

agreement to formally merge the region's militia into the Russian armed forces. Such steps by Russia and the de facto authorities in the breakaway regions further erode Georgia's sovereignty and pose vital challenges to its national security. Even though Georgian authorities claim that there are no direct and immediate threats from these militarization processes, having regular, Russian-led, military trainings just a couple hundred meters from Georgian citizens leading "normal lives" (and the strategically important East-West highway) should definitely be seen as threatening and increases Georgia's insecurity (Kornely Kakachia, Ponars Eurasia, 2018).

In 2017, 5th April First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Davit Zalkaniani met Fiona Hill, an official at the US National Security Council specializing in Russian and European Affairs. The Ambassador Davit Bakradze also attended the meeting in the White House. The main issue for discussion was Georgia's Euro-Atlantic and European integration and implementation of visa- free regime with EU.

He continued his formal visit in New York on 7-12 April to discuss Security and Human Rights of People living in occupied territories. He shared detailed information about so-called Referendum and illegal Elections there and blocking the line between Georgia and Abkhazia by Russian Federation.

Consequences of the Visit of Georgian Delegation to the USA and Congressmen's Letter to the President Donald Trump

Later, Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili announced that a Georgian delegation returned from the USA after fruitful meetings there. (First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Dimitri Kumsiashvili, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Zurab Alavidze, President of the National Bank, Koba Gvenetadze). As a result, OPIC (Overseas Private Investment Corporation) made a decision to double the limit of funding Georgia, World Bank granted Georgia with 1 million US dollar to fulfil reforms in the country. Senior Vice President of the World Bank Paul Romer got interested in fiscal reforms of Georgia. He even decided to get involved in the process of reformation personally. "He is the head of the group "Ease of Doing Business" in the World Bank; therefore, his participation and advice would be very important ...

One of the most important steps made under Donald Trump administration was letter of Congressmen to the President of USA Donald Trump. On 3rd May 2017, Thirty Representatives made a supportive letter dedicated to 25 anniversary of Diplomatic Relations with Georgia and strategic partnership of two countries. This letter showed unchangeable support of two

Houses of Congress to territorial integrity of Republic of Georgia. Congressional representatives called the President to implement negotiations on Free Trading Agreement with Georgian and support Georgia to integrate to NATO. (Relations between NATO and Georgia date back to 1992 when Georgia joined the North-Atlantic Cooperation Council) The letter emphasized the importance of deepen the political partnership and USA support to Georgia. They also mentioned occupation problem in Georgia and Russian illegal and aggressive policy in Georgia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2017).

It is an evidence that USA has its geopolitical interest of territorial integrity of Georgia and backs the country course and development.

The US Federal Budget Law

President Donald Trump signed the US federal budget Law to recognize occupation of Georgian territories. According to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, on 5 May 2017, after confirmation in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate, President Donald Trump signed the budget law (Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2017 which will remain in force until the end of this year). The US President's signature on this act is a very important and unprecedented event for Georgia because it is the first time when a US legislative act contains a provision about the occupation of Georgia's territories... According to the law, none of the funds appropriated by the act may be made available for assistance for the central government of a country that has recognised the independence of or has established diplomatic relations with the Russian occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. At the same time, the document states that US representatives of any international financial institutions are forbidden to allocate any assistance for any programmes that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2017)

The bill is the best example of President's support and the bill would probably reduce the number of countries that wished to recognize the independence of South Ossetia or Abkhazia. It is obvious that many countries would not want to destroy relations with USA and lose financial support.

Later, President personally expressed his support to territorial integrity during the meeting with Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili. On 8th May he was invited by Vice President Mike Pence to the USA for a formal meeting with Donald Trump administration. Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili met with US President Donald Trump. The meeting was held in the Oval Office. At the beginning of the meeting, President Trump emphasized that Georgia is an important ally and a strategic

partner of the USA. The leaders discussed significant issues and future plans for the US-Georgia relations. At the end of the state visit Prime Minister Kvirikashvili invited President Trump to Georgia. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia)

It should be emphasized that Kvirikashvili was the twelfth country leader that was invited to White House to meet the President. We can say that a new administration managed to arrange the meeting of two countries' leaders in a very short time that was a really big political event.

Kvirikashvili met Mike Pence and Rex W. Tillerson. Mike Pence thanked Prime Minister for a great support of Global Security and participation of Georgia in fighting with World terrorism.

Prime Minister discussed and shared information about situation in Georgian villages located near the occupied territory with Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee - John McCain. Later, Giorgi Kvirikashvili evaluated this visit as a very successful one. He had a great opportunity to make speech and talk about problems of the country especially in the occupied regions and got a complete support from all sides he had met. He summed 25 years of diplomatic relations with the USA and discussed the future cooperation.

U.S. - Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission Continued Annual Meetings

The number of formal visits of Georgian officials to the USA is the best evidence of active collaboration and dynamic relations between two strategic partners that is getting deeper under President Donald Trump administration.

We should underline the other important fact that from American side the number of visits was not also small. On 22nd May USA officials arrived in Georgia to participate in annual meeting of a working group of U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission. (Based on core principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, the Security Working Group seeks to enhance security cooperation, promote Georgia's efforts in defense reform, and improve Georgia's defense capabilities, including NATO interoperability and contributions to ISAF operations in Afghanistan. The United States supports Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions, including aspirations for membership in NATO as reflected in the Alliance's decisions in Bucharest, Strasburg-Kehl, and Lisbon. The United States also supports Georgia's efforts related to its "Annual National Program" as agreed by the NATO-Georgia Commission) (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Unfortunately, despite of activities of Congressmen in 2017 there was no step forward in the NATO integration issue. However, the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, was chosen for the annual NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The U.S. delegation of

Representatives was welcomed by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. According to the minister, the members of delegation expressed again the significance of strong and stable partnership between USA and Georgia and the future steps to deepen it.

The Important Document Signed by Prime Minister of Georgia and United States Secretary of States

In 2017 Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson signed a US-Georgia General Security of Information Agreement (GSOIA) at the US Department of State. The agreement represents a major milestone in security cooperation between the United States and Georgia, the Department of State said in a press release. The GSOIA establishes a legal foundation for bilateral intelligence sharing and will strengthen counterterrorism cooperation between Georgia and the US. This agreement will also enhance the Georgian military's interoperability with the armed services of NATO member states.

The GSOIA supports Georgia's efforts to transform its military and paves the way for future security agreements between the US and Georgia (Agenda.ge 2017).

As a July 2017 article in Foreign Policy remarked: "Just before President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin's tête-à-tête at the G-20 on July 7, Russia quietly annexed 'about 10 hectares' of Georgian territory on behalf of the Republic of South Ossetia, a polity recognized by just four countries (including Russia). The move went largely unnoticed except, of course, in Georgia proper, where President Giorgi Margvelashvili decried 'creeping occupation.' That generalized silence is what the Kremlin was counting on."

The hybrid warfare and borderization strategies used by Russia in Georgia pose a clear challenge to Western interests and the wider European security order. By keeping the conflict unresolved, Moscow positions itself as the dominant actor not only in Georgia's neighborhood but also in the wider Black Sea region. Russia has troops positioned in Georgia, an openly aspiring NATO and EU member (Kornely Kakachia, Ponars Eurasia, 2018).

Collaboration in Defence Field

The role of the USA in supporting of development of Defence field in Georgia was very vivid. According to Minister of Defence of Georgia, Levan Izoria in 2017, US was planning to build a training military base the same standard as it was only in Germany. It would be the only one in the region and would give

more opportunities to Georgians to get the best training standards for international missions. We should say that "Participation in international missions maintains the high level of combat readiness of the Georgian Defense Forces and the acquisition of relevant experience, which is one of the foundations for the development of the Georgian Defense Forces and is important for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and compatibility with NATO and Partner countries" (Ministry of Defence of Georgia).

It is significant to mention US-Georgia Strategic Bilateral Defense Cooperation – "The strategic cooperation between Georgia and the United States in the field of defense and security is strong, comprehensive and based on mutual support. The purpose of this cooperation is to strengthen Georgia's defense capabilities and resilience in order to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity." Georgia annually hosts and participates in US-organized exercises and exercises. The Georgian-American multinational exercise "AGILE SPIRIT" and "NOBLE PARTNER", which is held on the territory of Georgia, is noteworthy (Ministry of Defence of Georgia).

In August 2017 Mike Pence personally met the participants of "Noble Partner 2017" during his formal visit in Georgia. "...US Vice President Mike Pence visited Georgia. He voiced strong US support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and the two countries launched their biggest ever joint military exercises" (BBC news, 2017). The President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili and Vice President of United States of America Mike Pence addressed to all the participants. Prime Minister of Georgia welcomed Mike Pence and later summed the meeting with the following words: "We have heard very clear messages addressed to Georgia. In terms of supporting Georgia's territorial integrity, supporting its foreign priorities, and strengthening the country, the United States has been, is, and will be the number one strategic partner for Georgia. This visit is a confirmation of that. We are very grateful to the Vice President for his first European tour to Georgia along with Estonia and Montenegro. We, of course, have the greatest sense of gratitude to President Trump, whose messages were delivered by the Vice President to Georgia. "I think the Georgian people have seen how much support our country has from the United States, and this is a truly historic opportunity for Georgia" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2017).

Prime Minister's Speech at UN General Assembly

One of the most important meetings was UN General Assembly where the Prime Minister of Georgia made an informative speech. Giorgi Kvirikashvili addressed the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly on September 21. Led by the Head of Government, the Georgian delegation arrived in New York on

September 18-22 to participate in the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly. The Prime Minister of Georgia focused on Georgia's achievements, ongoing reforms in the country and the current situation in the occupied territories of Georgia. "This year marks the 25th anniversary of Georgia's accession to the UN. During this period, we have successfully transformed our country from a UN humanitarian recipient to a leading reformer, who was recently elected Chairman of the Open Government Partnership."

"We have declared a fierce battle against corruption. We firmly defend the independence of the justice system. Georgia, along with Ukraine and Moldova, has signed an Association Agreement with the EU (including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) and achieved visa liberalization with the EU" (Government of Georgia, 2017).

The Prime Minister attended an official dinner held in honor of the heads of delegations attending the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly on behalf of US President Donald Trump and his wife, Melania Trump (Government of Georgia, 2017).

In December 2017, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Janelidze highly appraised the progress made by Georgia in terms of strategic partnership with the U.S.

"According to him, the unprecedentedly high level of contacts with the new U.S. Administration and the Congress, the regular visits of the Georgian Prime Minister, Minister (including 4 visits of the Foreign Minister) and various MPs to the U.S., the U.S. Vice President's visit to Georgia, the decision to transfer defence systems to Georgia; promotion of Georgia's defence capabilities under the Georgia Defence Readiness Program; deepening of co-operation in the areas of trade and investments and the involvement of U.S. companies in large-scale infrastructure projects. Mikheil Janelidze also highlighted the importance of the act passed by the United States Congress, which prevents the U.S. administration from providing financial assistance to governments that support independence of the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2017).

Conclusion

Strategic partnership with the USA is the main guarantee of the security and democratic development of Georgia. All official meetings described above show the strong support from US side, more active relations and preparations for a better collaboration. A new administration also expressed the readiness to protect Georgia from Russian illegal policy in conflict zones.

Hence, taking various factors into account, it is necessary to make the following recommendations: Official visits and participations of Georgian side in international forums, assemblies are very good opportunities for Georgia to share country's political situation and problems with other developed countries especially with strategic partners. At the same time, officials of Georgia should try to use the experience of professionals from the USA to build a real democracy in Georgia, to strengthen institutions and to raise the level of political atmosphere in the country. We still need to work on several directions, as the government is still not completely ready for such political changes as becoming the member of NATO or EU. A permanent inner political crisis, lack of professionalism and Russian impact on some political figures still keeps the country away from its Euro-Atlantic course.

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