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### **The strenuous path of Georgia**

The NATO-Georgia relations have essentially been shaping the Georgian political course for fifteen years and probably they will continue to do so in the future. Despite the difficulties on Georgian territory, due to the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abchazia supported by Russian military forces, military cooperation between NATO and Georgia has remarkably continued. Indeed, from July 30 to August 12 2017, was held the joint military exercise "Noble Partner". This is a U.S. Army Europe-led exercise hosted at the Vaziani and Camp Norio training areas in Georgia near the capital Tbilisi.

United States, Armenia, Germany, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom participated [Exercise Noble Partner Opens in Georgia, U.S. Department of Defense, 31 July 2017]. The exercise affords participating nations an opportunity to train in a multinational environment while enhancing cooperation and interoperability. Leaders at all levels get the chance to train staffs in mission planning, command and control, movement and maneuver, and the execution of complex joint and combined operations. This kind of exercise represents an hope for Georgia to not remain alone on a path that, as far as it is, is stuck in a situation that is the same since 2008.

That is why Georgia in the coming years will have to be able to join NATO structures, provided that Western could prevent the Russian-led Euroasian institutions from attracting it more easily and quickly. The will to improve the relations between Western structures and Georgia has also been demonstrated with the visit of US Vice President Mike Pence, whose reaffirmed the United States' support for Georgian membership in NATO, during his visit to Tbilisi on August 1. Condemning alleged Russia's «presence» in Georgia, the Vice President emphasized that the US administration sustains Georgia's aspiration to become a member of the bloc.

Mike Pence said also that South Ossetia was «occupied» and Russian tanks were «40 miles» from the place where he was delivering his speech [Helena Bedwell, Pence Says U.S. Backs Georgia in NATO Over Russian Objection, Bloomberg, 1 August 2017], statements that suggest how Trump administration is not so compliant about Putin's will, as expected after the election of the new US President. Georgia has maintained the strongest aspirations of NATO integration among post-Soviet states, in spite of the change of the political fronts leading the government. After the decade that saw the leader of United National Movement Mikhail Saakashvili (who fled to Ukraine with charges of abuse of power during the period to the government and appointed Odessa governor) leading Georgia, with the 2012 elections won by Georgian Dream the aspirations to NATO structures have not ceased.

However, the political elites will have to address structural problems such as corruption, if it wants to achieve the long-term objectives, fundamental for the access to the Community structures. Military

support, between NATO and Georgia, has increased as demonstrated at the Wales Summit, where thanks to the reiterated willingness of cooperation Georgia obtained the Substantial Package, a series of measures aimed at strengthening cooperation between Georgia and NATO, which allowed the operativity of a joint NATO training center between 2015 and 2016.

The structure incorporates support that aims to improve the compatibility of the Georgian armed forces with the Alliance standards, and the country's ability to defend the territory in terms of cyber-defense (the 2008 war highlighted the gaps in the " Georgian apparatus over Russian superiority) [United States Army War College, Strategic Cyberspace Operations Guide, Center for Strategic Leadership, 1 June 2016, pp.55-56], ground, air and sea security, intelligence services and joint military exercises. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg expressed his appreciation for Georgian progress and reiterated the country's future access on several occasions for example during the annual Agile Spirit Joint Training missions between USA and Georgia, which since September 2015 has become a program of multinational military exercises [NATO-Georgia exercise 2016 Fact Sheet].

This strategy must be pursued and must be able to concretize the efforts that Georgia is trying to achieve. Unfortunately, accession to the MAP has been postponed many times, while other Eastern European countries have been able to achieve true NATO accession. The risk that Georgia is demoralizing and losing its will to join must become a NATO priority. Georgia itself has a strong sense of participation in NATO structures as it is the largest non-NATO contributor in Afghanistan and Georgian soldiers actively participated in peace missions in Kosovo, in Central African Republic and anti-terrorism missions in the Mediterranean sea. NATO can not afford to lose a decisive actor and a creditable partner like Georgia.

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