

The first contacts of the Georgians with the West were reflected in the popular myth about the Argonauts. In the mid-second millennium BC Greeks from Miletus came to the country Eguri (Egrisi) for the Golden Fleece. Their boat was called Argo, while the participants of that expedition were known as Argonauts. Eguri was Colchis – a wealthy state which emerged in the mid-second millennium BC.

In the 6-5th cc. BC Greek migrants from Miletus founded trade factories in coastal line of Egrisi (Colchis): Phasis (Poti), Dioscuria (Sukhumi), Pitiunt (Bichvinta), Gienos (Ochamchire). The Greek written sources since the 6th c. BC provides us with detailed information about ancient Georgian state formations, filling up some gaps in later local chronicles.

As a result of expedition of the Roman commander Pompeus (65 BC) Kartli (the same Iberia -Eastern Georgia) fell to Rome, while Western Georgia (Egrisi) as a province of Pontus was included into the Empire. Short dependence took a turn for alliance, formulated as a "brotherhood and alliance".

In 298, under a treaty concluded by Rome and Sassanid Persia in Nissibin, the Kartli Kingdom appeared to be under the Roman political control, enabling the authorities to acknowledge Christianity.

Kartli declared Christianity as the state religion in 326, and about that time the same was done in Egrisi (Lazica)¹. This decision for Georgia, situated at the crossroads between the West and the East, implied taking political orientation towards the West, while two strong superpowers, Rome and Sassanid Persia, were rivalling for world domination. The decision determined Georgia's further fate and strongly tied the Georgian people and the Georgian culture to Western civilisation, even if after that Eastern Georgia much of the time was controlled by Persians or for a shorter time by Arabs.

In 482 the powerful Georgian King Vakhtang Gorgasali broke with Iran, turned to Byzantium, married the Byzantine princess Helena, achieved independence for the Georgian church, and expressed his loyalty to Byzantium, keeping it till his death. His last words to his people were: "Never abandon love for Greeks,"² which was a conformation of the Western orientation.

In 596 the Catholicos of Kartli Kirion corresponding with the Roman Pope Gregory the Great, firmly turned the Georgian church to Diophysitism which meant Western orientation. In early 7th century, Abraham, Catholicos of Armenia, wrote to the Catholicos of Kartli: "We

* Prof. Dr., Vice-Rector, International Black Sea University

¹ G. Alasania. Twenty centuries of Christianity in Georgia, Publisher "Diaspora-Credo", Tbilisi, 2005, p. 34-35.

² Kartlis Tskhovreba (Georgian History) ("Old Kartlis Tskhovreba"). Preparation for publication, introduction and terminology by Ilya Antelava and Nodar Shoshiashvili, Publisher "Nike", Tbilisi, 1996, (Georgian), p. 182.

hardly believe in devoted love for Byzantium from a slave of the king of kings as well as in his separating from Persia having the same faith"³. However, that was true.

Splitting up into Catholic and Orthodox churches was not immediately recognized by Georgians and despite the schism of Christendom in 1054 A.D. , the Georgian Church retained contacts with the Catholic Church. About 1065, the famous ecclesiastic figure Giorgi Mtsatsmindeli made the following comment concerning the ecclesiastic discord between Rome and Constantinople: "As heresy has occurred so many times among Greeks... Holy councils among ecclesiastic leaders were summoned and this issue was thoroughly investigated... Khroms (i.e. the Western church) once they acknowledged God, they have never deviated from this faith and they never practiced heresy..."⁴

Georgians didn't participate in Crusades; however 200 crusaders joined forces with the Georgians in defeating invaded Moslem coalition at the Didgori battle in 1121 A.D.

There are several Georgian documents in which the Roman Pope is still in place after 1054:

1. 1057: The deed granted by Bagrat IV to Shiomghvime monastery. The document is confirmed by Catholicos Giorgi;

2. 1188: The deed granted by Queen Tamar to Gelati monastery, signed by Catholicos Tevdore;

3. 1245-50: renewed immunity conferred by eristavi of Kartli Grigol Surameli to Shiomghvime Monastery, confirmed by Catholicos Arseni;

4. 1281-1282 ; the conferring deed issued by Nickolos Catholicos to Arvanbeg Sabaisdze;

5. 1260-1270 ; the deed from Shiomghvime collection about granting Samtsirveli to Zosime Tokhaisdze;

6. 1454 document of Kulukhi, issued by David Catholicos about tribute of Kulukhi Cross population;

7. 1467 endowment to Mary of Mtskheta Metekhi from Catholicos Abraam Abalaki ;

8. 1470 conferring deed from Catholicos David to Makharebel Maghaladze;

9. 1472 conferring deed from Catholicos David to Okropir Maghalashvili. ⁵

The early Georgian document where one can't see the Pope alongside with the other patriarchs is dated 1545. It is not accidental that prior to that, Russian kniaz married the niece of the last Byzantine emperor and assumed the right to claim the West and to the East. Later on, in the mid 16th century, Ivan IV the Dreadful took the title of a king, extending his territory eastward with the 4-year interval to Kazan and later Astrakhan khanates. Disappearance of the Pope from the list of patriarchs has to be somehow connected with empowering Russia⁶.

³ Ukhtanesi. History of separation of Iberia from Armenia. Armenian text translated and edited by Z. Aleksidze, Tbilisi, 1975, (Georgian), p. 5.

⁴ Giorgi the Junior. Life of Giorgi the Athonite. Georgian prose, I, Tbilisi, 1982, (Georgian) p. 487.

⁵ Guram Mamulia. Giorgi Mamulia. Orthodox isolationism or western nationalism. "Politics ", March, 2001, (Georgian), p. 42-47 .

⁶ Ibid.

In the letter of the Georgian King Giorgi the Brilliant to the king of France Philippe Valois (1328-41) the former complained that the French kings frequently pitted Eastern kings against the foes, but after that they didn't come, leaving them alone in face of danger.⁷ King Giorgi implied the Georgian kings were under the Eastern kings, while the French king had a wide meaning, covering all western rulers.

In 1318 Catholic bishopric was founded in Sukhumi.⁸ In 1328 according to the bull, issued by the Pope, bishopric, placed in Smirna before, was transferred to Tbilisi, and a decision was made about constructing the temple, church for bishop.⁹ Since that time Georgia was visited by European Roman Catholic missionaries and envoys who contributed greatly to the survival of Georgia throughout the Middle Ages. Contacts with the missionaries were attractive for the Georgian side as a means for establishing trade and cultural links between Georgia and Christian Europe - a challenge of the time. The key factor in the great headway made by Catholic Missions in Georgia was the efforts of the missionaries. The latter strongly supported the idea of unification of the state, built churches, founded schools, disseminated education, rendered medical aid, bridged Georgia to the rest of Europe, fulfilled diplomatic functions, opposed the slave trade, wrote the books, extolling Georgia, and unlike some other foreigners, took the time to learn Georgian and the local culture, in every way possible contributed to its continued development.

From the end of the 13th century to the beginning of the 14th century Genoa got permission to found a trade factory in Georgia.¹⁰ After defeating of Venetian fleet in 1354, Genoa founded trade factory in Sebastopolis (the same Sukhumi). In 1354-1453 trade factory was administered by Kafa. In 1453, that factory passed to "St. George Bank".¹¹ According to the regulations of Kafa (1449) the consul of Sebastopolis had 1% of cost of the goods brought in or out of Sebastopolis. In those years not just Georgian goods but also silk from Iran and Azerbaijan was exported via Georgia to Europe. The attempt to establish trade relations with the Western Europe one can trace later, for instance in times of Levan II Dadiani (1611-1657), who invited European merchants to Megrelia for founding a company exporting Iranian silk to Europe via Georgia.¹² The same project was revived in 1714 in the Agreement that had to be concluded between Georgia and France, some paragraphs of which considered trade of France with Iran via Georgia and Black Sea.¹³

Despite of attendance at Ferrara-Florence Council, Georgians didn't join the Florence union (1439), avoiding losing of independence of their church. However they still participated

⁷ T. Beradze, M. Sanadze. Georgian History, I, (Georgian), Tbilisi, 2003, p. 203.

⁸ T. Beradze. Navigation and marine trade in medieval Georgia. (Russian), Tbilisi, 1989, p. 97; Richard J. La papaute at les missions d'orient au mouen Age (XIII-XVs), Rome, 1977, p. 178.

⁹ M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian church, materials and studies. Edition, introduction by Z. Aleksidze, J. Odisheli. Publisher, «Kandeli», Tbilisi, 1995 (Georgian), p. ; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome Relations, Publisher, «Aghmashenebeli», Tbilisi, 1995, (Georgian), p. 94).

¹⁰ T. Beradze. Navigation and marine trade in medieval Georgia, p. 99;

¹¹ T. Beradze, Navigation and marine trade in medieval Georgia, p. 99-100.

¹² T. Beradze, Navigation and marine trade in medieval Georgia, p. 150-152; Payssonel. M. De Traite sur la commerce de la Mer Noire t, II, Paris, 1787, p. 41-42, 48-50.

¹³ T. Beradze, Navigation and marine trade in medieval Georgia, p. 151; Documents from the history of French-Georgian Relations, (March 1707-December 1714). French text with the Georgian translation, introduction and comments by I. Tabaghua, (Georgian), Tbilisi, 1975, p. 276.

in various attempts of Europeans to organize anti-Ottoman coalition, since the increasing power of the neighbouring Ottoman Empire threatened its independence.¹⁴

In 1460 Ludovico of Bologna took with him the envoys of the Georgian king Giorgi VIII and Kvarqvare Atabeg with the letters. Those were Nikoloz from Tbilisi and Kusudan (Parsadan), who were going to Europe together with five envoys. Their route was through Hungary, Germany, Venice, Florence, Rome, Milan and France. In May 1461, the Georgian envoys reached France; they first visited the French king Charles VII, after that Philip the Kind, the Burgundy Duke¹⁵. Despite failure, they didn't lose the desire to establish contacts with European countries. The next, who was sent, by the Kartli King Constantine in the ninth decade of the 15th century, was Nilo, the follower of the St. Basilus order. Together with brother Zakaria, they were sent to Spain, to Queen Isabelle and King Ferdinand in 1495, with the gifts. The hosts appreciated their visit, expressed thanks for the gifts, however they declined the request to participate in anti-Ottoman coalition.¹⁶ The ambassadors also met Pope Alexander VI and gave him a letter from the Georgian king appealing to Europeans to rise against increasing Moslems. As a response, the Pope sent to the Georgian king the decision of Ferrara-Florence Council, inviting him to follow the document.¹⁷

The dissolution of Georgia in the end of the 15th century made its division between the Ottoman Empire and Sassanid Persia in the mid 16th century easier. Since then, the aspiration toward unification and independence was an impetus for the further activities of Georgian civil as well as ecclesiastic figures. West Europe was considered by them as a potential ally with whom they tried to establish contacts in all ways possible. In some cases they even were ready for concessions in religious affinity. Throughout the late Middle Ages a number of Georgians who were at the highest social position, adopted Catholicism with expectation of efficient support in achieving the main goal.

In the first half of the 16th century the Kartli King Luarsab I tried to establish contacts with the Pope via the Armenian envoys. The latter informed the Pope that the Georgian kings and rulers recognized supremacy of the Pope.¹⁸ One can see evidence about that in the Pope's letter, sent to the Georgian king.

In the ninth decade of the 16th century, a new attempt to establish a anti-Ottoman coalition was undertaken, in which Roman Pope Clement VII (1592- 1605), German Emperor Rudolf II (1576-1612), Venice, Spanish king, Persians and Georgians were implied.

In his letter to the Pope (1596 6 May) Luarsab's son Simon – the Kartli king, following his father, mentioned the Pope as a "spiritual Father", "the Greatest Pope", asking him support against Ottomans. Simon addressed the Spanish king with the same plea, asking him to attract the German king to the coalition as well. In his letter Simon promised to be loyal to the Pope¹⁹.

¹⁴ M. Makharadze. Georgian-Ottoman Relations in the 15th century, (Georgian), Tbilisi, 2005, p. 80-84; J. Vateishvili Georgia and European countries, v. I. Georgia and Western Europe XIII-XVII cc. I, "Publisher "Nauka", (Russian), Moscow 2003, 179-210.

¹⁵ G. Paichadze. The anti-Turkish coalition of European countries and Georgia in the 1460, Publisher "Metsniereba", p. 88-105.

¹⁶ M. Makharadze, Georgian- Ottoman Relations in the 15th centuries, p. 98-100.

¹⁷ M. Papashvili. Georgian-Rome relations, p. 110.

¹⁸ M. Tamarashvili. History of the Georgian Church... p. 519-521; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome relations, p. 113.

¹⁹ I. Tabaghua. Georgia in European archives, I , (Georgian) Tbilisi, p. 156, 222, 227; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome relations, 117, 121-122; .M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian Church... 523-524.

In 1625 the ambassador of Kakhetian King Teimuraz, Nikoloz Irbakhi Cholokashvili, was sent to the European countries, to the Pope Urban VIII . The ambassador asked the Pope to connect him with the Spanish king. When visiting the Spain King Philip IV, Nickoloz was pleading him to join him in his fighting against Ottomans.²⁰ That attempt also failed however was followed by the positive result - the first printing of Georgian books by Propaganda Fide.²¹ Instead of support, Teimuraz recieved a letter from the Pope and blessing. In 1630 Teimuraz sent another envoy - missionary Pietro Avitabile to the Pope²² .

In the early 17th century Lui Grange cites the words of the Western Georgian prince Gurieli. The latter said that the reason for the fall of Constantinople was separation from Rome. In his words, everybody had to be loyal to the Pope.²³

In the mid 17th century Vakhtang V, the king of the Eastern Georgia addressed the Pope, Alexander VII: "The Great", "the Most Powerful", "Invincible", "the Greatest among All Patriarchs", "Protector of Justice", "the Head of All Christians."²⁴

In the eight decade of the 17th century (1687), in his letter to the Pope, Giorgi XI expressed the will to join European kings who were under Pope's protection. In his letter to the Pope Innocencio XI he explained that the situation in Georgia, which was controlled by Persians, didn't allow him to accept Catholicism publicly, but the king promised to live in loyalty to the Pope. That was time when the anti-Ottoman forces - Austria, Poland, Venice and others were united. " All Georgian troops in our kingdom are ready and wait for your orders; our dream is to follow your orders. Do not doubt our loyalty. Although we are far, we dream to see you", -were the words of the Georgian king to the Pope .²⁵

Another Georgian king Erekle I (1688-1703) recognized simultaneously Islam and Christianity. According to Tournefort , "He went to the mosque", "came to Mass too at the Church of the Capuchins, where he would drink his Holiness's (i.e., the Pope's) health".²⁶ Missionary Iosef informed Rome about loyalty of Georgian king Erekle I to the Pope.²⁷

In times of the Pope Climent XI (1700-1721) the Georgian Catholicos Domenti was ready to accept Catholicism, however not losing independence. He considered the Pope as a viceroy of Christ, head of apostolic church.²⁸

²⁰ J. Vateishvili. Georgia and European countries, v. I. Georgia and Western Europe, XIII-XVII cc. I, p. 248-254.

²¹ J. Vateishvili, Georgia and European countries, v. I, p. 378-440; M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian Church... 556-558; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome relations, 160-162.

²² M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian Church..., 556-558; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome relations, 169-162.

²³ M. Tamarashvili. History of Catholicism among Georgians, since XIII th - till XXth cc. Tbilisi, 1902, (Georgian), p.139.

²⁴ M. Tamarashvili. History of the Georgian church..., p. 620-621.

²⁵ M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian Church..., 631-632; M. Papashvili, Georgian-Rome relations, 221-224.

²⁶ David Marshal Lang, The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy 1658-1932, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 83; J.P. de Tournefort. Travel to the Eastern countries. Translation from French, introduction and comments by M. Mgaloblishvili, (Georgian), Tbilisi 1988, p.61.

²⁷ M. Tamarashvili. History of Catholicism among Georgians, P. 255.

²⁸ M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian church, P. 430. M. Tamarashvili. History of Catholicism, among Georgians, p. 306.

Kartli King Kaikhosro (1709-1711) informed the Pope, that he accepted Catholicism, but was forced to hide it, since Georgia was controlled by Persia and asked his permission for keeping this in secret.²⁹

Hard times in the Persian history in early 18th century raised hope for achieving independence in Georgia. The first step made for getting help was again toward the West. That time the Kartli King Wakhtang VI sent the ambassador (Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani) to France to plead with Luis XIV. He also visited Italy and other European countries (1714-1716). After failing attempt to protect his country from Persians and Ottomans³⁰ Wakhtang was forced to get into contact with Russia. That turned into tragedy for Georgia. The country was occupied by invaders,- and the Georgian king was forced to emigrate forever, ever accompanied by the greater part of educated elite.

In the 40s of the 18th century, Catholicos of Georgia Nicolos VII Kherkheulidze sent a letter to Pope Benedict XIV, in which he described the situation in Georgia, asking him not to call back the Catholic priests, who were in Georgia³¹.

In the sixth decade of the 18th century after long time of splitting Kakheti, Kartli King Erekle II managed to unite Eastern Georgia, and unification of country as a whole was set up on agenda. Once again he appealed to Europe. In 1781 Erekle sent Father Dominic of Trieste to Rome and Vienna. The latter died on his way. The following year, Erekle sent Father Mavros (Mauro) of Verona with a letter to the Austrian emperor, the king of France and several of the Italian states. One can read in his letter to French king Louis XVI: "...we now make bold to state that our request consists in imploring means to maintain two regiments, to enable us to recruit soldiers and organize them on the European model, so that our foes, hearing of the formation of such a corps, may not dare to undertake any further hostilities against us..."³² That time Erekle's appeals to the courts of Western Europe had not met with any response.

A vain quest for an ally in the West throughout the 18th century by the orientation towards Orthodox Russia came to an end. In 1783 the treaty of Georgievsk, signed between Russia and Georgia, actually laid the foundation for the abolition of the Georgian Church's independence, followed by abolition of statehood. According to the treaty the Georgian Church had to subordinate itself to the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to the eighth place in the Church hierarchy. By the same document, sympathy and tolerance toward Roman Catholicism was sealed up. In 1801, the Russian king annexed Georgia's centuries-old statehood in Eastern Georgia on the basis of a manifesto and a bit later Western Georgia Kingdom was abolished.

Letter sent to Napoleon by the last Western King Solomon II is the last desperate attempt to attract attention of the West:"...the emperor of Moscow had unjustly and illegally stripped us of our royal estate; .. this emperor had no legal title whatever; ... since we ourselves had neither the strength to set up armed resistance to the invasion of our domains, nor any means of obliging the usurper to restore them to us by recourse to law, therefore this double impotence served to excuse our failure to take effective action;... may you deign to liberate me, together with million Christian souls, from the yoke of the pitiless emperor of Moscow, either by your lofty mediation, or else by the might of your all-powerful arm..."³³ The international situation was not favourable for the realization of those plans. Activities of the Catholic

²⁹ M. Tamarashvili. History of Catholicism among Georgians, 306.

³⁰ David Marshall Lang, The last years of the Georgian Monarchy 1658-1832, p. 100-115.

³¹ M. Tamarashvili, History of the Georgian church, 432.

³² David Lang, The Last years of the Georgian monarchy 1658-1832, p. 182-182.

³³ David Lang, The Last years of the Georgian monarchy, p. 263-264. .

missionaries in Georgia were suspended in 1845 by the hegemony of Russian authorities, since the Russian administration was established there.

In the second half of the 19th century, many Georgians studied in European Universities, being involved in political activities, founding the political parties, and editing different newspapers and journals. Many Europeans with different intentions visited Georgia. However cultural as well as commercial interaction between Georgia and the West was mainly realized via Russia and under Russian control.

A new experience of relations is connected with a short period of independence of Georgia in 1918-1921. Germany, Britain and Italy, one after another, supported the independence of the small state in different ways. Yet, they finally gave up in the face of more significant challenges. The end of WWI didn't put the independence of Georgia on the political agenda. This was confirmed later by the League of Nations which didn't recognize the independence of Georgia. That resulted in 70years of Bolshevik regime in Georgia.

In 1991 Georgia once again restored political independence. Recognized by international community, Georgia is a member of a number of international organizations. After the "Rose Revolution" in November 2003, Georgia firmly stood for the following strategic goals: a strong, united and stable democracy and Euro-Atlantic Integration. For the performance of the current program the country has accepted the following documents: Government Action Plan of Reforms 2006-2009; Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, 2004-2006; European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, signed in October 2006. Each comprises a number of obligations and duties, which are gradually fulfilled by our country. Unlike the previous experience, Georgia is strongly supported by International community. However, its territorial integrity as well as independence is still at risk. But this time we believe, that increasing significance of global integration and cooperation in different spheres, steadiness of democratic values, and transparency of ongoing processes will not give way to injustice.