

The Importance and Economic Prospects of Strategic Relations Between Georgia and Romania

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Abstract: *The historical and cultural-religious basis of relations between Georgia and Romania has roots in the depths of centuries. A key figure connecting both cultures is Saint Antim Ivireanul (Antimoz Iverieli 1660-1716), a Georgian-born metropolitan who became a major spiritual and cultural figure in Romania. Romania is the largest Orthodox country in the European Union. More than 85% of its population are Orthodox. Approximately the same percentage of Orthodox Christians in Georgia. This is an important positive factor for all types of relations.*

A new era in relations between Georgia and Romania began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The countries have maintained diplomatic relations since 1992. Since then, Romania has been an important partner for Georgia. Romania strongly supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and is an active advocate of Georgia's EU integration and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Trade between Georgia and Romania has two strategic directions. The first is trade in nationally produced goods between these countries for local consumption. In this regard, Romania is a particularly interesting partner, as its economic potential significantly exceeds Georgia's. The second direction is the movement of transit cargo between Georgia and Romania which will have a greater economic impact, which is consistent with the concept of the Middle Corridor.

Romania-Georgia economic cooperation has solid foundations and is growing, especially in trade and emerging strategic projects. There's untapped potential in transport, energy, and deeper business linkages, supported by Romania's political backing for Georgia's EU integration. With sustained effort, bilateral economic ties can deepen significantly in the coming decade.

Keywords: *Romania. Georgia. Strategic relations. Trade and economic collaboration. Black Sea collaboration. Georgia's EU integration.*

Introduction

Romania is a very important economic, political and cultural partner of Georgia. This country is a member of the European Union and NATO, which is fully consistent with the ge-

ostrategic orientations declared by the Constitution of Georgia. In the future, in addition to the above, these states can even be considered the axis of cooperation in the Black Sea Basin, as important contributors to the security and stability of the region.

The convergence of political courses is an important prerequisite for economic cooperation and that is why the economic integration of Romania and Georgia has good prospects. This is obviously largely due to the fact that both states are located on the Black Sea coast and have regionally important ports on the Black Sea, between which important maritime cargo routes have already been launched.

Regional cooperation between Georgia and Romania is on the rise, although its acceleration is desirable. There are several promising directions where regional cooperation can be deepened. The first of these is, of course, trade. This includes both the direct exchange of goods and services between the two countries, as well as re-export. Romania has the most optimal location for Georgia for transporting goods to the EU countries, just as Georgia is the gateway to the Caucasus and Central Asia for European countries.

Romania stands out for its energy potential in the region. In addition to the fact that this country has sufficient oil reserves, it also has significant oil refining potential, which is of particular interest to Georgia. In the first seven months of 2025, oil products worth \$132.6 million entered Georgia from Romania, which is the second largest indicator in this regard after Russia¹.

Romania's agricultural sector is on the rise and most importantly, the country has developed agricultural production facilities industries. Geor-

gia can import agricultural machinery and chemicals from this region. In turn, Georgia has accumulated significant potential in agricultural production, especially in viticulture, which will be interesting for Romanian entrepreneurs.

Cooperation between Georgia and Romania in the development of transport infrastructure on the Black Sea is particularly promising. We have touched upon this issue above and noted that the ports of Georgia and Romania create the most optimal maritime corridor connecting the Transcaucasus and the European Union. Transport and communication cooperation requires particularly close cooperation and concentration of efforts in terms of synchronization of legislation, technologies and business activities.

The development of transport and communication ties will certainly accelerate the deepening of cultural and educational relations, which in turn will contribute to the expansion of economic cooperation. These processes should be carried out in a mutually reinforcing manner, which will create the best conditions for Georgia's preparation for EU membership. Romania can also be considered a gateway to the EU for Georgia and the entire Transcaucasus.

Historical and cultural-religious basis of relations between Georgia and Romania

We have mentioned above that political compatibility greatly contri-

butes to the development of economic relations. In this regard, cultural ties, religious identity and traditional relations are of no less importance, which increases the acceptance between nations. Romania is the largest Orthodox country in the European Union. More than 85% of its approximately 19 million population are Orthodox. This is an important positive factor for all types of relations.

In the modern world, when states set a goal to deepen cooperation, at the initial stage they always strive to identify a common ideological basis and if this is not possible, they try to create it. A common religious context is extremely important, although it is gratifying that in this regard the relations between the two nations also have deep historical roots and all this can be freely used as a cornerstone of relations. What would otherwise require great effort and material costs, in our case already exists.

When discussing the relations between Georgia and Romania, Antimoz Iverieli must be mentioned. He lived in Romania and made a great contribution to this country. Of course, his field of activity was not economics or trade, however, when such grandiose people as Antimoz Iverieli were at the foundation of relations between two countries, this had a significant material dimension even after centuries and had a positive impact on all spheres of relations. Grateful Romanians do not forget the deeds of Antimoz Iverieli and in

1992 he was canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Antimoz Iverieli made a significant contribution to the development of the Romanian literary language. He made Romanian the liturgical language². He organized the printing of books. He fought for the independence of Romania, for which he ultimately sacrificed himself. It is also worth noting that it stands at the origins of the first Georgian printed book. When the King of Kartli, Vakhtang VI, intended to establish a printing house and addressed this request to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the latter forwarded his request to Antimoz Iverieli. After which Antimoz sent his disciple, the Romanian Mihai Istvanovich, to Georgia and thus the foundation of the first Georgian printing house was laid³.

When the relations between the two countries have such a brilliant foundation as is the case with Georgia and Romania, it would be unreasonable not to use this fact for the further rapprochement of the Georgian and Romanian nations. The contributions of Antimoz Iverieli and Mihai Istvanovich are so great that they can be considered a strategic basis for relations.

General comparison of the economic potential of Georgia and Romania

Economic relations between Romania and Georgia span several decades and can be divided into two periods. At the first stage, relations

were conducted within the context of the socialist bloc and were not voluntary in nature and therefore could not create a picture of natural development. Georgia was not an independent country at all and its foreign trade was completely controlled by the union structures. Although Romania had formal independence, it was also strictly subject to the rules that operated in the socialist camp. The beginning of the second stage is obviously connected with the liquidation of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the socialist camp. After the change of government in Romania in 1989, this country took the path to-

wards integration into European structures. The same processes began in Georgia from the end of 1991, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union was formalized. A very important event in the history of Romania occurred on January 1, 2007, when this country, together with Bulgaria, became a member of the European Union. From that moment on, relations between Georgia and Romania took on a new political and economic significance, which was further strengthened in December 2023, when Georgia became a candidate for EU membership.

Table 1. Comparison of the economic potential of Romania and Georgia

	Romania			Georgia		
	2015	2020	2024	2015	2020	2024
Area (thousand km ²)	238.4	238.4	238.4	69.7	69.7	69.7
Population (million)	19.82	19.27	19.07	3.72	3.72	3.69
GDP (billion USD)	177.9	210.3	238.2	15.2	17.3	25.1
2015 USD						
GDP (million USD)	578.2	683.6	774.4	55.6	63.4	91.8
2021 international dollars						
GDP per capita	8.98	10.91	12.49	4.01	4.65	6.80
Thousand USD at 2015 exchange rate						
GDP per capita, thousand USD in 2021 international dollars	29.17	35.47	40.61	14.95	17.0	24.88
GDP growth rate %	3.15	-3.67	0.81	3.35	-6.29	9.43

The table was compiled using information from sources^{4 5 6},

Table 1 compares the economic potential of Romania and Georgia in the context of general indicators. Romania is approximately 3.5 times larger than Georgia in terms of territory and 5 times larger in terms of population, according to recent data. Therefore, Romania's basic strategic potential significantly exceeds Georgia's, which is also reflected in economic indicators. In particular, according to 2024, Romania's GDP at the official exchange rate in 2015 US dollars would amount to 238.2 billion, while Georgia's would amount to 25.1 billion, which is almost 10 times less than Romania's. If we compare GDP indicators in terms of purchasing power parity, the difference is slightly smaller and Romania's advantage is 8.4 times greater.

Romania's GDP growth rate in the period 2015-2024 was 33.9%, while Georgia's was 65.1%. Georgia's significant GDP growth, compared to Romania's, was due, among other factors, to a low base effect during the period. From the above, the 2020 figure indicates a significant recession rate for both countries, which was caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic during this period. Georgia experienced a notably big economic decline, which exceeded Romania's similar figure by almost two times. On the other hand, Romania's economic development stagnated in 2024, with GDP growth of less than 1%, while Georgia's similar figure exceeded 9% this year.

In 2024, the average GDP per capita in the European Union in purchasing power parity terms was 62.4 thousand international dollars. If we adjust this figure for the inflation rate, we will find that in 2021 dollars it would be approximately 54 thousand international dollars. If we compare it with the corresponding data in Table 1, we will find that in 2024, the GDP per capita in Romania would be 75% of the overall EU average, while Georgia would be 46%. It should also be noted that among the EU countries, Bulgaria has the lowest figure in this regard, at approximately 34 thousand international dollars and Luxembourg has the highest, at 128 thousand international dollars.

Comparative characteristics of transport communications between Georgia and Romania

The first regular container route between Georgia and Romania was launched on September 20, 2019, connecting the ports of Batumi and Poti with the port of Constanta. The working group estimates that this new route will significantly reduce cargo handling times and tariffs. They expect the Batumi/Poti-Constanta route to take 5 days one-way⁷.

A further regular route between Poti and Constanta is operational from June 27, 2023. The route takes approximately 42-48 hours and operates once a week in one direction⁸. The route is served by a 150-metre ferry, which operates in both directi-

ons. The vessel is mainly staffed by Georgian nationals and sails under the Georgian flag. The service is used by truckers; oversized cargo and motorcycles are also transported. Containers and closed railway wagons can also be transported through it. The cost of cargo transportation varies from 300 to 2,600 euros, depending on the type of cargo. Passenger transportation is also planned from 2025, which was already being carried out between Batumi and the Bulgarian port of Burgas by 2023⁹.

In addition to Romania, Georgia is also connected by ferry-cargo crossings with Bulgaria. For example, the direct distance between Batumi and the Bulgarian port of Varna is about 1,100 kilometers and between Batumi and Burgas, which is also a Bulgarian port city, the distance is about 1,000 kilometers. There is also a ferry service between Poti and Burgas, the distance is 950 kilometers. The same indicator between Poti and the Romanian port city of Constanta is 1100 kilometers and between Batumi and Constanta is 1150 kilometers.

Despite the fact that the distance between the ports of Georgia and Bulgaria is relatively shorter than between the Romanian port city of Constanta and the ports of Georgia, in our opinion, sea freight transportation with Romania has greater prospects and this is determined by several reasons. First of all, we should consider the geographical location of these countries. Bulgaria is located south of Romania and borders such countries as Turkey, Greece, Serbia,

Macedonia and Romania. Georgia can establish sea or land connections with Turkey, Greece and Romania. Accordingly, the use of Bulgaria as a transit country is promising only in the case of Serbia and Macedonia. Romania, which is closer to the center of Europe, borders Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria. In addition, transit cargo transportation from this country, due to distance and location, is more appropriate to be carried out in Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and while the war is ongoing in Ukraine, in Poland, Northern Europe and the Baltic countries.

In addition to the above, in terms of the development of economic ties, Romania is a more promising country than Bulgaria because it is larger in terms of territory and population and is significantly better developed in economic terms. An essential factor in this regard is oil reserves and its refining capacities, which make Romania the most important trade and economic partner for Georgia.

Other routes to Europe are less attractive not only compared to Romania but also to Bulgaria. For example, transit times on the Istanbul and Piraeus routes are 12-24 days, while on the new Poti-Constanta route this time is reduced to 2 days¹⁰. The land route via Turkey cannot compete. From Poti to Constanta, its length is more than 2000 km, while the sea distance between the same cities, as already mentioned, is about 1100 km.

Strategic directions for the development of trade between Georgia and Romania

Trade between Georgia and Romania began in the years after Georgia gained independence, although at first it was mainly limited to imports from Romania and export figures to this country were quite insignificant. Among imported products, oil products prevailed.

Trade between Georgia and Romania has two strategic directions. The first is trade in nationally produced goods between these countries for local consumption. However, in our opinion, in the future, the movement of transit cargo between Georgia and Romania will have a greater economic impact, which is consistent with the concept of the Middle Corridor. Regardless of the implementation of the Zangezur Corridor, in our opinion, for the reasons discussed above in this article, Georgia will not lose its importance as a transit point for Romania.

Table 2 presents such indicators of Georgia's trade as domestic exports, total exports and imports with important trading partners. First of

all, it is worth noting the fact that the domestic and total export indicators of Georgia with Romania practically coincide. This indicates that almost no re-export of goods supplied from Georgia is carried out from the territory of Romania. This, in our opinion, is unacceptable, since Romania has great potential as a transit country.

The value of goods imported from Romania to Georgia during the period under review significantly exceeds the export indicators and sometimes this excess is even tenfold. This does not indicate the fact that the territory of Georgia is used for the re-export of Romanian goods. Although the table does not show what part of the goods imported from Romania are re-exported from Georgia, these figures should not be impressive, since the lion's share of the nomenclature imported from Romania falls on petroleum products, which are consumed locally. If we analyze the dynamics of trade indicators between Georgia and Romania, it is easy to notice certain fluctuations in all three directions during the period under review, although no significant trend of growth or decline is evident.

Table 2. Georgia's trade figures with important partners

		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Domestic export (\$ m)	Romania	27	37	75	58	178	20	32	18	22	20
	Bulgaria	178	157	186	258	297	311	252	420	247	122
	Germany	70	76	39	44	42	59	65	62	49	50
	Italy	73	73	60	42	40	34	58	60	36	53
	EU	534	492	558	612	735	642	659	762	609	477
	Azerbaijan	90	48	86	116	88	80	110	152	146	141
	Russia	155	192	357	383	439	409	563	538	559	652
	Armenia	87	62	71	76	87	85	133	177	166	196
	Ukraine	55	61	75	114	132	126	184	90	74	85
	CIS	468	423	656	772	864	808	1,136	1,104	1,095	1,242
	USA	103	67	120	159	129	78	190	262	93	133
	Turkey	78	168	207	232	188	174	307	393	343	403
	China	88	171	190	184	187	460	582	696	270	273
	World total	1,602	1,619	2,006	2,221	2,353	2,437	3,167	3,729	2,862	2,993
Total export (\$ m)	Romania	27	37	75	58	178	20	34	23	25	28
	Bulgaria	214	161	187	259	300	313	254	424	250	124
	Germany	75	85	46	51	54	62	68	68	57	53
	Italy	75	73	69	43	40	35	58	61	37	54
	EU	623	550	642	713	805	697	717	863	704	574
	Azerbaijan	241	153	274	508	509	438	532	673	862	725
	Russia	163	207	398	438	497	441	610	642	657	680
	Armenia	180	153	214	286	433	187	256	584	787	618
	Ukraine	60	74	127	180	251	217	307	233	101	103
	CIS	841	741	1,194	1,689	2,043	1,506	2,021	2,686	4,016	4,525

		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	USA	104	68	122	160	132	80	195	265	97	141
	Turkey	187	173	217	241	202	191	323	435	409	459
	China	126	174	202	199	208	477	616	737	311	303
	World total	2,204	2,117	2,745	3,379	3,797	3,340	4,242	5,582	6,086	6,558
Total import (\$ m)	Romania	207	190	191	209	213	120	178	292	219	219
	Bulgaria	168	150	156	182	125	110	179	203	217	304
	Germany	432	432	455	467	501	404	481	664	974	1,293
	Italy	198	263	218	232	229	183	248	288	374	416
	EU	1,991	2,084	2,126	2,453	2,303	1,846	2,308	3,060	3,829	4,576
	Azerbaijan	539	493	567	593	559	513	598	640	655	584
	Russia	625	681	790	935	977	888	1,023	1,835	1,744	1,849
	Armenia	175	217	281	335	268	422	418	614	337	237
	Ukraine	456	418	447	515	416	390	452	286	260	251
	CIS	1,968	1,986	2,322	2,695	2,441	2,414	2,815	3,723	3,297	3,303
	USA	254	231	332	501	679	556	648	1,014	2,056	2,049
	Turkey	1,327	1,354	1,374	1,474	1,617	1,408	1,829	2,374	2,575	2,775
	China	587	546	733	834	859	709	865	1,127	1,330	1,612
	World total	7,304	7,342	8,057	9,361	9,518	8,049	10,099	13,540	15,611	16,889

The table was compiled using the figures provided in the source¹¹.

According to the table, Georgia has much more intensive trade relations with another Black Sea state, Bulgaria. The data on domestic and total exports are several times higher than the corresponding indicators for Romania. If we analyze Bulgaria's economic potential, it is clear that we are dealing with a high share of re-exports, although such a conclusion cannot be drawn unequivocally from the table, since these two indicators almost coincide over the years. For example, in 2022, domestic exports from Georgia to Bulgaria amounted to 420 million US dollars, while the total export figure amounted to 424 million US dollars. Based on these data alone, we can conclude that re-exports amounted to 4 million US dollars. But it is not excluded that we are dealing with hidden re-exports. It is also inconceivable that Bulgaria consumed goods worth 420 million US dollars sent from Georgia. There is no doubt that products manufactured in Georgia were re-exported from this country. Import rates from Bulgaria are high and it is highly likely that some of these goods are re-exported from Georgia.

Conclusions and recommendations

Romania and Georgia have complete convergence of political interests and orientations, both of these states are located on the Black Sea coast and are actually the gateways to Europe and the Caucasus. All this creates a solid foundation for deepening economic cooperation.

When there is ideological compatibility between countries, this greatly simplifies cooperation in all directions. Often, when such a thing does not exist, huge resources and funds are spent artificially to create such a base. Georgia and Romania do not need this. Both countries are carriers of Orthodox culture and relations between them have been going on for centuries, as evidenced by the contributions of such personalities as Antimoz Iverieli and Mihai Istvanovich.

Romania's economic and resource potential significantly exceeds that of Georgia, therefore, it is much more important for our country to deepen economic relations with this country.

For Georgia and the entire Transcaucasus, the most optimal routes for trade with most EU countries pass through Romania, which is confirmed by actual data. Their development has already begun, but the pace is clearly insufficient. Coordination at the government level is necessary to accelerate cooperation.

The trade indicators between Georgia and Romania are low and do not correspond to the potential that the two countries have in this regard. The failure to use the re-export potential looks especially disappointing, which deprives both countries of great opportunities. To correct the situation, it is necessary to deepen intergovernmental relations, synchronize legislation and actions and involve other bordering and interested countries in this process, which is so necessary for the development of transit cargo transportation.

Notes

- ¹ <https://georgiatoday.ge/georgia-and-romania-hold-business-meeting-to-expand-cooperation/> .
- ² Vasile-Lucian V. Goldan, „The Archbishop Antim Ivireanus (1708-1716) Interactions between the orthodox religion, spirituality and creativity”, *Management Intercultural*, nov. 2015, Vol. XVII, NR. 34 pp. 339-346, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/cmj/interc/y2015i34p339-346.html>.
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