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### **Georgian Social Stereotype According to the Estimation of the Citizens of Europe Visiting Georgia \***

Georgia is the country, located at the verge of Europe and Asia, counting the centuries-old history, by stages reflecting the impact of as Western so of Oriental politics and culture according to the variable geo-political situation. It is natural that these factors had the immense influence on formation of Georgian mentality and creation of social capital. Although, it is impossible to reiterate in single regards the affiliation of Georgian social stereotype to the European or Asian society.

Georgia was always attractive for the European travelers, who had the particular interest and describing in detail Georgian social way of life and cultural values. Georgian and foreign archives keep the great volume of documentation, allowing the clear conception of the Georgian reality in the corresponding epoch. Besides, the attitude of the authors of records, which they express towards Georgian way of life, culture and traditions, their estimations and general perceptions are of utmost interest.

Today Georgia is intensively engaged in the process of European integration and correspondingly, many foreign citizens (as from Western so from Asian countries) arrive in the country with various purposes (business visit, official obligations, traveling etc). It is interesting what is the attitude of the Western citizens towards Georgian way of life, culture and generally, to Georgian social stereotype today, what is the subject of their approval or inadmissibility.

As it is known, **coordination**, i.e. **consensus** is considered as one of the core features of social stereotype. A. Teshfel considered the coordination exactly as the core feature of stereotypes. In his opinion, the perceptions and

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attitudes, shared by the great number of individuals of one social group, can solely be attributed to social stereotypes<sup>1</sup>. Correspondingly, the objectives of the work are to detect the feature, according to the emotional estimation, and also the stabile cognitive aspects of Georgian ethnic stereotype, and study/description of the basics of stereotyping, implemented by the European citizens and creation of final picture. The research is aimed to reveal the estimation of the European citizens on Georgian society – as European or Asian socium.

The empiric and analytical research methods are used in the work. The special questionnaires were deliberated for this purpose and distributed to the citizens of various countries, gender, age and social requirement, stayed in Georgia at least over one-month period and who more or less are familiar to the Georgian way of life.

The questionnaire consists of several sections: 1. information on respondent: name, age, gender, citizenship, profession; 2. the basic part, containing several questions: a) which Georgian tradition/behaviour do you like most? why? b) which georgian tradition/behaviour do you like least? why? c) arrange the list of traditions / behaviours by the order, which from your point of view shows Georgian characters most; d) what were your first impressions when you came to Georgia? e) what has changed since then in your impressions? 3. Conclusive part with estimation and summarizing question: do you think that Georgia is more European or Asian country?

One paragraph from the basic part was particularly relevant and important for the research: c) arrange the list of traditions / behaviours by the order, which from your point of view shows Georgian characters most. Respondent were offered the list of Georgian traditions and the way of life. They had to arrange the list in the succession according to what they considered the most important or less valuable for Georgian character. The list included the following traditions and the way of life:

- hospitality traditions;
- family life-style;
- “supra” (banquet) and cuisine;
- orthodox religious life;
- political life-style;
- artistic temperament;

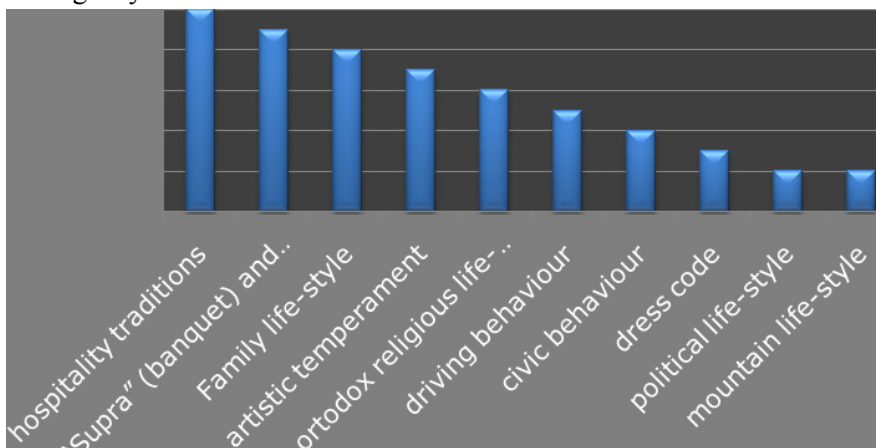
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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/gumanitarnye\\_nauki/sociologiya/STEREOTIPI\\_SOCIALNIE.html](http://www.krugosvet.ru/enc/gumanitarnye_nauki/sociologiya/STEREOTIPI_SOCIALNIE.html)

- others (very patriotic);
- Dress code (black etc.);
- civic behavior ;
- driving behavior;
- Mountain life-style.

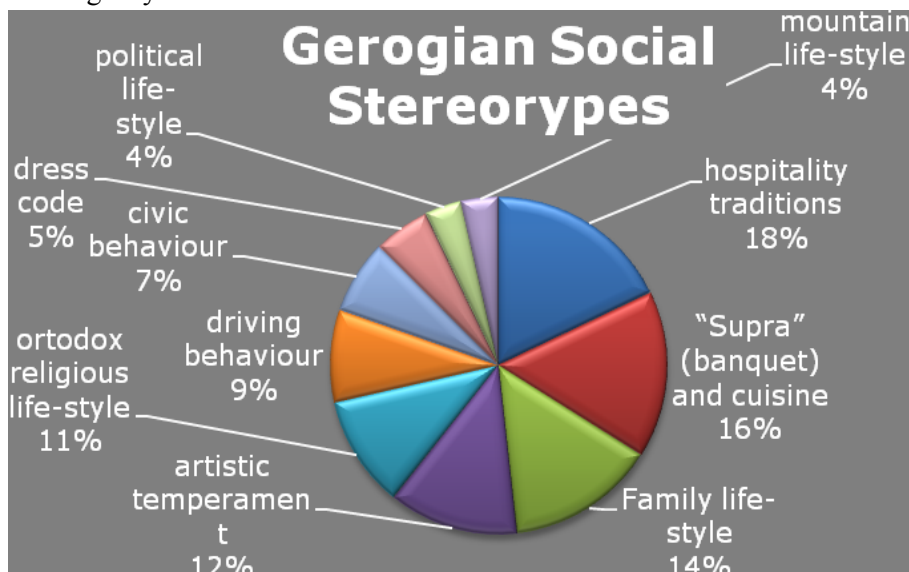
As a consequence of studying the questionnaires, we obtained very interesting results. Those core features which according to the opinion of the European citizens, create Georgian social stereotype and become the basis for the Georgian-European social perceptions and entail the types of relations, were detected. In opinion of inquired, the following are the six most dignified features of Georgian social stereotype: hospitality traditions, “Supra” (banquet) and cuisine, Family life-style, artistic temperament, orthodox religious life-style, driving behaviour. Reasoning from their position and estimation, the civil self-perceptivity and responsibility are the less characteristics of Georgian mentality. On the other hand, political activity, dress code and the mountain traditions less create the Georgian social stereotype in their opinion.

Besides, on the basis of the material study, the consequence of the mentioned factors was outlined. Upon estimation of Georgian social stereotype, the tradition of hospitality occupies the top rank for the European citizens. The Supra (banquet) tradition takes the second place. The family life-style also is the integral part of Georgian social stereotype. The material is summarized in the following way:



18% of inquired persons consider hospitality as the core feature of Georgian social stereotype, 16% votes for the banquet tradition, 14% consider

the family life-style as the core feature. The rest of material is assessed in the following way:



Obtained material was processed in several more directions:

Upon answering the questions, the internal differentiation was outlined considering several factors: the steady, single-angled estimations from one side, supported and recognized by almost all inquired respondents, and variable estimations, depending on various external factors from another side.

For the most of the inquired, the core features of Georgian social stereotype are hospitality, banquet tradition, family life-style in a single regard. These three factors take the first three places upon sharing the Georgian social stereotype to everyone, i.e. identification of Georgian socium is performed according to these three factors. Estimation of several traditions/ways of life varies between several indicators, i.e. the answers are not single-angle, and can be said that they are conditions with specific concrete reasons:

Upon estimation of Georgian social stereotype, driving rule is actualized for the foreigners, who recently (for more than one year) arrived to Georgia, and those, visited Georgia a long time ago, pay particular attention to civil self-perceptivity for Georgian routine reality.

Instead, the citizens under the age of 40 consider the civil self-perceptivity as the less characteristic of Georgian social stereotype, for foreign guests over the age of 40 the particular love and talent of Georgians to arts are actualized. The estimation of the mountain traditions is not single-angle as well.

Reasoning from this, we can discuss, what the core markers of Georgian national way of life are for the European citizens, which factors become the basis for the stereotyping and which features are subject to dissociation according to the emotional estimation. Thus, the objective of the work is final detection of the stabile and variable values of Georgian social stereotype.

As it is known, upon researching the phenomenon of the stereotype, four main aspects are outlined:

- 1) cognitive aspect;
- 2) affective aspect;
- 3) social- psychological aspect;
- 4) sociological aspect.

Stereotype is considered as the integral part of cognitive process, as a result of stereotyping, dissociation and schematization. Moreover, the gnoseological analyses and structural analyses are as well linked to the same aspect. Structural analyses implies the study of the features, such are fixity and steadiness. In regards with the affective aspect, stereotype is studied in different manner, as the element of the emotional estimation process. In sociological-physiological regards, the stereotype is studied as the general type of a human – the representative of some definite social group. In this regards, the attention is emphasized to ethnic superstitions.

The focus is attached to overemphasization of concrete signs of some specific objects, ranking thereof in essential type, the criteria of which are their social meaning. According to this concept, stereotype differs from other types of knowledge with the fact that it is basically directed not to the corresponding object, but to the knowledge of another person, related to the object. Although, it is noteworthy that different researchers considered various factors on various stages as the leading idea upon researching the social stereotype<sup>2</sup>.

Naturally, the question arises, which factors, according to the held research, represent the dissociation, the result of schematization and which features depend on the concrete situation according to the emotional estimation and finally, what Georgian social stereotype is.

It can be said that hospitality, family life-style, banquet tradition and orthodoxy mean the steady social stereotype, apprehended by the European citizen. This is proved by their single-angle estimations. Other estimations

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<sup>2</sup> P. N. Shikhrov, Researching of Stereotypes in American Social Studies, Issues of Philosophy, 1971, N5, p. 171.

presumably have emotional-analytical basis, depending on concrete situation of the concrete estimator, thus apparently represent the part of Georgian social stereotype in less grade.

We shall separately discuss the traditions, as a result of research of which, the basis of Georgian cultural identity is:

### **Family life-style tradition**

Most of inquired are amazed in Georgian environ by the family life-style tradition, when parents and grown-up children live under one roof. Moreover, sometimes one family consists of parents, children, their spouses and accordingly the representatives of three generations live together. Presumably, this cannot be explained with social and material background solely, as possibly in western countries this reason exactly could become the reason for dissociation from the family in the juvenile age and the foreground of separate life and nucleon family tradition. Juveniles of the age of 17-18, living separately, can to some extent be considered as indignity of the family, this issue in Georgian environ is not yet actual. Although, in the event when the family is represented with the three generation, the family life-style tradition is acceptable and valuable for the European citizens. It can be said that patriarchal traditional family appeared on the strongest factors of preservation and survival of national identity under the severe geo-political conditions.

Worship of a family becomes the basis for one more social stereotype, which is reflected on firmness of sibling relations. The part of inquired approve the close sibling relations and commitment for mutual aid in Georgian environ, which is necessary for social integration and cooperation, is not blind and comprises the prognosis for the behavior of personages. Such prognosis in scanty societies, the example of which is Georgian society, is mainly based on personal relations and “peculiar trust”. It can be said that the process, which converts personal trust to social trust is principally important for social integration. Besides, close sibling and friendly relations persist the spiritual degradation, total depression and sense of solitude of a person. Although, it is noteworthy that such close sibling relations are one of the strongest factors of nepotism domination in the country and hinder the statehood development.

### **Georgian banquet tradition**

For most of the inquired Georgian banquet tradition - Georgian banquet academy, as it is also called, is acceptable and interesting. The banquet occupies

considerable time and place in life of a Georgian, as the integral part of the national way of life. The behavior norms, toasts, as well as essence and substance of the dishes, timely consequent appearance thereof at the table are preliminarily defined. Georgian feast, first of all, represents the act of co-integration and socialization of individuals. The impact of Georgian banquet and banquet relations are as well recognized by the Western anthropologists in their researches. Though, for more precision, it shall be noted that socialization of Georgian banquet differs from the Western-puritanical type socialization, which is based on apprehension of definite norms of social-political or religious obligations and responsibilities. As distinct from this, banquet socialization represents sensual-emotional “unity”, harmonization of different individuals, where attitude to another person, as responsibility is substituted with the principle of sensual-aesthetic “embracement”, i.e. the banquet, human relations, estimation of the events, own views and attitudes, combined with various forms of eloquence, are certain type of means for self-actualization and relief. Moreover, it can be said that business relations in Georgia are formed and established at the banquet as well.

Georgian banquet is the arrayed system of self-actualization, social hierarchy and culture. Each toast has own consequence, appropriate cliché, verbal decoration and sacral significance. The toast of the Lord is a must. Georgians raise toasts of parents, then of siblings, of deceased, died for the homeland, and then of children, new life etc. Besides, the banquet leader (Tamada), according to the definite situation and talent, can include own interpretations in any of the toasts. In other words, the banquet tradition is the one of the strongest marker of nationality for every Georgian of any layer, social requirement or age. In spite the fact that views and social perceptions of juveniles alter today, they get education in Europe and in USA, the banquet tradition remains still the characteristic of their national identity, perhaps the severe subsequence and the form of the toasts are modified, but they stay the same in essence. On the contrary, Georgians even spread and inculcate this tradition among unknown society for them.

It can be said that the results of the research give a very interesting picture and clearly reflect compatibility and sections of western and Georgian social stereotypes.

### **Hospitality tradition:**

Georgia is the small collective-oriented culture. The culture of such type

is utterly oriented on relations. The primacy of relations, hospitality and several other factors are outlined in such culture as a norm. These norms are much more important and efficient than any other abstract norm, as is the Law, religious concept etc. The conscious that you can always understand your folks, is the linking layer for all this.

The main channel of socialization, for sure is the family but afterwards, from the age of 13-14, it moves on districts, street and the circle of friends. Georgia is interesting with the fact that friendly relations are deeper and more important than in any other culture. Correspondingly, any guest, visiting the home, according to the mountain tradition, shall be considered as a friend, even if the guest is a deadly enemy, the host is obliged to properly respect him/her, share own food. In western Georgia, no matter how poor the family is, they give away the last slice of bread and host the guest properly. This is the norm, which is not subject to alteration. For Europeans this is a sort of exotics, definitely they like this tradition, although this factor appeared incomprehensible for one European respondent and even caused his irritation.

### **Orthodox religion:**

Christianity became one of the most important factors of Georgian national identity just upon the spread of Christianity. Moreover, it is said in the ancient hagiographic work “Torture of Abo” that Georgians have particular mission, Georgia is the edge of the Christian world and Georgians have obligation to protect Christianity, even at the price of own physical torture. Georgia was called “the mother of the saints”, i.e. there are a great number of saints in Georgia, who were tortured for Christianity (including the day of 100 000 saint martyrs). Rejection of Christianity means rejection of the national conscious, and this is equal to destruction of Georgian statehood. Thus, the orthodox rule is one of the strongest and invariable traditions in Georgia even today. People go to churches for the service with the whole families, parents and minor children, juveniles, from the age of 15 approximately independently go the churches, it is noteworthy that the elderly people keep all ecclesiastic traditions, attend services every Saturday and Sunday, keep Lent, tell the confession etc. It can be said that orthodox religious tradition is one of the most important factors of socialization. One of the inquired states that he is surprised when Georgian intersect passing the churches, no matter are they walking or driving.

**Low civil self-conscious:**

It is a paradox that real power of our society is exactly where unbiased and impartial observers see the weakness solely. It can be definitely said that the underlined disobedience to the laws of conquerors and the empires during the centuries, disparaging attitude towards them created the low law-abiding culture, though the same circumstances strengthened the degree of freedom and the immortal value of Georgian individualism as well.

As a result of the research, the positive and negative estimations of respondents were also outlined, i.e. positive and negative stereotypes. We wonder what is not acceptable for a person with the European mentality in Georgian stereotype most of all and what is incompatible with their views and ideology. Georgian hospitality appeared interesting, acceptable and noteworthy for most of inquired. They do like this tradition and attitude. Here we represent the answers of several respondents:

**Question: which Georgian Tradition/behaviour do you like most? Why?**

***Esther, 30 years old, profession: germanous/slavish, citizenship: Czech:***

Fine humor, Creativity and sense for the grotesque/absurd in difficult situations/circumstances. This is a sign of intelligence.

***Susanne: 33 years old, teacher, German:***

Generosity, which is closely interconnected to their talent for friendship and their capacity to seize the day.

***Christopher: 40 year's old, male, Dr. Phil, Swiss:***

Hospitality, social cohesion, emotional warmth, sensitivity. Because in Switzerland people are colder and relations are more rational.

***Holgeri, 46 years old, male, German, teacher:***

Hospitality traditions, it is a good feeling – warm, friendly, open for everyone.

***Raymond, 65 years old, male, Swiss, Entrepreneur:***

Hospitality. Georgians in their country would give away their last shirt to welcome their guests. When I came first to Georgia in 1990, you could not buy anything in the shops, but guest tables were full of everything I could not even dream of. I just wondered how this could work. I was also very much attracted by the tamada tradition of toasting positive statements for every person around the table, once the traditional toasts were through. I never before experienced such an arty-lifting tradition. I have traveled many continents and countries of

this world but never have I found such an overwhelming hospitality. Several characteristics of national routine, existing in Georgian reality appeared utterly unacceptable for the European way of life: unpunctuality, lack of responsibility, impulsive character and driving rule of course.

**Question: which Georgian Tradition/behavior do you like least? Why?**

***Chshishtoph, 23 years old, male, student, Polish:***

Non-punctuality.

***William, 38 years old, associate professor, male, US:***

Punctuality. I realized that Georgian people are unable to complete a required task or fulfill an obligation on time or a previously designated time.

***Tomasz, 42 years old, male, teacher, linguist, Polish:***

Impulsiveness and hot-headedness (difficult in the long run)

***Vaida, 23 years old, female, historian, Lithuanian:***

Driving culture. Drivers signalize too much, also you must be very careful if you want to cross the street even if traffic light is green.

***Trevor, 67 years old, male, British:***

Aggressive behavior in men. Such behavior in England is rare. It would often lead in violence.

***Susanne, 33 years old, female, teacher, German:***

Unreflected conservatives, e.g. as for double standards in the relationships between men and woman.

The answer on the last question of the questionnaire is particularly interesting:

**Is Georgia European or Asian country?**

80% of inquired suppose that Georgia is the European country. One of the basics for this is orthodoxy. Part of inquired (10%) suppose that Georgia is neither Europe nor Asia, it represents the specific phenomenon. In opinion of part of inquired (10%), Georgia is the mix of European and Asian mentality and temper. And the part of inquired suppose that Tbilisi is the European city, and other small towns of Georgia less reflect the European features.

***Vaida, 23 years old, female, historian, Lithuanian:***

it is between Europe and Asia. Tbilisi is more European than other cities in Georgia, but still I couldn't say that it is Europe, also not Asia.

**Kavagan, 44 years old, male, lawyer, university professor, Spanish:**

I think it is a mixture of both, which is a great advantage in order to play a leading role in the future between Europe and Asia. many arias of the capital Tiflis resemble any European city but when one travels to rural areas or small cities of Georgia, the influence of Europe is much less and traditional Georgian ways of live and attitudes are strongly rooted.

***William, 38 years old, associate professor, male, US:***

I would say that Georgia has combination elements of Europe and Asia. I find 1) European style of architecture in Rustaveli Avenue, vake and saburtalo neighborhoods, 2) European style for woman fashion and 3) maintaining Christian identity. However, I find also Asian elements in Georgian tradition such as family oriented, the attitude of tardiness and women stereotype. In general, I realize that Georgia is in the process of integration and moving more close to the European style of life and tradition.

In the end it can be said that the most of the inquired suppose that Georgia is European country, in spite of the fact that Georgians have not completely established the European mentality. In their opinion, Georgia gradually approximates the European standards of statehood. It must be mentioned that in the VI century B.C. Greeks considered Georgia as the best and perspective Geographical substratum for colonial life<sup>3</sup>. In the end, Georgian chatachter is closer to the european phycology than to the asian mentality. It is natural because Georgian feudalism, social structure alwayse was like european, although georgian character is more like south european, especially spanish mentality and behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> Tedo Dundua, Colchis in the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cc.b.c. The Geek Settlements in Western Georgia, Tbilisi, 2009.