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Issues on Teaching Area Studies in Georgia

Abstract

Today, influence of globalization can be apparently seen in the spheres of politics, economics, culture and education. The countries are not able to isolate from one another anymore. Globalization influences social systems, institutes, communication sphere and this clearly shows that this process impacts the higher education as well. Changes in teaching of different discipline were put on agenda.

Collapse of the Soviet Union, gaining of independence by Georgia, geopolitical position of Georgia, diplomatic contacts made, all these have increased the role of Georgia as an independent actor on international arena. Since that time, Georgia gradually became part of the global processes. Thus, in the 21st century, against the background of globalization and dialogue of civilizations, Georgia faced new challenges. The country has to take its position in the contemporary world. Today, implementation of the proper policies would determine our prospects, both, in short and long run. Goal of the research is to investigate the issue of education of the proper professionals against the background of such challenges.

Today, regarding its political, economic and cultural relationships, Georgia increasingly needs highly qualified professionals in the spheres of regional studies and area studies. Mostly we imply gaining of wide knowledge about the European and oriental countries and generalization of this knowledge in the process of inter-country relationships development. Today we regard that due consideration of the experience of foreign countries is of great significance to adjust modernization and globalization to the historical and cultural traditions of our country.

In this respect, it is important to study history and current situation of the Europe and Near East, Georgia has great traditions of this. As for the Europe, together with teaching Western European languages, it is desirable to develop teaching of European studies in interdisciplinary context, as this responds to the globalization challenges. Georgia's active participation in Bologna Process, internationalization of education processes provide good opportunities, with respect of improvement of teaching of cross-cultural studies, though together with education, expansion of scientific researches, conducting of interdisciplinary studies is of significance as this would allow introduction of the new approaches, provide opportunity of training of the highly qualified and competitive professionals. In addition, teaching of cross-cultural studies should become more pragmatic to ensure its contribution to the state building.

Keywords: Georgia, regional studies, globalization, cross-cultural studies, interdisciplinary, teaching.

Collapse of the USSR, gaining independence, the geopolitical situation and established diplomatic ties added up to

Georgia's part of an independent player on the international arena. By and by Georgia is becoming a part of the global

development, which, given the globalization and the dialog of civilizations in XXI c., poses new challenges to this country. The search for its distinct place in the world makes the national policies all the more important in terms of not only the immediate future but a much longer term perspective, as well. Understandingly, the appropriate internal, foreign and economic policies largely depend on the relevant university graduates. Therefore, instruction in various subjects, promotion and upgrading the scholarly research become all the more important.

Today, Georgia's political, economic and cultural stance calls for duly qualified experts in regional studies especially so where Europe, the Americas and the East are concerned. In lien with the development of the international relations, comprehensive knowledge of each of the players will have to be gained and generalized.

In the recent years, the profile of the regions has heightened on the international arena; hence the increasing scholarly interest to the regional studies and

research. Although instruction in the international relations has upstaged that of the regional studies, the recent publications show its increasing importance. To this end, Lee Kyu Young mentions several reasons:

1. The international studies calls for profound knowledge of the peculiarities of individual territories;

2. The complexity of the international system makes it nearly impossible to focus on all the key problems of the international affairs;

3. The regional studies form a springboard for delving into certain theoretical issues for they makes it possible to verify them or push forward new studies regarding individual territories. We may even say that the regional studies is a much broader concept than the international relations per se;

4. The dynamics of the international level regional development brought forward in the Western publications have led to coinage of the term, such as "the

regional complex” or “the actors integrated in the world politics”¹;

5. Given the aforesaid, we should emphasize how important it is to look at the world from both the inside and outside (Lee Kyu Young).

While we agree with Mr. Lee Young’s view, we do not think that the globalization makes the country and regional studies less important. Conversely, the scope of the regional studies makes it possible to synthesize the expertise in the country studies and that of the international politics and economics and subsequently, provide instruction required for their comparative analysis and setting them within the global context.

Our view of the regional studies is shored up by the opinions reflected in Prof. G. Modelski’s study “South-East Asia: the International Relations and Regional Studies”. In it, the author emphasizes the link between regional studies and

international relationships saying that the former was understated in favor of the latter² while the contrary should be more appropriate: the regional studies should form the basis for the international relations. Prof. G. Modelski points out that research into the individual territories, i.e. regions gives insight into certain international development and eventually reveals the factors influencing the processes of interest. He goes on to say that the international system is becoming so complex that the survey of international politics leaves but little room for certain important problems, while focusing on the specifics of individual countries and regions sets them within the context of the global thinking. (Modelski, George).

Among the 1990s theories expounded in connection with the regional studies and globalization, we should single out “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington. The critics say that Prof.

¹ The term “Regional Complex” emerged in the studies by Barry Buzan, the British scholar published in late 1980s. The concept was further elaborated in the 2003 publication (Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, “Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

² Prof. G. Modelski substantiates his view by referring to: Grayson Kirk, *The Study of International Relations in American Colleges and Universities*, New York, Council of Foreign Relations, 1947, H.J. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1958

Huntington failed to answer certain questions about the opposed civilizations and the conflict brewing within them (Chikovani 2006: p.59). We may conclude that the global issues may be solved on the basis of profound knowledge of individual regions. In order to prevent the “Clash of Civilization”, the world community must pay due attention to the intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence (Machitidze 2018: p.37). The pace the globalization spreads across the regions makes their investigation all the more important.

Given the aforesaid and, also, Georgia’s geopolitical situation, adds up to the significance of instruction in the regional studies, all the more so that there is a long-standing tradition where Middle Eastern studies are concerned. Georgia’s ties with the Middle East date back into the centuries. Understandingly, studying the history of the Middle Eastern states has been a priority. Since the collapse of the USSR, Georgia has maintained diplomatic

relations with quite a few Middle Eastern states, which calls for finding new scholarly approaches to them. Here we single out Turkey, Georgia’s strategic partner and the regional power. Given the little scholarly attention, which used to be paid to the non-Western countries (Колдунова, Е. В.), the issue seems all the more important. Namely, as a result of the 2014 survey of the key foreign policy magazines - International Organization, World Politics, European Journal of International Relations, Prof. Johann Wüllers at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), pointed out at a significant disbalance in the international studies. What he meant was the scarcity of publications on the non-Western countries (Koldunova, E.V.). However, it should not concern the Georgian experts of Oriental studies, who remain true to the long-standing tradition³. However, given Georgia’s increasingly close relations with the Eastern states, the Georgian Oriental scholars should constantly keep up with the

³ “Orientalism” according to A. Said

regional and global policy trends and challenges and include them into the curriculum.

As to Europe, in the Soviet times, the European studies were limited to the instruction in the Western languages and literature, as well as the history of individual European states. The instruction in the European languages included the relevant country studies. The same was true for the Americas, which understandingly was no longer the call of the day in view of Georgia's foreign policy challenges emerging in the mid 1990s. Therefore, it became evident that the European and American studies had to be included into the university curriculum, which soon became the case.

The experience shows that instruction and research into the regional studies have to be placed in the interdisciplinary context. Contacts among the universities are no less important so that the Georgian historical and cultural traditions could be adapted with the world developments and

the challenges posed by the globalization. In this regard, Georgia's involvement in the Bologna Process, i.e. the university level international collaboration is an important factor, which implies development and implementation of international projects by both the Professors and students.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the regional studies we have to discuss another issue. As said above in this paper, we believe that studying the history of a certain country or a region is insufficient. Therefore, the question rises: do the country-/regional studies belong to the humanities? We suppose that as it is the case in the USA, they should rather be considered as a part of the social sciences. Even their interpretation implies domestic and foreign policy factors (geopolitical, geographic, economic, social and cultural, confessional etc.) of the territorial units, regional groupings and countries, i.e. subjects of the international relations, whose investigation calls for a systematic approach.

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