



Students of Tbilisi State Conservatoire on strike in support of Georgia's European aspirations. May 2024.

COURTESY PHOTO

GEORGIA AT THE CROSSROADS

Perspectives on the Europeanization of higher music education

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abstract

Music and Performing Arts is one of the fields Georgia can pride itself on internationally. While the country is in transition as it officially embarks on its long path to European Union membership, this study explores the process of Europeanization of higher music education in Georgia. Authors analyze how higher music educational institutions employ European projects for organizational change at a grassroots level and to what extent and in what way supranational and national policy instruments influence the outcome at the local – institutional level. This study categorizes Georgia's higher music education sector into three major stages since the country regained independence in 1991 and uses structural, institutional, and organizational approaches for analysis of collected data. The findings suggest that significant challenges remain despite emerging European support in the cultural area and active cooperation between major stakeholders in the sector and their European counterparts.

KEYWORDS: Georgia, higher music education, Europeanization, internationalization.

On March 28, 2023, Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Georgia's oldest and most prominent higher music education institution (HMEI), organized a panel discussion titled: "Return to Europe, our home. Europeanization of Georgian Higher Music Education."¹ The discussion led the authors to write this article to build on previous research and explore the organizational change in connection to the concept of Europeanization in higher music education (HME) in Georgia. This field has yet to be widely studied.

Georgia's journey in transforming its HME system in the post-Soviet era and its integration into the European higher education (HE) landscape has been dynamic. This period marks significant changes in various fields as Georgia shifts from a Soviet-influenced system to engaging with broader European contexts. The country remains in transition.²

Georgia applied for membership in the European Union (EU) in March 2022, together with Ukraine and Moldova.³ However, the Association Trio, a tripartite configuration, was de facto split by the EU Commission in its opinion on granting EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova but denying it to Georgia in June

2022.⁴ The following year, Georgia received a candidate status for EU membership, too. Despite Georgia's recent political and rhetorical drift from Europe,⁵ the people of Georgia have repeatedly proven their pro-European aspirations, which have also been demonstrated in overwhelming popular support for membership of the EU.⁶

According to the EU Analytical Report on alignment with the EU *acquis*, Georgia is “moderately prepared” in the area of education and culture. It is broadly aligned with EU objectives.⁷ The initial assessment is that EU presence has brought systemic changes in higher education and the cultural sector. However, obstacles and challenges remain. In particular, core transformation is reflected in three main pillars: student-centered education, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy. This paper analyzes how Georgia endeavors to align its higher music education system with European standards, practices, and values, seeking to further integrate with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

GEORGIA'S HIGHER MUSIC education sector is dominated by one institution, Tbilisi State Conservatoire (TSC).⁸ Accordingly, this research focuses on the changes in TSC as primary and broadly representative of the field. The research aims to analyze the process of Europeanization of Georgia's higher music education from the transitional perspective and answer the following research questions: (a) How is the Europeanization of Georgian higher music education defined, understood, and interpreted at the supranational, national, and local levels? (b) What are the gains and failures of Georgian higher music education in its path to synchronization with the EU standards and practices?

The study uses the framework of analysis for Europeanization in Higher Education provided by Amélia Veiga, which considers a multi-theoretical framework for analyzing the complexity of the topic. The framework includes structural, institutional, and organizational approaches.⁹

At the international level authors looked at: EU Publications and statistics on Higher Education, including Erasmus+, Horizon and Creative Europe program guides and statistics, as well as country reports by the European Commission and resolutions on Georgia adopted by the EU Parliament. At the national level: national rules and regulations; higher education strategy documents, such as The Unified National Strategy of Education and Science for 2022–2030; cultural strategies, such as Culture Strategy 2020–2025; governance, structure and policy documents, including reports and publications from National Erasmus+ Office were analysed. At the local level: institutional strategic development plans, internationalization mechanisms, EU-funded projects overviews, institutional involvement in EU initiatives, statistics regarding international programs, courses, students, exchange studies,

etc., were reviewed. In addition, material from the accreditation self-evaluation report has been analyzed.

Besides documentation, this article is based on the data from the project “Return to Europe: Exploring the Europeanization of Higher Music Education in Georgia.”¹⁰ Those include multiple in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and two surveys conducted in March–May 2023 involving students and staff from TSC.

One hundred nineteen students of Tbilisi State Conservatoire participated in the surveys. There were two surveys in total, one for students with international experience, i.e. who had previously participated in international activities, such as Erasmus+ mobilities; another survey was designed for students who did not have such experience. Eighty-eight participants had no international experience, while the rest had spent at least a semester abroad as exchange students. This number is 25.05% of the total student population, strengthening the representativeness of this inquiry.

Data from four focus groups with teachers and students at Tbilisi State Conservatoire, with seven to ten participants each, were also used. In addition, two interviews were conducted with TSC administration representatives. The length of focus groups and interviews was 45–90 minutes and included a diversity of participants from different ages, genders, backgrounds and disciplines.

Background: Higher education in Georgia

The Georgian higher education sector operates and is regulated by the Law on Higher Education and various policy documents.¹¹ As part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Georgia, among others, has established a three-cycle higher education

system, authorization and accreditation mechanisms, as well as entities such as the National Examination Centre to ensure that student status is obtained through the United National Exams and National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE). Structural changes at higher educational institutions (HEIs) included developing quality assurance bodies and adopting the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), as well as preparing mandatory self-evaluation reports (SER) through internal quality assurance analysis for external

evaluation by the NCEQE.

Higher education research is a diverse and extensive field that covers a wide range of topics related to governance, leadership, and organization of higher education institutions, teaching and learning, education systems and environment, and more. For the last three decades, increasing numbers of educators and experts in Georgia have engaged in discussing not only the need for educational reforms but also opposite traits in the ongoing educational reforms, teaching and learning environment, and teach-

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Tbilisi State Conservatoire (TSC) is Georgia's oldest and most prominent higher music education institution.

ing methodology. The authors have developed guidelines for HEIs and produced national reports on challenges and opportunities based on research. The National Erasmus+ Office in Georgia (NEO) has frequently conducted research projects.¹² Those projects have addressed topics such as internationalization, quality assurance, the accreditation process and its effectiveness, and the impact on the overall quality of education, governance, and funding models, as well as curriculum development and innovation. Research has been done on the modernization of curricula, exploring labor market trends, internationalization of the research, and the impact of training and professional development in higher education. National reports also address the governance and organization of HE. Darchia, Bakradze, Glonti, Gurchiani, et al. have examined the policies and reforms implemented in the Georgian HE field, the results and challenges of the Bologna process in Georgia, and steps taken by Georgia to align with European standards and practices.¹³ Dobbins and Khachatryan address Europeanization processes as part of governance in Armenia and Georgia and discuss HE developments amid political transformation and global tensions. The research shows that while the higher education management in both countries generally follows western practices, according to the authors: “policy learning from the West has taken place in a very selective and tactical manner, as steering instruments are only being adopted to the extent that they do not undermine the state’s means for political control over higher education.”¹⁴

MUSIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA is divided into two main stages: secondary education and higher education.¹⁵ The so-called “*non-stop* music education.”¹⁶ at the secondary level finds its continuation on the higher level and, in most cases, at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire.¹⁷

Research on music education in Georgia, particularly in the context of the country’s unique musical traditions and cultural heritage, has been a subject of interest for scholars.¹⁸ Some areas of research related to Georgian higher music education include teaching methodology implications of certain specific courses such as ear training, music history, traditional music education, and cultural preservation, as well as studying pedagogical approaches within various disciplines of music-specialty-related courses. For the past decade, this has been a primary focus for the faculties at Tbilisi State Conservatoire during the national annual conferences, such as the TSC Methodological Conference.¹⁹ It has been a reflection on local institutional problems rather than a comprehensive research platform for displaying music education in Georgia as part of the international perspective. Accordingly, internationalization and Europeanization, specifically in higher music education in Georgia, have not been addressed until recently.²⁰ Besides the authors’ previous work, the TSC quality assurance office’s recent Evaluation Reports (SER) provide substantial insights into the current state of HME in Georgia.²¹

Internationalization, or more specifically, Europeanization?

Cooperation in higher education (HE) in Europe was accelerated by the Bologna processes in 1999 and by the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.²² Establishing the European Higher Educational Area has encouraged convergence in several directions, such as policy rhetoric and objectives, and brought systematic changes in governance and policy. However, there is “persistent diversity in policy instruments and, in particular, policy outcomes.”²³ European initiatives and programs, such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, also bring changes.²⁴ Erasmus



PHOTO: COUNCIL OF EUROPE OFFICE IN GEORGIA



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The phrase “I am Georgian, therefore I am European” was coined by the former Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in 1999. A memorial star with the quote was unveiled in Strasbourg in 2019.

has been a game-changer program since 1987, significantly since it has expanded to the third countries not associated with the program (so-called “partner countries”) under the International Credit Mobility (ICM) framework.²⁵ The program that was aimed at individual mobility of students and teachers has further expanded into several key actions, focusing on its original idea of mobility, as well as on capacity building of the institutions (TEMPUS, CBHE)²⁶ and promotion of European Union “integration matters” (Jean Monnet and Actions).²⁷

Marijk van der Wende, a noteworthy scholar in HE studies, describes internationalization as “any systematic, sustained effort aimed at making higher education (more) responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy, and labor markets.”²⁸ Even though internationalization and Europeanization have been studied and defined thoroughly, only some scholars have connected them to higher education as a scholarly area of studies.²⁹ Dagen et al. also attempted to categorize the waves of research interest in the internationalization of higher education. The authors have distinguished initial interest in internationalization research in the 1970s and the 80s as “primarily focused” on HE in the US. In the 1990s, the research expanded to conceptualizing Europeanization and the relationships between internationalization and Europeanization. Since 2000, the links between internationalization and globalization have been explored; in Europe, research on the impact of the Bologna process in the global context has been one of the examples.³⁰

The research on internationalization and Europeanization of Higher Arts Education (HAE) has been limited, among other things, due to the need until recently for more engagement in mainstream discussion. The prioritization of culture and arts becomes noticeable in the EU; examples may include the launch of the New European Bauhaus initiative,³¹ as well as the establishment of the Knowledge and Innovative Community (KIC) of Culture and Creativity as part of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).³²

ALONGSIDE INTERNATIONALIZATION, European initiatives also affect the Europeanization of HMEIs. Marijk van der Wende

explains Europeanization processes as internationalization on a “regional level.”³³ Similarly, Ulrich Teichler refers to Europeanization as a “regional version of either internationalization or globalization, which is frequently addressed when reference is made to cooperation and mobility, but beyond that to integration, the convergence of contexts, structures, and substances.”³⁴

Europeanization is not mentioned as an official term in policy documents by Georgian authorities. However, as most international funding within the HE sector comes from the EU, internationalization processes mainly contribute to alignment with the EU priorities through its programmes and initiatives. In addition, several policy documents, such as strategy papers for education and culture, directly note European projects as tools for quality enhancement through internationalization.³⁵

The Context for new Eastern Europe

European identity and belonging to the European family, which Georgia sees itself as historically and culturally part of,³⁶ remain significant factors when approaching internationalization.

Eastern Europe underwent a complex political, economic, and social transformation since the end of the Cold War. While Europe overwhelmingly approved some Eastern European countries’ bid to join the Euro-Atlantic structures in the early 2000s and granted the European Union membership perspective to others, the geopolitical argument has been part of the debate over Georgia’s European aspirations.³⁷ By granting candidate status for European Union membership to Georgia in December 2023,³⁸ the EU cemented the legitimacy of Georgia’s European goals.

Felix Ciuta uses the term region-making and reflects that “region-making has been one of the key ways in which new spaces of EU power have been narrated and created.”³⁹ He further states that the EU’s neighbors or membership candidates might have different reasoning when employing the term Europe, and those could be: “a normative desideratum, sometimes must-have label, sometimes a myth or a bargaining tactic.”⁴⁰ The Black Sea region, and Georgia, as the primary subjects of this inquiry, seek to “become European by reproducing the logic of European integration, while at the same time seeking to demonstrate it is, and has always been European,”⁴¹ which echoes the well-known

phrase *I am Georgian, therefore I am European* coined by the former Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania during his address to the Council of Europe in 1999.⁴²

Many scholars have also addressed transformations in the post-communist and post-socialist countries from the decolonization perspective. John Pickles states, “A post-socialist and postcolonial Europe seems to be reinscribing known geographical conceptions with direct political and social consequences: ‘Europe a known, bounded and stable ‘entity’; a hearth, an origin, a home.’”⁴³

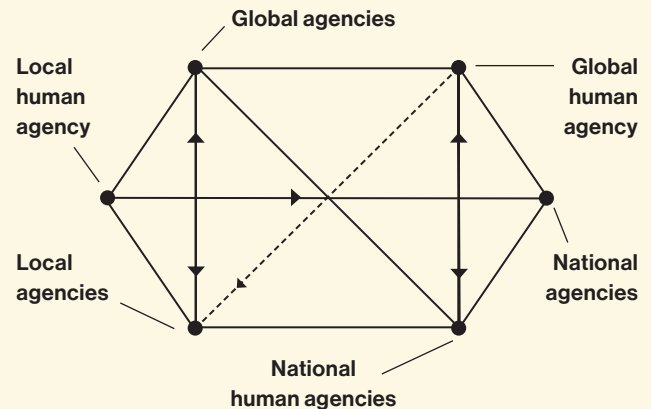
The EU has been enlarging since its foundations were laid in the 1950s. Although EU enlargement fatigue has stalled the accession of the new members, the EU has been steadily moving forward to the next steps in its neighborhood and enlargement policy. Since Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine began in February 2022, the EU has opened accession talks with Albania, North Macedonia, Ukraine and Moldova; granted EU candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia; and signed the visa liberalization agreement with Kosovo.⁴⁴ Furthermore, it has admitted Croatia into the Eurozone,⁴⁵ and partially admitted Romania and Bulgaria into the Schengen Area.⁴⁶

These developments have made significant progress in bringing Eastern European countries closer. It was not long ago when Jan Zielonska, in his controversially titled book: *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, claimed that the EU’s eastern enlargement was an “impressive exercise in empire building.”⁴⁷ Zielonska introduced a notion of a “neo-medieval model of democratic governance”, which refers to the multilevel and polycentric nature of EU decision-making.⁴⁸

Higher education also reflects these developments; hence, Europeanization processes are becoming more relevant to research. HME is a relatively small sector, but it significantly impacts society when it comes to cultural activities and entities, such as orchestras, opera theatres or pop culture. The EU recently published an extensive study that gives evidence about the connections between culture and democracy. The study’s results underline the need to draw holistic conclusions and comprehensively address culture, and in this case, music. “Investing in citizens’ cultural participation is ... essential to promote civic engagement and democratic outcomes,”⁴⁹ which can be strengthened by authorities through promotion of arts education, development of sustainable culture strategies, prioritization of cultural programs and recognition of its significant role in society.

Theoretical framework and methodology for the study

In late 2022, Simon Marginson published the paper “Space and Scale in Higher Education: the Glonacal Agency Heuristic



GLONACAL Agency Heuristic, Marginson and Rhoades, 2002.

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.RESEARCHGATE.NET/FIGURE/GLONACAL-AGENCY-HEURISTIC_FIG2_226037618](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/GLONACAL-AGENCY-HEURISTIC_FIG2_226037618). ACCESSED AUGUST 14, 2023.

Revisited,”⁵⁰ which gave another boost to the glonacal (global, national, local) framework, which has been widely used in higher education research. Educational scientists often use a macro-meso-micro model to explore interactions and compare different levels of analysis. However, the structural approach of the glonacal model has been deemed more relevant for this study as it shows a “dynamic process of institutional and systematic

change.”⁵¹ This model contributes to analyzing “intersections, interactions and mutual determinations of these [glonacal] levels and domains,”⁵² to show that “local entities and collective efforts can undermine, challenge and define alternatives to global patterns; they can also shape the configuration of global flows.”⁵³

Thus, the model can be understood as “interconnected hexagons of three-dimensional space.”⁵⁴ In this study, global refers to international bodies and entities, such as the European Union and umbrella organizations in the HME sector; national level refers to Georgian authorities and

national bodies, such as the National Erasmus+ Office, and local level refers to higher music education institutions, especially focusing on the experiences at TSC.

MARGINSON AND RHOADES define the word agency as “in the sense of an entity or organization that could exist at global, national and local level” and “ability of people individually and collectively to take action (exercise agency), at the global, national and local level.”⁵⁵

The glonacal model also considers reciprocity, strength, layers, conditions, and spheres. Reciprocity refers to “the idea

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	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-granted-ness Shared understanding
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanism	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules Laws Sanctions	Certification Accreditation	Common beliefs Shared logics of action Isomorphism
Affect	Fear Guilt/ Innocence	Shame/ Honour	Confusion/Certainty
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognizable Culturally supported

Three Pillars of Institution. From Scott, *Institutions and Organisations*.

that activity and influence generally flow in more than one direction,⁵⁶ meaning that it is not only a top-down approach, and the process could be non-linear. Strength considers “the magnitude and directness of the activity and influence, as well as the resources available to agencies and agents. Links between levels and domains may be stronger or weaker, more direct or indirect.”⁵⁷ Layers and conditions outline the “the historically embedded structures on which current activity and influence are based, and the current circumstances that make it possible for lines of force and effect to move from one level to another, global, national and local”⁵⁸ and spheres “refer to the geographical and functional scope of activity and influence.”⁵⁹

The glonacal model positions itself between “two extreme propositions: higher education is being totally transformed by economic globalization, and higher education is continuing as before.”⁶⁰

THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH can also be complemented by the institutional approach. New institutionalism provides a comprehensive picture of the institutional environment. William Richard Scott’s *Three Pillars of the Institutional Theory* builds on addressing organizational change influenced by the institutional environment.⁶¹

According to Scott, the three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive constitute the most essential elements for institutions’ operation.⁶² The regulative refers to rules and regulations; the normative pillar constitutes social norms, values, and traditions. Scott defines the cultural-cognitive pillar as “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which the meaning is made.”⁶³

Based on those pillars, the authors analyze and categorize the data collected through various methods.

THE CASE STUDY methodology has been used in various disciplines and has been relevant to this research as well. Compelling authors on case study methodology, such as Robert E. Yin, Sharan B. Merriam, and Robert E. Stake, focus on the connection between phenomenon and context.⁶⁴ In the case of the Europeanization of higher music educational institutions, context matters when exploring the phenomenon and HMEIs responses. Case study methodology also distinguishes several purposes; one is the exploratory type, which studies the phenomenon that needs further understanding, defining, and thus *exploring*. It is practical when answering *why* and *how* questions,⁶⁵ which reflects the research questions of this study.

The authors limited the research area to higher *music* education in Georgia and used inductive approaches. We departed from our personal experiences and reflections in the initial stages of the research, focusing on Tbilisi State Conservatoire.

A phenomenographic analysis was conducted. Phenomenography has been a valuable approach to educational research, especially when addressing and understanding new concepts and phenomena; since the 1980s, it has gained popularity and emerged from an “empirical rather than theoretical or philosophical basis.”⁶⁶ The phenomenological approach encourages underlining the timeline of the process.

The categorization has been done in the following way:

- 1991–2005: Pre-Bologna period;
- 2005–2015: Foundations laid;
- 2015–onwards: Erasmus+ ICM Established.

THESE THREE PERIODS characterise significant changes in the higher music education landscape. Since regaining independence in 1991, Georgia had to rebuild its education system; after the grim 1990s, the country finally joined the Bologna process in 2005, which marked the beginning of a Europeanized higher education system. Another benchmark was when Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility made possible the involvement of third countries not associated with the program in the Erasmus+ flagship activity – mobility of individuals. ICM was first introduced at the higher music education level in Georgia in 2015.

“A core premise of phenomenography is the assumption that different categories of description or ways of experiencing a phenomenon are logically related to one another, typically by way of hierarchically inclusive relationships.”⁶⁷ This premise connects the relevance of the phenomenological analysis to the structural and institutional approaches used as a framework for the study.

“Interviews represent the most common data source for phenomenography analysis” and “explore the range of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group,”⁶⁸ Therefore, conducting a wide range of interviews with diverse groups of respondents was essential. The large scale of the data also contributes to objective and holistic analysis rather than concluding by departing from initial assumptions.



The Grand Hall of the Conservatoire.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Before moving forward, we acknowledge potential bias and limitations in this exploration. Considering that both authors are closely linked to the main research subject in this inquiry, Georgia's higher music education field and Tbilisi State Conservatoire, the challenge remained that we would depend on our reflections rather than empirical findings. However, we limited personal input by collecting and reviewing a wide range of data, survey results, focus groups, interviews, statistical information, reports, and other official documentation, which made our observation more transparent and objective and minimized the bias in the analysis.

Data from interviews and focus groups were anonymized, transcribed and coded. Anonymization also contributed to limited bias in the analysis. Surveys were designed as anonymous so that students could express their opinions more freely and without reservations. Since one of the authors lives outside Georgia, most data was collected using online platforms like Zoom and Teams. The Google Forms questionnaire was used for the surveys. Each interview/focus group participant granted the authors permission to record and store data and use it for the research. They were informed about the purpose of the study, their right not to answer all questions and withdraw from the interview/focus group at any time, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality and the fact that the recording and the transcript will be stored on a researcher's device and only accessible to the researcher.

We acknowledge that having Tbilisi State Conservatoire as a single case for this research also limits the scope of the study as some conclusions might be endemic to a particular organization and not be reflective of the field in general. Nonetheless, a broad spectrum of data and the significance of Tbilisi State Conservatoire in Georgia's higher music education sector contribute to eliminating significant bias in this article.

There is a widespread consensus that interpretative studies can not be entirely objective, but the researcher needs to minimize the bias in the findings. In phenomenological analysis, "the focus of research quality shifts to ensuring that the research aims are appropriately reflected in the research methods used."⁶⁹ In this study, the challenge is the reliability of statistics and the small scale of the HME sector. However, analysis from overall curves depicting organizational change and the institutional environment was possible. The analysis is thematically categorized based on the structural approach.

Linking Europeanization with higher music education

European integration greatly bolsters Georgia's Europeanization. European integration refers to European countries forming closer political, economic, and social relations.⁷⁰ In this article, we refer to integration in the context of Georgia's EU membership aspirations as a measurable, merit-based process. In contrast, Europeanization as a concept refers primarily to perceptions, ideas, and identities.

Georgia signed an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in 2014, a significant milestone in Georgia-EU relations. The cooperation has advanced in the education area. Article 359 underlines the relevance to focus on "promoting quality in higher education in a manner consistent with the EU Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education and the

"GEORGIA SIGNED AN ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT (AA) WITH THE EU IN 2014, A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN GEORGIA-EU RELATIONS."

Bologna process."⁷¹ According to the Analytical Report, which assesses Georgia's alignment with the *acquis* and was published by the European Commission last year, "The education system in Georgia is broadly aligned with the EU objectives" and "Georgia's cultural policy broadly reflects the general priorities of the New European Agenda for Culture."⁷²

HME has benefited primarily from the Erasmus+ program,



The Glomus Camp was hosted by Batumi State Arts Teaching University in Batumi, Georgia. It brought together people from 15 countries and of 26 nationalities in 2019.

PHOTO: GLOMUS.NET

which has been a significant funding source for the Europeanization of the sector, especially since AA was signed, Erasmus was converted into Erasmus+, and international credit mobility (ICM) projects have been established to include partner countries. Funding allocation also suggests that Georgia has been one of the biggest beneficiaries per capita in the world.⁷³ Such statistics can also be explained by the prioritization of the Eastern Partnership together with Western Balkan countries and the relatively good preparation of Georgian HEIs to make the best of the opportunities provided.

THE GLOBAL DIMENSION of glonacal also suggests the role of human agencies to which, in this study, international umbrella organizations have been assigned. The AEC – European Association of Conservatoires represents the prominent platform for networking, idea exchanges, project development, socializing, advocacy, and much more in higher music education. Tbilisi State Conservatoire and, thus, the higher music education sector in Georgia have benefited from the membership of the organization. The membership increased visibility as the country hosted the international relations coordinators’ annual meeting in 2017,⁷⁴ and its staff joined the working groups of the AEC’s EU-funded projects.

Top-down indirect transposition of EU priorities has also been explored through this study. The 2021–2027 EU framework stresses the importance of inclusion and diversity. The AEC, moving forward with the ARTEMIS project and participating in projects like PRiHME, has adopted a firm stance on political issues, such as Russia’s war on Ukraine in addition to the digitization and green development of higher music education. TSC also

already established a working group to address EDI – equality, diversity, and inclusion – last year; as yet, no substantial policy changes have been made.⁷⁵

ANOTHER CRITICAL FACTOR for the supranational level has been a partnership with the Nordic region and the Association of Nordic (and Baltic) Music Academies (ANMA). Tbilisi State Conservatoire joined as an associate member in 2021.⁷⁶ “Participation in ANMA has purely *political* reasons for Georgia,” one of the international relations coordinators mentioned in a conversation with the author on ANMA annual forum 2023, arguing that because Georgia is not part of the programs, such as Nordplus, the engagement has only symbolic meaning. Although, as the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre rector put it, TSC requested to join ANMA because of its “values and working culture.” The transposition of *values* and *culture* into policies and practices has also been supported by ANMA members acting as advisory groups for Georgia’s HME.⁷⁷

The Glomus network has also been highlighted as a platform for Georgian HME to reach the wider world. According to its webpage, Glomus is a “value-driven non-profit community where students’ artistic and human development is at the center.”⁷⁸ Every two years a Glomus camp is organized, which brings together dozens of artists and leaders in the arts field; TSC has been involved in the Glomus activities since 2015 and hosted the Glomus camp in the Black Sea coastal city of Batumi in 2019.⁷⁹

Challenges remain in several areas. Although the cultural sector has benefited greatly by joining the Creative Europe Programme, the non-associated status on Erasmus+ remains an obstacle to higher music education. While Batumi State University of Arts does not even have an international office and is not involved in Erasmus+-funded projects,⁸⁰ TSC has been actively participating in ICM projects. In contrast to program countries’ institutions, Georgian universities cannot apply and coordinate ICM projects and, therefore, depend on the partner institutions’ will. This creates uncertainty and an unbalanced workload. Although there are hopes that by 2027, Georgia could join the Erasmus+ as a program-associated country, it is evident that obtaining such status requires substantial financial resources as well as enhanced quality indicators.

Regional positioning also reflects a mismatch in the educational sector for several reasons. The EU has placed Georgia in the Eastern Partnership framework, comprising six countries with drastically different relations with the bloc. The most logical grouping from the current political circumstances and historical perspective would suggest the Association Trio configuration, coupling Georgian HMEIs with Ukrainian and Moldovan institutions, a region defined more by political, historical, and cultural characteristics rather than purely geographical ones.

National scope — gains and failures

Georgia “has already made significant advancements on the key commitments of the European Higher Education Area” (EHEA).⁸¹ This includes the importance of quality assurance mechanisms, adhering to European Standards and Guidelines for Quality As-

surance (ESG),⁸² and participating in international evaluations to ensure the quality and relevance of education programs, including in higher music education. Georgia's National Center For Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), which joined the European umbrella organization ENQA in 2021, hosted an annual members' forum in Spring 2023, another step in acknowledging the progress Georgia has made recently.

However, significant differences remain between arts-specialized and multi-profile institutions. State Arts Universities (of which there are three: Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Theatre and Film Georgian State University and Tbilisi State Academy of Arts) are covered under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Georgia (MCYS), a continuation of Soviet tradition.

THE ORGANIZATION MODEL of higher arts education institutions (HAEIs) is ambiguous: on the one hand, questions related to authorization, accreditation, etc., remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science and all institutions follow the guidelines of NCEQE, while on the other hand, the funding is almost entirely up to the MCYS. "Higher arts education institutions (HAEI) receive only a small proportion of their funding through vouchers with the main funding coming from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCYS) through so-called Program Funding based on negotiation as well as on a historical basis."⁸³ The TSC Quality Analysis 2018–2022 document attests to the suggestion from Briller et al. from 2021 that "experts recommend to the government of Georgia to introduce a differentiated model of funding which reflects the different cost of programs/fields of study and implement performance-based funding (PBF)." Interestingly, the Georgian Government made a promising decision in 2018 by bringing all institutions under the Ministry of Education and Science, which also included HAEIs; however, in 2021 they were again taken under the umbrella of the MCYS.

Furthermore, during the initial development period those HAEIs lacked resources and prioritization to participate in programs such as the Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies (TEMPUS).⁸⁴

Georgian HMEIs were not able to participate in the TEMPUS program, which operated via the establishment of consortia and implementing Joint European Projects (JEPs); therefore, until the establishment of Erasmus+ ICM, there was a lack of participation in EU-funded projects.

The Unified Strategy for Education and Science for 2017–2021 has been focused on internationalization.⁸⁵ HEIs have been encouraged to engage further with European institutions and explore the opportunities provided by European programs. The document stated that "5.4.2 Goals and objectives: The specific goal of higher education is the internationalization of higher education and ensuring access to quality higher education for

the individual, professional development of the individual, and the improvement of employment."⁸⁶ The current strategy that the Government approved in Summer 2022 notes the progress towards internationalization and implies that Georgia has applied to join the Erasmus+ as a program country.⁸⁷ The Culture Strategy 2025 also stresses the importance of intercultural cooperation and internationalization.⁸⁸

However, implementing those strategies encounters significant challenges, especially for small sectors, such as higher music education. The internationalization process, as well as quality assurance, requires considerable financial resources, which remains a problem, especially against the background of the need for more funding models in HME. This is an obvious obstacle to further implementation of reforms.

IN ADDITION TO limited funding and resources, there has recently been a shift towards censorship and drastic leadership changes in several key cultural organizations and arts-specialized HEIs.⁸⁹ Higher music education professionals fear that they might be next. The current Minister of Culture has been framed as "A stern-spoken, hard-charging disciplinarian with little patience for the ceremony and diplomatic language, out of sync with what is largely a universe of delicate manners, free-thinking, and intricate social connections."⁹⁰ The clashes between sectoral workers and new management in the ministry are frequent, which causes toxicity in the field.

Moreover, the clash between stakeholders in the cultural sector and the MCSY turns out to reveal

a mismatch between the principles declared by the country as a strategy and specific acts of behavior from the top management of the ministry. While one of the main achievements of the reform in Georgia's HE was the declaration of institutional autonomy and academic freedom,⁹¹ the pillars that Georgia had to adopt in order to align with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), the MCSY's tendency to control, censor and get involved in academic decisions directly contradicts those values of autonomy and academic freedom.

As TSC was preparing three newly developed educational programs for the accreditation process, the MCSY created a Temporary Advisory Group in the framework of "Supporting Arts Education Reform."⁹² Considering that it is the Ministry of Education and Science that administers accreditation procedures, and there are no requirements for the higher music education institutions to carry out any preparatory steps to seek approval from the MCSY, the creation of the group, as well as its working style, indicates the signs described above. The group issued near-mandatory recommendations not to proceed with the accreditation process of new education programs.⁹³ Their decision was based on the idea that programs were not ready

“THERE HAS RECENTLY BEEN A SHIFT TOWARDS CENSORSHIP AND DRASTIC LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN SEVERAL KEY CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ARTS-SPECIALIZED HEIs.”



International Agreements with European HMEIs, Tbilisi State Conservatoire. Compiled by author Kekenadze Gustafsson, "Europeanisation in Higher Music Education," 31.

or, in one case, not eligible for accreditation, although arguments seemed to be personal rather than justified or backed by evidence. "It should be the accreditation body NCEQE that should assess the program's eligibility and not the advisory group under the MCSY."⁹⁴ TSC representatives believe that as it turned out, institutional autonomy and academic freedom were attacked and not guaranteed by the Ministry of Culture when without having the authority to do so, it all but restricted TSC from sending its new educational programs for the accreditation evaluation process.

Some perceived the tense relations between the Ministry of Culture and TSC during 2023 as power relations between two women, the Minister of Culture of Georgia and the rector at TSC. This implies that instead of an ideological divide and mismatch in leadership styles, the basis of the disagreement over issues was that both of them were women, which is an example of a sexist approach and simplification.

In addition, for the last two years, the National Erasmus+ Office (NEO) in Georgia has been going through management changes. Therefore it has not been active in advising and giving guidelines to universities. Georgia's NEO has been crucial in support of the Europeanization processes at Georgian HEIs. The EU Commission Analytical Report on Georgia mentions that Georgian NEO's "support is foreseen to continue for the period 2022 onwards." However, HEIs have yet to see any new reports or guidelines since 2021.⁹⁵

Local scope – the clash of two mindsets

On an organizational level, Europeanization covers various directions, starting from curriculum design and modernization of the curricula in order to reflect contemporary music education trends, as well as a balance between the labor market and spe-

cialties, bridging the gap between theory and practice, teaching methodologies, change in working culture and different types of collaboration.

Cultural and value-based benefits have been related to Europe throughout the centuries, and current processes of Europeanization are a continuation of that perspective, which relates to the cultural-cognitive pillar from Scott's institutional theory.

Our categorization of three periods since Georgia restored its independence in 1991 gives us perspective to analyze the collected data structurally. Europeanization slowly transformed the work at the international offices of HMEIs. Focusing on the TSC, at the beginning of the 1990s, international work at higher music education institutions was limited to disseminating information about international festivals and competitions and making copies of specific leaflets and brochures while currently, the international department is in the driver's seat of internationalization of the sector, and even beyond music education, including other art fields.⁹⁶

Pre-Bologna reality was dim in Georgia and also for higher music education institutions. Infrastructural problems, a massive fall in student numbers, and insufficient funding contributed to the slower speed of internationalization. Since 2005, TSC has joined international organizations, such as the AEC, and expanded partnerships, especially strategically targeting two regions: Poland and the Baltic countries, as good examples for transition, and Scandinavian countries, as best examples in the field. By then, Poland and the Baltic countries were already EU member states, and their HME structures were rapidly transforming. This was a period when TSC gained momentum to establish Inter-Institutional Agreements (IIA) and Memorandums of Understanding (MoA), with prominent institutions such as the



Erasmus+ ICM Projects featuring Georgian HMEIs. Compiled by the author.

Sibelius Academy in Finland and the Norwegian Academy of Music within the top 25 of QS Rankings.⁹⁷

Another chapter began in 2015 when mobility of individuals for teaching/training, studies, and then traineeships became possible. The latest statistics show that 43 music-specialized students participated in the ICM during 2022–2023 out of TSC's just over 420 active status students, and 32 more students are expected to start their Erasmus+ studies from Autumn 2023 in program countries. More than 10% of the total student population in international mobility every year makes TSC one of the most, if not the most, engaged HEI in Erasmus+ ICM in Georgia. With 23 active ICM projects and six new projects financed in 2023, TSC compensates for the need for more local resources by investing in international partners and implementing projects.

TSC prioritizes European/Western programs and institutions as they provide greater opportunities for enhanced education and research quality indicators. This strategy suggests that TSC acknowledged the benefits of pursuing internationalization processes in sync with the development plan for quality enhancement.

FOR THE LAST DECADE, Georgian higher education moved from the concept of quality assurance as a control mechanism towards quality assurance as a working culture. It promotes the concept of continuous improvement. Employees are encouraged to identify areas for enhancement, propose solutions, and participate in initiatives aimed at optimizing processes and outcomes. It mainly refers to the mindset, values, and practices that an organization and its employees adopt to ensure that the processes and procedures, as well as the products and services, are consistently in line with European standards and practices. Developing a quality assurance culture involves integrating quality

principles into every aspect of an organization's operations and fostering a shared commitment to continuous improvement. A culture of quality assurance encourages open and transparent communication. Employees feel comfortable reporting quality issues, suggesting improvements, and providing feedback without fear of reprisal.

In that regard, TSC has made essential steps. Since 2019, several working groups (WGs) have been created for educational quality enhancement and educational program modernization in all three cycles. WGs brought together students, faculties, employees, and alumni who strived to work toward the modern curriculum. WG work might not be done at once; as mentioned above, it is a process based on collaboration and aims to address quality-related challenges. Different teams work together to identify the root causes of quality issues and implement effective solutions. Processes, procedures, and best practices are documented and standardized to ensure consistency in quality across different projects and teams; simultaneously, individuals and teams are held accountable for meeting quality standards.

TSC has also established new programs in recent years, namely the Music Technology MA program and the Jazz Program on the BA level. The Music Technology programs have been designed in collaboration with Norwegian partners. TSC has participated in and benefited from the Eurasia development projects financed by the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU) funded in 2015 and 2016. The project with the Norwegian Academy of Music also financed equipment for the music technology studio, library, and the establishment of a one-year music pedagogy program.⁹⁸

Modernization of study programs, curricula, and plans has been part of Georgian HME transformation from *Soviet-*

influenced to European practices. This included designing new courses like *Studio Classes*, *Performance Coaching*, and *Body and Performance*. It is worth noting that according to the results of the Internal and External Evaluation of Quality Assurance Analysis 2018–2022, TSC states that the temporary advisory group created by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia within the framework of the promotion of arts education (musical) reform recommended removing or drastically changing the content and structure of newly established courses.⁹⁹ This example further showcases the drift between national (state) and local (organizational) levels.

Important milestones include transforming the orchestra projects from a semester-long course to two separate, week-long projects consisting of several rehearsals and a final concert in the grand hall of TSC.

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE in addressing teaching methodologies and modernizing the assessment system, especially by inviting professors from the EU countries to attend and assess the degree entrance and final exams and give expertise and opinions. The *Critical Friends* format also contributed to advancements in the study environment. *Critical Friends* are international experts from the Sibelius Academy, the University of Arts Helsinki, who have conducted assessments of the study environment at TSC in 2019 and 2022. The report they produced helps TSC management to strategically plan and develop policy through international guidance. Here too, recommendations by the newly formed temporary advisory group created by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia within the framework of the promotion of arts education (musical) reform have been opposed to guidelines and suggestions from the *Critical Friends* experts.¹⁰⁰

International engagement has provided valuable opportunities for exchange and collaboration and increased cultural exchange between Georgia and other European countries. Georgian music and musicians have gained greater visibility and contributed to promoting the country's cultural heritage. This visibility is reflected in the variety of incoming students from European countries. It is worth noting that the number of incoming students compared to outgoing students is one to six, although there are increasing and hopeful tendencies.¹⁰¹

Some students participating in international mobility programs have chosen not to return to Georgia and to continue their careers abroad. One side of this is that they have started working as orchestra musicians or have been invited as teachers at their hosting institutions. However, many just continue their studies abroad as regular degree students. The reality of good quality education in Europe is attracting students. However, this creates a challenge for TSC, which needs help to attract students with more and better opportunities to study in Europe. Unfortunately,

the statistics regarding alumni and students who terminate their studies on grounds like continuation of studies abroad are unavailable or unreliable.

When it comes to challenges, the language barrier remains one. Even though the level of English language proficiency among students has been steadily increasing, as documented through the language exams that TSC students undertake for participation in international mobility programs, the level of English proficiency is fundamentally low among staff. "We need English lessons or courses too," replied one of the teachers during focus groups.¹⁰² Most teachers and administrative staff need more language skills to conduct lessons or administrative work in English, which leaves a significant gap between opportunities for those who speak the foreign language and those who do not.

Georgia is a land of many paradoxes. While working on this article, we observed that while many European institutions struggle to balance gender representation in top management, the Tbilisi State Conservatoire was led predominantly by women. In 2023, the majority of leading portfolios, such as rector, dean of performing faculty, head of the quality assurance office, head of research, head of the doctoral dissertation council, head of admissions office, head of the academic council and the council of representatives and the majority of department heads were women. One can argue that this is a sign of improvement and progress; however, once we delve deeper, another pattern appears. The competition is low because higher music education sector jobs are very low-paid and not prestigious. At the same time, most top management positions at Tbilisi State Conservatoire have exhausting workloads, paperwork and routine administrative tasks that women are considered more capable of doing.

“GEORGIAN MUSIC AND MUSICIANS HAVE GAINED GREATER VISIBILITY AND CONTRIBUTED TO PROMOTING THE COUNTRY’S CULTURAL HERITAGE.”

REGARDING ACADEMIC positions, we see a certain pattern in favour of male professors; there are, in total, 11 emeritus professors and only four are female. Out of 22 full professors, there are 14 male and eight female; Out of 50 associated professors, 34 are female, while there were four female out of 13

assistant professors during the 2022–23 academic year. One can note that with the exception of assistant professors, the higher the position, the more males. Unfortunately, it was not possible to compare the age at which those academics got their positions; it would be interesting to see whether males are more likely to get higher academic positions earlier in their careers.

Particularly imbalanced representation can be seen in the data of piano accompanists; out of 43, only two were male in 2022–23. The stereotype that piano accompanist is a profession for females is deeply rooted in Georgia's higher music education field.

The risk of a two-tier development of Europeanization is visible, and one of the factors may be language-related. On the one side are Western-educated faculty members, who are more active and strive for further engagement. On the other side are so-

called “silent” staff, who tend to have negative attitudes towards change, initiatives, and new development. Georgia’s higher music education is a conservative field that is difficult to reform; therefore, stakeholders need to address the issue further.

“We have the following reality: teachers as enthusiasts working on a low salary and poor but extremely talented students needing to take extra jobs while preparing for international competitions,” as one of the interviewees described the situation.¹⁰³ Financial challenges remain one of the major concerns. It is worth noting that the total budget of international collaborations that TSC is involved in amounts to more than a third of its total yearly budget. European projects benefit short-term mobility and internationalization at home and act as a lifeline for students who strive for better opportunities.

Considering the economic success and best practice examples from Eastern European countries that joined the EU during 2004–2007,¹⁰⁴ one should expect that the EU membership will have a boosting effect on the development of Georgia and its higher music education sector, too, as it will increase representation and participation in culture, career opportunities, salaries, and possibilities for a more equal society.

Concluding remarks

Receiving candidate status for EU membership boosted morale in Georgia for Europeanization. Georgia’s higher music education sector has been in this process for some time now, especially since 2015, once European opportunities through the Erasmus+ programme became more accessible. In this article, two insiders analysed and reflected on the current state of internationalization in Georgia’s higher music education and, using a variety of data, concluded that despite significant progress and successful individual engagement with European and international institutions, organizations and thus programs, standards and the best practice examples, many challenges and obstacles remain. Considering Georgia’s current approach to culture and the mismatch of values on the level of the Ministry of Culture of Georgia and general European priorities, higher music education in Georgia is exposed to controversial developments and a lack of leadership.¹⁰⁵ However, pro-European solid sentiments among students and staff, as well as years of work in promoting European standards in higher education, will contribute to long-term positive outcomes.

Departing from the recent shift in the EU’s approach to culture and the sector’s resurgence in European priorities, the developments indicate a positive direction to fully enshrine *Arts in STEAM*.¹⁰⁶ However, challenges remain on a European level that organizations in the field periodically address.¹⁰⁷ The arts have been invited to the party, but it is time to get asked to dance.¹⁰⁸ The unity and cooperation of those organizations such as Culture Action Europe, European Music Council, ELIA, AEC, and others are vital for higher music education institutions. However, it is even more important that those organizations also focus on regional differences in the EU and pre-accession countries. As many pan-European platforms are establishing new partnerships and projects in Ukraine, including with Ukrai-

nian higher music education institutions, the focus should be on sustainable relations rather than emergency assistance-type partnerships for the EU’s eastern neighbourhood countries.

The association trio configuration should be reestablished and strengthened by the countries involved and should expand into deeper cooperation in the area of education and culture, although given the recent developments and misalignment between Ukrainian and Georgian positioning,¹⁰⁹ it remains difficult for a small and underfunded sector, such as higher music education in Georgia, to swim against the stream. While the educational standards regarding convergence with the EHEA practices are implemented, and participation in EU programs remains active, it is evident that Georgian authorities no longer actively encourage Europeanization efforts and instead praise the Chinese governance model.¹¹⁰ Sadly, in private conversations, government officials even question the need for international mobility or modernization of programs in order to align EU standards and practices.

On the organizational level, the challenge remains an unhealthy working culture, uncertainty regarding the future, and the slow speed at which the organizational mindset changes. There is a young generation of students and teachers, full of energy, who speak fluent English and would like to gain as much as possible in the process of teaching and learning, those who welcome introducing new courses, having masterclasses, or collaborating with European teachers and colleagues, and those who are actively participating in the international mobility programs and projects. However, they often clash with those with an old-fashioned understanding of third-cycle studies, in which university is just a continuation of a Soviet-type secondary school, and the teacher’s conduct is unquestionable. The divide creates polarization in opinion and causes either nihilism or confrontation.

ONE CAN ASSUME that stakeholders at higher music education institutions sometimes take the progress made regarding internationalization for granted and do not internalize the need for improvement. Europeanization is a process, a tool for development, and not something that can be achieved and celebrated with an award like winning a classical music competition, nor is it measured by the number of international mobility activities or partner universities. Europeanization is a direction that needs everyday work and a realization that it is needed on all levels. The institutional environment might not always be optimal, but in times of uncertainty, one should step up the efforts. ✖

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