



**Paper: “EU market in Sight, Russian at the Gate: Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance”**

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Peer review:

Reviewer 1: Jozsef Zoltan Malik  
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Reviewer 2: Mahgoub El-Tigani Mahmoud  
Tennessee State University, USA

Reviewer 3: Blinded

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Date Manuscript Received: 08.14.2025.	Date Review Report Submitted: 08.23.2025.
Manuscript Title: EU in Sight, Russian at the Gate: Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance	
ESJ Manuscript Number: 0851/25	
You agree your name is revealed to the author of the paper: No	
You approve, your name as a reviewer of this paper, is available in the “review history” of the paper: Yes	
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#### **Evaluation Criteria:**

**Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Rating Result</b> [Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]
<b>1. The title is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.</b>	<b>5</b>
The title is strong and rhetorically engaging. It captures the core dilemma of the manuscript: Georgia’s aspirations for EU integration contrasted with persistent Russian influence. The metaphorical construction draws attention while remaining academically appropriate.	
<b>2. The abstract presents objects, methods, and results.</b>	<b>4</b>
The abstract offers a clear summary of the central issues and argument. However, the methodological element is too brief and does not explicitly state which tools of methodology were used (document analysis, case study, secondary analysis of statistical data). For a research article, the abstract should also briefly mention the methodological design and the scope of the sources analyzed.	
<b>3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.</b>	<b>5</b>

The text is written in a scholarly style and is generally clear. Some sentences are overly long and complex, which makes reading demanding.	
<b>4. The study methods are explained clearly.</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>The article is implicitly based on case-study logic and document analysis, supplemented with official statistical data (GeoSTAT, EU reports). This rich source base is a strength. However, the methodological transparency is very limited: Source selection criteria are not defined and analytical steps are not explained; no information is provided on reliability checks or possible source biases.</p> <p>As a result, the analysis appears more narrative than systematic. A separate <i>Methods section</i> is recommended, where the author specifies data selection, coding criteria, and analytical framework.</p>	
<b>5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The main argument is coherent and convincingly presented: the EU’s delays and strategic hesitations contrasted with Russia’s rapid and assertive moves. The historical and sociological layers are well integrated. However, competing explanations are insufficiently addressed, especially internal Georgian factors such as elite interests, structural economic weaknesses, and political fragmentation. Integrating these perspectives would make the analysis more balanced and academically rigorous.</p>	
<b>6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The conclusions are aligned with the body of the text and clearly reinforce the central thesis. Still, they are expressed in a rather essayistic, rhetorical style, with few concrete policy recommendations. Stronger and more practical conclusions could significantly increase the paper’s scholarly value. For example, recommendations on how the EU could react faster, what institutional steps Georgia could take, and how Russian influence might be mitigated would make the conclusions more actionable.</p>	
<b>7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.</b>	<b>4</b>
<p>The bibliography is extensive, and many relevant official and academic sources are cited. Yet, formatting is inconsistent (year formats, URLs, DOIs), some references are dated (2006–2012) without systematic engagement with the most recent literature. The paper would benefit from integrating 2023–2025 studies in EU enlargement, geopolitics, and security.</p>	

**Overall Recommendation** (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed	
Accepted, minor revision needed	
Return for major revision and resubmission	
Reject	

**Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):**

The manuscript has significant strengths. It addresses an important topic, offering an overview of three decades of Georgia’s aspirations for EU integration while highlighting the persistence of Russian influence. The rhetorical force and the breadth of sources make the text engaging and relevant. However, in its current form, the paper requires substantial revisions to meet international academic standards.

**Key suggestions for improvement:**

- **Methods Section:** Add a clear methodological description specifying the type of study (case study, document analysis), the criteria for source selection, and the analytical framework. Indicate whether coding was used and how reliability was ensured.
- **Source criticism:** Discuss potential biases in EU, Georgian, and Russian sources, and how these were balanced. Acknowledging political bias strengthens scholarly rigor.
- **Competing explanations:** Integrate domestic factors, such as political instability, elite strategies, and economic vulnerabilities, alongside external influences.
- **Structural editing:** Eliminate repetitions (e.g., EU delays, Russia's rapid responses), condensing these points into a single focused argument. This would create a tighter, more academic narrative.
- **Policy recommendations:** Strengthen the conclusion by offering specific and implementable suggestions for EU institutions, Georgian policymakers, and civil society.
- **Update the literature:** Incorporate more recent academic works (2023–2025), especially on EU enlargement and regional security. Ensure bibliographic consistency.

With these revisions, the manuscript could transition from a narrative essay with strong rhetorical qualities to a robust scholarly article.

### **Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only:**

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Date Manuscript Received:	Date Review Report Submitted: 17.09.2025
Manuscript Title: <b>EU [market] in Sight, Russian at the Gate: Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance</b>	
ESJ Manuscript Number: 0851/25	
You agree your name is revealed to the author of the paper:	
You approve, your name as a reviewer of this paper, is available in the “review history” of the paper:	
You approve, this review report is available in the “review history” of the paper: Yes	

#### **Evaluation Criteria:**

**Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Rating Result</b> [Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]
<b>1. The title is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.</b>	<b>2</b>
The title has a few issues that could be improved. 1. <b>Use of brackets:</b> a. Writing EU [market] with brackets is unconventional. Brackets usually indicate editorial insertion or uncertainty, which is not appropriate in a published title. Author should either remove the brackets or clarify what is meant. For example, EU Market in Sight.  2. <b>Ambiguity with “Russian”:</b> b. “Russian at the Gate” is unclear. Grammatically, “Russian” is an adjective or noun, but here it seems to refer to Russia or Russian influence. Better would be Russia at the Gate. c. <b>Colon use and readability:</b>	

The title is long and has two clauses separated by a colon. While colons are acceptable, this author should consider whether the second part Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance clearly complements the first. It works, but readability could be improved by slightly rephrasing.

**d. Overall clarity:**

a. Combining metaphors in sight, at the gate with abstract concepts aspiration and resistance makes it a bit dense. Simplifying might make it punchier.

**Suggested revision:**

Europe’s Market in Sight, Russia at the Gate: Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance

<b>2. The abstract presents objects, methods, and results.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Yes, partially.          The abstract identifies the object of study: Georgia’s post-1991 trajectory toward the EU and the role of Russian resistance. It frames research questions: whether the EU acted too late, and whether earlier economic integration could have secured stability. However, the object is embedded in a long historical narrative, rather than clearly foregrounded at the start.</p> <p><b>Methods</b>          There is no mention of what method is used (e.g., case study, policy analysis, historical institutionalism, qualitative interviews, trade/economic data analysis). Without a method, readers may assume it’s an essayistic or conceptual piece, which might weaken its positioning for an academic journal.</p> <p>The abstract hints at findings: EU integration came too late, the DCFTA underperformed, Russia successfully reoriented Georgia’s economy and politics through non-military means. But these are not framed as <i>results of author’s analysis</i>, they read more like descriptive claims. Right now, the abstract is <b>descriptive and argumentative</b>, but not methodologically rooted.</p>	
<b>3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>There are grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. The article needs considerable proofreading.</p>	
<b>4. The study methods are explained clearly.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Methods are not visible (or at least, not foregrounded) in the abstract.</p>	
<b>5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Needs improvement.</p>	
<b>6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Yes, but indirectly. Avoid introducing new material in the conclusion.</p>	
<b>7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Not consistent.</p>	

**Overall Recommendation** (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accepted, minor revision needed	<input type="checkbox"/>

Return for major revision and resubmission	
Reject	

**Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):**

The paper presents a valuable and timely analysis of Georgia's European integration and Russian influence. Its strengths lie in comprehensive source use and strong policy relevance. However, revisions are necessary to improve clarity (shorter sentences, more precise terminology), accuracy (typo and factual corrections), structure (clear methodology section, avoid introducing new material in the conclusion), and consistency (references, terminology). With these revisions, the manuscript could make a strong contribution.

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Reviewer Name: Mahgoub El-Tigani Mahmoud	
University/Country: Tennessee State University/USA	
Date Manuscript Received: September 21,2025	Date Review Report Submitted: September 25, 2025
Manuscript Title: EU [market] in Sight, Russian at the Gate: Three Decades of Aspiration and Resistance	
ESJ Manuscript Number: 0851/25	
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<b>2. The abstract presents objects, methods, and results.</b> <i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.</b> <i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>4. The study methods are explained clearly.</b> <i>(Please insert your comments)</i> Included to the Author	<b>5</b>
<b>5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.</b>	<b>5</b>



<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
<b>6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
<b>7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i> <i>The small percentage of authentic sources hardly supports the claim of ‘comprehensive’ factual analysis of the country’s complexities.</i>	

**Overall Recommendation** (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed	<b>X</b>
Accepted, minor revision needed	
Return for major revision and resubmission	
Reject	

**Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):**

**In addition to the example on the working conditions, what European standards did not penetrate? Also, what of them applied nicely in Georgian society and/or Authority? Why? What role, if any, the civil society played to end the imbalance? Which force showed strong nationalist resistance? How was the Georgian civil society/national government undermined by Europeanization and/or Russia? The ensuing chaos of the concerned parties (nationalist/ European/ Russian) race in earnest to control G needs points clearly to the dominant players’ success or failure.**

**What posited the ‘foreign negative forces’ versus European (?) positive forces in the light of the many negative effects the analysis reported?**

**A short historiography on the historical European roots seems necessary at this point.**

**Were they a motive for the country to allow Europeanization to apparently expand the imbalance?**

**Why Europe failed while Russia, which has only recently abandoned the communist political economy, overwhelmed the Georgian market?**

**Is People of Georgia a reference to the general populace, or to pro-Russia, or pro-EU groups?**

**An earlier reference to corrupted economy (together with politics) has not pointed to the role of the national side. Is it appropriate to bring it at this point?**

**Reader needs to understand how European political economy that embraced every cell of the country obviously was countered by Russia almost versus each European step. Would this intensive competitive political and economic environment allow a solid belief that Georgia nationalism was able to maintain independence, as claimed?**

**Importantly, what states/organizations acted against G, even by disrupting the correct description of events and relations? Where they all pro-Russia?**

**Apparently, Russia, as mentioned earlier in the article, instated since Soviet times, Russian popularity in G. A sketch on the extent of EU influence before collapse of Soviet might be helpful to assess the developing situation in ambiguity of country’s best independent position.**

**The author's analysis indicates in her concluding words:** However, these recommendations can only be implemented once communication between the EU and Georgia is restored at the diplomatic and official levels. If establishing such an official structure (and its representations) proves impossible, social networks and internet media should be utilized for resilience, overcoming these difficult years, and maintaining connections between the Georgian and European communities for the future agenda through unstoppable and widely accessible informational products with broad impact.'

**Eventually, much more authentic references on the Georgian civil society, especially voluntary organizations, might reveal significant facts why this overwhelming population seems pro-Russia, a choice of the country, regardless of a smaller percentage of the country actively pro-EU.**

**The author's deep concern for closer EU-Gorgia inter-lockage would have to invite an overall creative All-Georgia-EU consistent relationships that are not yet attainable.**

**Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only:**