GEORGIAN FOREIGN POLICY

THE QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

Edited by Kornely Kakachia and Michael Cecire

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Foreword

There are few words that are so commonly associated with Georgia as "crossroads," which is understandable considering my country's geography, culture, history, and political aspirations. But for the first time in recent memory, my country has picked a road in the fork. Since the elections in 2012 and 2013, the Georgian government has re-committed itself to democracy and strongly reaffirmed its Westward course. Our gradual political development has not come without its costs, and much that is necessary and urgent remains to be done.

But as Georgians cautiously steps out from the crossroads, the way my country sees itself, its neighbors, and the world will be of crucial importance. Almost equally significant is for our partners in the West to consider and appreciate the inherent multi-dimensionality of Georgian foreign policy. At the meeting point of powerful countries and resource-rich regions, an adaptive and reality-oriented Georgian foreign policy is not only desirable but a strategic necessity. We embrace and cherish our European identity, but neither can we ignore the realities of geography and geopolitics.

This book from the Georgian Institute of Politics and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation examines some of Georgia's most important foreign policy issues and partnerships. While the expert authors may not all agree on the particulars of certain issues, the book presents a consensus view that strongly favors Georgia's integration within Euro-Atlantic structures. Outside of this core foreign policy objective, the foreign policy picture becomes more nuanced. Recent institutional political progress should not obscure the fact that Georgia lives in an uneven and sometimes perilous neighborhood. Ties with Moscow, despite recent thaws, remain tense and understandably viewed through the lens of war and the Russian occupation of Georgian territory. To our south, meanwhile, Georgia's ties with Turkey, the region's other great power, are exemplary and accelerating as our interests increasingly intertwine. This is no less true of Azerbaijan as well.

Georgia does not have the luxury of taking our peace, security, or sovereignty for granted. In spite of our overriding Euro-Atlantic aspi-

rations, must be prepared to communicate and cultivate serviceable relations with all of our neighbors. If we are to do more than survive as a state, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations must be accompanied by effective international relations that understand and properly engage our diverse and sometimes tumultuous region. Countries like Iran, though isolated internationally, cannot be ignored by Georgia. And Armenia, though a close ally of Russia, can still be a friend and partner.

Ultimately, Georgia's long-term accession and integration with the Euro-Atlantic space depends not on enthusiastic rhetoric, but in the consistent conduct of responsible statecraft. More than anything else, our Western partners should be able to trust in Georgia's ability to manage its affairs with care and deliberation while staying true to the liberal democratic values our leaders have so often espoused. This book is an important part of that process. Not only do the contributors offer an array of interesting and important perspectives on Georgian foreign policy, but they do so in a way to make these issues accessible to our partners in the West and beyond.

Irakli Alasania
Minister of Defense of Georgia
November 2013

Introduction

When Georgia joined the international community of independent countries in December 1991, this small and weak country was already being torn apart by ethnic conflicts and civil war. For most of observers of post-Soviet politics, Georgia constituted an illuminating example of the destructive force of nationalism. In many ways, Georgia was illustrative of a fragmented society and failing state. Georgia struggled to find peace at home and shape its relationship towards the world.

In the years since, we have witnessed a deep-rooted political and economic transformation in Georgia and its adjacent regions. In terms of foreign and security policies, the country has chosen a clear direction towards integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. However, challenges remain. Georgia's ethnic conflicts remain largely unresolved and Russia is still a significant impediment to the country's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, as confirmed by the Russian-Georgian war of 2008. At the same time, considerable achievements on the way of modernization and democratization have made it possible for Georgia to exercise a more independent foreign policy and establish itself as an important regional player and contributor to international security. Georgia—having recently completed its first peaceful change of government—has the potential to become an attractive model for development in the region, which is of genuine strategic importance to Europe. Further, Georgia has contributed to international peace operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan and expressed its readiness to support other NATO and E.U.-led missions in the future.

This volume is part of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's mission to promote greater understanding, dialogue, and cooperation between nations, countries, and religions. In Georgia and the South Caucasus, one of the primary goals of the foundation is to support the region's rapprochement with European structures and values, an objective which is shared by the Tbilisi-based Georgian Institute of Politics. The book contains various articles elaborating the directions, dilemmas, and

opportunities of Georgia's foreign relations. In cooperation with the Georgian Institute of Politics, we expect this volume to contribute to further academic debate on the complexity of factors relevant to the formulation and implementation of security policy strategies of Georgia.

Georgia's Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security allows the reader to compare different issues and topics, developments, trends and scenarios and their impacts on Georgia's evolving foreign policy context. This publication offers chronological accounts of Georgian foreign policy along wiith explorations of identity and ethnicity's roles in framing foreign relations. This volume also considers Georgia's integration processes into the Euro-Atlantic space as well as relations with its neighbors and partners: the U.S., Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and the Baltic States.

Georgia's foreign policy has been the object of study in many books and articles. However, this is the first attempt to collect the perspectives and analyses of a variety of international experts within a single publication. We are confident that this volume will contribute to a further discussion of the context and opportunities of Georgian foreign policy. Members of academia, the think tank community, and researchers studying Georgia and the region should find this a comprehensive and informative resource. It should also be a valuable piece of work for political decision-makers and even the general public.

The successful completion of this volume attributable to the commitment of the authors—distinguished Georgian and international scholars, whose work and expertise have been invaluable. We also especially thank those colleagues whose feedback and comments have been very helpful in making this publication a reality.

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THE INTERREGNUM: GEORGIAN FOREIGN POLICY FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE ROSE REVOLUTION

Stephen Jones and Levan Kakhishvili

It is obvious to us that Georgia, as a small country situated between contending empires and powerful regional powers (like Iran and Turkey), must pay attention to the relative distribution of power among its neighbours and to the properties of a competitive interstate system which, until recently, has not been favourable to small states. Georgian policy makers over the centuries knew this; the country has, except for a few periods in the Middle Ages, been focused on survival and on balancing or bandwagoning with the interests of aggressive neighbouring powers. Security threats dominate Georgia's history, in part because of its geographical position, in part because of an international system in which Great powers compete for influence over weaker states. In that sense, Georgia's fate over many centuries is an example of the systemic qualities of neorealist theory.

But as even the champion of neo-realism, Kenneth Waltz, would admit, foreign policies (as distinct from issues of national security) are made by agents subject to domestic constraints, to the biases of political culture and historical experience, to the influence of domestic state structures, and to the needs – in the case of post-communist states like Georgia – of nation building and regime survival.[1] Georgia's foreign policies are, of course, shaped by a complex regional environment, by the competitive strategic relationship between the US, the EU, and Russia in the Caucasus, and by global economic forces that fashion Georgia's external economic policies. But we would argue that the fundamental determinants of Georgian foreign policies over the last twenty years (indeed over the centuries) are largely

[1] For and excellent overview of theories on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy, see James D. Fearon, "Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998): 289–313.

domestic ones, in particular the multiple problems associated with Georgia's history of weak statehood and the dominance of one-man leadership, whether monarchs or presidents. The "insecurity of statehood" within an "insecure neighbourhood," as Robert Legvold puts it (p.26), has proved a deadly combination since 1991, and underpins Georgia's vulnerability to external conflicts that all three presidents were unable to contain.[2] Equally crucial is the structure of leadership. Georgia's presidents have had almost total control over foreign policy-making, with minimal countervailing power, horizontally or vertically. In these circumstances, populism becomes a tempting political weapon and undermines the institutionalization of foreign policy, a framework that creates multiple constraints on impulsive and one-sided decision-making.

Domestic issues are a powerful force in Georgia's foreign policy, accentuated by the context of economic collapse, and the triple tasks Georgian governments have faced in the last two decades, namely nation building, state building and democracy building. Such challenges, inadequately met by inexperienced Georgian leaders, contributed to poor outcomes – civil war, secessionism, the rise of dominant political personalities, wild (and harmful) rhetoric, and a dissolving social fabric. In conditions of increasing dependency on outsiders to solve Georgia's colossal economic and security issues, domestic and foreign policies became tightly interwoven. Georgian governments' domestic choices – over economic policy or policies toward national minorities – narrowed Georgia's foreign policy manoeuvrability.

With the rise of greater stability under President Saakashvili – despite the August 2008 war – new foreign policy challenges emerged. However, as with his predecessor, Eduard Shevardnadze, they remained firmly anchored in the domestic scene. The war with Russia in 2008 is an example; this was a war that grew largely out of mismanaged nationality policies at home. S. Neil Macfarlane reminds us the war was the "result of Russian preferences," but at the same time

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[2] Robert Legvold, "Introduction: Outlining the Challenge," Bruno Coppieters & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Statehood and Security*: *Georgia* After the. Rose Revolution. Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2005, pp.1-37.

"a consequence of Georgian policy choices."[3] The attempt to transform the economy into an exemplary neo-liberal model is a further example. Economic policy has major implications for trade, foreign investment, international loans, migration and political relations with other states. The unpredictability of the global economy adds to the risks faced by Georgia's small, unproductive, and unprotected economy.

In this article, we will consider the domestic issues we believe have had the most impact on Georgia's external relations; we explore the ways in which they influence the thinking of Georgia's foreign policy makers. We have not come to a conclusive answer; that would require a long and resourceful study. We have provided pointers and hypotheses, and hope other researchers will explore our ideas with more rigorous studies. We have settled on six broad categories of investigation to illustrate internal contexts and how they connect with Georgian foreign policy. They are: the economy, political culture, national minorities, public opinion, institutional structures, and leadership.

The Economy

The economic development of a country determines its ability to address its own internal vulnerabilities, including support for marginalized populations (transport, infrastructure, education, employment), economic security for its citizens, and social services, such as health, environmental and pension supports. Georgia's internal social and political crises were intimately connected with failed economic policies and had dramatic impacts on its ability to pursue foreign policy goals. Domestic economic crises do not explain foreign policy decisions, but Georgia's foreign policy cannot be understood without the context of the state's low economic resources. Georgia's devastated economy in the 1990s contracted to the level of the 1950s,[4] which inevitably influenced the

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[3] S. Neil MacFarlane, "Georgia: National Security Concept versus National Security," *Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper REP PP 2012/01*, Chatham House, 2012. http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812pp_macfarlane.pdf

[4] Mark De Broeck and Vincent Koen, "The Great Contractions in Russia, the Baltics and the Other Countries of the Former Soviet Union: A View from the Supply Side," Innternational Monetary Fund, Working Paper WP/00/32, 2000.

choice of partners and allies.[5] Georgia's dependence on Western governments and financial organizations such as the IMF and World Bank – in 1996 10 percent of Georgia's GDP consisted of foreign assistance and humanitarian aid, and external debt reached about 45 percent of GDP[6] – cemented Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy. It was not simply a yearning for "a return" to Europe, so often cited by Georgian leaders, it was a question of interests and survival. Similarly, Georgia's reliance on oil from Azerbaijan shaped a strong Georgian-Azerbaijani strategic partnership, which had major implications for relations with Armenia.

Economic collapse in the 1990s led Russia, on which Georgia was traditionally dependent for grain, energy, and employment (of migrants), to seek control of Georgia's domestic industries. This was in line with the "liberal empire" philosophy articulated by Anatoly Chubais, the CEO of Unified Energy System (UES), in the early 2000s. Russia exercised decisive influence on Georgia in the 1990s largely because of Georgia's poor domestic resources. The flow of remittances from Georgian migrants in Russia, which accounted for an estimated 5-10 percent of GDP in the 1990s was vital to any foreign policy decision concerning Russia.[7] It left little room for manoeuvre (although Saakashvili chose to ignore it in his vitriolic rhetoric against Russia). Economic resources were the key to foreign policy independence from Russia in the 1990s, but faced with secessionist revolts, the Georgian economy could sustain neither civilian nor military control in the separatist regions of South Ossetia

[5] For a theoretical discussion on how the economy and interdependence affect international politics, see Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, New York: Harper Collins, 1989, especially Part I, pp. 3-60. For a theoretical overview of how economic processes translated into political integration in Europe, see Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: political, social, and economical forces, 1950-1957*, London: Stevens & Sons, 1958.

[6] World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, *GDP* http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?page=3 *Net official development assistance and official aid received* http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?page=3 *External debt stocks* http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.DOD.DECT.CD?page=3

[7] According to the Economic Policy Research Center, remittances from Russia to Georgia increased seven times from 1999 to 2004, a dependency that continued after the Rose Revolution. In 2011, remittances were calculated as 6 per cent of GDP with 65 per cent of the total coming from Russia (Economic Policy Research Center, "The Role of Remittances in Georgian Economy," *Issue in Focus, Third Report.* December 2011. http://www.osgf.ge/files/publications/2011/Georgian_Economic_Outlook_III,_Dec_2011.pdf)

and Abkhazia. Georgia had little choice, given the massive asymmetry in resources, but to accept Russian-negotiated cease-fire agreements and the deployment of Russian troops as peacekeepers. Shevardnadze later confessed in his memoirs, that in 1993, "Georgia was forced to enter the CIS."[8]

By the mid 1990s, Georgia's economy showed signs of recovery.[9] Georgia's foreign policy agenda, dominated by territorial conflicts and tense relations with Russia over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Chechnya, shifted toward greater integration with the EU and NATO. It resulted in a conceptual document in 2000, which prioritised integration into Western institutions.[10] What radically stimulated Georgia's turn to the West was the Transcaucasian energy corridor, or Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. These two pro-Western policies established Georgia as a strategic partner for Europe and the US. Both developments, strongly promoted by the Clinton administration as a source of economic independence for Georgia, led Shevardnadze to declare in the fall of 2001, that, "Georgia is not the southern flank of Russia's strategic space, but rather the northern flank of a horizontal band of Turkish and NATO strategic interests."[11] Conceptualizing Georgia as "the northern flank" of Turkish and NATO interests coincided with Turkey's emergence as a major economic power and as

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[8] ედუარდ შევარდნაძე, ფიქრი წარსულსა და მომვალზე: მემუარები, (Eduard Shevardnadze, *Thoughts on the Past and Future*), Tbilisi: Palitra, 2006, p.437.

[9] According to World Bank data, the first sign of growth was recorded in 1995, which was followed by double-digit growth rate for two years; in 1998 Georgian GDP was almost the same as in 1992. After 1998 the growth rate was lower but steady. After 2003, GDP growth rates shot up and in 2007 it was a record 12%. Later, in 2009 partly because of the 2008 war and partly due to the global financial crisis, the country witnessed a recession, although the following years showed continued gradual growth. (World Bank, *World Development Indicators: GDP Growth* http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG)

[10] *Georgia and the world: a vision and strategy for the future*, [online] Available at: http://www.parliament.ge/files/1_886_192675_nato_vision.pdf [Accessed 19 April 2013].

[11] Jaba Devdariani, "US Visit May Lead to Georgia's Policy Adjustments," UNAPAR, Tbilisi, *Civil Georgia* http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=375, March 20, 2013.

one of Georgia's major trade partners.[12] Turkey remains Georgia's "strategic partner," more recently cooperating over a new rail link (the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway), which will promote trade and travel by rail from Asia to Europe, bypassing Armenia and avoiding Russian territory. Georgian-Turkish relations, notwithstanding the Georgian public's suspicion of the motives of Turkish investment and a long history of mutual distrust, are based on common economic and strategic interests.

The Rose Revolution in 2003-2004, with an economic strategy almost entirely dependent on attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), stimulated rapid economic growth. A new image of Georgia was created – dynamic, fiercely liberal, open to the global economy, and a tax haven for foreign investors. In 2010, Saakashvili announced that it was "extremely important for Georgia to become what it aspires to be – the Singapore of the region."[13] The market economy was an assertion of Georgia's loyalty to the West and its ideas; the more fundamentalist its capitalist practice, it seemed, the more genuinely Western it was. At the same time, government tax reforms and a campaign against corruption created more economic resources. Between 2004-2008, Georgia's GDP grew from 5 billion in current USD to 12.8 billion USD, and budgetary resources multiplied by more than 2.5 times, allowing Georgia to pursue a more assertive foreign policy in Europe and establish greater economic separation from Russia. Georgia's new felt confidence was reflected in massive growth in the military budget, from 71.8 million in current USD in 2004 to 1,087.9 million USD in 2008. There was rapid modernization of Georgia's military forces, and participation in NATO forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. On October 20, 2005, Saakashvili declared

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[12] The National Statistics Office of Georgia shows that between 2000-2012, 15.6% and 13.3% of Georgia's import and export went to Turkey. This makes Turkey the major trade partner for Georgia. (National Statistics Office of Georgia, *External Trade: Export 2000-2012* http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/bop/2000-2012/Export_country.xls National Statistics Office of Georgia, *External Trade: Import 2000-2012 http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/bop/2000-2012/Import_country.xls*)

[13] "President Saakashvili: Georgia should become region's Singapore," *Trend*, Tbilisi, 28 Dec 2010 http://en.trend.az/capital/business/1804426.html

that "Euro-Atlantic integration, ... is a means to achieve our top priority [restoration of territorial integrity]."[14] For Saakashvili's government, a Western economic model equalled national security. Not only did it bring Europe in, but created an economy strong enough to endure the consequences of a Russian economic embargo after 2006, the deportation of Georgian migrants (2004-2006), and an invasion in August 2008.[15] The aftermath of the war underscored the link between economic reform and Georgia's alliance with the West; Western governments stepped in with $4.5 billion of loans to ensure Georgia's Western model survived.[16]

Yet the Western economic model adopted by Georgia has failed to improve the economic life of the majority of its citizens. The withdrawal of the state from economic management is the current global model, but its impact on Georgia's developing economy has had negative political and social consequences. It contributed to massive demonstration in November 2007, which led to state violence and a constitutional crisis. Political instability, driven by economic decline, has direct consequences for national security. The reverberations for foreign relations can be perilous.

Political Culture

If economics is primarily about interests, political culture is about ideas, identity, psychology, myths, and perceptions. That ideas affect foreign policy is, in our view, unchallengeable; this does not mean ideas are necessarily independent of interests, or that policy makers act "irrationally" when they act ideologically. But as with economics, ideas provide alternatives and choices, and as such are part of the foreign policy complex. Like Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, we

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[14] "Saakashvili Sets Priorities to New Foreign Minister," *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi, 20 Oct 2005 http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11013

[15] "Saakashvili: Russia's Ban on Wine Import an "Economic Embargo," *Civil Georgia*, 3 Apr 2006, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12251

[16] Vladimer Papava, "Georgia's economy: post-revolutionary development and post-war difficulties," *Central Asian Survey,* Vol. 28, No. 2. pp.: 199-213 http://www.papava.info/publications/Papava_Georgia%20s%20economy%20post-revolutionary%20development%20and%20post-war%20difficulties.pdf

see ideas acting as "roadmaps in uncertain environments."[17] Georgia over the last two decades experienced transformations (revolutions), where existing orders collapsed and new mental maps were required. We are not making claims in this article for direct causal effects – that requires a deeper investigation – but we believe ideas (whether principles, values or worldviews), act like filters and provide what one author of this article referred to earlier as "global paradigms," or the ways in which "socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, and habits of mind" frame political environments for policy-making elites.[18] We have selected three Georgian "global paradigms" to illustrate the ways in which they contribute (or not) to foreign policy thinking.

The first is religion, unavoidable in any discussion of political behaviour in Georgia over the last two decades. In a 2012 survey, 86 percent of the respondents claimed to be Orthodox Christians and 45 percent suggested they attended religious services at least once a month.[19] The Georgian Orthodox Church has not always been so popular. Georgians' demonstrative religiosity only emerged in the second half of the 1990s, and such mass support does not necessarily translate into influence on the government. Church-state relations over the last twenty years have been ambivalent, even under an openly radical Christian believer like Zviad Gamsakhurdia. However, the church's role as a powerful historical and national-cultural symbol is universally accepted by nearly all Georgians, and over the last two decades, the Georgian church has played a major role in domes-

[17] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Approach," in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds.) *Ideas & Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, p.14.

[18] "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy," in Rick Fawn (ed.), *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, pp.83-110.

[19] According to the November 2012 survey, 86% of the respondents are Orthodox Christians and 45% attend religious services at least once a month with an additional 38% attending the service a few times a year (see Survey of Georgian Public Opinion, International Republican Institute (IRI), USAID, Baltic Surveys, The Gallup Organization, IPM Georgian National Study, November 2012), http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-releases-first-georgian-national-survey-after-elections

tic political discourse, often challenging the secularist aspirations of Georgia's political elites.[20]

Official government statements, even those concerning foreign policy, frequently cite the centrality of religion in Georgian identity. The 2000 conceptual document on foreign policy, for example, underlines the role of Christianity in strengthening Georgia's "affiliation with the Western, Christian world."[21] More recently, President Saakashvili declared Christianity was a "passport to Europe" and the Church a frontline of Georgia's struggle against Russian domination.[22] In January 2013, he announced that the Patriarch of Georgia would "prevent any attempt to turn Georgia back to the Russian orbit."[23] The conviction is that Georgian Orthodox Christianity underlines both Georgia's Europeanness, and at the same time, its separateness from Russia.

Despite the projection of a strong Christian identity (the new Georgian national flag consists of five crosses), Georgian foreign policy makers have remained quite pragmatic in their choice of allies and partners. Relations with traditionally Christian Russia (as well as Armenia) are worse than those with Turkey and Azerbaijan, both Muslim states and considered strategic partners. Georgians have traditionally defined Turkey and Muslims as a historical threat to the country's integrity, and are still suspicious of their investment activities in Georgia's

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[20] An indication of the influence of the church on Georgia society is reflected in the regular surveys of popular trust for Georgian institutions. The Georgian Orthodox Church is always the most-trusted institution in Georgia. Over the last five years, the approval level has stayed above 85% and peaked at 92% in 2013. See "Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a June 2013 Survey," National Democratic Institute (NDI), Caucasus Research Resources Centers (CRRC), http://www.ndi.org/files/NDI-Georgia-Survey-June-2013-Politics-ENG.pdf

[21] Government of Georgia, "Georgia and the World: A Vision and Strategy for the Future," 10 October 2000. http://www.parliament.ge/files/1_886_192675_nato_vision.pdf

[22] „საქართველოს პრეზიდენტი: „დარწმუნებული ვარ, პატრიარქი ღირსეულ პასუხს გასცემს და ხელს შეუშლის საქართველოს უკან-რუსეთის ორბიტაზე დაბრუნების ყველანაირ მცდელობას. ჩვენი ქრისტიანობა ასევე არის ჩვენი პასპორტი ევროპაში. ევროპულ სახლს ჩვენ ვერავინ ვერ ჩამოგვაშორებს." 14 Jan 2013 http://president.gov.ge/ge/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=8092&i=1

[23] Ibid.

western regions .[24] But Georgia's foreign policy makers have taken a consistently pragmatic line; Muslim or not, Turkey is a link to the EU and NATO and a vital trading partner. The church has significant power at home, but its impacts on Georgian foreign policy can best be described as marginal.

Another global paradigm critical to Georgian foreign policy in Eurasia, is Georgia's relationship to Russia, a colonial master in the Caucasus for almost two centuries. In an official declaration called "Basic Principles of the Sustainability of Social Life, the Strengthening of State Sovereignty and Security, and the Restoration of the Territorial Integrity of Georgia," endorsed by parliament in April 1997, history is viewed as a valuable lesson:

"History confirms that in the past Russia created problems for Georgia, or used whatever means available to exacerbate existing contradictions; and then it had an excuse to resolve them, turning [states] into satellites, or at worst, colonies." [25]

In the NSC document published in 2012, the reminder is still there. "At the beginning of the twentieth century," the document states "Georgia was the victim of Russian aggression that led to 70 years of Soviet occupation." [26] President Saakashvili, after Russia's invasion, has underlined the historical continuities, as he sees it, of Russian aggression. Delivering a speech at the first anniversary of the war he declared: "on August 7, the Russian 58th Army ... as well as in February of 1921 11th Army crossed the Georgian borders recognized internationally and intervened into Georgia."[27] Yet the Shevardnadze administration showed a more ambivalent attitude, one that recog-

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[24] The population is suspicious of the Turkish people's "buying" Batumi and of building a series of new mosques. "Batumi residents promise to destroy the mosque with bulldozers," *Georgia Times,* 30 Jan 2012, http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/news/71264.html

[25] There is no published copy of this document available. The author has a copy.

[26] *National Security Concept of Georgia*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=12

[27] The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili's speech delivered at the ceremony dedicated to Russia-Georgian war anniversary, 7 August 2009 http://president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2247&i=1

nized the traditional mix of Georgian elite attitudes toward Russia as both predator and patron (citing Russia's cultural and economic benefits, for example). Polling shows ordinary Georgians share this ambivalence: in 2007, 52.6 percent of Georgians wanted improved relations with Russia – even at the expense of the United States – and in August 2009, one year after the war, 54 percent still favoured cooperation with Russia.[28] This does not mean Georgians view Russia as "friendly." They do not: Georgian suspicions of Russia's imperial ambitions were reinforced by the 2008 war. Russia is now considered an occupier, not just a threatening neighbour. But statements from both the Shevardnadze and Ivanishvili administrations suggest Georgian elite views of Russia are not only characterized by fear, but by long-standing historical connections and a practical recognition of Russian power.[29] The characterization of Russia as imperial aggressor is only one part of a complex relationship; other strands must be considered when thinking about how past Russian behaviour, as well as the necessities of the present, inform the views of Georgian elites.

Our third global paradigm concerns Georgian self-identity, in particular the popular perception of Georgia's Europeanness. In 1999, marking Georgia's membership in the Council of Europe, then prime minister Zurab Zhvania declared: "I am Georgian, therefore, I am European."[30] This is a value that trumps all others in Georgia's approach to foreign policy. In an August 2009 poll, even after disappointment with the EU's weak response to the war, 54 percent of Georgians asked, agreed with Zhvania's statement.[31] In the 2000 document cited above, it is clear:

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[28] Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History of Independence*, London: I.B. Tauris. October 2012, p.p.249-50.

[29] I discuss this in a previous essay on Georgian foreign policy. See "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy," *op.cit.*

[30] *The Parliament of Georgia Newsletter*, Research Department, Parliament of Georgia, no.2, February 1999, p.1

[31] Jones, *Georgia: A Political History of Independence, op.cit.* p.250

The highest priority of Georgian foreign policy is to achieve full integration into European political, economic, and security structures, thus fulfilling the historical aspiration of the Georgian nation to participate fully in the European community." [32]

Since the Rose Revolution, the conviction that Georgia is European has become a fierce cornerstone of the country's foreign policy. The 2005 National Security Concept equates joining NATO with Georgia's Europeanness. It declares: "Georgia, as a Black Sea and South-Eastern European state, has historically been a geographic, political and cultural part of Europe.[33] According to Saakashvili (Ivanishvili has stuck to this policy), Georgia's "NATO aspiration is an integral part of our identity," and "the bedrock of [Georgian] values;" the NATO path "is in our genes as Georgian citizens. It is defining not only what we want, but who we are."[34] The return to the European family was not only historical destiny, but "a matter of survival against existential threats."[35] This last statement suggests Georgia is driven by both interests and values. It needs Europe to ensure its economic and physical security; there is no other partner, apart from the United States, that can provide the financial assistance and minimal level of security (even if it is largely soft power) that comes from the EU. The EU sees it much the same way, and focuses on its trade and energy relations with Georgia. Leaving aside the naive assumption that Europe would be willing to provide the stability, prosperity, and security Georgians seek, in Georgian minds, despite a strong historical orientation toward the Middle East, Europe is home. For Georgia's elites, many educated in the West, Europe is the country's cultural source as well as its political guarantor. It is the *only* roadmap for Georgian foreign policy.

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[32] *Georgia and the world: a vision and strategy for the future, op.cit.*

[33] "National Security Concept of Georgia," Government of Georgia, 2005, http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf

[34] "The President of Georgia addressed the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 58th Annual Session," 11/12/2012 http://president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements/?p=7961&i=2

[35] *Ibid*.

National Minorities

The ethnic composition of Georgia is complex. It changed dramatically over seventy years of Soviet rule, characterized by war, industrialization, collectivization, deportations, and migrations from neighbouring republics. In the 1950s, non-Georgians began to leave the republic, and Georgia reversed its status as a country of net immigration to one of net out-migration. After the 1940s, the Georgian population increased in the republic every decade, from 64.3 percent in 1959 to 70.1 percent in 1989, and 80.1 percent in 2002. [36] Independence dramatically accelerated the departure of non-Georgians. As in 1918-21 when Georgia experienced a brief period of sovereignty, economic chaos, corruption and state collapse led to inter-ethnic conflict.

Georgia's minorities are seen as fundamental to Georgia's national security, but mostly as a source of threats. Ethnic diversity need not represent vulnerability, but in Georgia, policy makers continue to see it this way. Ethnic minorities are "outsiders," not part of an integrated multicultural society. This is why they feature so centrally in any discussion about domestic and foreign policy. Occupying poor borderlands, they are particularly significant in labour and migration issues, in human trafficking, and cross-border trade. They remain central to Georgia's fulfilment of multilateral and international agreements on human rights (linguistic and educational policies and the powers of self-governance fall into this category), and in policies aimed to control terror networks (for example, the Chechen issue in the Pankisi Gorge). Both human rights and security threats are of particular concern to Georgia's most important partner, the EU. Georgia's failure to meet the national minority standards stipulated in Europe's human rights conventions, or more specifically in the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Actions Plans, undermine its pursuit of swift integration into Europe. Economic policies designed to encourage foreign investment or extend trade with neighbours – such as the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway, which crosses Georgia's Armenian dis-

[36] "Ethnic Groups of Georgia: Censuses 1926 – 2002," at http://ecmicaucasus.org/upload/stats/Censuses%201926-2002.pdf See also Jones, *Georgia: A Political History of Independence, op.cit.* p.203

tricts – also involve the interests of national minorities. The railway project antagonized both local Armenian leaders and the Armenian government, fearful of rising Turkish influence in the region. Similarly, Adjara, a Georgian autonomous republic which contains most of the country's ethnic-Georgian Muslims, needs sensitive treatment. Proper attention to Adjara's religious differences is crucial to the preservation of good relations with Turkey, which is Georgia's largest trading partner and an important balance to Russian aspirations in the region.

National minorities have been central to relations with Russia; since the early 1990s, minority rights and secessionism have supplanted almost all other issues in the Russian-Georgian relationship. The secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is perceived by the Georgian elites to be the result of Russia's interference. Russia played a decisive role, but the Georgian governments' failures in national minority policy and civil integration at home was at the heart of the problem. The alienation of Georgia's minorities opened the door to Russian intervention (this was true in 1918-21 when the Red Army invaded to "protect" a revolt among minority Armenian districts). All the more astonishing then, given the multiple ways in which national minorities affect relations with neighbouring states, is *Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-2009*, which does not mention minority issues at all beyond the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts.[37]

The 2012 NSC document makes a better effort. It places civil integration of national minorities under the sub-heading *Threats, Risks and Challenges to the National Security of Georgia*. It acknowledges the importance of national minority participation in the state's civil and political life, but its singular emphasis on linguistic integration underestimates the complexity of the issue. Georgian governments, despite innumerable documents and declarations (a *National Council on Civic Integration and Tolerance* was created in 2005) have failed to provide the necessary conditions for integration, which has only increased Georgia's vulnerability to outside intervention.

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[37] "Foreign Policy Strategy 2006-2009," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006, http://belgium.mfa.gov.ge/files/-Documents/strategy2006_2009.pdf

Azerbaijanis and Armenians make up 6.5 percent and 5.7 percent of the Georgian population respectively; they are concentrated in the rural regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, bordering the kin-states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgian nationalism at home, concern over potential irredentism, domestic manipulation of Georgian fears regarding non-Georgians' demographic expansion, and economic neglect all exacerbate majority-minority relations. Issues like this complicate Georgia's interaction with neighbouring states which claim an interest in their co-ethnics, or in Russia's case, take on the mantle of "protector" of Russian speaking minorities. Rogers Brubaker in his work, calls this triangular dynamic between minority, majority and kin state a "triadic nexus." A nationalizing state like Georgia must contend not only with minorities, but with the claims of neighbouring "motherlands." [38]

Georgian policy makers overestimate the role of external powers in national minority politics, and underestimate the importance of a legal and practical framework for power sharing with non-Georgians. In twenty years, Georgia has not passed a national minority law or effectively decentralized power to the regions. National minorities are central to the three challenges of state, nation and democracy building. Without attention to national minority needs and their full participation in civic life, they will always remain a foreign policy problem.

Public Opinion

Public opinion is volatile and diverse; it will vary – as it does in Georgia – according to where people live (urban versus rural), their age group, educational level, and ethnicity and gender. There are other divisions: Thomas Risse-Kappen, for example, distinguishes *mass public opinion* from the *attentive public* and the *issue public*.[39] An *attentive public* is a segment of the population which follows their own field of interest (Georgian internally displaced persons [IDPs]

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[38] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[39] Thomas Risse-Kappen, 1991, "Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies" *World Politics,* 43 (4), pp. 482.

likely follow Abkhazian events, for example); an *issue public*, on the other hand, is concerned only with a certain issue (Armenian resistance to the removal of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki in 2007, which was an important source of local employment, is a case in point).

The question is how these ordinary citizens affect the decisions of elites. It will vary according to the issue (foreign policy issues have less priority for most Georgian citizens), and the nature of the political system (can citizens build coalitions, do they have access to elites, do they have resources, can they influence the media?). In Georgia, the institutional channels for the expression of public opinion are weakly developed; access to elites is feeble; political parties are diffuse, unresponsive, and have undefined ideologies; parliament is ineffective as a body that articulates the public's interests. Civil society and interest groups are weak, and political power is concentrated in tightly knit executive circles, determined by a centralized Presidential power structure. These institutional weaknesses make it easier for Georgia's political elites to control and fashion public opinion and ignore popular dissension on foreign policy decisions, particularly given the limited public awareness of external issues.

Polls suggest that the Georgian public is far less hawkish over Russia than the leadership. As noted above, a high percentage of Georgians want greater cooperation with Russia. In the latest National Democratic Institute (NDI) poll in June 2012 54 percent believed Russia was an exaggerated threat or no threat at all, yet President Saakashvili and his party persist with their militant anti-Russian rhetoric with only limited resistance from voters.[40] However, with the rise of the Georgian Dream coalition (and its victory in the October 2012 elections), significant party cleavages have emerged over policies toward Russia. This will increase the salience of public opinion as the parties compete for popular support and begin to build coalitions around opposing programs.

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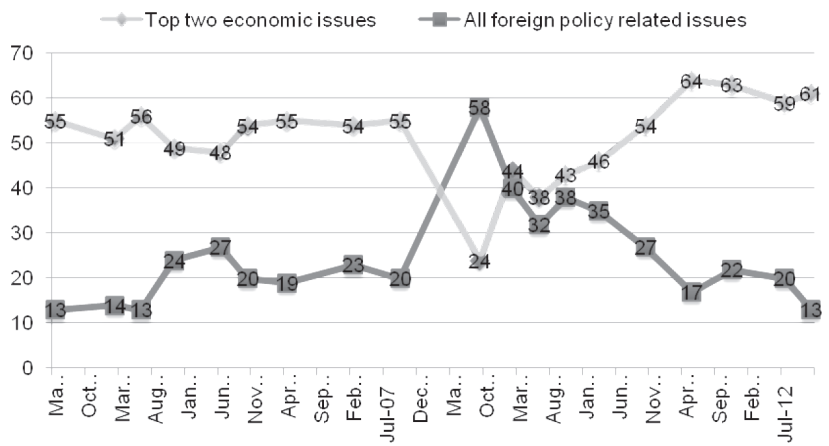
[40] "Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a June 2013 Survey," *NDI*, http://www.ndi.org/node/20484

Figure 1. below suggests that the Georgian public consistently prioritizes economic problems (such as unemployment, price rises, and economic decline) over foreign policy issues. In October 2010, typically, Georgian respondents listed their priorities in this order: unemployment,

Figure 1. Salience of economic and foreign policy issues.



Source: the data is taken from the Georgian public opinion surveys of International Republican Institute (2003-2013) http://www.iri.org/Eurasia/PublicOpinionPolls

territorial integrity, the economic situation, social issues, inflation, conflict with Russia, poverty, the threat of war, low pensions, high taxes, and education.[41] In every survey since 2003 (September 2008 is the exception following the war), two out of the top three issues were economic. Territorial integrity is prominent, although in many ways this is a domestic issue. NATO and EU integration, or relations with Russia and the USA, if included in the surveys, were often at the bottom of the list.

Yet despite the exclusive nature of foreign policy decision-making, Georgian citizens find ways to powerfully express their opinion, often through mass demonstrations on city streets. This way, Georgians overthrow governments, although their passions rarely extend to for-

[41] The data is taken from the Georgian public opinion surveys of International Republican Institute (2003-2013) http://www.iri.org/Eurasia/PublicOpinionPolls

eign policy issues. Georgian TV is not always fully independent from government pressures (particularly during the Saakashvili era), but is a persuasive medium; in June 2013, 87 percent of Georgians claim they receive their information through TV; newspapers are freer but less influential.[42] TV and newspapers are constantly polling the population, and politicians are aware of the trends. In this sense, public opinion can act as a general constraint, or impact foreign policy formation during election periods.

Given the limited political infrastructure in Georgia, and the low level of civil society organization, the influence of public opinion on Georgian foreign policy is weak. It may matter in the shorter term at times of crisis (for example, when Georgian casualties spike in Afghanistan) and may work as a general constraint (no Georgian politician will advocate military conflict with Russia), but given the centralized nature of power, Georgian elites operate most of the time quite autonomously in foreign policy matters. This may change as Georgia shifts to a more decentralized parliamentary system in late 2013, with a freer media and more clearly differentiated political parties dependent on coalition building.

The Institutional Dimension

Understanding a country's foreign policy is incomplete without knowing how decisions are made. Which institutions and organizations make foreign policy? Whose opinions do they take into account? Which among them are most influential? How does the formal institutional relationship among foreign policy bodies work in practice? We found the institutional framework remains weak, and the line between institutions and the personalities who lead them is blurred. The political weight of a particular institution has varied according to who is in charge.

In the early years of independence, foreign policy decision-making was chaotic; institutions were absent or skeletal, personnel was inex-

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[42] "Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of a June 2013 Survey," NDI, http://www.ndi.org/node/20484

perienced, and regularized channels of information absent. Decision-making was impulsive and reactive, often made under the pressure of demonstrations, sometimes organized by the government leaders themselves. The first President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was pro-Western and pro-Caucasian (he developed the idea of a "common Caucasian Home" with Dzhokhar Dudayev, the Chechen President), but during his short nine-month term, Gamsakhrdia could not build institutions capable of developing a coherent foreign policy. It was only in 2000, nine years after Gamsakhurdia's departure, that we saw the first official document (*Georgia and the world: a vision and strategy for the future*, cited above), which tried to strategically define Georgia's foreign policy orientation.

After the introduction of the 1995 constitution, Georgia began to move toward greater stability in foreign policy making. In 1996, a National Security Council (NSC) was established. The prime minister, foreign, interior, finance and defence ministers were made permanent members. Created "with the aim of organising the military construction and defence of the country,"[43] under Shevardnadze it became the most powerful state security body, and played a vital role in foreign policy. Its mandate included control over "the ministries working on national defence and security;"[44] its five departments cover threat assessment, Georgia's occupied zones, foreign policy strategy, human rights and minorities, and "the creation of a National Security Concept."[45] The NSC is described in current legislation as "the highest political decision-making body for security matters."[46] Article 7 of the *Organic Law on National Security Council* of 2004 declares "[t]he apparatus of the Office of the National Security Council is an extraordinarily important special regime institution, which works on excep-

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[43] Constitution of Georgia, Article 99. http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf

[44] Organic Law on NSC, Article 2, Para R. http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/legislations/kanonebi/organuli%20kanoni.pdf

[45] Office of NSC - http://nsc.gov.ge/eng/OfficeofNSC.php 23.02.2013

[46] http://nsc.gov.ge/eng/Mission.php 23.02.2013

tionally important, secret and top secret information."[47] The NSC secretary "is accountable only to the president."[48] The Council, crucially for foreign policy, "proposes draft legal acts in the spheres of defence, national security, and law enforcement, and composes relevant directives for the President of Georgia on responses to contemporary threats and challenges, and is responsible for their implementation."[49]

Parliament gained a constitutionally defined role in foreign affairs after 1995. Article 48 gave it the right to "determine the principle directions of domestic and foreign policy." Its confirmation powers over ministerial appointments furnished it with significant leverage. Under President Saakashvili, the United National Movement (the President's party) converted parliament into a one-party chamber; the death of Zurab Zhvania, the influential prime minister, in 2005, ended parliamentary resistance to presidential prerogatives in foreign policy. Decision-making, as under Shevardnadze, was personalized and centralized in the office of the president, but Saakashvili showed far less inclination for consultation. Giga Bokeria, a deputy foreign minister, and NSC Secretary, was probably the single most important staff member in foreign policy decision-making under Saakashvili.

This is not to suggest the ministries lack input or even control over foreign policies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) are central to devising foreign policy strategies, but the Approval of the Regulations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia (November 2005) focuses on the MFA's function to "draft proposals" on foreign policy strategy and priorities.[50] The Analytical Department of the NSC, by contrast, "develops" strategy. This may just be semantics: the MFA is a multifunctional and complex bureau-

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[47] Organic Law on NSC, Article 7, Para 1. http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/legislations/kanonebi/organuli%20kanoni.pdf 23.02.2013

[48] Organic Law on NSC, Article 4, Para 2. http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/legislations/kanonebi/organuli%20kanoni.pdf 23.02.2013

[49] Office of NSC - http://nsc.gov.ge/eng/OfficeofNSC.php 23.02.2013

[50] Resolution of the Government of Georgia on the Approval of the Regulations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia http://mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=45 23.02.2013

cracy compared to the minimally staffed NSC. It covers international law, international economic organizations, European integration policies, and most regions of the world such as the US and Russia; it filters much of the information that reaches the President's desk on world events, and recommends strategies to deal with them. Relations between the NSC and the MFA can be quite different depending on the authority of the foreign minister. After the October 2012 elections, power shifted dramatically from the NSC and President's Office to the Prime Minister's Office; since then, the NSC has lost its significance.

Ultimately, however, the institutional landscape for foreign affairs is unpredictable; it has been subject over twenty years to the President's wishes, and is dependent on his personal relations with ministers. The "power ministers" - defence, interior (which includes the various intelligence agencies), and justice, were all directly appointed by the President. The parliament and its Committee on Foreign Relations could monitor foreign policy, and even make recommendations, but its primary function, it turned out, was to analyze and ratify international treaties. The committee had minimal input in foreign policy formation. The government, including the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration and the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, had the opportunity to contribute policy advice, but in reality they functioned as advisory bodies, lobbies, and executors. A minister's closeness to the president, as was the case with former interior minister turned prime minister, Vano Merabishvili, enhanced the ministry's influence.

The President, according to the constitution is "the highest representative of Georgia in foreign relations."[51] Officially, he concludes "international agreements and treaties, negotiates with foreign states" and can "appoint and dismiss ambassadors and other diplomatic representatives of Georgia with the consent of the parliament."[52] He ap-

[51] Constitution of Georgia, Article 69, Paragraph 3. http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf

[52] *Constitution of Georgia*, p. 20-21 http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf

points the prime minister and approves the cabinet of ministers. He could dismiss the government and the parliament in certain cases, a clause since revoked, and was able to dismiss the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Defence at will.[53] This gave the president enormous powers over foreign policy. The super-presidential system in Georgia overwhelmed alternative sources of institutional and civic power. This is one explanation, perhaps, why the decision to go to war in August 2008 was made, against all odds.

After the 2012 elections, the foreign policy making process in Georgia has changed radically. The President's office and the NSC are no longer the focus of decision-making. The Georgian Dream coalition controls parliament and the cabinet; the prime minister, rather than the president, is now the foreign policy arbiter. It is hard to say, more then one year after victory, who is making foreign policy, though a joint parliamentary resolution by the ruling coalition and the United National Movement (now in opposition), suggests the country's pro-Western course is unchanged.[54] The most significant departure in foreign policy is the new government's emphasis on dialogue with Russia. Prime Minister Ivanishvili created the position of Special Representative to develop trade, economic, humanitarian, and cultural relations with Russia. The question is whether Ivanishvili represents a break from the personal style of foreign policy making characteristic of the last twenty years. A new parliamentary system will be introduced in October 2013; will it bring institutional pluralism to foreign policy making in Georgia, or will we see more of the same, with a prime minister reluctant to devolve his foreign policy powers?

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[53] According to the Article 51[1] of the Constitution of Georgia, the parliament can be dissolved by the president save for "a. within six months from the holding of the elections of the Parliament; b. discharging of an authority determined by Article 63 of the Constitution by the Parliament; c. in time of a state of emergency or martial law; d. within the last 6 months of the term of office of the President of Georgia" This article was added in 2004. Article 63 outlines general guidelines for the impeachment of the president, which involves the Supreme or Constitutional courts, and a High Treason commission to document the violation of the constitution by the president.

[54] "Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy," *Civil Georgia*, 7 Mar 2013. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828

Leadership

Institutional weakness alone does not explain why foreign policy decision-making has been so concentrated in the office of the President. The constitution was designed that way. Second, a Soviet legacy of deference to authority, and a lack of social and political organization in society, gave Georgia's leaders enormous autonomy, unfettered by public opinion or an effective parliament. Presidential control of the media, most notably under President Saakashvili, undermined public debate on foreign policy. Finally, the style of leadership of all Georgia's presidents has been critical. All were populists in their own fashion, and the manner in which they exercised their power was crucial to both the process of policy formation, and to its outcome.

Until 2013, almost all changes to the constitution, especially those passed in 2004, increased presidential powers, and the practice of foreign policy making has never departed from a highly personalized style, with power flowing from a narrow circle of decision-makers at the top. The President has wide formal powers in foreign policy: he (or she) leads and exercises the foreign policy of the country, and his constitutional prerogatives, coupled with in Saakashvili's case, a parliament controlled by the president's party, make the president almost unchallengeable in foreign policy. The President's informal powers are just as significant, augmented by the lack of any countervailing power, and by a political environment that was frequently in crisis. A weak media, the absence of an independent body of civil servants or strong bureaucratic lobbies, and the popular focus on domestic issues, has given Georgia's presidents a free hand. Georgia's presidents, as directly elected leaders, have fully exploited the "cult" of personality among the Georgian public. Both Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili, early on in their presidencies, generated "camp followers" known as "Zviadists" and "Mishists." Presidentialism provides the leader with high media exposure; he can demonstrate his command over cabinet meetings, or personify the patriotic nation at military parades.

Given the President's dominance in foreign policy, the personality of the leader is critical. There has always been debate in political sci-

ence literature, much of it sceptical, about the significance of leaders. We share the view of Margaret Herman, Thomas Preston and their co-authors that what they call "predominant leaders" *do* count, especially in poorly working institutional environments like Georgia's. Herman classifies leaders as crusaders, strategists, pragmatists and opportunists, and argues that these different styles have significant influence on foreign policy.[55] This is a useful framework for viewing Georgian presidents, though we should keep in mind that crusaders often turn into pragmatists. Here is how she describes the difference between crusaders and pragmatists (or "contextually responsive predominant leaders"):

"The more contextually responsive predominant leaders appear more constrained by the specific domestic settings in which they find themselves than do their more goal driven counterparts, and, accordingly, are relatively incremental in the activities they urge on their governments. They are less likely to engage in conflict than the predominant leaders who are more goal driven, and are averse to committing their country's resources to bellicose actions unless the choice enjoys the support of important constituencies." [56]

This is not a completely fair description of the different approaches to foreign policy by Georgia's crusading and pragmatic presidents (we classify Saakashvili and Gamsakhurdia as "crusaders," and Shevardnadze and Ivanishvili as "pragmatists"). Saakashvili, for example, is pragmatic in his policy toward Turkey, China, and Azerbaijan, but a "crusader" toward Russia and the West. But despite its generalities, Herman's description illustrates the ways in which presidential styles in Georgia can impact foreign policy.

Let's look at the crusaders first: Gamsakhurdia was a combative Soviet dissident, a street leader of a radical wing of the Georgian nationalist movement in the late 1980s. He continued a crusading

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[55] Maragaret Herman, Thomas Preston et al, "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review*, Summer 2001, Vol. 3 Issue 2, pp. 95-97.

[56] *Ibid*., pp.87-88

style in office which initially generated popular support. Russia was a coloniser, an enemy that could be blamed for Georgia's problems. Using religious symbolism in his speeches he portrayed Georgia's struggle for independence as a battle between light and dark forces. In a speech in 1990, Gamsakhurdia declared to his followers: "We, brothers, are facing Satan, the dragon. Either we will defeat it with the support of St George, or this cosmic dragon, the planetary beast – antichrist – will take control of our historic fate and trample us down."[57] It was a mental framework that demanded displays of resistance and sacrifice. The anti-colonial and national liberation framework also led him to condemn Georgia's national minorities as Moscow's "fifth columnists." Gamsakhurdia's belligerence generated conflict and, in the end, alienated all potential supporters, including Western states and Russia under Boris Yeltsin.

Mikheil Saakashvili is also a crusader, a radical Westerniser and a Huntingtonian "civilizationist" who characterizes Russia as an Asiatic despotism. Saakashvili, in a statement on Russia's recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence in 2008, described the Russian authorities as opposed to the "civilized world." "Georgia's future is no longer the future of only Georgia," he remarked, rather "it is the future of freedom, democracy and of civilised mankind."[58] Yet during the first year of his presidency, Saakashvili was pragmatic enough to establish a framework agreement on good neighbourly relations with Russia, which he signed with Vladimir Putin, though it was never ratified by the Russian Duma.

Saakashvili's radical rhetoric on the Georgia desire to join NATO, though perfectly justifiable, undermined Georgian-Russian cooperation. Other members of the government shared his style. In February 2006, Saakashvili's Minister of Defence, Irakli Okruashvili, promised

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[57] "ზვიად გამსახურდიას მიერ 1990 წლის 26 მაისს ქარიშხალას სტადიონზე წარმოთქმული ისტორიული სიტყვა" ("Zviad Gamsakhurdia's speech at the Karishkhala Stadium, 26 May 1990"). http://www.ai-ia.info/online-arqivi/124-zviad-gamsaxurdias-mier-1990-clis-26-maiss-qarishxalas-stadionze-carmotqmuli-istoriuli-sitkva.htm

[58] "The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili's statement," 8/26/2008, http://president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2312&i=1

to celebrate the New Year of 2007 in Tskhinvali, the capital of secessionist South Ossetia.[59] That same year, Georgia launched a three-day military operation to reassert central government control of the Kodori gorge in Western Georgia, a region adjacent to Abkhazia.[60] Russia, as a patron of Georgia's secessionist regions, became the enemy; intense government rhetoric throughout the summer of 2008, helped inflame relations with Russia, contributing to the war that exploded in August 2008.

Eduard Shevardnadze was a Soviet trained pragmatist. He clawed his way to the First Secretaryship of the Georgian party organization in 1972, and between 1985 and 1990 (and again in November-December 1991) was Soviet Foreign Minister. As a local communist official, he ruled by balancing domestic lobbies, and as Soviet foreign minister, he negotiated an end to the arms race with his Western counterparts. Both these experiences informed his style as president of Georgia. He was an "insider," a tactician. His view of the world was uncomplicated by doctrine, his pronouncements temperate, quite different from the soaring rhetoric of Gamsakurdia and Saakashvili. Shevardnadze's politics, however, became increasingly isolated from public concerns, and degraded into high corruption and stagnation, features that finally brought his regime to an end.

Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, and in power since October 2012, lauds his pragmatism over the radical rhetoric of Saakashvili. Saaakashvili has condemned Ivanishvli's pragmatism toward Russia as a betrayal. At the April 19 rally of the UNM, Saakashvili promised his supporters: "we will not let you [referring to the government] to betray the country."[61] Ivanishvili promises a non-ideological approach to domestic and foreign policy, even suggesting his party will align with the moderate social demo-

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[59] Liz Fuller, "Georgia: What Led To Defense Minister's Demotion?" *RFE/RL,* 14 Nov 2006 http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1072724.html

[60] Richard Giragosian, "Georgia: Kodori Operation Raises NATO Questions," *RFE/RL*, 31 Jul 2006, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070226.html

[61] "Saakashvili Addresses UNM Rally," *Civil Georgia,* 19 Apr 2013, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25971&search=

crats in the European parliament. His statements on Russia call for dialogue, including the return of Georgian products to the Russian market, and the possible restoration of the railway through Abkhazia (closed during Gamsakhurdia's period in office in an attempt to enforce an economic "blockade" on Abkhazia). Ivanishvili has appointed Zurab Abashidze, a former Georgian ambassador to Russia, as a Special Representative to Russia. He claims his goal is to "arrange relations with Russia and to keep up with the previous pace of integration in NATO."[62]

Georgia's leaders have all put a distinct stamp on Georgian politics. Naturally, the political conditions under which they work present constraints and opportunities, and will shape their style and choices. Crusaders and pragmatists are ideal types; there is a lot of grey in between. But the pattern is an interesting one; Georgian leadership style has cycled between crusaders and pragmatists, and Georgian foreign policy has reflected these trends, particularly in relationship to Russia. It would be foolhardy not to consider the implications of leadership style in Georgia's foreign policy decision making. Whether a president consults widely or not, is open to multiple sources of information, selects advisers outside his own circle, believes in incremental change – these characteristics all can help explain why and how foreign policy decisions, like going to war, are made.

Conclusion

This assessment of the domestic impacts on Georgia's foreign policy is preliminary. Our conclusions are tentative, but suggest future lines of research. The caveats are clear: Georgia's options as a small, poor state in a volatile region dominated by powerful and competing regional powers, are limited. Georgia's hostile relationship with Russia, an influential state in international politics which exercises a strong influence in the Caucasus, narrows Georgia's options even further. Over the last twenty years, policy choices have been made by Georgian leaders, which have led to painful and risky strategic

[62] Zurab Abashidze's "Mission Impossible" http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/russia-zurab-abashidze/24757603.html

outcomes. Suggesting these choices are determined by domestic contexts, is nothing new. But what we have tried to do is broaden the traditional focus on Georgia as strategic object buffeted by global forces, to Georgia as political regime making choices.

Our clearest conclusion is the strong link between Georgia's political structure and the isolated nature of its foreign policy making. The top-down presidential system, the persistent economic crisis, the weakness of state institutions, the absence of organized interests from below, and low popular interest in external affairs, make it easy for Georgia's foreign policy makers to make decisions with little monitoring and minimal interference from domestic actors. It reflects a more general problem in domestic politics too, although the salience of prices, health, and jobs makes domestic politics a much more "democratic" affair.

It can be argued that foreign policy is best left to the experts, that it requires long-term strategic thinking, or that information needed to make good decisions is unavailable to ordinary citizens. Yet what was evident to us was the negative impact of foreign policy makers' isolation. This is both a structural problem and a domestic political one. In the introduction, we mentioned three major tasks Georgia has faced over the last twenty years, namely, nation, state, and democracy building. The challenges are enormous, but the domestic choices made (or not made) have had disastrous consequences for Georgia's development as a stable and relatively prosperous state, despite serious external constraints. Erroneous economic policies inspired by Western financial organizations, the marginalization of national minorities, the construction of a super-centralized presidential system – these are all domestic factors, which dramatically impacted Georgia's foreign policy outcomes. This is why continuing to study the changes in Georgian domestic politics should give us a better chance of predicting Georgia's foreign policy behaviour in the future.

EUROPEAN, ASIAN, OR EURASIAN?: GEORGIAN IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

Kornely Kakachia

Despite a general acknowledgement that knowledge about identities is essential for understanding contemporary international relations, surprisingly little has been written about the relevance of national identity narratives in shaping foreign policy of small post-Soviet states. As national identities play a significant role in Post- Soviet international relations, they affect the ways in which policy-makers view themselves and others, as well as influence the ways in which their policies are received abroad. To some extent, identities create opportunities and constraints for foreign policy-making, and can also help frame relations between countries.

Since an effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, the foreign policy of small states is dictated by a number of factors, some realistic, like geography, and some ideological, like identity. As people seek to represent themselves as a nation, and states strive to define themselves in terms of national communities, they do so through the maintenance and reproduction of values, symbols, myths, memories, and traditions that constitute and are specific to a nation.[1] Similarly, when people talk about their national identities, they are making special sorts of claims about what they share; in Benedict Anderson's useful formulation, they are appealing to an "imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."

Conversely, foreign policy also has a great impact on national identity, reflecting Graham Fuller's observation that "foreign policy expresses not only what one wants, but also what one is." Similarly, identities

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[1] Anthony D. Smith. The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism. Brandeis/Historical Society of Israel; 1st edition , 2000. p.796

shape not only what we want, but also the manner in which interest and goals are fulfilled. And there is a "grand strategy" definition that suggests foreign policy is about national identity itself: "about [the] source of national pride, the characteristics which distinguish a country from its neighbors, the core elements of sovereignty it seeks to defend, the values its stands for, and seeks to promote abroad."[2]

Georgia's Identity-Driven Foreign Policy and the Struggle for Its European Destiny

Georgia's foreign policy emerged as a product of classic geopolitical factors, where geographic location remains one of the central features for the country's political development. As a small, weak state confronted with issues of survival and a choice of strategic orientation, its national identity is closely linked to different conceptions of sovereignty and statehood. As Jones argues: "as in most of the former Soviet republics, Georgian foreign policy – at least in the first few years after independence – became part of the re-ideologization of politics, and an instrument for asserting the legitimacy of the new elite and the identity of the new state."[3] Generally speaking, the Georgian paradigm is more inclined to protect territorial integrity and its foreign policy is largely based on preserving the status quo. Moreover, Georgian identity tends to externalize domestic issues related to the frozen conflicts on its territory and possesses a cognitive map that is mainly shaped by separatism and the Russian threat perception. As a result, since 1994 Georgia's major foreign policy objective has been balancing Russian power and influence, which is seen as key to enhancing the country's national security. Forging close ties with the United States and acceding to NATO are the two preferred foreign policy outcomes – as well as the means of achieving that balance.

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[2] William Wallace. Foreign Policy and National Identity in the United Kingdom. International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) Vol. 67, No. 1 1991, pp. 65-80

[3] Stephen Jones. "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy." In: Rick Fawn (ed.) Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies, London: Frank Cass, 2004: 83–110

The majority of Georgia's political elite share these goals[4].

At the same time, while Georgia's foreign policy is considered pro-Western and multifaceted, it is not always based on principles of pragmatic expediency. One may even claim that Georgia's foreign policy priorities are identity-driven (the determination to join the "West," the E.U., NATO) and unlike its neighbors has not been as focused on realist paradigms, such as national interest, pragmatism, or balance of power. In order to understand the nature of Georgia's foreign policies towards the rest of the world, it is necessary to understand the factors defining them, including identity. This perspective includes measures of continuity, which explains persistent factors in the way the country interacts in the international arena. Considering that the integration into Western political and security structures was a stated goal of all successive Georgian governments and strongly supported by citizens, frequent public appeals to national identity may seem logical.

Similarly, as identity plays a significant role in the construction and application of Georgian foreign policy, exploring Georgia's evolving national identity offers the potential to better forecast the future direction of its foreign policy orientation as well. However, one should not forget that any attempt to analyze Georgia's foreign policy and the country's identity is fraught with risks, as Georgia is constantly changing.

History, Geography, and Identity as Factors of State Behavior

An increasing number of International Relations scholars are focusing on the ideational sources of foreign policy, contending that national identity is the key to understand state behavior.[5] At the same time one should not neglect role of history and geography as well. Geography and identity define Georgia's political options and determine many

[4] we use Gaetano Mosca's definition of political class here, who refers to it as "the relatively small group of activists that is highly aware and active in politics, and from whom the national leadership is largely drawn".

[5] The Return of Culture and Identity in IR, Boulder: Lynne Rienner. In quantitative terms, the rise of identity research in IR has been documented by Horowitz, Michael 2002: Research Report on the Use of Identity Concepts in International Relation, Harvard Identity Project, available at: http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/identity_use_of_horowitz.pdf Rev. 20-02-2009. (2002).

aspects of its state behavior. Georgias location, nestled between the Black Sea, Russia, and Turkey, gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. As a Black Sea and southeastern European state, the country has historically been a geographic, political, and cultural part of greater Europe and has identified itself with European civilization through Christianity, cultural values, and forms of ownership. An historical analysis of Georgian foreign relations and its dealings with Roman and later Byzantine civilizations demonstrates the continuity in this trend. Georgia played a role of a buffer state between various empires and invaders.[6] At different times, Georgia has persisted, fought, and eventually evicted the invading great powers from its part of the Caucasus – it could not have survived as a nation otherwise.[7] In order to triumph over more powerful enemies, Georgia historically had to make alliances with the enemies of its enemies, and such alliances almost always transcended religious boundaries. However, by the middle of the 15th century, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the fall of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire sealed the Black Sea, cutting off the Christian states in the area from Europe and the rest of the Christian world. As a result of these changes, Georgia suffered economic and political decline and become a battleground for two rival eastern powers – Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire.[8]

Since then, fractured Georgian kingdoms struggled to remain connected to Europe, first through the Genoese colonies in the Crimea and later via the Russian Empire. From time to time, Georgian kings unable to resist pressure from the Persian and Ottoman empires sought potential allies in Europe. The diplomatic mission of Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani to Europe was the most famous case in

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6 On detailed account on Georgia as a buffer state see: Tornike Turmanidze. Buffer States: Power Policies, Foreign Policies and Concepts (Global Political Studies). Nova Science Pub Inc. 2009

7 Lasha Tchanturidze. It does not take a prophet: War and Peace in the Caucasus. Central Asia and the Caucasus. Journal of Social and Political Studies No. 1(55), 2009. p.10

8 Details see: Roin Metreveli, Essays on the history of Georgian diplomacy. Tbilisi State University. ქართული სახელმწიფო და სახალხო დიპლომატიის ისტორიის სამეცნიერო-კვლევითი ცენტრი. თბილისის უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, 1998

point. Considering France as the most powerful state in Europe, the Georgian king, Vakhtang IV, sent his envoy, Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, and appealed to the West for assistance. Though the Georgian envoy managed to meet Ludwig XIV, Pope Clemente XI, and Louis XIV, who allegedly even promised assistance, concrete historical circumstances made his diplomatic mission unsuccessful. Consequently, all attempts made by Georgian nobility to bring Georgia and states of Western Europe together turned out to be in vain.

Meanwhile, another great power appeared on the scene of European politics: Russia. In hopes that Orthodox Christian Russia would protect its coreligionists in Georgia against Muslim oppression, Georgian monarchs turned to Russia as a hopeful substitute for the West – or perhaps as an intermediary between Georgia and the West. Russia , for its part, viewed the Caucasus mainly as a means of achieving its objectives in the Black Sea and Southeastern Europe and regarded Georgia as useful but minor player in its high-stakes imperial drama. Similarly, annexation was rarely absent from the calculations of Russian statesmen. As a result, after the death of the last Georgian King, Giorgi XII, Russian Tsar Paul I signed a decree incorporating Georgia (Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti) within the Russian Empire, thereby depriving it not only of independence but even the modest autonomy it enjoyed as a protectorate.

The Russian empire's annexation of Georgia, which Georgians view as a great tragedy, nonetheless spurred the long-sought process of quasi Europeanization and reduced Georgian fears over the specter of Islamic influence over the country. It is important to note that Tbilisi's geographical and political closeness to Russia provided a mixture of benefits and burdens. For Georgians, the way to the West lay through Russia, and the late 19th century Caucasian enlightenment was largely enabled through the journeys northward by Caucasian students to Russian centers of learning to learn the latest discoveries of European thinkers.[9] And yet, Russia served not only as a positive intermediary between Georgia and Europe, but also played a negative role by

[9] Ronald Grigor Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 123

"filtering" direct European influence, a role it maintained until the fall of the Soviet Union.[10] Despite having no direct diplomatic links or access to European states, Georgians were mostly able to remain in tune with European civilization and maintained cultural, political, and spiritual connections with Europe.

Since its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia, as an emerging state within a shifting world order, sought direct links to Europe. New political elites comprised of the old Soviet nomenclatura and nationalist dissident intellectuals focused on foreign policy to increase Georgia's visibility abroad and to gain domestic support at home. With an inherited political culture lacking a strong democratic tradition, an inexperienced foreign policy elite, scarce financial resources, and poorly defined competing social forces, initially Georgia was unable to develop a viable foreign and security policy towards the West. As Georgian scholar Alexander Rondeli put it: "[Georgian] attempts to integrate their country into European structures is often seen as strategic idealism which goes against all geopolitical arguments and even common sense."[11] Yet already at this early stage, Georgia's foreign policy was heavily driven by its self-ascribed "Western" identity. Subsequently, Georgia's foreign policy was formulated in association with the nation-building project and was dominated by a quest to secure its Western identity – as well as foreign aid, along with security necessities. Using the historical narrative that it belongs to the West, Georgia continued its traditional quest for a European future.

Georgia's Narrative and the Struggle for its European "Destiny"

Georgia, as a country with an ancient Christian civilization, frequently claims European identity and calls for a close E.U. association as a

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[10] The only exception is the short-lived period of the first Georgian democratic republic during 1918–1921, when Georgia was able to forge direct political contacts with European powers like Germany, Britain, France, Italy and international bodies like the League of Nations.

[11] Alexander Rondeli. The choice of independent Georgia in: The security of the Caspian Sea Region / edited by Gennady Chufrin. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001 p. 195

matter of historical justice.[12] Georgia claims that as a result of its difficult historical circumstances, it became separated from European civilization and culture and thus has been unable to move in parallel with European advances. Since liberal democracy is considered a part of European civilization, the aspiration to establish Western-style democracy became a part of the Georgian subconscious. Likewise, it perceives modernization and Westernization as complementary.

Zurab Zhvania, the late Georgian Prime minister and former speaker of the Georgian Parliament, declared upon his country's accession to the Council of Europe in February 1999: "I am Georgian, therefore I am European." This statement underlined the aspirations of the Georgian people to achieve full-fledged integration into European political institutions as part of Georgia's national narrative and articulated its foreign policy agenda for the coming decades. Since the November 2003 Rose Revolution, European integration acquired new momentum as Georgia loudly reclaimed its European identity and established E.U. and NATO membership as its goals.

The National Security Concept of Georgia – the basic document that explains Georgia's fundamental national values and interests, which was adopted by parliament in July 2005 – describes Georgia as "an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and who] aspires to achieve full-fledged integration into Europe's political, economic and security systems … and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe."[13] The later version of the Concept,[14] adopted on December 23, 2011, also underlines the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve full-fledged integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region.

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[12] To further this assumption see: Ghia Nodia. "The Georgian Perception of the West," in: Bruno Coppieters, Alexei Zverev and Dmitri Trenin, (ed). Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia, London-Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998: 12–43.

[13] 2005 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf

[14] 2011 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: http:// www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf

Since Georgia considers regional cooperation within the Black Sea area as one of its foreign policy priorities, a fully realized "wider Black Sea" project is central to Georgia's agenda for ensuring its stability and prosperity. Although close political and security cooperation with Russia and other CIS states would be beneficial for Georgia in terms of solving its territorial problems, Tbilisi avoided cooperation with these states due to its own insecure identity. No longer willing to be labeled merely as a post-Soviet state nor wishing to be identified with the volatile and fragmented Caucasus region, Georgia sees its ties with the Black Sea community[15] as a way to become affiliated with the rest of Europe.[16]

Georgia's Political Class: Erasing Traces of the Soviet Past

During the twenty years since regaining independence, the main goal of Georgia's foreign and domestic policy was to disassociate itself from its Soviet past and escape from Russia's historic, geographic, and civilizational space. Likewise it has often distanced itself from post-Soviet institutions and regional groupings like the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russia-led Customs Union, and others that were heavily dominated by Moscow. In some ways "de-Sovietization" became a nationwide mantra drawing from an identity-based narrative. In addition to efforts to find security through a "Black Sea identity," Georgia also developed another national narrative that considered Russia as an existential threat given its political, security, and economic realities and prolonged period of tension with Moscow. In some sense it seemed quite logical and even necessary as Georgia

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[15] Jonathan Kulick and Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia and the Wider Black Sea" in: Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott. (eds). *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: strategic, economic and energy Perspectives*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, 2008.

[16] On the question: Do you approve or disapprove? 85% stated that they support the government's stated goal to join the EU and similarly 81% supported the goal to join NATO. See: Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of a September 2013 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC, http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Sur vey-Results-report-101013.pdf

was (and still is) in the process of shaping its identity and determining its corresponding national interests.

An identity-based account has the potential to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex web of problems in Russo–Georgian relations. For Georgia's Western-educated political class, Russia and its political model – which is still evolving – are not attractive as they do not generate new interesting political, cultural, or civilizational ideas. In this view, Russia offers no compelling rationale for a revived Russian sphere of influence – even among its allies, as it is gradually becoming an "industrial museum." Georgia, Georgian liberals argue, should form partnerships with more progressive countries and should be united to the core area of global development (the West), not to peripheral areas (such as the CIS or the post-Soviet space). They claim that Georgia should continue to cooperate with the West as other alternatives cannot satisfy Georgia's economic, security, and ideological needs.

Besides this, Georgia's political elite see Russia as the direct successor of the Soviet empire and view any attempts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space under the auspices of the CIS (or any other post-Soviet regional organization) as a danger to Georgian national security. The early 2013 bipartisan legislation in the Georgian parliament on the "Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy" is a case in point. The resolution sets the goal of "de-occupation" of Georgia's territories and restoration of the country's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders[17]. However, Georgia shall "neither have diplomatic relations, nor be in a military, political, or customs alliance with a state that recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia or that occupies Georgia's territories." More generally, Georgia shall not join international organizations whose policies contradict "the principles of rule of law and supremacy of human rights." Cumulatively, these injunctions preclude Georgia from reestablishing diplomatic relations with Russia or joining Russian-led organizations (the Collective

[17] Civil Georgia. GD Unveils Draft of Agreement on Foreign Policy Priorities. February 11, 2013. Available at: http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25744

Security Treaty Organization, Commonwealth of Independent States, Customs Union, Eurasian Union), unless and until Russia ends its occupation of Georgia's territories.[18]

Some of these fears are psychological, with deep roots in the period of the Russian empire and Soviet occupation of Georgia after the establishment of the first republic. However, the real reason Georgia finds Russia so uncooperative lies not in psychology but in objective calculations of national interest. All the grievances accumulated since the time of the Russian empire has led the Georgian elite to perceive their interests as utterly incompatible with those of the Russian Federation. They also see little advantage in cooperating with the Kremlin as they do not believe that there is a deal to be had with Russia.[19] Similarly, the Russian socio-economic model limits its capacity to act as a pole of attraction for Georgia. On the contrary, as Russian expert Fyodor Lukyianov observed, "Georgia has sought to create a conceptual alternative to Russia by providing an example of a complete and irreversible break of historical and cultural ties with its powerful neighbor." In addition, Russia's conduct in Georgia has made a pro-Russian stance politically untenable.

Today, Georgians see neither the Russian nor the Soviet empires as "European." They remember the Russian empire as autocratic and emphasize the USSR's ideological anti-Western orientation. Moreover, some elements of the Georgian public does not consider Russia as part of the pan-European project and believe that Russia is a *sui generis* phenomenon which cannot disassociate itself from an imperial Eurasianist ideology that neatly serves its global geopolitical ambitions. As this (mis)perception still prevails over the sub-consciousness of Georgia's political elites, many polls indicate, that while most Georgians support good neighborly relations with Russia,

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[18] Civil Georgia. Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy. March 7,2013 Available at: http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828

[19] On this account see: Hans Gutbrod and Nana Papiashvili. Georgian attitudes to Russia: Surprisingly positive. Russian Analytical Digest, no. 68, 23 November 2009, http://kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/RESSpecNet/109833/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/4e1ea849-74f9- 4bc3-bc0a-30c674f3cd5f/en/Russian_Analytical_Digest_68.pdf

they similarly do not want to be involved in any Russian-dominated integration process in Eurasia. In short, Georgians perceive their country in the long-term perspective as "European" and part of a united Europe, and in no way suitable for a "new Eurasian superpower project" promoted by Moscow.

Conclusion

Considering Georgia's status as regional front runner in European integration, it is necessary to distinguish between the majority of the population and the foreign policy elite, as most international affairs decisions are elite-driven. The Georgian elite plays a significant role in articulating and molding national self-understanding. They are also at the forefront of persuading and shaping identities, though they are constrained by the masses and historical memory. There is a strong impression that the Westernization policy of Georgian leaders was a top-down and elitist project rather than a process generated by society. The determination of national identity was made strictly at the level of the political elites and excluded most of society and, accordingly, has received only partial recognition from the West.

Despite the fact that Georgia shares a compact geographic area, similar past, common cultural practices, and a long, interlinked history with other Caucasian nations, it faces a dilemma in how to identify itself within its region. Georgia has viewed its South Caucasus and the post-Soviet space as regions characterised by instability and stagnation that were potentially disquieting in consequence, disregarding the fact that Tbilisi was bound to these regions by strong historical and religious links. Secondly, Georgia oriented itself ideologically and strategically towards the West, both as a result of the above and owing to its immediate proximity to Russia, which was seen as a threat. Unable to act in concert with its immediate neighbors and considering its past political history, Georgia potentially could associate itself with a post-Soviet, Caucasian, or even Middle Eastern identity if it wanted to. It also could utilize multiple regional identities without being limited just to one regional vector. However, neglecting all three and focusing only on a Black Sea identity as a ticket for its

European identity has played a major role in Georgia's pro-Western drive.

The formulation of Georgia's national interest and foreign policy was a direct result of the internalization of identity preferences that were shaped by cultural patterns of social and economic life. The notion that Georgia belonged in "the West" provides a certain foundation for Georgia's pro-western orientation and its identity-driven foreign policy. Properly understanding its impact requires a far more systematic study of specific groups, institutions, public opinion and political decision-making, which is beyond of the focus of this particular chapter.

EU-GEORGIA RELATIONS: WHERE IT STARTS AND WHERE IT GOES

Ivane Chkhikvadze

Bilateral relations between the European Union and Georgia emerged after the former Soviet country gained independence. In the mid-1990s, the E.U. paid limited attention to the South Caucasus region since it was not its immediate neighbour and had less ambition to become global player. After the E.U.'s eastward enlargement in 2004 and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Union in 2007, its external frontiers moved east, giving the E.U. a shared maritime border with Georgia on the Black Sea.

Georgian ambitions for E.U. integration gained fresh momentum as a consequence the European Neighbourhood Policy's (ENP) launch and the E.U.'s decision to extend greater attentions to the South Caucasus region. The ENP contributed to Georgia's efforts to modernize its state institutions and carry out economic reforms. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, holding the rotating E.U. presidency at the time, played a crucial role in stopping the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. The E.U. reacted promptly and deployed the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), an unarmed monitoring mission deployed to the Georgian side of the administrative boundaries with the separatist regions. So far, the EUMM remains as the only monitoring mechanism implemented as a result of the ceasefire agreement, albeit only from one side of administrative line since it lacks access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The E.U. is also involved in the international mediation process over Georgia's breakaway regions.

In May 2009, the E.U. launched the Eastern Partnership initiative, which offers Georgia new mechanisms to get more closely integrated with the E.U. Within the framework of the EaP, Georgia recently completed its negotiations on the legally binding Association Agreement, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the E.U. The up-

coming EaP Vilnius Summit, where the Association Agreement is likely to be initialed, stands as a potential milestone in E.U.-Georgia relations.

Early Days of Georgia – EU Relations

Immediately after Georgia gained independence, the government began actively seeking support at the international level. One target was the E.U., However, the E.U. kept Georgia at an arm's length. This could be explained by several reasons: first, Georgia did not have advocates within the E.U. to lobby on its behalf – such as Finland, which plays a major role in formulating Northern E.U. policy; or Spain, which was an important player in launching the Barcelona Process. Secondly, due to bloody internal conflicts, the E.U. considered Georgia to be "distant" enough that the security risks emanating from its conflicts were not perceived to be an immediate threat. Also E.U. reticence can also be traced to a difference in outlook: the government of Georgia was keen to pursue short-term goals while the E.U. was more interested in the implementation of longer-term, sustainable projects. In addition, the E.U. did not have any historical memory about having close ties with Georgia, even thought the latter enjoyed three years of independence until the invasion by Bolshevik troops in 1921.

When comparing relations of the E.U. with Georgia and the E.U. with Central and Eastern European states (former satellites of the Soviet bloc), a noteworthy difference of them was a peculiar trait: "the notion of "return to Europe" and a "common European home" have been concepts that indicate the identity and history-driven factors within E.U.[1] In addition, because of largely clan-oriented customs of administration, Georgia inherited a national tendency where "traditions and informal practices were considered to be far more important than formal legal procedures."[2] In Georgia, there was a pervasive deficit of the rule of law, which inhibited the implementation of much-needed reforms. Initially, the Georgian government considered E.U. relations

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[1] "Turkey and the EU – an awkward candidate for EU membership?" by Harun Arikan.

[2] "Georgian Security and the Role of the West" by Damien Helly Giorgi Gogia; Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution edited by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold; pp. 271-307.

to be primarily an opportunity to solve the internal conflicts, but the E.U. did not demonstrate a clear political will to intervene. However, this attitude was not definitive and subject to change as the reasons behind their lack of interest were stated as: the "South Caucasus are not active demandeurs of an increased E.U. role … they are active demandeurs only if it serves their interests, and not necessarily if it serves the interests of the other states in the region."[3]

Mutual cooperation between the E.U. and Georgia took a step further in 1996 when the two sides signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force on July 1, 1999. The agreement was concluded for an initial period of ten years time, but did not exclude the possibility of future prolongation. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) had four major aims:

- To provide an appropriate framework for political dialogue between the parties allowing the development of political relations

- To support Georgian efforts to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy and to complete the transition to a market economy

- To promote trade and investment and harmonious economic relations between the parties and so to foster their sustainable economic development

- To provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural cooperation

The PCA aimed to develop economic relations between the E.U. and Georgia and has granted both parts of the agreement with the status of "most-favoured-nation treatment." As it was stated in Article 9 (1) of the agreement: "The parties shall accord to one another most-favoured-nation treatment." This gave better access to each other's markets by not discriminating against the other party's goods and

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[3] "The South Caucasus: a challenge for the EU"; European Union Institute for Security Studies; Chaillot Paper # 65, December 2003;

forbade the use of quotas (quantitative restriction) on imports to the E.U. and vice versa. Also, the dialogue was designed to strengthen political links between Georgia and the E.U. while helping to develop closer economic ties. The agreement also made references to future investment projects in the energy sector, and particularly in the construction or refurbishment of oil and gas pipelines. Article 56 (2) refers to the "improvement of energy supply, including security of supply, in an economic and environmentally sound manner."

Another achievement of the PCA was the establishment of three joint institutions, frequently called the "institutional triangle": The Cooperation Council, which meets at ministerial level at least once a year; the Cooperation Committee – meetings of senior civil servants in order to prepare for the meetings of the Cooperation Council; and the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, which was the forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the E.U. and Georgia. All of them are established to ensure the implementation and observation of the agreement's provisions. However, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement remained largely unfulfilled and has not achieved much in the way of tangible results, which would be beneficial for Georgia. One of the biggest disadvantages of the PCA was the lack a framework to augment conflict settlement activities and thus, without which, all other agreements were not productive.

The PCA, which is still in force, sets a legal framework of E.U.-Georgia relations in a way that is very similar to the ones signed with the Central Asian republics. By contrast, the PCAs with Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine envisage maintaining closer economic ties. Looking at the PCAs with Ukraine and Moldova show strikingly different language. For example, Article 4 states that "the parties undertake to consider, in particular when Ukraine has further advanced in the process of economic reform ... to the establishment of a free trade area between them." The PCA with Georgia, on the other hand, does not envisage any opportunity to create any such free trade area. This suggests that the E.U. has had a number of different approaches towards the post-Soviet states even in the early years of their independence.

European Neighbourhood Policy

The E.U.'s big round of enlargement of 2004 and its vulnerability to energy shocks were the leading factors that contributed to the strengthening of its ties with Georgia. Georgia's geophysical location plays a crucial role when it comes to the transit of Caspian energy resources to Europe. As a consequence of enlargement, the E.U.'s dependence on Russia as a single energy supplier significantly increased. The share of Russian natural gas in domestic gas consumption in the new E.U. member states of the EU are substantial: 100 percent for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; 98 percent for Slovakia, 92 percent for Bulgaria, 77 percent for the Czech Republic, Hungary 60 percent, Slovenia 52 percent, Poland 49 percent, Croatia 37 percent, and Romania 27 percent.

As a follow up to enlargement to deal with its immediate neighbors and to create a ring of well-governed states around its frontiers, the E.U. launched the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The ENP covers the E.U. countries to its east – Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine – as well as states located on the Mediterranean: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority, and the three states of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It is important to consider that at the initial stages, the E.U. did not include the South Caucasus in this initiative. A communique published by the European Commission on March 11, 2003 stated that the South Caucasus states fell "outside the geographic scope of this initiative for the time being."[4] They were added to the ENP only in 2004. This was due to at least two reasons: first, the E.U.'s new European Security Strategy – "A secure Europe in a better world" – emphasised the avoidance of spillover of security risks from neighbouring states. After its eastward enlargement, the E.U. became an immediate neighbour of Georgia, the South Caucasus, and all of its conflicts. Second, the E.U. decided to grant the benefits of the ENP to Georgia as well as a whole South Caucasus region after the 'Rose Revolution' which took place in November 2003.

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[4] "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood; A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", Commission Communication COM (203), 104 final, Brussels, 11 March 2003.

The European Union gradually became more interested in Georgia after the 2004 enlargement, as the new members were more interested in Georgia and had much closer diplomatic links. Countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania are in a group known as "New Friends of Georgia" and are genuinely interested in solving the internal problems and encouraging the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The aim of these countries is to "share with Georgia their experience in the process of accession to the E.U. and NATO."[5] In addition, after the enlargement in 2007, the E.U. inherited a shared maritime border with Georgia and its breakaway region of Abkhazia, which enhances E.U.'s concerns about challenging any spill-over of security threats in the region. The E.U. came to realise that it needed to become an acticve security actor on the world stage and engage in conflict resolution matters, as "giving the EU a stronger voice in the world was one of the four priorities of the Barroso Commission."[6] That was the core principle of the E.U.'s decision in 2003 to launch the peace and security missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

However, the government of Georgia which took power after the Rose Revolution had more expectations of the ENP than was justifiable. The ENP was not sophisticated enough largely because of its heterogeneity – countries that were covered by the ENP had different political cultures and ambitions. Georgia was grouped together with states of the Mediterranean region that have no E.U. membership perspective whatsoever, whereas Georgia intends to gradually become an E.U. member state. The Commission made little explanation of what the ENP was going to offer to the partner countries. It was stated that the ENP was going to "bring added value, going beyond existing cooperation,"[7] but this was very vague. Then-president of the

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[5] Marius Vahl (ed.), "The EU and Black Sea Cooperation: Some Challenges for BSEC, 15 April 2004" Available at: www.ceps.be

[6] Speech /06/149 by Benita Ferrero-Waldner; European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy; Swedish Institute for International Affairs and the European Commission Representation in Sweden; Stockholm, 7 March 2006.

[7] "The EU and the wider Europe: Toward an Alternative Geopolitics of Regional Cooperation?" by James Wesley Scott; Geopolitics, Volume 10; issue 3; 2005; pp: 429-455.

European Commission Romano Prodi gave more clarity to the policy after stating that it was offering to ENP countries the ability to share "everything with the E.U. but institutions."[8] However, the ENP is not the first attempt by the E.U. to grant neighbouring states with comparable benefits to its member states. The E.U. applied to the same strategy in 1989 when it established the European Economic Area (EEA). But it is not helpful to compare the EEA counties with Georgia. Even Prodi argued that "the situation of countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus differs completely from that of Norway."[9]

Today, the ENP purports to give Georgia a stake in the internal market of the European Union. One might infer that Georgia should enjoy access to the common social and economic space of the European Union and *consequently* to the pivotal principles of the "four freedoms," including the free movement of capital, goods, persons, and services. According to the statements made by then-European Commissioner for External relations and Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the E.U. was going to offer "eastern and southern neighbours many of the benefits previously associated only with membership."[10] At the beginning, the E.U. proposed for neighbouring states "further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of – persons, goods, services and capital."[11] However, the E.U. later made the decision that the "free movement of persons is not on the agenda for the foreseeable future."[12]

The E.U. is not going to grant Georgia other benefits unless it fulfills currently stipulated requirements. Only after implementing the necessary reforms and gradually approximating to E.U. standards and demonstrating clear progress in implementing political, economic, and institutional reforms will added pathways be given. All the more, the initiatives to

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8 Speech 02/619;

9 "The European Economic Area: A Model for the EU's Neighbourhood Policy" by Tim Gould; Perspectives on European Politics and Society; Volume 5; issue 2; p: 171; 2004

10 Speech/06/149;

11 "Beyond enlargement; The European Neighbourhood Policy and its tools" by Rosa Balfour and Allessandro Rotta; The International Spectator; 1/2005; pp: 7-20.

12 http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/faq_en.htm#4.1

carry out those reforms must come from Georgia and not from the European Union. One might discover that the in order to having access to the E.U. Single Market, Georgia must be committed to adopt selected parts of the *Acquis Communutaire*. Adoption of the new legislation is directly linked to financial resources, as there are certain elements of E.U. legislation that are particularly expensive to adopt. Georgia does not belong to the group of economically rich states, making it very hard to embrace reforms and adopt parts of the *Acquis Communutaire* without substantial financial support from the E.U. Enacting E.U. legislation seems even more unlikely when considering the research of the European Commission done in 1997 stating that "the costs of complying with the environmental acquis alone in ten Central and Eastern European Counties would be between 80 and 120 billion euros."[13]

Another challenge that might lay ahead in E.U.-Georgia relations is the gap between the adoption of E.U. legislation and the receipt of benefits. The latter is envisaged for the long run, whereas the harmonisation of the national legislation to E.U. standards needs to be accomplished in the short term. This could cause difficulties not only for he economy but also from a political point of view as the Georgian government could be reluctant to pursue painful reforms and risk losing credibility in front of the electorate.

Russia – Georgia War of 2008 and the Launch of the Eastern Partnership

After war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, then-French President Nicholas Sarkozy, who held the rotating E.U. presidency, played a crucial role to in reaching a ceasefire agreement and keeping Russian tanks from rolling to Tbilisi. After Russia blocked the extension of the mandate of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Georgia, the E.U. decided to send the EUMM – the only third party mission monitoring situation in the administrative border lines of Georgian breakaway regions. The E.U. also ardently pursued a non-recognition policy towards the two separatist regions.

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[13] "The European Economic Area: A Model for the EU's Neighbourhood Policy" by Tim Gould; Perspectives on European Politics and Society; Volume 5; issue 2; p: 171; 2004

It played a crucial role in organizing a donors' conference in the aftermath of the war and provided significant support IDPs for rehabilitation of infrastructure and the settlement of Internally Displaced Persons who lost their homes during the war.

In May 2009, the European Union inaugurated the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative that aimed to boost E.U. ties with its eastern neighbors. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The project was especially promoted by Poland and Sweden. The Partnership aimed to provide ground for elaborating new Association Agreements between the E.U. and the EaP countries. According to the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit on May 7, 2009, "the main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate the political integration between the European Union and interested partner countries." The Eastern Partnership appears more sophisticated than the ENP since the former has multilateral as well as bilateral dimensions and avoids a "one size fits all" approach. From a multilateral point of view, the E.U. aims to create a free trade zone with and among the EaP partner states, however the latter seems unlikely in due to outstanding territorial disputes between EaP states Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the frames of the EaP, the E.U. and Georgia launched negotiations in 2010 for a legally binding Association Agreement, which included the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area . From the Georgian side, negotiations began under the previous government led by President Saakashvili and were successfully continued by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream coalition, which came to power in October 2012. It took three years to finalize the agreement and, at the moment of writing, is expected to be initialed at Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit in November 2013. The Association Agreement will change the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. However, it must be signed and then ratified by legislative bodies of all 28 EU member states – as well as the European Parliament and Parliament of Georgia – before entering into force.

From the Russian point of view, the Eastern Partnership is considered

to be Western interference in its "near abroad," which is perceived by the Russian political elite as within its exclusive sphere of influence. Russia has employed various instruments to disrupt Association Agreement progress with the E.U. So far, it has managed to sufficiently pressure Armenia to abandon its Association Agreement and join the Russia-initiated Customs Union covering Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

The Association Agreement lays the foundation for establishing an E.U.-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. According to a feasibility study, the DCFTA should confer genuine economic benefits. It is expected to increase Georgia's GDP (in short term 1.7 percent; long term 4.3 percent); will promote export growth (short term 9 percent; long term 12 percent); enhance imports (short term 4.4 percent; long term 7.5 percent); contribute in salary growth (short term 1.5 percent; long term 3.6 percent) ; but also slightly increase consumption prices (short term 1 percent; long term 0.6 percent).[14] However it needs to be highlighted that having an Association Agreement and DCFTA with the E.U. does not offer only economic benefits, but it also has a political dimension – showing that Georgia has attained irreversible progress away from the Russian sphere of influence.

At the same time, the process of negotiating the text of the Association Agreement lacked transparency since it was closed process with no involvement from civil society representatives or field experts. According to the government of Georgia, the text will be made publicly accessible only after it is signed by the government of Georgia and the European Commission. Still, the Eastern Partnership provides a strong opportunity to the government of Georgia to engage in sector cooperation and sign agreements in selected policy fields. In particular, the Georgian government under the Common Foreign and Security Policy field has negotiated a framework agreement to take part in crisis management forces. On the other hand, Georgia has applied for membership to the European Energy Community, which is still being processed by the European Union.

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[14] "Free trade agreement between the European Union and Georgia: How Feasible is it?" by Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE); available at http://www.case-research.eu/en/node/55658

The E.U. and Georgia are also engaged in a process of visa dialogue that in several years might lead to the demolition of the so-called "Schengen Wall" and permit citizens of Georgia to enjoy visa-free travel to E.U. member states. This is an extremely crucial process should be accelerated since visa free-travel would bring tangible benefits for each and every citizen of Georgia and transform the promise of European integration from words into deeds.

EaP: Vilnius Summit and Beyond

The Eastern Partnership Summit taking place in Vilnius on November 28-29 will be a milestone for E.U.-Georgia relations. It is expected that the Association agreement between the two parties will be initialed at the event. Signing of the agreement is scheduled to take place sometime in 2014 before the current European President leaves office. Since trade issues falls within the competence of the E.U., the process of establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area will begin upon signing of the agreement. Therefore, the period between the Vilnius Summit and the signing of the agreement will be crucial for Georgia. It is expected that in this period Russia will increase its pressure to bring Georgia to the Customs Union – or at least abandon its Western progress. On top of that, the internal situation in the European Union will not be favorable for Georgia. The E.U. will be more concentrated on its internal affairs and paying less attention to the Eastern Partner states in 2014 because of lingering internal issues as well as European Parliamentary elections.

SECURITY AND SYMBOLISM: GEORGIA'S NATO ASPIRATIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

Michael Hikari Cecire

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) occupies a uniquely prominent position within Georgian foreign policy thinking. Though it is not a member, the intensity of the Georgian bid for membership is such that that its aspirations to NATO membership could be considered a defining element of Georgian foreign policy. However, the issue of NATO membership is actually a relatively recent addition to the Georgian political landscape. Over the course of a little over a decade, the NATO issue not only has become the centerpiece of Georgian geopolitical aims, but one that enjoys near-unanimous political support and robust public approval.

Georgia's interest in NATO membership is borne from both interests-based security concerns as well as the country's process of identity formation as a "Western," modern European state. However, cognizant of Western fears of inheriting Georgia's conflict and security baggage, Tbilisi has sought to simultaneously reduce the likelihood of conflict while expanding its value to the Euro-Atlantic space. Yet skepticism towards Georgia's membership bid remains widespread throughout the Atlantic alliance and will likely remain so without expanded, serious engagement on the part of Georgia and its Western partners, particularly the United States.

In spite of Georgia's forceful rhetoric and institutional orientation towards NATO membership, Tbilisi's political commitment to Western integration in general and NATO accession in particular has varied. Still captive to the after-effects of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war, Tbilisi's ability to achieve escape velocity from its current state of NATO limbo will probably demand significant concessions, creativity, or both from the Georgian government. This is also likely to force

Georgian policymakers to prioritize between its policy of territorial maximalism (which is its right) or a nearer-term likelihood of Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Rise of Georgian Euro-Atlanticism

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia sought to position itself in alignment with the West almost immediately. Despite being physically removed from the geographic heart of European civilization, Georgia self-identified as a European state – albeit one that had been forced to develop largely in isolation due to the strangling effects of successive chapters of foreign domination. When Georgia did have the benefit of self-determination, such as its during its short-lived social democratic republic between 1918 and 1921, it expressed sentiments and practices that were recognizably European,[1] though with allowances for its situational context. The end of the Cold War was generally hailed by the Georgian elite as the reconstitution of the 1921 republic and a broader commitment to its rightful position as an ultimately European civilization.

However, the breakout of interethnic conflict and open war not only delayed Georgia's quest for re-Europeanization, but also put its state- and nation-building processes on hold for the better part of the 1990s. It was only after the return of Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister, that Georgia was able to achieve a modest degree of stability and be in a position to more thoroughly consider its longer-term geopolitical options. It was during this period that Georgia-NATO relations saw major progress. Shevardnadze, though initially hoping to leverage his considerable contacts and relationships in Moscow to secure a negotiated resolution to the outstanding separatist conflicts, was unable to overcome deeply-engrained Russian pretensions to regional dominance. As it became clear that he could not depend on his previous experience as Soviet foreign minister to cultivate a more progressive bilateral relationship with Moscow,

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[1] See Karl Kautsky, and H. J. Stenning. *Georgia. A social-democratic peasant republic. Impressions and observations. (Transl. by H.J. Stenning and rev. by the author)*. London: International Bookshops Limited, 1921.

Shevardnadze gradually oriented Georgia's foreign policy in an explicitly pro-Western direction. Contrary to some characterizations, foreign policy under Georgia did not drastically shift from moderately pro-Moscow to pro-West, but rather from a largely neutral, multi-vectored outlook (in some ways mirroring that of Heydar Aliyev's agenda in nearby Azerbaijan) to one that more fully embraced a Euro-Atlantic future for Georgia.

The trend line for Georgia-NATO relations tracks upward throughout Shevardnadze's tenure in power. In 1994, Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program. In 1997, Georgia signed onto with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. In 1998, official relations were established between Georgia and NATO. It was in 2002 that Georgia formally announced its aspirations to join with the both NATO and the European Union.[2] The same year also saw the U.S. commit significant military assistance programming to Georgia for the first time in the form of the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), in which Georgia received equipment and training by U.S. army special operations forces. The $64 million program was packaged to help Georgia develop an increased capacity to combat terrorism – especially the alleged threat posed by Chechen refugees in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge in an effort to avoid a full-scale Russian incursion.[3] Pursuant to the institutionally pro-Western turn pioneered by Shevardadze, Georgian forces also participated in the NATO-led Kosovo Force mission (KFOR) from its beginning in 1999 until 2008.[4] Shevardnadze also supported the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and even approved the deployment of Georgian forces alongside coalition forces in Iraq.[5]

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[2] Sepashvili, Giorgi. " Shevardnadze Pledges Closer Ties with the European Union, NATO." *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), March 21, 2002. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=1611 (accessed August 12, 2013).

[3] Areshidze, Irakly. "Helping Georgia?"*Perspective* 7, no. 4 (2002). http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol12/areshidze.html (accessed August 13, 2013).

[4] *RIA Novosti* (Moscow), "Georgia announces withdrawal of peacekeepers from Kosovo," April 14, 2008. http://en.ria.ru/world/20080414/105041588.html (accessed August 14, 2013).

[5] "სამშვიდობო მისია – ერაყი [Peacekeeping Missions - Iraq].» MoD.Gov.Ge. http://mod.gov.ge/?page=samshvidobo-misia&mission=eraq&lang=ge (accessed August 16, 2013).

Rose Revolution and NATO

The 2003 Rose Revolution, a peaceful popular uprising that forced Shevardnadze to resign, ushered in a new generation of young and markedly Western-educated political leadership. Mikheil Saakashvili, a Shevardnadze-era justice minister educated in Ukraine and the U.S., came to power promising modern state development and an end to the rampant corruption that had become institutionalized under Shevardnadze. Saakashvili also vowed to do what Shevardnadze could not – restore Georgia's territorial integrity and, interestingly, repair relations with Moscow. Though it was later largely forgotten, the early stages of Saakashvili's tenure was marked by a period of outreach to Moscow. He even made a point of saying in his 2004 inauguration that he wanted "good relations with Russia" and that he was not "pro-American or pro-Russian" but "pro-Georgian," dismissing the prevailing binary typology normally assigned to the former Soviet Union.[6]

However, like Shevardnadze – albeit in a more accelerated manner – Saakashvili was not able to extract sufficient concessions from Moscow and relations eventually took a turn for the worst. The collapse of Aslan Abashidze's pro-Moscow regime in the Adjara autonomous region and the Georgian government's territorial operations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2005 and 2006 contributed to Russian distrust. But more significantly, Russia continued to regard Georgia as an indelible part of its privileged sphere of interest and refused to countenance an independent Georgian foreign policy, not to mention a continued drive for Euro-Atlantic integration. In contrast to Shevardnadze, however, the Saakashvili era was marked by more sharply confrontational rhetoric between the two sides and both Russian and Georgian authorities used their diplomatic estrangement as foils to shore up domestic political support.

Nonetheless, Georgia made serious progress between 2004 and 2007 in both modernizing its state apparatus as well as advancing its case for Euro-Atlantic integration, although perhaps not its democratic in-

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[6] *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* (Prague), "Saakashvili Inaugurated As President," January 26, 2004. http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1051322.html (accessed August 11, 2013).

stitutions.[7] This coincided with a period of warming bilateral relations with the U.S. through a personal friendship between Saakashvili and U.S. President George W. Bush and a number of their respective proxies. Saakashvili continued Shevardnadze's pro-West policies and generally expanded upon them, deploying combat troops to Iraq and deploying forces to the NATO mission in Afghanistan (ISAF) in 2004.[8] At certain points, Georgia represented the largest non-NATO troop contributor in Iraq and later in Afghanistan – a major achievement considering Georgia's modestly sized military.

The 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania was expected to be a potentially major turning point for Georgia-NATO relations. Perceived Georgian successes in state-building successes and a broader Western desire to extend the momentum borne from the "Color Revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine (in 2004) made the awarding of a Membership Action Plan, the typical NATO roadmap to accession, a genuine possibility. This was a potential outcome that the Saakashvili government eagerly broadcasted, leading many in Georgia to believe that a MAP was imminent.[9] However, though supported by the U.S., the U.K., and a number of Eastern European member states, continental powers Germany, France, Spain, and others were reportedly strongly opposed to such a move.[10] As a compromise measure, Bucharest offered a middle-road solution by withholding the MAP but promising that both Georgia and Ukraine would someday be NATO members – though without a timetable. Continental European opposition was at least partially attributed to these states' more robust geopolitical and economic interdependencies with Russia, which they did not wish to provoke by bringing Ukraine and Georgia into

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[7] See Michael Cecire. "Georgia's 2012 Elections and Lessons for Democracy Promotion." *Orbis* 57, no. 2 (2013): 232-250.

[8] *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), "Georgia Sends Troops to Afghanistan," August 29, 2004. http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7710 (accessed August 10, 2013).

[9] *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), "საკაშვილი: ნატოს ბუქარესტის სამიტი შეიძლება "ისტორიულად" იქცეს საქართველოსთვის [Saakashvili: NATO Bucharest Summit Could be «Historic» for Georgia],» March 8, 2008. http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=17653 (accessed August 15, 2013).

[10] *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), "საქართველოს MAP-ს ნატო-ს ექვსი სახელმწიფო ეწინააღმდეგება [Six-state Divergence Over Georgian NATO MAP] ,» March 14, 2008. http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=17760 (accessed August 14, 2013).

the Atlantic alliance. One report event suggested that just as U.S. support for Georgia was personal, German skepticism may too have been as well: German Chancellor Angela Merkel was reportedly "disgusted" by a dossier detailing Saakashvili's infamous party lifestyle.[11]

However, a more immediately pressing concern was the increasing evidence of autocracy by Saakashvili's ruling United National Movement. In late 2007, widespread dissatisfaction with the UNM government's shortcomings, particularly related to elite corruption, translated into wide-scale protests that included tens of thousands in Tbilisi and across the country. State authorities cracked down sharply; interior ministry troops beat protestors, including public defender Sozar Subari, arrested scores of protestors and opposition leaders; and raided and effectively seized the main opposition television outlet.[12] A snap presidential election was eventually called to help ameliorate the crisis, which Saakashvili won in a highly controversial election.

While the 2007 crisis and the diplomatic setback in Bucharest in 2008 were certainly deleterious to Georgian NATO aspirations, the most damaging blow came during the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war. According to the E.U.-commissioned Tagliavini report, which sought to identify the origins of the conflict between Russia and Georgia, Georgian forces precipitated the conflict by seeking to retake South Ossetia – prompting a Russian invasion. While the prevailing Georgian account contends that forces were mobilized and deployed to protect ethnic Georgian citizens under attack by South Ossetian militias, the Tagliavini report attributes the onset of a state of war to the joining of the conflict by a preponderance of Georgian military forces. However, the report also traces the roots of the conflict to a successive series of provocations by Russia against Georgia.[13]

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[11] Andrew Cockburn. "The Bloom Comes off the Georgian Rose." Harpers Magazine. http://harpers.org/blog/2013/10/the-bloom-comes-off-the-georgian-rose/ (accessed November 1, 2013).

[12] See "Georgia: Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?" International Crisis Group. http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/189_georgia___sliding_towards_authoritarianism (accessed September 11, 2013).

[13] Heidi Tagliavini. "Independent Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia." CEIIG.ch. http://www.ceiig.ch/Report.html (accessed October 16, 2013).

While the debate over the alleged culpability of the various actors still rages, there is a broad agreement that the August 2008 war did grievous harm to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and particularly its NATO hopes. During the war, the concerns in Bucharest about Georgia's outstanding security issues transformed into realistic fears that a Georgia in NATO could conceivably drag the entire alliance into a ruinous war with Russia. To many member states, including some erstwhile supporters of Georgian accession, the idea of granting postwar Georgia access to NATO's Article V mutual defense clause appeared to invite issues of adverse selection.

Although the geopolitical situation gradually stabilized post-2008 as the Georgian government adopted a more interests-based foreign policy course,[14] Georgia's fundamental geopolitical realities remained unchanged, keeping the prospect of a MAP, not to mention outright membership, well out of reach. Perhaps cognizant of its position, Georgia's policies appeared to reflect less concern with Western opinion. Tbilisi pursued and rekindled a robust relationship with Iran, even standing apart from most of its Western partners in hailing the 2010 nuclear fuel swap agreement.[15] Meanwhile, relations with Israel collapsed.[16] And domestically, democratic development saw little improvement – and even some regression – after 2007, demonstrating indifference if not outright hostility, towards genuine democratization within the UNM's tight circle of decisionmakers.[17]

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[14] Michael Cecire. "Georgia Pursues Realist Course Correction." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/7243/georgia-pursues-realist-course-correction (accessed October 2, 2013).

[15] Michael Cecire. "No Need to Panic Over Georgia-Iran Ties." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12629/no-need-to-panic-over-georgia-iran-ties (accessed October 4, 2013).

[16] Michael Cecire. "Georgia-Israel Love Affair Now a Messy Divorce." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/11939/georgia-israel-love-affair-now-a-messy-divorce (accessed October 11, 2013).

[17] Michael Cecire. "Georgia's Democratic Stagnation Threatens Its Legitimacy." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/9446/georgias-democratic-stagnation-threatens-its-legitimacy (accessed October 10, 2013).

A Renewed Push

The October 2012 parliamentary elections witnessed the surprise victory of billionaire philanthropist Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream (GD) coalition over the UNM. Ivanishvili, who earned his fortune in Russia before moving to France and finally decamping to Georgia, pledged to preserve his predecessors' Euro-Atlantic orientation. However, in contrast to the previous UNM government, GD attempted to target the sources of NATO reluctance directly through a combination of internal reforms and foreign policy realism.

GD's chief mandate was arguably to dismantle of the state's ubiquitous security and surveillance apparatus[18] and achieve appreciable democratic gains. The heart of this effort was de-politicizing and promoting independence within the Georgian judicial system. By most objective accounts, this effort is succeeding, although much work remains to be done.[19] The October 2013 presidential elections, which saw a renewed mandate for the ruling GD coalition, were easily the freest and fairest in modern Georgian history. Though serious issues remain in the realm of economic development and inter-ethnic relations, the GD government has thus far restored a democratic trajectory to the country's development.[20]

Another major internal reform was within the defense ministry itself. Besides overseeing a comprehensive depoliticization drive, the defense ministry under ex-UN ambassador Irakli Alasania undertook major reforms to recalibrate the Georgian military itself. Doing away from the conscript-heavy mixed force he inherited, Alasania chose to phase out mandatory conscription, slightly reduce the size of the active force, remake territorial reserve forces, and bring the entire military up to de-

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[18] See Mathias Huter, and Mamuka Andguladze. "Ending unchecked, illegal wiretapping practices." Transparency International Georgia. http://transparency.ge/en/node/2526 (accessed October 17, 2013).

[19] See Thomas Hammarberg. "Georgia in Transition." EEAS.Europa.eu. http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/virtual_library/cooperation_sectors/georgia_in_transition-hammarberg.pdf (accessed October 4, 2013).

[20] Michael Cecire. "Georgia's Surprising New Normal." Foreign Policy. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/10/18/georgias_surprising_new_normal (accessed October 21, 2013).

ployable, Western-trained, NATO standards. Embracing the NATO "smart power" doctrine, Georgia sought to position itself as a premier counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism force for the alliance.[21] It is expected that the new force would not only be more valuable to NATO partners, but would also be a qualitative improvement for territorial defense purposes. To the alliance, Georgia is already a security contributor. Georgian forces already enjoy a strong reputation within the ISAF community for their professionalism, capabilities, and work rate in Afghanistan.[22] The recent inclusion of Georgian forces within the newly-established NATO rapid reaction force[23] is regarded by Alasania as evidence of Georgia's de facto integration within NATO military structures.[24]

The second pillar of the new government's approach was to reduce tensions with Russia. Believing that the UNM's approach to bilateral relations were overly confrontational, the GD government sought to remove Georgia from the "list of differences between the West and Russia" as a practical diplomatic measure but also as a means to improve its prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration.[25] While Tbilisi would not budge on its core interests – Euro-Atlantic integration and its territorial integrity – the new government believed that it could achieve at least serviceable, pragmatic relations with Moscow on those areas where they could agree.

By some reckoning, the new approach has borne fruit. At the very least, there is general consensus in Eurasia and the West that the possibility of

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21 Michael Cecire. "Georgia Embraces 'Smart Defense' in Euro-Atlantic Bid." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12858/georgia-embraces-smart-defense-in-euro-atlantic-bid (accessed October 17, 2013).

22 Multiple ISAF veterans. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Washington, D.C., August 9, 2013.

23 Koba Liklikadze. „მდგრადი ენერგიით" ნატოს სწრაფი რეაგირების ძალებისაკენ! [«Sustained energy» for NATO›s Rapid Reaction Force] .» *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* (Prague), October 13, 2013. http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/natos-stsrapi-reagirebis-dzalebi/25135059.html (accessed November 2, 2013).

24 Irakli Alasania. Interview by author. Phone interview. Philadelphia, April 2, 2013.

25 See *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), "GD Unveils Draft of Agreement on Foreign Policy Priorities," February 11, 2013. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25744 (accessed October 31, 2013).

another conflict are far reduced. One senior NATO official, reflecting on the GD government's initiatives, noted that the ongoing reforms demonstrated that the new government was "pushing harder" in some ways compared to their predecessors.[26] The same official also noted that previously skeptical Western European members were re-evaluating their opposition to Georgian accession.[27] While few would argue that Georgia is on the cusp of NATO membership, there is evidence that Tbilisi is in a considerably stronger position in late 2013 than it was even a year before.

Georgia's Case

There is an incongruence between Georgia's institutional commitment to the Atlantic alliance and the seemingly glacial pace of its progress towards membership. Georgia's prospects for accession into the Euro-Atlantic security club depends on its "value proposition" to the alliance as a whole. In many ways, Georgia is already a strong contender for at least the intermediary MAP step. Its outsized deployments in Afghanistan, relatively robust annual defense spending, willingness to take on security missions, broad advances in its political development, and increasingly stable relations with Russia and the separatist regions make Georgia a potentially worthwhile addition. In many ways, Georgia is already "ahead" of several existing NATO members in various respects.

But more fundamentally, Georgia's NATO ambitions are worth rewarding because of the West's long-term interest in extending the Euro-Atlantic liberal democratic order. Expanding this area has historically proven to be a stabilizing factor; Georgia, which sits at the heart of the strategic South Caucasus region, has the ability to serve as a regional carrier of the liberal democratic framework and as an amplifier for its attendant values. Other states in the Euro-Atlantic neighborhood, whether they aspire to NATO membership or not, are

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[26] Michael Cecire. "Georgia Looking Better for NATO." The National Interest. http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/georgia-looking-better-nato-8510 (accessed October 17, 2013).

[27] Senior NATO Official. Interview by author. Phone interview. Washington, D.C., May 9, 2013.

closely monitoring Georgia's progress in attaining membership given its potential geopolitical implications for their own relations with the West. In this sense, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations are not only a determinant of Tbilisi's long-term strategic direction, but potentially for other states at the Euro-Atlantic periphery and beyond.

The meeting point of the E.U., Turkey, Iran, Russia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, the South Caucasus should be expected to increase in importance over time – and not decline as some suggest. Though the South Caucasus corridor's primary value to the West is in its ability to bring hydrocarbons to market in Europe, its long term value lies in its position as connective tissue for trans-Eurasian trade and as a convener for the major powers and regions that surround it. NATO's inherent interests in all of these areas make Georgia ideally-situated from a geo-strategic standpoint.

Georgia's entry into NATO would also have the possibility of offering a stabilizing effect on the region, including in helping develop Russia-NATO relations. While the initial Russian reaction to Georgian accession would almost certainly be discomfiture at best, it is arguably well within Moscow's interest to see Georgia join the alliance. For example, security in its restive North Caucasus republics – several of which share a common border with Georgia – would benefit from the increased cooperation between Georgia and Russia as obligated under current NATO-Russia relations.[28]

Navigating a Path

Despite the potential advantages of Georgian membership, not the least being the alliance's promise of membership, concerns by some members are nonetheless legitimate. Chiefly, the question of Georgia's outstanding territorial conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia loom large. While Tbilisi is reportedly in favor of considering a modified form of NATO membership in which only undisputed Georgian territory is

[28] See Michael Cecire. "How Georgian NATO Membership Actually Serves Russian Interests." Center on Global Interests. http://www.globalinterests.org/2013/09/18/how-georgian-nato-membership-actually-serves-russian-interests/ (accessed October 17, 2013).

covered by the Article V guarantee,[29] such an arrangement would presumably only be temporary and may not be considered compelling enough in itself to justify the MAP, much less accession[30].

While it is presently unclear whether or not NATO is willing to grant Georgia a MAP (or accession) without achieving some form of permanent political settlement with its separatist regions, it is generally presumed that a final settlement would improve Tbilisi's chances considerably. In spite of the Georgian government's stated intent to pursue direct outreach with the separatist regimes,[31] few expect a durable political settlement to be achieved within the short to medium term. In the broader view, Georgians' twin desires for territorial reunification and Euro-Atlantic integration could be working at cross-purposes. Although strategic patience is a prerequisite for resolving the separatist problem peacefully and to Tbilisi's stated satisfaction, an extended deferment of progress towards NATO membership would be interpreted as a lack of interest or commitment by Georgia, its neighbors, the West, and beyond.

This would seem to be a strategic conundrum for Georgia, which regards both goals as paramount to its long term strategic interests. To a large degree, the 2008 war postponed consideration of this issue, as worries over the potential for future instability was overwhelmed by the present threat of Russian aggression. Five years on, however, the issue is once again increasingly relevant. To reconcile these competing objectives, Tbilisi will need to formulate more creative solutions that might help redefine the means by which the separatist regions are able to affect consideration of Georgia's suitability for accession.

In practical terms, potential options abound. One option, for example,

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[29] Aleksi Petriashvili. Interview by author. Personal interview. Washington, D.C., October 4, 2013.

[30] Kornely Kakachia. NATO-Georgia Relations: Will 2014 Bring Anything New? PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo N 291. September 2013http://www.ponarseurasia.org/node/6561 (accessed October 10, 2013).

[31] *Civil Georgia* (Tbilisi), "In War Anniversary Speech Ivanishvili Reaches Out to Sokhumi, Tskhinvali," August 8, 2013. http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26344 (accessed October 10, 2013).

could be to constitutionally re-classify one or both regions as confederal (or some other autonomous configuration) subjects – perhaps even unilaterally – which would legally grant the regions in question deep autonomy without surrendering Tbilisi's territorial claims or ethnic cleansed Georgians the right of return. Either way, the policy would need to be sufficiently comprehensive to allay Western concerns that the separatist regions would ever again be a source of major instability with the propensity for wider regional spillover. These types of policy discussions would also be entirely justifiable within the framework of the MAP process.

In spite of such challenges, however, Georgia-NATO relations appear to be continuing to progress in an upwards trajectory. Although Georgia's rate of progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration has tracked erratically over the past decade, its longer trend since independence in 1991 would illustrate a moving average of steady advancement. Just as importantly, Euro-Atlantic integration has emerged as a consensus issue in within the Georgian political landscape and among the general public overall – support for NATO membership remains steady above 70 percent (support for E.U. integration has broken 80 percent)[32] – in spite of the relatively slow pace of progress. Georgia may not have achieved its breakthrough with NATO yet, but it is surely moving steadily in the right direction at a rate that should confer membership within the medium term.

[32] "NDI Poll: Georgians Say Government Is Making Changes That Matter to Them; They Disapprove of the Prime Minister's Resignation Statement." The National Democratic Institute. https://www.ndi.org/georgia-poll-sept-2013 (accessed October 13, 2013).

THE RELUCTANT PATRON: GEORGIA-U.S. RELATIONS

S. Neil MacFarlane

This chapter addresses the development of US-Georgia relations since Georgia's independence in 1991, with a particular focus on the recent (2001-2008) and contemporary (2008-2013) periods. These periods correspond to the George W. Bush and the Barrack Obama administrations.

The project of which this is a part seeks to look at Georgian relations with other states from the perspective of Tbilisi. This chapter takes this perspective into account, but focuses on the interplay between Tbilisi and Washington perspectives.

In the analysis of bilateral relationships, it is tempting to speak of the states in question as unitary rational actors. It is also misleading to do so. In the first place, there is often a wide variation of views within each country on what threats are and how serious they might be. Similarly, one encounters a range of views on the calculation of cost, benefit, and risk associated with particular relationships and policies. States generally do not follow an undiluted strategic logic when they develop policy. Foreign policy directions and choices are affected by internal political competition, ideological contestation, and domestic interest group politics. These are embedded in culture and in particular understandings of history. Finally, the evolution of the bilateral relationship eloquently displays the significance of personalities to policy outcomes (Shevardnadze's prior connections to James Baker and George H. W. Bush in one instance, and Mikheil Saakashvili's connections to George W. Bush and John McCain in a second. As such, consideration of the perspectives and policies of the two sides necessitates study not only of strategic perspectives, but also of internal elite dynamics, bureaucratic and interest group politics, and also public opinion.

Background

Georgia was absorbed into the Russian Empire in the early and mid-19th Century. With the exception of Georgia's brief period of independent statehood from 1918 to 1921, Georgia had no modern history of international engagement and no experience of foreign policy-making. Its politics were determined from Moscow. Its economy and infrastructure were oriented inwards towards Russia. It did not participate in the global economy. It had had little contact with the United States. Travel of Americans to Georgia was difficult, and that of Georgians to the United States even more so, for much of the Soviet era. There was no reason to develop expertise in international relations and foreign policy in Georgia during the Soviet era. Consequently, it was thin on the ground.

The United States had no history of relations with Georgia until 1991. American analysis of the country was almost non-existent and there was no established core of policy expertise on Georgia, its history and culture, and also its politics. No thought had been given to what the international relations of the Southern Caucasus might look like, since, until 1991 they did not exist. The United States had become accustomed to dealing with the USSR and did not support its dissolution. Events overtook its preferences. In 1991, the US found itself dealing with fifteen new states, of which Georgia was one.

In other words, the Americans had no experiential and very little professional background on which to fall back when Georgia's independence created a fundamentally new situation. In addition, the United States had no established international interests in the region; there was no compelling strategic driver. There were also no vocal domestic lobbies arguing for Georgia. This is a dramatic contrast with Georgia's neighbours. Armenia benefited from a well-organized and politically influential diaspora lobby. Georgia had no organized diaspora lobby. Azerbaijan was a longstanding hydrocarbon producer. Although American firms had no recent involvement, some of them were interested in exploration and production potential of the Caspian Basin in general, and also in Azerbaijan. In this sense, it is puzzling that, over the long term, the most substantial and profound US relationship in the region has been with Georgia.

Georgia jumped the gun on independence. The country held a more or less free and fair election in 1990, producing a victory for the Georgian Round Table, led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The new government had little idea of how to govern a country. Gamsakhurdia had no conception of how to lead a country, let alone construct an effective foreign policy. The economy entered a rapid and long decline, as a result of disruption of the Soviet planning structure and inter-republican trade, and the absence of any alternative sources of support. Gamsakhurdia's nationalities policy provoked a civil war in South Ossetia, drawing Russia back into Georgia's internal politics.

At this time, Georgia had no developed conception of the US role in the region. It also had very little academic or policy expertise.[1] What the government did have was a collapsing country and a destructive civil war.

Early Georgian-American Relations

The United States held back on recognition in view of the mess. It was only when Eduard Shevardnadze returned to Georgia as *de facto* Head of state in March 1992 that relations were established. This reflected the reasonably close personal relations he established with President Bush and with US Secretary of State James Baker[2] during the last two years of the USSR. The American leadership was grateful for the role Shevardnadze played in the ending of the superpower confrontation in Europe, and particularly in the Soviet acquiescence to the reunification of Germany in 1990, which also involved commitment to the withdrawal of Soviet/Russian forces from Germany.

In short, engagement with Georgia at this time reflected no particular strategic logic. It was about friendship and gratitude. The arrival of Shevardnadze initiated a period of substantial growth in humanitarian assistance, and also the involvement of US security agencies in

[1] One exception was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tedo Japaridze, who had returned from the USA-Canada Institute in Moscow, where he had been involved in analysis of US politics and foreign relations.

[2] Baker was Secretary of State from 1989 to 1992, and President Bush's Chief of Staff until the end of the Bush Administration in January 1993.

the protection of Shevardnadze himself. In addition to being an act among friends, the latter was a recognition of the troubled relationship between Russia and Georgia and alleged Russian complicity in Georgia's security problems.

On the other hand, the US showed no desire for deep engagement in the security affairs of the Southern Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular. Various policy steps dating back to the Bush Administration, and including the early days of the Clinton Administration, suggested that they preferred to let Russia take the lead in managing conflict and generating security in the post-Soviet space, excluding the Baltic republics. The Americans had larger issues to manage. Some (e.g. the former Yugoslavia) required Russian cooperation. Russia delivered on the central objectives of the United States: the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), and then the resolution enabling the post-Dayton NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), mandated to impose peace in Bosnia.

The US had no role in the mediation of a cease-fire in South Ossetia by the Russian Federation in June 1992. When Shevardnadze appealed to the UN to provide a peace-keeping force to regulate the conflict in Abkhazia, the US did not support the idea. Instead, the UN decided to deploy an observer mission. When a definitive cease-fire in the Abkhaz conflict was achieved, again through Russian mediation, Georgia was obliged to accept a CIS peace-keeping force at the price of joining the Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS). This sequence of events left Georgia dependent on, and vulnerable to, Russia, the regional hegemon.

The United States supported a UN resolution welcoming the establishment of a CIS peace-keeping force for the conflict in Abkhazia. This deferential behaviour was not limited to Georgia. The UN also endorsed Russian and CIS peace-keeping in Tajikistan. This suggested a tacit acceptance of the Russian view that the other states of the former Soviet were a "near abroad" in which sovereignty was derogated by the special interests and responsibilities of the Russian Federation in the space.

Towards the end of the first term of the Clinton Administration, American perceptions of Georgia shifted for several reasons. The first was a gradual comprehension that Russia was not a benign actor in the region. Its peace-keeping reflected its particular interest in dominating the region, rather than a general commitment to regional stability. There was widespread and growing suspicion that Russia perceived benefits in the non-resolution of regional conflicts, not least in Georgia. The persistence of unresolved conflicts facilitated Russia's direct engagement in neighbouring countries, and Russia's manipulation of settlement negotiations. It also deterred other former Soviet states from the attempt to exit their situation of dependence on Russia. In addition, relations between the United States and Russia were troubled by President Clinton's embrace of NATO enlargement in 1994-5. Finally, although Russia acquiesced in the IFOR solution to the war in Bosnia, it did not do so happily, and it had been a difficult partner in Yugoslavia throughout the post-Yugoslav wars. Consequently the self-denying ordinance on US engagement in the former Soviet space was weakened. This perception produced a new American emphasis on the sovereignty of the former Soviet states other than Russia.

The second was growing interest in the hydrocarbon reserves of the Caspian Basin. American energy companies, along with their foreign counterparts, had concluded that there were substantial and possibly profitable resources in the basin. The question was how to remove them to international markets. Russia controlled existing exit from this energy province. Iran, although the low-cost option, was excluded, given the rift between the United States and Iran and, in particular, the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1986. The alternative was across the Caucasus and, given Turkish sensitivities about transhipment of oil through the Bosphorus, on to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. Given the rupture of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that meant a route through Georgia.

There is no persuasive evidence that this was a strategic priority of the United States. Instead, it reflected the domestic political clout

of US oil companies in the context of the leadup to the 1996 presidential election. Clinton's second term was littered with exaggerated statements by leading administration officials (e.g. Federico Pena and Richard Morningstar) on the importance of the Caspian as a critical new energy province.[3] This played into an equally exaggerated Georgian discourse about Georgia's central significance in regional and global geopolitics. Since Georgia, purportedly, was a strategically vital linchpin in the global energy economy as well as the gateway to the riches (*sic*) of Central Asia, the West had to ensure Georgia's security and its future. That discourse, in turn, generated unrealistic expectations in Georgia regarding Western, and notably American, support for Georgia.

In the meantime, Georgia was learning how to press buttons in the United States. The Embassy in Washington was strengthened with the arrival of Ambassador Japaridze in November 1994, along with a very strong team of more junior diplomats. They set about learning the ropes in Washington, and began systematic lobbying in Congress, in order to convey the message of Georgian centrality. This included the development of relations with established lobbyists. This message played into the interests of key people in the US energy sector, for example Richard Cheney, then Chief Executive Officer of Halliburton, and eventually to become Vice-President under George W. Bush. We see here the early stages of development of a Georgia lobby in the US.

None the less, despite the establishment of an effective Georgian footprint on the ground in Washington, and the interest of potential beneficiaries in hyping the significance of the Caspian in general and Georgia in particular, the Clinton Administration took a reserved position. They supported the development of energy infrastructure bypassing Russia. They also embraced the rather vague notion of the recreation of a Silk Road to Central Asia and, possibly, beyond. But, concerning the pipeline, they were very clear, first, that this was a private venture, and second that, to work, it had to be commercially viable.

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[3] See, for example, the US Department of Energy's "International Energy Outlook 1998", Washington, 1998. For useful comment, see Pankaj Kumar, "The Unrealized Dream of Caspian Oil," *International Politics* 2:4 (Summer/Autumn 2009), pp. 1-18.

This was a problem in the late 1990s. The world price of oil (around $10-$12 per barrel) was lower than the price ($15) at which the pipeline could break even. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline moved forward at the end of the decade when the price ratios changed in its favour. Had the United States viewed this project as a strategic imperative, they would have ignored the price and subsidised the venture. They did not. In addition, the ambivalent quality of the US commitment to the region was evident in the failure of the 1999 Silk Road Strategy Act to receive approval in the US Senate. [4] That was another early indicator of the parameters of US interest in the Caspian Basin, and, by extension, their interest in Georgia.

However, the efforts of Georgia to enhance its profile in Washington did pay off in other ways during this period. It coincided with Georgia's transition from humanitarian to developmental assistance in the mid- and late 1990s. The US played a major part as a donor. Table 1 provides a longtitudinal breakdown of US Official Development Assistance to Georgia since 1992. The table indicates that commitments rose rapidly in the period in question.

By 2003, only 36% of committed aid was distributed. This coincided with the abandonment of the Shevardnadze government in the lead-up to the Rose Revolution.

In the meantime, prior to the so-called war on terror, military assistance to Georgia averaged about $2.75 million per year. It spiked to $92 million in 2002 and Assistance then settled down to around $14 million over the next several years.[5]

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[4] The act was an amendment to the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act ad sought to target US assistance on the countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as to mandate upgraded US engagement with the region's conflicts and security. For a text of the act and summary commentary, see http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/hr1152.

[5] For summary data, see Patricia Sullivan, Brock Tessman and Xiaojun Li, "US Recipient Aid and Recipient State Cooperation," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7(2011), 275-294.

Table 1. US ODA Commitments to Georgia, 1992-2011[6]

The first figures are aid committed. The second (in parentheses) are aid disbursed.

Year	**Amount** (current $USmillion)
1992	-
1993	61 (72)
1994	39 (57)
1995	133 (52)
1996	116 (55)
1997	75 (32)
1998	191 (22)
1999	160 (30)
2000	148 (74)
2001	159 (94)
2002	183 (133)
2003	206 (75)
2004	193 (92)
2005	209 (72)
2006	498 (103)
2007	216 (87)
2008	788 (402)
2009	653 (279)
2010	621 (202)
2011	251 (173)

The US, not least through civil society assistance, supported the transition in the Rose Revolution. This reflected two factors. One was that the personal connection to Shevardnadze diminished in significance over time. Baker was gone and Bush (the older) was gone. Second, the record of Shevardnadze was not what the US expected. He had consolidated the state in Georgia, but then had left it vulnerable to

[6] These data are taken from OECD:Stat Extracts, "Aid (ODA) Commitments to Countries and Regions." ohttp://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=TABLE2A#. These data are revealing in a number of respects. One is the difference between aid committed and aid disbursed. In the early years (1993-4), disbursement exceeded commitment. This presumably reflects a flexible response to Georgia's deep humanitarian crisis in the early 1990s. In the second, aid disbursed is lower than aid committed. This reflects the difficulty of actually spending the money in a difficult developmental situation.

corruption, including by members of his own circle and family. That is to say, the Shevardnadze government had not satisfied American expectations. Under the circumstances, the Americans chose to back another horse.

Recent Georgia-US Relations

This brings us to the development of relations between Georgia and the United States under the Saakashvili Administration (2004-2012). This can be divided into two periods. The first was the George W. Bush Administration – 2001-2009. The second is the Obama Administration – 2009 to the present.

Concerning the first period, as we have seen, in the early years of the Bush Administration, the US displayed growing disillusionment with Shevardnadze. Consequently, aid flows dropped, and they emphasised civil society rather than government. The one exception was military: Shevardnadze skilfully leveraged US concern over international terrorism to attract a significant increment in military assistance. As we have seen, US military assistance spiked upwards in 1992. This reflected the US response to Chechen infiltration of the Pankisi Gorge, the Georgian government's loss of control over the region and Russian pressure on Georgia to permit Russian personnel to operate there. The US responded with the Georgia Train and Equip (GTEP) programme. One quick result was the resumption of government control over the Pankisi Gorge and the removal of Chechen militants sheltering there.

The Rose Revolution in 2003 began a rapid transformation of US relations with Georgia. The new governing team, led by Mikheil Saakashvili, were well known to the United States government and to aid organizations.[7] Their liberal agenda in governance and in economic reform appealed to the neoconservative advisers of George W. Bush. Their early achievements – notably in police reform, but also the reform of the national examination system – were seen by many

[7] For example, a number of leading personalities (*e.g.* Kahka Lomaia, Davit Darchiashvili) had worked for the Soros Foundation in Georgia. Another, Ghia Nodia, was the leading expert on Georgian affairs for American media and foundation outlets. Saakashvili himself was educated partly in the US and well-connected there.

in Washington as evidence of both resolve and effectiveness in pushing Georgia's transition forward.

The Bush Administration's ideological focus on democratization fit naturally with the image that Saakashvili sought to cultivate in the US. Georgia was sold as a democratizing success story in order to consolidate US support for the Saakashvili government. In 2005, Mr. Bush visited Tbilisi. He lauded Georgia as a beacon of liberty in the region. As the Bush Administration's embrace of Saakashvili grew tighter, aid budgets rose commensurately.

The Georgian government also sought to consolidate the bilateral military relationship, not least by contributing forces to alliance operations in Kosovo, and to the US coalition in Iraq. By 2008, Georgia was the largest non-NATO contributor to that operation and the third largest troop contributor overall. As the war in Iraq wound down, Georgia became a major non-NATO contributor to the NATO-led ISAF effort in Afghanistan. The US provided significant training assistance over this period.

Georgia's policy of defence cooperation with NATO and the United States was designed not only to enhance Georgia's military capability. More importantly, in the context of Georgia's intensifying aspiration to membership in NATO, it was an effort to show that Georgia could contribute meaningfully to alliance activities. To the extent that Georgia did so, and was seen to do so, US support for membership would increase.

Underlying the optimistic narrative of democratic transformation was a growing body of evidence that Saakashvili's project was not quite what US liberals may have wished for. As time passed, evidence mounted concerning the manipulation of judicial process, the concentration of key media outlets under government control, the instability of property rights, political killings that were never properly investigated, torture of detainees, and the use of plea bargaining to extort money from opponents of the government. The culmination of democratic deterioration occurred in November 2007, when the police ruthlessly suppressed mass demonstrations in Tbilisi, injuring

over 500 people, destroying the only remaining independent TV station with national coverage, and then transferring it to ownership by Saakashvili allies.[8] This was followed by a snap election for the presidency in which the opposition had no time to organize a campaign, and then by flawed parliamentary elections in May 2008.[9]

The accumulating record of authoritarian behaviour on the part of the Saakashvili administration had little immediate effect on US policy. That is puzzling since the evidence ran manifestly contrary to the Bush administration narrative of democratic success. There may be some utility in the use of framing analysis to explain this oddity. Once an official narrative is established and political capital is invested in it, cognitive theory tells us that dissonant information is ignored or denied. The experience of US-Georgian relations from 2005 to 2008 is consistent with this explanation. Information concerning the creeping authoritarianism of the Saakashvili administration did not fit the frame. The Bush administration was invested in the frame. So dissonant evidence was ignored.

Things changed as a result of the August 2008 war with Russia. The war appears to be a classic case of misperception of the United States on the part of Georgia's government. Relations between Georgia and Russia had worsened steadily from mid-2004. The Rose Revolution Georgian government initially had warm relations with Russia. Russia, in turn was helpful in negotiating an end to the Ajar situation, involving the removal of Aslan Abashidze to Moscow[10] and the establishment of Tbilisi's control over the region. By the Russian account, Moscow

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[8] For a summary, see US Department of State, *2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia.* http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100560.htm. For a more pointed description, see Human Rights Watch, *Crossing the Line*, http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/12/19/crossing-line-0, and also the organization's letter to President Bush in March 2008 (http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/03/17/open-letter-bush-should-urge-investigation-november-7-violence).

[9] For an account of problems in these elections, see US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Report: Georgia*. http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119080.htm. See also the OSCE observation reports available at: http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/66641 and http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/33301.

[10] Interviews in Moscow, July 2010.

was working on a settlement of the South Ossetia question, but their effort was truncated by unilateral Georgian steps, not least the effort to establish customs control and the subsequent fire-fight between Georgian troops and Ossetian fighters in the summer of 2004, involving Russian forces, in which a number of Georgians died. This began a long deterioration in Georgian-Russian relations. In 2006, the Georgian government arrested a number of alleged Russian spies. The Russians responded with a visa and trade embargo. They followed with bombings of Georgian government facilities in the Kodori Gorge and also with repeated intrusions into Georgian airspace.

The deterioration in Georgian-Russian relations was one factor contributing to an acceleration of Georgian diplomatic efforts to join NATO. The Bush Administration supported this objective. As the April 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit approached, the Russians made clear (repeatedly) that they would not tolerate further NATO enlargement into the former Soviet space. From a Russian perspective, this was not only, or even principally about Georgia. The other state in the mix was Ukraine. These remonstrations were discounted by the United States, which supported the delivery of a Membership Action Plan at Bucharest. Although the Summit did not deliver a membership action plan, it affirmed that Georgia would be a member at some point in the future.

The Georgian government then apparently concluded that it had a security guarantee. It could proceed with the reunification of Georgia with confidence that, behind them, was the military power (or at least a perception of the military power) of the United States and NATO. From the perspective of the Saakashvili government, the US was a committed ally. There was a green light. That was a mistake. Although Georgia's government may have thought they had an American backstop when they attacked South Ossetian, and, collaterally, Russian peace-keepers in Tskhinvali, they did not.

The large error was to think that the United States would play the balancing game with Georgia against Russia in the event of war. To some extent, the United States bears responsibility here. The American rhetoric of alliance and commitment may have been interpreted as

evidence of real intention in Georgia. Or, the Georgians may have felt that, when pushed to a choice, the Americans would not abandon them because of their prior commitments. However, there had been no concrete evidence that the United States was prepared to, or was preparing to, defend Georgia if they got into trouble with Russia. The United States had no significant military presence in the theatre and no conventional rapid response options, on land or by sea. According to the accounts of Matt Bryza and Condoleeza Rice, who then had principal responsibility in the State Department for the relationship with Georgia, the Georgian side was warned repeatedly that there would be no military support. When Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008, military options were reportedly discussed in the US National Security Council (NSC), and then dismissed because nobody could come up with a reason why the US would risk war with Russia over Georgia.[11]

Instead, the United States pressured the Russians to halt the operation, supported French and EU mediation, and then pledged a large postwar reconstruction package.[12] Five months later, they also signed a non-committal and somewhat vacuous strategic cooperation agreement with Georgia,[13] one of the last acts of the Bush Administration.

The war was also a threshold in US perceptions of Saakashvili's Georgia. The 2007 police violence had raised questions about Georgia's commitment to democratic reform, human rights, and the rule of law. The war demonstrated that Georgian recklessness in the relationship with Russia could create real risks for the United States and real political costs, not least to to American credibility in the Caucasian region and more widely in the former Soviet Union,[14] as well as real embarrassment and loss of credibility.

[11] Condoleeza Rice, *A Memoir of My Extraordinary Ordinary Family and Me* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp.688-9.

[12] As the ambassador of another state to Georgia said soon afterwards: "We were not going to put boots on the ground, so we sent a cheque. It was guilt money." Interview in Tbilisi, 2010.

[13] "U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership" (9 January, 2009). http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm.

[14] For example, Ukraine soon abandoned its quest for a NATO MAP, as well as its stated aspiration to membership in the alliance.

These lessons were not lost on the Obama team, which, upon assuming the presidency in 2009, abandoned Bush-era hostility towards, and belittlement of, Russia. Instead, they sought a reset in the Russian-American bilateral relationship, while distancing themselves from Saakashvili. Those around Obama had few close connections with the Georgian political elite, a contrast to both Bush administrations. Feelings of gratitude associated with Shevardnadze's role in ending the Cold War had faded. The close personal relationship between Saakashvili and George W. Bush and their aides dissipated with the change in administration. The fact that the Saakashvili government so obviously wanted the Republican candidate John McCain to win in 2008 did not help.

The neo-conservative ideological bond between the Georgian and US administrations evaporated as a result of the US electoral transition. Obama's large agenda was quite different: reducing the number and cost of foreign engagements/entanglements, focusing on vital interests (of which Georgia was not one). Instead, he sought to concentrate the limited resources available on a domestic agenda of working through the financial crisis, mitigating its consequences for American citizens, restoring America to economic competitiveness, and establishing universal health care, and a more equitable tax system. In that context, Georgia was significant only in the context of relations with the Russian Federation, and in not causing problems for Washington as it sought to refocus on its preferred agenda.

Improvement in the Georgian-Russian bilateral was desirable in that context. But the United States did not put pressure on Georgia to make concessions on key issues (territorial integrity, diplomatic relations, military transit). To do so would be to legitimise a Russian act of aggression, and implicitly the apparent Russian claim of exclusive influence in the region.

A good measure of American restraint in dealing with the Saakashvili Administration was their approach to post-war military assistance. The Georgians put strong pressure on the US to provide weapons assistance. That pressure was conveyed not only through diplomatic

channels and high-level meetings, but also through Georgia's friends in Congress and in the lobbying community, to no avail. The US systematically refused to provide any potentially offensive materiel, limiting operational assistance to training participants in NATO coalition operations in Afghanistan and the shrinking coalition operation in Iraq. More generally, given the Obama Administration's desire to focus on a narrower policy spectrum, they clearly conveyed to the EU that Georgia was a European problem.[15]

In the absence of personal association and ideological affinity, the Saakashvili government encountered the hard calculation of interest, cost, benefit, and risk. Their American friends were not in a position to countervail through lobbying.

So far as one can tell, the Saakashvili administration never adjusted to their fall from "grace". That became very clear in the leadup to the October 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia. The UNM attempted to brand the emergent Georgian Dream opposition under Bidzina Ivanishvili as a Russian initiative designed to undermine Georgia's sovereignty and democracy, and also America's strategic position in the Caucasian region. That failed. The Obama Administration kept a more or less open mind on Ivanishvili and the electoral process. In the meantime, Saakashvili's actions against the opposition (revocation of Ivanishvili's citizenship, financial sanctions against the Georgian Dream, seizure of the assets of Ivanishvili's bank in Georgia, intimidation of opposition supporters, imprisonment of Georgian Dream activists, abuse of state resources to support the incumbent party's election campaign, etc.), generated further doubt about the democratic credentials of the regime. The result was counterproductive from the perspective of the UNM. The US participated fully in a blanketing of Georgia with international observers during the election campaign in order to minimize the potential for election fraud.

The election, partly in consequence of the substantial international presence, was widely considered to have produced an accurate re-

[15] Personal email communication from a participant in a meeting between leading Obama Administration officials and European diplomats in January 2009.

flection of what voters wanted. The UNM was defeated; the Georgian Dream formed a new government, initiating a one year period of divided exercise of power, President Saakashvili remaining in post pending presidential election in 2013.

After the election, the President and his team continued with the rhetoric of Russian subversion and expanded on the centrality of Georgia as a bastion in a new Cold War against Russia. He and his team also criticized the new government for a judicial campaign of revenge directed against UNM former cabinet ministers. Sympathetic westerners, both in Europe (*e.g.* his colleagues in the European People's Party), and in the united States chimed in. One example was a Washington Post editorial[16] in which as a result of the new government's alleged persecution of leading figures in what was now the opposition. The editorial suggested that Prime Minister Ivanishvili be denied the opportunity to visit the United States until his government repented.

Despite this noise, the Obama Administration moved not an inch, supporting the government in its domestic consolidation, withholding judgement on judicial processes involving the opposition, continuing the programme of economic and military assistance, and supporting Ivanishvili's efforts to improve relations with Russia while supporting the Georgian position that the status of occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia were non-negotiable. Saakashvili had benefited in previous years from effective use of internal lobbying in the United States. He no doubt continued to expect results. There were no results. His friends had been marginalised, not least given Obama's re-election in 2012. The personal connections and lobbying funding had no effect.

Conclusion

The central conclusion of this chapter concerns exaggerated aspirations and disappointed expectations, accompanied by a gradual em-

[16] 27 November, 2012. http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-11-27/opinions/35508119_1_new-government-opposition-leaders-bidzina-ivanishvili. Among other empirical and interpretive problems, the article displays an enormous, and patronising, over-estimation of US influence in Georgia.

brace of realism on both sides. Successive Georgian governments expected the United States to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. In effect, they were seeking a new patron to defend them against Russia when necessary, and to underwrite Georgia's economic development. US aid and capacity building made an enormous difference in the development of the Georgian state and, eventually, in the development of a reasonable approximation of democratic process in a country that had no knowledge of that practice. However, it was not willing to be the new patron when it counted.

Successive US governments overestimated the capacity for quick democratic and liberal transformation in Georgia. They were repeatedly disappointed, first by the Shevardnadze administration and then by the Saakashvili administration. They also fairly clearly underestimated Georgia's capacity to create real problems for the United States in its regional diplomacy.

On the basis of accumulated experience, each side has become more realistic in their approach to the other. They define their and aspirations in the bilateral relationship more modestly. Their expectations are less ambitious. The emotionalism and bombast of previous periods have disappeared, as have the exaggerated promises and hopes. In other words, we appear to be entering a period of normal, business-like relations between friendly states.

DIVERGENT INTERESTS: WHAT CAN AND CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IN GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Ghia Nodia

There are three basic certainties about Georgian-Russian relations that this chapter uses as a starting point. First, they are exceptionally bad. The 2008 war obviously a nadir: it was the only interstate military conflict that either country had engaged in since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The two countries have yet to restore diplomatic relations. Moreover, while there had been oscillations between bad and worse in the past, Georgia has for the entirety of its independence considered Russia to be a major existential threat. Due to the obvious asymmetry in size and power, conflict with Georgia is not as important to Russia and Russian policy-makers prefer to play down the issue. However, Georgia appears to be perceived in Russia as its most problematic neighbor and a threat.[1] If we assume that Russia aspires to be a respected regional power and seeks to institutionalize aspecial role in the neighborhood through organizations like "Eurasian Union," Georgia serves as a spoiler in this respect.

Secondly, the Georgian-Russian conflict is multifaceted and cannot be understood through conventional realist theories of international relations. As Siroky, Gvalia, et al.[2] have argued, there is no fully pragmatic justification for Georgia's current policies: namely, prioritizing European and Euro-Atlantic integration to the detriment of relations with its powerful northern neighbor. Instead, it might make more sense for this small and vulnerable country to bandwagon with Russia. Arguably, the support that Tbilisi receives from the West

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[1] For instance, in a 2011 poll, Russians mentioned Georgia as the third greatest threat following USA and China – see http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2011/07/110715_georgia_russia_enemy.shtml accessedApril 11, 2013.

[2] Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Zurab Iashvili (2013), "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policy of Small States", *Security Studies* 22:1, 98-131.

in security or economic matters hardly matches the magnitude of the Russian threat in response to Georgia's pro-Western policies. Especially after 2008, Georgia was supposed to learn its lesson and seek to placate Russia. But so far it has not.

Appeasing Russia would be a sensible choice from ani nternal politics viewpoint as well. For instance, it would allow Mikheil Saakashvili to ignore Western opinion and turn openly autocratic, which might have helped him to stay in power longer. Conversely, Russia's view that any Western involvement in Georgia – or other former members of the Communist bloc – constitutes a national security threat does not appearfully rational either. Looking to international relations theory, the constructivist approach bases the foreign policy behavior of states on the way they perceive their identities that is the best way to make sense of both countries' mutual behavior.

Thirdly, it is hard for this author to imagine that mutual relations will significantly improve in the foreseeable future. Underlying problems simply run too deep – the choice continues to be between bad and worse. However, if this implies a difference between open confrontation and uneasy peace, it is a very important one. The rest of the chapter is an attempt to expand on these points.

What Georgia Wants

Georgia wants to be a European (that is, Western) country. This means both *becoming* Europe and being *recognized* as such. The former implies developing and consolidating political, economic, and societal institutions of the kind we find in the West. These include features such as democracy, a market economy, effective and non-corrupt institutions of state power, pluralism, tolerance, a law-abiding society, and the like. The latter, recognition, means closer relations with and eventual membership into NATO and the European Union.

Why this became a priority for Georgia, and not another, is a question far exceeding scope of this analysis. Identities are constructed within certain historical trajectories and it is a matter of interpretation as

to why do they develop in certain ways. The Georgian case might be explained by the fact that, in different periods, it felt threatened by its Islamic neighbors and later by Russia, rendering the West as its only perceived savior. Or maybe as long as the West continues to be dominant and successful, all states which have any good pretext to join it, tries.[3]

For over twenty years, the project of Western integration has been a point of consensus for all political parties of any significance in Georgia. There have been hardly any openly pro-Russian parties that mattered. Despite extremely tense relations between the government and the opposition following the October 2012 transfer of power, one of the few issues which enjoyed bipartisan consensus was Georgia's commitment to pro-Western policies.[4] Public opinion polls steadily demonstrate a high level of support for EU and NATO integration: typically, over 70 percent support Euro-Atlantic integration with less than 10 percent opposed.[5]

Can this change? Of course it can. However, the fact is that commitment to Western integration has been a strong and durable trait of Georgian political life and public opinion for a long time. The experience of other countries shows that such features do not change easily.

Therefore, what is it that Georgia primarily wants from Russia? Primarily, Georgia wants Russia to acknowledge its right to freely choose its development path and foreign policy orientation.

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[3] For the elaboration of this point see GhiaNodia"The Georgian Perception of the West", in: Bruno Coppieters, Alexei Zverev and Dmitri Trenin, ed., *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia* (Frank Cass: London-Portland, 1998), pp. 12-43.

[4] "Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy", Civil Georgia, 7 March 2013, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828, accessed April 11, 2013.

[5] See, for instance Georgian National Study conducted by International Republican Institute and its partners in June-July, 2012,http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20August%2020%20Survey%20Georgian%20Public%20Opinion,%20June%2026-July%204,%202012.pdf, accessed April 11, 2013.

What Russia wants

Russia, by contrast, craves recognition as a major international power: its motive is status-seeking. This has been a stable feature since the collapse of the Soviet Union. As President Putin famously claimed in Munich, the dissolution of the USSR was the most tragic event of the 20th century[6] because it implied Russia's demotion to a second-rate power. The new generation of Russian security thinking has developed around the fact and perception of this demotion. It has also pushed Russians to rebuild their new identity being in opposition to the West.

Initially, it was not obvious that it had to be so. We remember the Yeltsin-Kozyrev period in early 1990s when the Russian political leadership strived to build a new identity of Russia as a partner of the West. But this never became popular and acceptable to the broader Russian political elite because there was no way for Russia to be an *equal* partner to the West. Whatever the rhetoric, these were relations between victors and losers of the Cold War. The West could not possibly offer Russia a status that would have satisfied its wounded ego, because Russia's hard and soft power simply could not match that of the West.

The story of Russia's reaction to NATO's eastward expansion is the best illustration of this point. The official Russian line that expansion constitutes a threat to Russia's security is not rationally defensible. But this is perfectly understandable if Russia regards NATO expansion as a conspicuous expression of its demoted status.

The NATO military operation against Serbia and subsequent recognition of Kosovo was another deciding event. Why should Russia have bothered? This is hard to understand from the point of view of Russia's vital interests. Eastern Orthodox solidarity is not a satisfying explanation as there is no such fraternal regard in Russia for its coreligionists in Georgia. But Russia's motivations become

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[6] For Putin speech see http://www.securityconference.de/archive/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2007=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=179&, accessed April 11, 2013.

clearer if reformulated as a status issue. In addition to its military and economic might, the West acquired a status as the normative global power in the wake of the Cold War. In the case of Kosovo, the application of this power came close to being arbitrary. The Western message, as heard in Russia, was that Kosovo should not be considered a precedent applicable to cases like Abkhazia because the West decided it so. This was too much for even the most liberal and pro-Western Russians; the homeland of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky would not voluntarily submitto the higher moral ground claimed by the West. Kosovo has marshaled a consensus throughout Russia that the West is hypocritical, that its claim to political moral superiority is but a veneer beneath which lurks a craving for universal domination.

All this came to a head in the August 2008 during the war with Georgia, which, from the Russian perspective, was a proxy war with NATO.[7] Did Georgia have to become the primary arena in which Russian anti-Western resentment was to be played out? Why not Estonia, for instance? Nothing is inevitable, but there was logic to the Russian-Western conflict reaching its pinnacle in Georgia. To Russia, surrendering the Baltic states was difficult enough, and the Estonians' perisistent impetuousness might have been difficult to swallow. Still, Russians had always accepted that the Baltic nations were culturally Western, so there was some justice to the Western claim. Apart from that, Estonia "made it" to the West before Putin came to power. But to Moscow, long accustomed to regarding the Georgians are "theirs" – fellow-Orthodox Christians "saved" from imminent annihilation from the Islamic world. By this logic, the Western claim to Georgia is illegitimate and the Georgians themselves have no moral right to defect from Russian orbit.

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[7] I made this point in *The War for Georgia: Russia, the West, the future*, "Open Democracy", created 2008-08-12, www.opendemocracy.net/article/georgia-under-fire-the-power-of-russian-resentment;*The Russia-Georgia war: mission unaccomplished*, "Open Democracy", created 2009-08-14, www.opendemocracy.net/article/the-russia-georgia-war-mission-unaccomplished, accessed April 24, 2011. Among western authors, Ronald Asmus put up the most convincing argument linking NATO expansion and Kosovo recognition with the August war in *A Little War that Shook the World. Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Separatist Conflicts

It is widely believed, especially among Western analysts, that the Russian-Georgian conflict (and, in particular, the 2008 war) are primarily about the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Playing down their importance would be foolish: those conflicts are the largest and most direct irritants to bilateral relations. And since Russia recognized both regions as independent states in September 2008, it has become harder to imagine how these irritants could be resolved in the foreseeable future. However, I would argue that these issues do not adequately explain the depth of the Georgian-Russian conflict. Rather, the state of Georgian-Russian relations may be an important – if not the decisive – variable that explains how the separatist issues reached such a level of intractability.

Ethno-territorial conflicts are typical during the dissolution of empires or multinational states. Similar conflicts occurred in the wake of the collapse of the Tsarist Russian empire and were replayed in the period of the Soviet Union's breakup. Such conflicts are essentially tripartite in character: while the primary dispute is between an emerging state (in this case, Georgia), and a smaller ethnic group (and territory) that refuses to be part of this state (in our case, Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the former imperial power (Russia) is also an interested party because it has a stake in the issue and retains leverage to define the outcome. Typically, as the empire/multinational state fights against its dissolution, its interests coincide with minorities within emerging nation-states that may be used to hamper and undermine the legitimacy of anti-imperial nationalist movements.

Moreover, other great powers also often intervene with their own visions of a desired settlement. This was the case after the First and Second World Wars and was also true after the end of the Cold War. It would be fair to generalize that the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts primarily depends on ethnic differences and competing visions promoted by respective political elites. However, the way they unfold and come to resolution is often defined by an interplay of factors dominated by outside parties.

In our case, clashes between different versions of ethnic nationalism (Georgian and Abkhaz, Georgian and Ossetian) and the immaturity of respective political elites gave initial impetus to the conflicts. However, opposing aims of Georgian and Russian societies and elites constituted an important contributing factor for further radicalization. The new Georgian political elite rallied around the idea of national independence, which put it at loggerheads with the Russian elites that either wanted to save the Union (in its twilight years), or, later, preserve Russia's dominant position in its "near abroad." Therefore, Russian political players had a strong in terest inusing Abkhazian and Ossetian separatism against Georgia. Later, especially in the Putin years, Georgia came to be synonymous with the West's hostile encirclement of Russia. Unresolved conflicts could be used as Russia's chief leverage against Georgia.

Other than that, there was no rational necessity for Russia to support separatist movements in Georgia. One can easily imagine Russia calculating its national interest in such a way that favored resolving or at least not escalating conflicts in Georgia. There were such moments in the early 1990s when Russian President Boris Yeltsin's government appeared to be inclined to play a much more constructive role and then-Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze's government genuinely counted on Russian support in resolving the conflicts.

Problems in the North Caucasus could have also incentivized Georgian-Russian cooperation on conflict resolution. Here, Russia faced similar problems as Georgia did, and this region continues to be its chief actual security threat. Both Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili pinned their hopes for Georgian-Russian rapprochement on common interests in this region. But the separatist conflicts on both sides of the Caucasus mountains not only failed to contribute to mutual understanding, but became a factor of exacerbated tensions (it suffices to remember a near-crisis around Pankisi Gorge in 2001). One explanation may be that Moscow believed the bestway to resolve the Northern Caucasus conflicts was to restore credibility to Russian power – those rebellious Caucasians should know who is boss. And

the idea of treating Georgia as an equal partner, able to pursue an independent foreignpolicy, ran counter to this.

After the 2008 war, the problem got better and worse at the same time. It brought the benefit of clarity and, thus, perhaps a greater chance for relative stability: Russia is now the patron to quasi-independent statelets that but a lean handful consider legitimate.[8] At the same time, Georgia has no other option but to accept the inevitable for the time being, even without formally validating the status quo. However, this made it even more difficult forboth countries to substantially improve relations without losing face.

What the West Wants

It follows from the above that the West is at the center of the Georgia-Russia problem. But it was dragged into this position against its wish – and remains reluctant to admit this to be the case. And as the 2008 war illustrated, the West is not completely unified on the issue. The lowest common denominator between Western actors is that they want fewer headaches from the region. They are preoccupied with other, more pressing issues and want to avoid complications with Russia. The West also does not want to become deeply involved in problems it cannot solve, such as the Georgian-Russian conflict or its derivative separatist conflicts.

On the other hand, the West can neither abandon its value-based approach nor afford to lose face in its relations with Russia. Any acknowledgement that Georgia is a part of Russia's sphere of influence would mean losing face. Georgia has enough friends and allies in the West to prevent disengagement. The compromise reached at the Bucharest summit – a sufficiently vague promise of eventual NATO membership so to be able to postpone an actual decision indefinitely – is the best expression of the West's disunity on Georgia's Western bid.

However, the West relies on a regional strategy that tacitly accepts the status quo to prevent any escalation. For instance – by agreeing

[8] Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from a handful of other non-regional countries has purely symbolic importance.

to disagree with Russia on the Georgia issue. On the other hand, it prefers to separate the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts from the Russian-Georgian one and encourages Tbilisi to have direct dialogue with separatist authorities. To be sure, Europeans or Americans understand that nothing of consequence may be accomplished this way. But it is easier to achieve consensus on encouraging "confidence building measures" between Tbilisi and the separatists than to develop any common position with regards to the more fundamental Tbilisi-Moscow issue.

Russia as Georgia's Internal Problem

There is an interesting paradox in Georgian politics: no political force of any significance is openly pro-Russian, but almost everybody accuses each other of being pro-Russian in secret. This may be written off as an expression of Georgians' propensity to conspiracy theories. Still, there is more to it than just a figment of imagination or a cynical propaganda ploy.

Nostalgia for the Soviet past is not as strong in Georgia as it is in some other post-Soviet countries, but it is there as well, which is only natural. Moreover, Mikheil Saakashvili's more activist pro-Western policies appear to have caused a kind of nativist anti-Western backlash that is not yet obvious in the public opinion polls but is conspicuous within elite opinion. Some parts of the Georgian Dream coalition that replaced the National Movement in October 2012 are openly anti-Western, and some statements of coalition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili create legitimate doubts whether his general pledge to continue pro-Western policies are genuine and/or thought through.[9]

The position and influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church may be the most important case at issue here. While the official stance of the Church hierarchy is to avoid politics, in practice the Church

[9] The most scandalous of this was his statement in an interview with the Armenian service of the Radio Liberty that with regards to its foreign policy "Armenia gives a good example for Georgia" (provided that Armenian foreign policy is mainly pro-Russian though it also has good relations with the West) – see http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/24846548.html, accessed April 11, 2013.

has become increasingly vocal on political issues. Prior to October 2012, Orthodox priests of different rank agitated for Georgian Dream – or rather, against Saakashvili's United National Movement. Most importantly, the Church (or to put itmore broadly, Orthodox circles, which includes those public figures who position themselves as advocates of the Church) has become the milieu where pro-Russian positions have been most openly and radically propagated. "Pro-Russian" here implies not a natural wish to improve relations with Russia, but an ideological stance that presents the West as the enemy of Orthodoxy, Georgian identity, and calls for an alliance with coreligionist Russia as necessary for preserving Georgia's cultural and spiritual values.

Given the high authority of the Orthodox Church in Georgian society, this issue cannot be ignored and belittled. How does this mix with the consensus over Georgia's pro-Western orientation? This is a paradox to which I do not have a clear answer – and there is no space in this article to discuss the issue at length. But it is sufficient to say that the Church has become an important interlocutor of Russiansoft power in Georgia.[10] This makes it understandable why some of Georgia's pro-Western elites have some rational ground to be concerned over the sustainability of Georgia's European orientation. This is also one of the reasons why Russian policy-makers and analysts may continue to cherish hopes that Georgia may yet reverse course.

Between Rapprochements?

This article is written during a period when, following the change of power, there is an apparent thaw in Georgia-Russia relations as well as widespread expectations that relations may improve after all. How far may this go, and what are the likely outcomes of this turn?

Generally, the future is unpredictable and everything is possible. But previous experience calls for caution. So far, we have witnessed cycles.

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[10] See several articles on this in: Tengiz Phkhaladze (ed.), *Religion as an Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy towards Neighboring Countries: Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine* (International Centre for Geopolitical Studies: Tbilisi, 2012).

Incoming Georgian governments begin by seeking improved relations with Russia. They recognize the complexity of the problem and pledge not to make concessions on the most vital issues, but also accuse the predecessors of unnecessarily harsh anti-Russian rhetoric.They claim that with a more flexible approach, some kind of deal may be achieved. This leads to some optimism, as well as fears and accusations of being a "sellout." Leaders as different as Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili, andnow, Bidzina Ivanishvili all began in this way. Each time, new leaders have tried to explain bad relations with Russia with the peculiar personalities of their predecessors. Gamsakhurdia was an arch-nationalist; Russians could not forgive Shevardnadze for his role in dismantling the East-European Communist bloc; Saakashvili was too impatient and flamboyant, and later became personally unacceptable to Putin due to his role in the 2008 war.

The priority of improving relations with Russia declared by every incoming Georgian government is only natural. Persistent tensions with Russia, closely linked to the separatist conflicts, may be the most obvious impediment towards Georgia's successful development. This is also expedient in an electoral sense: Georgian voters want relations with Russia to improve (without making concessions on matters of principle), so they easily fall for the next round of promises in this regard.

Will it be the same with Bidzina Ivanishvili's government? So far it is too early to tell. What we can confidently say is that there is an obvious change in rhetoric, but not much improvement in substance. Restoring diplomatic relations is not on the table as the new government made explicit statements that this cannot happen while Abkhazia and South Ossetia are occupied by Russia. There are discussions about returning Georgian wines and mineral water to the Russian market, which is important or quite a few Georgian businesses, but is hardly a groundbreaking development. There may be some easing of the visa regime between the two countries.[11]

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[11] "Russian MFA comments on Meeting between Georgian, Russian Diplomats", *Civil Georgia*, 2 March 2013, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25806.

There was a mention of opening a railway link through Abkhazia (this idea had also being discussed during Shevardnadze and Saakashvili governments) but it seems to have been shelved again.[12] The official Russian rhetoric is that it expects Georgia to change its positions on Abkhazia and South Ossetia (and probably also on NATO, but this is not stressed in public), but this is unlikely. As mentioned, the Georgian Parliament has reaffirmed its commitment to Western integration and has forbidden any moves towards alternative integration projects like the Eurasian Union. This cannot be music to Russian ears.

Under the circumstances, it is important to define what Georgia should realistically aspire to in its relations with Russia. "Realistic" implies an assumption that in the near and middle term, Russia will not dramatically change. It will still consider NATO and Europe as opponents whose inroads in Russia's immediate backyard are unwelcome and it will not trust a pro-Western Georgia. It would be humiliating for Russia to backtrack on Abkhazia and South Ossetia issues in any way. Expanding economic relations is possible, but Saakashvili also tried to encourage involvement of Russian business in the country as a way to political rapprochement,[13] and prior to 2008, economic relations were lively enough, without bringing dramatic change either to political relations or to the Georgian economy.

What Georgia primarily needs is to consolidate its democratic institutions and stimulate rapid economic development to help alleviate poverty and expand the middle class. This – especially the democracy part – can only be successfully achieved in partnership and in linkage with the West. It is imperative that for any Georgian government to keep Western integration as a clear and consistent

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[12] "Ivanishvili: 'We Take Cautious Approach to Abkhaz Railway'", Civil Georgia, 14 March 2013, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25846.

[13] "Up to hundred business leaders of Russia arrived in Tbilisi on May 27 [2004] to discuss investment projects in Georgia at the Russian-Georgian Business Forum on May 28-29. The forum is described by the Georgian officials as the largest-ever business event in the country."– "Russia Seeks for Closer Economic Ties with Georgia" *Civil Georgia*, 28 May 2004, http://www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=7020One Russian participant of the Forum, KakhaBendukidze, stayed in Georgia to become Georgia's minister of economy, which was used by some of Saakashvili's critics to claim that he is too open to Russia's economic interests.

priority. With Russia, the objective should be damage control: it is modus vivendi, not necessarily close and cooperative relations with its northern neighbor that Georgia needs. It is acceptable for relations with Russia to be cold as long as they do not destabilize the country and undermine its chances of development. This goal is fully realistic and achievable, though never simple.

THE MERCHANT HEGEMON: GEORGIA'S ROLE IN TURKEY'S CAUCASUS SYSTEM

Michael Hikari Cecire

With its own rich history in the region, Turkey looks to be reclaiming its long-lost influence in the South Caucasus. Driven by its "Strategic Depth," doctrine, Turkey has cultivated strong ties with Georgia as a strategic partner. Today, Turkey is visibly ascendant as a Caucasus power. This has been especially propelled by the gradual transformation of Turkish outreach to the region from the bilateral to the trilateral level – Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Even bilateral talks and agreements are increasingly being subsumed within a larger appreciation for broader, trilateral implications. The emergence of an increasingly coherent trilateral grouping between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan could overturn traditional conceptions of the region as the domain of Russia.

Strategic Depth to Alignment

Prior to Russia's conquest and colonization of the region, Turkish power held sway over much of the region, including over Christian Georgia. At its height in the late 17th century, the Ottoman Empire dominated the entirety of the South Caucasus from the Black Sea to the Caspian.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the cultural admixture between the South Caucasus and the imperial provinces were regularly facilitated through trade and levies raised in service of the empire.[1] While Georgians and other Caucasians were particularly sought after for service within the Egyptian Mamluk armies, including under the period of Ottoman suzerainty, the Ottoman sultan's Janissaries were typically recruited from the Balkans. However, in the latter centuries of the empire, Caucasians

[1] See Bernard Lewis. *Race and slavery in the Middle East: an historical enquiry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

gradually became more prominently represented within Janissary units as well. While this period is not regarded as an especially happy one for Caucasians, and particularly to the Georgians, it does not figure into foreign policy thinking in these states as it does in today's Turkey.

Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu is widely considered to be the primary architect of Turkish foreign policy under the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP). This is most richly expressed in his 2001 book, *Strategik Derinlik: Turkiye'nin Uluslararasi Konumu* ("Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position"). In Strategic Depth, Davutoglu claims that Turkey's geography and "historical depth" – the legacy of its historical role – is a reservoir for its aspirations as an independent pole of power. Davutoglu and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan consider Turkey capable of fulfilling a role as the world's first modern "Muslim power."[2] However, critics, both in Turkey and abroad, have referred to the doctrine "neo-Ottomanism" – a qualifier that would seem to conflate Turkish geopolitical development with imperialization.

Davutoglu specifically highlights the Middle East as the region with greatest potential for Strategic Depth, but also makes mention of the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. In practice, best known internationally as "Zero Problems with Neighbors,"[3] Turkey's ability to channel its historical legacy into foreign policy successes has been operationally limited, particularly in its approach to the Middle East – the clear primary focus of its strategy. Although Turkey's cultural and soft power assets are unmistakable,[4] this has not necessarily translated into long-term geopolitical gains.

The first beneficiaries of Zero Problems was Turkey's historical rival Iran and its Alawite quasi-client Syria. This coincided with a dramatic

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[2] See Ahmet Davutoglu. *Strategik Derinlik: Turkiye'nin Uluslararasi Konumu*. Istanbul: Küre Yayinlari, 2001.

[3] "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors." Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa (accessed August 16, 2013).

[4] Ahmet Davutoglu. "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy." Foreign Policy. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy (accessed August 16, 2013).

reversal in relations with Ankara's longtime ally Israel. In May 2010, Turkey co-brokered (with input from fellow "rising" power Brazil) a nuclear fuel-swap deal with Iran in an effort to ameliorate the growing crisis over Iran's nuclear program. At the time, Turkey's leadership (and, tellingly, also Georgia's) hailed the agreement as a diplomatic breakthrough befitting Turkey's rising international stature. Perhaps foreshadowing things to come, however, the deal was soon aborted as Iran failed to cease enriching its uranium to the "weapons usable" level of 20 percent.[5] In a similar pattern, Turkey's late-decade diplomatic offensive saw warmer ties with Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, with which Kemalist Turkey had long had complicated relations – particularly over allegations that Kurdish militants, including the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), had variously used Syria as a haven to launch attacks against Turkey.

However, the events of the Arab Spring upset Turkey's Middle Eastern drive. While Ankara lent tacit support to the overthrow of the secular regime of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, it initially opposed (but quietly backtracked on) the insurrection and Western-led intervention against Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi. In Syria, however, policy uncertainty quickly turned to activism as domestic protests turned to rebellion and regime-loyal forces began indiscriminate reprisals. Perhaps hoping not to be overcome by events as they were in Libya, Turkey made support to the Syrian rebels – and opposition to Assad and his patrons in Tehran – a centerpiece of its Middle Eastern policy. Syria effectively transformed from the "crown jewel" of the Zero Problems effort to the most visible example of the doctrine's outer limits.[6] More recently, the military's forcible repudiation of Mubarak's successor in Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi, has drawn Turkish influence in North Africa to its nadir.

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[5] Scott Peterson. "Iran nuclear fuel swap: What's happening now." The Christian Science Monitor. http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0629/Iran-nuclear-fuel-swap-What-s-happening-now (accessed August 19, 2013).

[6] Michael Cecire. "Arab Spring Exposes Turkey's Western Moorings." World Politics Review. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/9338/arab-spring-exposes-turkeys-western-moorings (accessed August 15, 2013).

The unraveling of Turkish influence in the Middle East has evoked many an obituary for Zero Problems. The wave of domestic unrest that has gripped Turkey throughout much of 2013 has also been cited as an example of the limits of Turkish foreign policy.[7] Whatever the prognoses of Turkey's Middle Eastern policies, however, Zero Problems has seen relative success in other regions. More quietly, Turkey's diplomatic charms appear to be having a positive effect in the Balkans, the erstwhile source of much of the Ottoman Empire's bureaucracy, its prized Janissary units, and even many of its leaders. Diplomatic relations are strong and rising along with increased trade between Turkey and the Balkan states.[8] Some analysts, however, do not see Turkey's increasing Balkans influence as translating into much more than richer trade opportunities at the moment.[9] Yet the pejorative qualifier "neo-Ottomanism" seems to be muddying the analysis; the imperial connotations that it implies has, in many quarters, overtaken more sober considerations of Strategic Depth as a doctrine rather than as an ideology. In the Balkans, for example, Hajrudin Somun, the former Bosnian ambassador to Turkey, contends that Strategic Depth is a pragmatic means to operationalize its already latent soft power in the region – and not a subversive means of reimperialization.[10]

Perhaps even more than the Balkans, the Caucasus has been a beneficiary of Strategic Depth. Although, like in the Balkans, it has not received nearly the same media coverage or governmental attention from Ankara as the Middle East, it has quietly emerged as something

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[7] See Nick Ottens. "Zero Problems Abroad Made Many Problems at Home." The National Interest. http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/zero-problems-abroad-made-many-problems-home-8871 (accessed August 22, 2013) and Zalewski, Piotr. "How Turkey Went From 'Zero Problems' to Zero Friends." Foreign Policy. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/21/how_turkey_foreign_policy_went_from_zero_problems_to_zero_friends (accessed August 23, 2013).

[8] Dimitar Bechev. "Turkey's "zero-problem" foreign policy is working." European Council on Foreign Relations. http://ecfr.eu/blog/entry/Turkeys_zero-problem_foreign_policy_is_working (accessed August 19, 2013).

[9] İnan Rüma. «Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: New Activism, Neo-Ottomanism or/so What?.» *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2010): 133-140.

[10] Hajrudin Somun. "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans and "Neo-Ottomanism": A Personal Account." *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 3 (2011): 33-41.

of a success story. If Strategic Depth is judged on its ability to build serviceable or better relationships with its neighbors and increase Turkish geopolitical influence, the Caucasus rates exceedingly well. Compared to the Middle East, where Turkey's foreign policy "successes" in Syria, Iran, and Egypt have backfired and its former alliance with Israel has eroded – possibly to the point of no return – the South Caucasus has been a relatively consistent narrative of upwards-tracking relations.

The key element of Strategic Depth rests on its relationship with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's outsized position in the Turkish foreign policy firmament comes from the importance of Caspian hydrocarbons to the upkeep and growth of the Turkish economy and, with it, Ankara's aspirations to power. Although Turkey's energy relations with Azerbaijan have fluctuated since the latter's independence, it has recently come to not only rely on the stable flow of Azerbaijan-sourced energy, but to become functionally dependent.[11] With the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, the South Caucasus gas pipeline, the planned expansion of the latter to accommodate the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans-Adriatic interconnecting pipeline (TAP) – which will ferry energy to southern European markets – bilateral energy relations have grown from minimal to indispensible in the span of little more than a decade.[12]

Economic growth, which relies on the stability and growth of cheap energy, is the single-most important means to Turkey's great power aspirations. A 2011 announcement by Prime Minister Erdogan outlined a list of goals for 2023, the centennial of the republic's founding, which was dominated by economic targets.[13] This included the much-quoted mission to make Turkey a top-ten global economy by that point. The

[11] Şuhnaz Yılmaz, and Kılavuz Tahir. «Restoring Brotherly Bonds: Turkish-Azerbaijani Energy Relations.» *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memos* 240 (2012). http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm_240_Yilmaz_Sept2012.pdf (accessed August 22, 2013).

[12] See "Azerbaijan." U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=AJ (accessed August 19, 2013).

[13] "İşte ekonomide 2023 hedefleri.» Haberturk. http://ekonomi.haberturk.com/makro-ekonomi/haber/594402-iste-ekonomide-2023-hedefleri (accessed August 27, 2013).

Turkish economy's reliance on energy supplies to fuel its economic growth makes the South Caucasus overall as an essential means to that goal. This, perhaps, is Strategic Depth ideally illustrated: the residues of a bygone *Pax Turkana* form the foundations for a modern strategic partnership that confers Ankara access to badly needed strategic resources.

The Impetus of Turkey-Georgia Relations

In contrast to Azerbaijan, the case of Georgia is less straightforward. Unlike Azerbaijan, which can point to a common, if distinctive, socio-cultural identity with Turkey, the conventional Georgian narrative of historical relations with Turkey is largely adversarial. Although the historical record is replete with major battles fought between Georgians and Turkic armies, the prevailing contemporary account is nonetheless puzzling on its face, given that many Georgians voluntarily served the Ottoman sultan and his pre-Ottoman predecessors. Perhaps more importantly, Turkic empires' dominance over the various Georgian kingdoms rarely attempted the comprehensive colonization or social engineering that typified Russian rule. However, crucially, Russian lordship over the Caucasus – at least during the Tsarist period – co-opted the local elite in a manner that was only rarely observed during Turkish or Persian (or Mongolian) rule. Moreover, Georgians' common Christian faith with Russia – as well as an attendant European self-identification (at least by the ruling elites) – in contrast to their Muslim neighbors also helped shape folk attitudes towards the Turkic peoples.

Given this history, prevailing cultural predispositions in Georgia even today are primarily negative towards Turkey as well as Azerbaijan, albeit to a lesser extent given the latter's shared Soviet experience. Polling conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers illustrate this reality through the regular Caucasus Barometer surveys, which, among other things, gauges Georgians' attitudes towards foreigners through proxy indicators such as the percentage that approve of doing business with various foreign nationalities or approve of Georgian women marrying various foreign nationalities.

The most recent Caucasus Barometer, released in 2011, seems to confirm anecdotal evidence that Georgians are predisposed to skepticism towards their Turkic neighbors.[14] According to the survey, 65 percent approved of doing business with Turkey while only 21 percent approved of Georgian women marrying Turks. Azerbaijanis, as expected, fared somewhat better with 73 percent approving business and 27 percent approving marriage. For the most part, this rated poorly compared to other nationalities surveyed although, in fairness, Georgians reported no great enthusiasm for Georgian women marrying any foreigners overall. However, there is often an observable gulf between Georgians' reported ideals and their willingness to adapt to new situations. For example, the same survey shows a miniscule 6 percent reportedly interested in permanent emigration, while 47 percent expressed interest in "temporary" emigration. And yet, Georgia has lost an estimated 20 percent of its 1989 population due to out-migration.[15]

Georgian Attitudes towards Foreigners		
	Approval of doing business:	Approval of women marrying:
Americans	75%	37%
Armenians	70%	31%
Azerbaijanis	73%	27%
Turks	65%	21%
Russians	76%	41%
Source: Caucasus Barometer, 2011		

Likewise, perhaps surprisingly to some, Russians fared strongest in the 2011 Caucasus Barometer on both counts. But these positive sentiments are belied by contrasting attitudes among respondents who named Russia Georgia's biggest enemy by far – 51 percent compared to 3 percent for the United States (which easily led at 44 percent as Georgia's "biggest friend"), 5 percent "other" – though a large minority, 41 percent, answered "don't know" or refused to

[14] "Online Data Analysis." CRRC Georgia. http://crrc.ge/oda/ (accessed August 17, 2013).

[15] See Caucasus Research Resource Center. "Migration Trends in Georgia." CRRCCenters.org. http://www.crrccenters.org/activities/research/?id=32 (accessed August 12, 2013).

respond. This would seem to suggest that Georgians make a powerful distinction between their perceptions of people and their governments.

It is this distinction, possibly rooted in a historical need to adapt to rapidly changing political conditions, which allows Georgians to accept a strong degree of strategic realism in its foreign policy. Whatever Georgians' personal feelings – or rather, their ideals – about interactions with Turks and Azerbaijanis, they have countenanced successive governments that have presided over dramatic expansions of ties with both states. And while foreign policymaking in Georgia has traditionally been the sole province of elites, state policy has had a way of regressing towards popular opinion, whether through revolutions, upheaval, or democratically conducted elections.[16] Even despite public anti-Turkish sentiment voiced within its diverse ranks, Georgia's Georgian Dream coalition has maintained a strong policy that favors continued and expanded economic and geopolitical cooperation with Ankara.[17]

Georgia's chief value proposition to Ankara is its geophysical position connecting Turkey to Azerbaijan and the Caspian basin. Being the most logical conduit between Turkey and Azerbaijan, Georgia has been instrumental in the construction of the BTC pipeline, the South Caucasus pipeline, and the planned development of TANAP. Bilateral relations have expanded particularly rapidly since the AKP's election in 2002 and Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, which saw a modernizing government come to power. While Turkey has embraced Georgia as an element of Strategic Depth, Georgia has looked to Turkey as a means to economic development and a window to the Euro-Atlantic.

Today, strong bilateral relations boast not only a bevy of joint infrastructure projects, but have also made Turkey a leading source of foreign direct investment, overseen the establishment of a free trade area in 2007, and passport-free borders. In many ways, at least

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[16] See Michael Cecire. "Georgia's 2012 Elections and Lessons for Democracy Promotion."*Orbis* 57, no. 2 (2013): 232-250.

[17] Michael Cecire. "Turkish-Georgian Ties After Elections." *Hurriyet Daily News* (Istanbul), October 22, 2012. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-georgian-ties-after-elections.aspx?pageID=238&nID=32916&NewsCatID=396 (accessed August 18, 2013).

in terms of bilateral economic initiatives, Turkey-Georgia relations might be considered more progressive than even Turkey's economic relations with Azerbaijan.[18]

Strategic Partners

Georgia and Turkey's partnership has only continued its upwards trajectory since the early years of the 21st century. This is due in no small part to the inextricable relationship between bilateral economic projects and geopolitical designs. This is potentially best understood by the fact that the primary Georgia-Turkey projects are not merely bilateral, but exist within a larger trilateral format that also includes Azerbaijan. The various Caspian pipelines, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, and blossoming defense collaborations are all either primarily or at partially an outgrowth of trilateral developments. Trilateralism, though originally an outgrowth of the varied bilateral ties between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, has come to set the standard for interstate relations between the three states.

For example, the BTK railway is not only an interconnector between Turkey and Azerbaijan or Turkey and Georgia, but a truly trilateral project that will facilitate the exchange of goods, people, and ideas between the three states. In a broader sense, with an initial operating capacity for 1 million passengers a year annually, 6.5 million tons of freight (30 million at full capacity), and enabling the shortest distance between markets in Asia and Europe, the connector could also serve as an alternative rail link between Europe and the far east[19] – essentially a competitor to Russia's Trans-Siberian railway.

There are also less formal developments in the economic relations of the three states. Though pipelines and the BTK dominates high-level

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[18] Michael Cecire. "Georgia–Turkey Relations in a Georgian Dream Era."*Caucasus Analytical Digest* 48 (2013). http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=161014 (accessed August 14, 2013).

[19] Rovshan Ismayilov. "Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey: Building a Transportation Triumvirate?" *Eurasianet* (New York), February 6, 2007. http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020707.shtml (accessed August 25, 2013).

discourse, informal business relationships and tourism is bringing the three states together. Today, for example, Turkey and Azerbaijan are Georgia's top two trade partners, accounting for approximately USD 1.5 billion and 1.3 billion dollars in 2012 trade volume, respectively.[20]

Georgian Foreign Trade, 2012 (USD)			
	Imports	Exports	Total
Armenia	261 million	71 million	332 million
Azerbaijan	627 million	634 million	1.3 billion
Turkey	143 million	1.4 billion	1.5 billion
Russia	46 million	474 million	520 million
Source: Geostat.Ge			

In spite of the economic character of these projects, their geopolitical significance to Turkey and Georgia cannot be understated. By further integrating the South Caucasus into the European economy – as a source of energy, raw materials, and open markets – Georgia and Azerbaijan see their prominence rise in Western capitals while Turkey emerges as an essential broker. This satisfies the Turkish economy's need for energy, raw materials, and also shifts Turkey from the European periphery into a hub state. Meanwhile, Georgia's access and importance to the Euro-Atlantic is significantly upgraded.

Turkey-Georgia relations have also advanced in the pure security sphere. While Turkey provided training and security assistance under previous governments, current defense minister Irakli Alasania has taken a noticeable interest in enhancing military ties with Turkey. Following the first joint exercises in September 2012 between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan aimed at protecting pipeline infrastructure,[21] the three states again joined together for the Caucasus Eagle 2012 joint exercises held

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[20] "საგარეო ვაჭრობა [External Trade]." GeoStat.Ge. http://geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=136&lang=geo (accessed August 17, 2013).

[21] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Prague), "Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey Hold Pipeline-Security Exercises," September 24, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-georgia-turkey-pipeline-security-exercises/24718351.html (accessed August 23, 2013).

in Turkey that November.[22] In addition, underscoring Tbilisi's enthusiasm for security cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan (though he is careful to stress Tbilisi's good relations with Yerevan), Georgian defense minister Irakli Alasania has proposed that Azerbaijan and Turkey take part in planned U.S.-Georgia exercises set to be held in 2014.[23]

This has extended beyond joint military exercises. Alasania's defense ministry has been particularly keen to expand Georgia's indigenous defense industry through cooperative ventures with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Since the change in government in 2010, a joint defense industry working group has been established with Azerbaijan and the two states are collaborating closely in the development their domestic defense industries with significant assistance from Turkey.[24] Given Georgia's previous difficulties with procuring advanced arms abroad and a desire to have an independent defense industry capability, Turkey's long experience in this arena is seen in Tbilisi as a model to follow. And Azerbaijan, which has also sought to develop its own defense industry sector with Turkish assistance, is seen as an obvious partner in this regard. Reportedly, Georgian defense designs have attracted export interest from Azerbaijan and even South Korea, though this has not been confirmed.

Challenges

While the Turkey-Georgia partnership has conferred significant geopolitical yield to Tbilisi along with more tangible benefits of investment, trade, and tourism, the bilateral partnership is not without its problems. One sticking point in particular relates to concerns among certain segments of the Georgian population over the alleged

[22] "Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia to Hold Joint Military Exercises." TRT.Net.Tr. http://www.trt.net.tr/trtworld/en/newsdetail.aspx?haberkodu=fd99e483-f3e1-42d6-a3b5-057ad5eab4b8 (accessed August 27, 2013).

[23] *News.Az* (Baku), "Turkey, Azerbaijan may join US-Georgian military exercise in 2014," April 2, 2013. http://news.az/articles/turkey/78417 (accessed August 17, 2013).

[24] Zaur Shiriyev. "Azerbaijan-Georgia military cooperation and Turkey's influence (2)." *Today's Zaman* (Ankara), May 30, 2013. http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-316955-azerbaijan-georgia-military-cooperation-and-turkeys-influence-2.html (accessed August 22, 2013).

downsides of growing Turkish influence. For example, although Turkish citizens have brought significant investment and tourism to Georgian cities – and especially the historically Sunni Muslim region of Adjara – the throngs of foreign visitors has reportedly stoked some resentment among Georgian residents.[25] Of greater concern, however, have been anecdotal evidence of growing tensions between Georgian Christians and the country's relatively considerable Muslim community. Prior to the 2012 parliamentary elections, certain figures from the challenging Georgian Dream coalition voiced anti-Turkish statements as part of their campaigns.[26] More recently, Georgian Muslim villagers were harassed by Orthodox neighbors over their use of a house as gathering place for prayer.[27] And in early September, Georgian authorities forcibly removed a minaret from a mosque in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, provoking protests from the Georgian Muslim community, which makes up at least ten percent of the national population.[28] While tensions do not seem to have reached a point where inter-confessional conflict is affecting relations on the diplomatic level, such an eventuality is entirely conceivable.

In Turkey, meanwhile, the most persistent threat to bilateral relations comes from more pressing issues that compete for attention. Though Georgia and the Caucasus has become established as elements of Turkish grand strategy, the exigencies of regional strategic issues threaten to keep Ankara from more closely monitoring and calibrating their regional policies in the Caucasus. Fortunately, however, much of the bilateral relationship has proven durable and largely self-

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[25] Nata Imedaishvili, and Bigg Claire. "Locals Helpless As Sex Tourism Hits Georgian Black Sea Village." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Prague), July 8, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/locals-helpless-as-prostitutes-take-over-georgian-village/24638723.html (accessed September 2, 2013).

[26] See, for example, *Georgia Online* (Tbilisi), "Georgian Dream Apologizes for Earlier Xenophobic Statements," September 18, 2012. http://www.apsny.ge/eng/news/a1/politics/1348015735.php (accessed September 2, 2013).

[27] *Democracy and Freedom Watch* (Tbilisi), "Muslims afraid to attend Friday prayer in Kakheti village," July 6, 2013. http://dfwatch.net/muslims-afraid-to-attend-friday-prayer-in-kakheti-village-46574 (accessed September 2, 2013).

[28] Antoine Blua. "Coming or Going, Georgian Minaret Draws Ire." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Prague), September 2, 2013. http://www.rferl.org/content/georgia-minaret-muslims-christians/25093344.html (accessed September 4, 2013).

sustaining, due to natural strategic and economic interdependencies, the catalyzing effect of trilateralism – which marshals a third proactive stakeholder, Azerbaijan, which enjoys outsized influence in Turkey – as well as external backing from the West.

Macroscopically, another potent challenge is the question of the region's other great powers, Russia and Iran. For Russia, which sees itself as the status quo power in the region and is suspicious of potential competitors. Turkey's pro-Azerbaijan position, contra the Russia-Armenia alliance on the other side of the binary, already casts the appearance of competition. And Turkey's growing relationship with Georgia, which continues to have difficult relations with Moscow, only seems to underscore a narrative, however erroneous, of Russia-Turkey competition for the Caucasus.

With Iran, meanwhile, Turkey faces a power that has latent pretensions to regional leadership but has neither the geopolitical influence or instruments to operationalize its ambitions. However, Tehran can be counted upon to oppose developments that empower the Euro-Atlantic bloc, even if it means making tactical common cause with Moscow – much as it has done in other issues in the Middle East. This is not a direct threat to Turkey-Georgia relations per se except that it could introduce an unwanted variable in the future.

Policy Implications

The development of Turkey-Georgia relations should be welcomed. The emerging tendency for the U.S. and the West to take a more restrained international role makes the role of regional and "middle" powers like Turkey all the more important as nodes of liberal international values and Euro-Atlantic norms, even if imperfectly so. At the same time, Turkey-Georgia relations should be best considered within the context of trilateralism. While there are unique and even exceptional aspects of the bilateral Turkey-Georgia relationship, the broader trilateralism framework has become the kernel of relations between the three states. This, too, should be welcomed by the West. While previous regional groupings have failed – such as GUAM or the

"Democratic Choice Commonwealth" – trilateralism has demonstrated organic, interests-based moorings and evidence of both sustainability and long term upside. Though still in its early stages, Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateralism could conceivably evolve into a more robust multilateral regional entente, perhaps with the Visegrad Group as a partial model to emulate.

Shorter term, Turkey's growing relationship with Georgia is a potentially ideal vehicle for addressing several of Georgia's most pressing outstanding issues: its relations with Russia, the question of the separatist regions, and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. On the latter, Turkish involvement in Georgia's defense and structural reforms should be encouraged. Turkey is not only considered a credible military power, but it also has the benefit of a long history of membership and institutional interoperability with the Atlantic alliance to share with Georgia.

Turkey also has a role to play in helping Georgia to normalize its relations with Russia. To date, Ankara has managed to walk a fine line in cultivating serviceable, if unsentimental, relations with Russia while keeping its commitments to NATO and its defense pact with Azerbaijan. Turkish support for the new government's cautious outreach program could help produce results in a way no other Western power's involvement could. Similarly, Turkey's role as a neutral broker could be used to help moderate, if not settle, Georgia's ongoing conflicts with its separatist regions – and particularly with Abkhazia, with which Turkey has historical ties. For Georgia, bringing Turkey into a more active regional role could not only help further develop bilateral relations, but could also be the missing ingredient for diplomatic breakthroughs on one of more fronts. For Turkey, meanwhile, engaging Georgia and the Caucasus more directly could produce much-needed foreign policy victories and cement its status as an emerging Caucasus power.

THE LOST EMPIRE: IRAN'S CAUTIOUS RETURN TO GEORGIA

Kornely Kakachia

In the two decades since regaining its independence, Georgia, a weak small state, developed close relations with regional and great powers in order to compensate for its weakness. While considered to be a "darling of West" in the post-Soviet space and enjoying significant Western support, Georgia's recent move to establish closer political and economic links with the Islamic Republic of Iran caused some bewilderment in Western capitals. As Georgia is perceived as a close partner of the United States in the Caucasus and the recipient of roughly $4.5 billion in Western aid over the past three years, these developments attracted the intense attention of policy makers and regional analyst alike. The chapter aims to examine Georgian foreign policy towards Iran from a small-state foreign policy perspective and attempts to identify the main causes and motivations for Tbilisi to embrace Tehran.[1] It also examines Georgia's international position related to acute issues of regional security and the risks arising therefrom.

Brief History of Iran-Georgia Relations

Iran and Georgia have had relations for centuries. Official diplomatic relations between the two nations in the 20th century was established on May 15, 1992 after Georgia declared its independence. Georgia, throughout its history, has several times been annexed by the Persian Empire, specifically under the Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanid, and Safavid dynasties. This has facilitated much political and cultural exchange, and historical Georgia was at times even considered a part of Greater Iran. Subsequently, Iran played a significant and at times de-

[1] A shortened version of this chapter was published as PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo in September 2011

cisive role in the history of the Georgian people.[2] The Persian presence helped to shape political institutions, modified social structures and land holding, and enriched literature and culture. On occasion, Iran also acted as a counterweight to other powerful forces in the region, particularly against the Romans (and Byzantines), Turkic empires, and Russians. The Georgian-Iranian relationship became more complex during Safavid rule as Persia sought to annex the Georgian kingdoms, overturning customary arrangements of vassalage, which changed relations from positive to highly negative.[3] Tensions and outright warfare continued until Russia's 19th century colonising drive in the Caucasus resulted in Georgia's incorporation into the Tsarist empire. The 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay confirmed the loss of Caucasus to the Russian Empire and Iran's gradual exit from South Caucasus affairs. Since then, Iran-Georgia relations merged into Iran-Russian and Iran-Soviet relations.

After independence in the 20th century, Georgia faced serious domestic and international problems that endangered its existence as a sovereign state. Georgia's fragile state structure and persistent Russian attempts to subjugate and manipulate the weaknesses of its small neighbour constituted the biggest challenge to Georgian national security. And as often the case, states facing an external threat align with other powers to oppose the threat. Georgia's foreign policy, consequently, was driven by a concern to ally with external powers tilting from *balancing* (checking the rising Russian power) to *bandwagoning* (joining with West and to seek the patronage of the United States) policies. It has also made great efforts to court NATO, and other regional powers, including recently Iran. On the other hand, as Georgia was seeking partners to balance Russian influence, the Iranian leadership sees the South Caucasus as their near abroad and believe they have a socio-historical right to dominate the Caucasus economically, politically, and diplomatically.

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[2] see: David Marshall Lang. *A Modern History of Georgia.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962

[3] Fatema Soudavar-Farmanfarmaian. Georgia and Iran: Three Millennia of Cultural Relations: An Overview. Journal of Persianate Studies 2 (2009) p.1-43

Limits of U.S. Power and Geopolitical Reality

After the August 2008 war with Russia, as Moscow was trying to weaken and isolate Georgia,[4] Tbilisi was eager to expand the quantity and quality of its foreign relationships. The rapid shift in the balance of power and new developments stemming from Russia's unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia forced Georgia to reevaluate and reshape its regional foreign policy strategy. The war also demonstrated that implicit Western guarantees to Georgia lacked substance, and the integrity of the oil and gas corridor depended simply on Russian tolerance. Geopolitical trends become even more difficult as the Obama administration downgraded security ties with Georgia after initiating the "reset" policy with Russia and seeking rapprochement with Moscow as a key foreign policy initiative.[5] While Georgia threw its strategic lot almost entirely with the U.S., and close relations with the West is seen as indispensable its future development, some in the U.S. foreign policy establishment questioned whether the United States even has any interests in the region.[6]

The perceived decline of Georgia and the Caucasus' prominence in American foreign policymaking underscored a reality that Georgia cannot rely exclusively on Western backing to guarantee its security, making it is essential to advance relations with the other states in the region. In some ways, an exclusively Westernised, mono-vectored foreign policy limits Tbilisi's bargaining power towards rising regional powers aiming to counterbalance Russia's traditional hegemony. Consequently, against this background, the goal of Georgian diplomacy has been to promote a suitable balance of power in the region and to diversify its foreign policy portfolio, which included enhancing its relations with non-bordering Iran. And as it seems "Georgian knocking" to Iranian door has been so far successful.

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[4] For the analysis to back up this judgment, see: Kornely Kakachia K., *"Between Russian Assertiveness and Insecurity: Georgia's Political Challenges and Prospect after the Conflict",* Uluslararası İlişkiler, Volume 7, No 26 (Summer 2010), p. 87-104.

[5] The Economist. *My friend's enemy is...my neighbor. Georgia, geopolitics and Iran*. November 8, 2010. Available at: http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2010/11/georgia_geopolitics_and_iran

[6] Owen Matthews. *The Tbilisi Squeeze. Washington's new friendship with Moscow has one very clear casualty: Georgia.* The Newsweek. June 29,2010. Available at: http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/06/30/the-tbilisi-squeeze.html

Tbilisi and Tehran: Shared Concerns and Conflicts of Interests

The South Caucasus, both as a source of opportunity and possible threat, occupies a major place in Iran's multiregional foreign policy agenda. After largely disregarding the Caucasus for decades and being excluded from the geopolitical chess game in the region, Iran has decided to cultivate new relationships with Georgia, hoping to regain its once-potent role as a regional power.[7] Domestic inputs and constraints – primarily the presence of a significant Azeri minority in Iran – and its interests and confrontations beyond the region, including that with the United States, also influence Iran's policies toward the Caucasus. While Georgia is not central to U.S.-Iranian strategic competition, given its close alignment with the United States,[8] Western sanctions and tumultous internal politics renders Iran uncomfortable with having any neighbour allied with the West, its stated chief adversary. Georgian analyst Mamuka Kurasbediani identified four major characteristics of Iranian policy towards Georgia and its long term interests:

- Iran has no territorial dispute with Georgia and recognizes its territorial integrity;
- Iran is against the United States, NATO, and Israel strengthening their positions in Georgia and in the South Caucasus, and supports Russia's interests;
- Building gas and oil pipelines which bypass Iran is not in the country's economic interest, as it would reduce its importance as a transit corridor for gas and oil from the Caspian; and
- Iran is interested in transit routes through Georgia towards the Black Sea and Europe[9].

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[7] Edmund Herzig, The New Caucasus Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Chatham House papers. Royal Institute of International Affairs. Pinter, 2000.

[8] For detailed account see: Varun Vira and Erin Fitzgerald. The United States and Iran: Competition Involving Turkey and the South Caucasus. Center for Strategic and International Studies publication. August 2011. Available at: http://csis.org/files/publication/110804_iran_chapter_8_turkey_casp.pdf

[9] Mamuka Kurasbediani. "*Possibilities for reactivating bilateral relations between Georgia and Iran".* Policy paper series. GFSIS. 2010 p.33

Given Georgia's pro-Western orientation, Iran perceives Tbilisi as a "Westoxicated" regime, subservient to the interest of the United States in the region. While not dramatizing publicly the U.S.-Georgian strategic partnership, Tehran fears in particular that Georgia could be used as a staging point for the West in case of a military operation against Iran. Subsequently, Iranian leadership constantly voiced its concern with Tbilisi over Georgia's close security partnership with the U.S., claiming that "strengthening NATO's position in the region is not good for the region's population." Recognizing the limitations on its ability to influence Georgia, however, Tehran has increasingly adopted a pragmatic policy toward Tbilisi better suited to its limited political resources.

Due to geographical proximity and important political and geostrategic considerations, the ongoing Russia-Georgia conflict is closely watched by Tehran. As perceptions of Russia's threat occupies top billing in Georgian foreign policy and is seen as a major challenge to its sovereignty, Tehran has sought to sell itself as a protector of the weaker states in the region and promote anti-hegemonic policies. A good example in point is Iranian ambassador Majid Saber's statement made in Tbilisi. Questioning whether the United States was a reliable strategic partner for Georgia during the Russo-Georgian war, he said: "No U.S. help was there when you [Georgia] needed it most…Real friendship is demonstrated in hard times."[10] He thus hinted that only Tehran could be a reliable friend to Georgia. Tehran's diplomatic activity in the Caucasus is by no means limited to Georgia. Iran earlier cancelled visa requirements with Azerbaijan, and has been involved in key energy security projects in Armenia, and intends to create a railway link with both countries. Iranian officials have also offered to help mediate the 24-year-old dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.[11]

While enjoying a tactical relationhip with Moscow to counterbalance U.S. influence in the Caucasus, Tehran has also adopted cautious policy not

[10] Salome Modebadze. Georgia deepens cooperation with Iran, despite objections. The Messenger. May 25, 2010. Available at: http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2113_may_25_2010/2113_salome.html

[11] See: Abdollah Ramezanzadeh. Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis. In Contested Borders in the Caucasus, by Bruno Coppieters (ed.) 1996, VUB University Press

to antagonize Russia's security interests in the region. In addition to co-operating on energy deals, Iran has already proven an effective regional ally for Russia. It also realizes that Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran provides the Kremlin with leverage over Tehran. However, in recent years, Tehran has also hinted that it favours an ultimately independent foreign policy course. The cooling of relations between Tehran and Moscow over Russia's (admittedly mild) support for Iran sanctions has further contributed to this belief. In such circumstances, it seems that Tehran's policy is not aimed at forestalling the region's Westernisation but is intended to keep the South Caucasus from becoming a base for U.S. military power. Overall Iran is pursuing a stability-based foreign policy to promote its economic and strategic objectives and expand its own regional influence.

Given that the trend of obtaining support from regional and great powers represents continuity in Georgian foreign policy, its interest in Iran is purely geopolitical. This stems from different factors – geographical proximity, ethnic overlap, economic ties to Iran, diaspora communities in Iran, free market concerns, energy supply lines, and competition with Russia.[12] From Tbilisi's perspective, Iran is considered a "pragmatic radical" actor within the region with the potential to play a counterweight to Russia's geopolitical ambitions. By cautiously accepting Tehran's recent overtures of friendship, in Georgia's geostrategic calculations, Tbilisi assumes that it makes Iran a potentiall advocate for Georgia's territorial integrity. Politicians in Tbilisi remember well the balanced position of Iran during the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, when it refrained from siding with Russia, although Iran's relations with Georgia was at a low point. While Iran did not condemn Russia's aggression, Tehran officially supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states and stressed the importance of respecting international norms and agreements. Subsequently, based on this policy, Iran also refused to recognize the Russian-backed separatist regions of Georgia, which was crucially important for Tbilisi. By doing so it invested much to the improvement of its image and prestige in Georgia and somewhat recovered regional influence.

[12] Anthony H. Cordesman, Bryan Gold, Robert Shelala, and Michael Gibbs. Us And Iranian Strategic Competition. Center for Strategic and International Studies. February 6, 2013. Available at: http://csis.org/files/publication/130206_turk_casp_chap9.pdf

Yet despite the professed partnership, Tbilisi's dealings with Tehran have not been easy. While stressing – repeatedly – that its relationship with its Persian neighbour is solely about trade and tourism, Georgian officials have to consider a number of delicate international issues while dealing with Tehran, such as Iran's nuclear program and Tbilisi's strategic relations with Western countries. In 2008, Georgian-Iranian relations had been frozen for almost a year, as Georgia agreed to extradite an Iranian citizen at Washington's request on charges of smuggling, money laundering, and conspiracy.[13] Although the U.S. took the Georgian move for granted, failing to grasp the high sensitivity of this issue for Georgia, it caused indignation in Tehran. In order to stabilize the situation, Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze visited Iran in January 2010 and had a meeting with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[14] While it is unknown whether Tbilisi apologized to Tehran for the extradition or what Georgia offered to pacify Tehran, relations since that point have been quite successful and increasingly stable until 2013. Finally, Iranians, buoyed by the idea of making friends in the region, offered a reciprocal visit by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Tbilisi but so far the Georgian officials have held off for fear of antagonizing the United States and its European allies.[15]

Economic Cooperation, Investment, and Bilateral Projects

Many small states have recognized the need for diversification of their economies and have attempted to achieve that objective by encouraging foreign investments. Iran is a potentially important trade partners to Georgia and the economic relationship between the two neighbours have been somewhat promising, particularly in the energy sector.[16] As

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[13] Los Angeles Times. *Iran, Georgia: Washington wary of warming ties between Tehran and U.S. ally*. November 5, 2010 Available at: http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/11/iran-georgia-washington-wary-of-warming-ties-between-tehran-and-us-ally.html

[14] Civil Georgia. *Iranian President Meets Georgian FM*. January 19, 2010. Available at. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21899

[15] Giorgi Lomsadze. *Tbilisi Woos Iran While Washington Watches*. Eurasianet. org. May 28, 2010. Available at: http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61179

[16] Helena Bedwell, "Iran Plans Georgian Hydro Plant, Seeks to Import Electricity," Business Week (21 May 2010).

Georgian and Iranian political contacts improved, both sides sought to enhance economic cooperation as well. Desperately seeking a way out of its energy and economic dependence on Russia, Georgia considers Iran as an alternative supplier of energy, and both sides have renewed their drive for an energy partnership. One of the best examples of energy cooperation was the support Tehran provided to Tbilisi during the winter of 2006, when Russia cut off gas supplies to Georgia. Despite major pressure from Moscow, Iran supplied energy at a low price to Georgia. To accept cooperation with Iran was not easy to Georgia as well as it got warning from Washington that a strategic partnership with Tehran was "unacceptable" for the United States.[17] Georgian political class certainly did not forget this and learned useful lesson of political realism: Iran, which has the world's second largest gas reserves after Russia,[18] is eager to find a new export markets and to expand its economic ties, even at the expense of straining relations with Russia. Georgia also interested to share Iran's rich experience in generating electricity from wind power and has tried to encourage Iranian investment in this field.

Over the past decade, emphasizing long-standing historical and cultural ties between the two nations, Tehran has also signed agreements with Tbilisi for the elimination of double taxation, encouraging investment, air, surface and sea transportation, and customs and trade cooperation. The volume of trade transactions between the two countries has been rising steadily. Seeking to diversify transit routes for its cargo shipment, Iran has some interest in Georgia's transit capacity and considering the country as a viable alternative for shipping freight to Europe. It is expected that a visa-free regime between Georgia and Iran, which came into force on January 26, 2011, would help increase the turnover of commercial relations between two countries even further.[19] As a result of this agreement, Tehran has offered to assist Tbilisi

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[17] *US ambassador warns Georgia against Iran gas deal.* Jerusalem Post. November 26.2006. Available at: http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=42722

[18] See: Table posted by Energy Information Administration. March 3, 2009. Available at: http://www.eia.gov/international/reserves.html

[19] Mzia Kupunia. *Georgia and Iran sign visa free travel agreement.* The Messenger. November 5, 2010. Available at: http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2229_november_5_2010/2229_mzia.html

build a new hydroelectric plant, make good on a plan to reopen a long-abandoned Iranian consulate in western Georgia,[20] and sent thousands of Iranian tourists on chartered planes to Georgia's Black Sea resorts.[21]

While commenting on the visa-free regime between Georgia and Iran, authorities in Moscow have expressed hopes that cooperation between Tbilisi and Tehran were not be directed against a "third party," with the possible implication being Russia itself. The official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Andrey Nesterenko, said Georgia and Iran are parts of a "complicated region": "I hope that these two countries getting close will not be directed against any third country." However, Nesterenko did not exactly specify which country he meant. As Moscow seems largely indifferent towards Georgian-Iranian rapprochement, Washington has made no comment on the Tbilisi-Tehran friendship, calling Georgia's economic relations its own business; although whether or not the Georgian initiative had Washington's full support has not been entirely clear. However, amid heightened global tension stemming from Iran's controversial nuclear program, the announcements coming out of Tbilisi apparently caught Western observers off-guard, as West is concerned over the concept Iran filling the "vacuum" in the South Caucasus.

Yet, despite investment deals on transport and energy projects and being just over 300 kilometers to the south, Iran currently holds only a modest share in Georgia's import basket. Notwithstanding the declared partnership, there is a huge gap between the actual and potential economic relationship between the two countries. Iran is not on the list of Georgia's key trading partners. According to the Georgian state statistics office, trade turnover between Georgia and Iran declined by 41.5 percent in 2009 to $36.3 million. The figure climbed again to $67.2 million in 2010, but in spite of this increase, trade between the two nations still accounts for less than 1 percent of Georgian imports. (See Figure1 bellow).

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[20] Incidentally, Iran had a consular service operating in Batumi since 1883 under the Russian empire and it was functional even during the Soviet era till 1927.

[21] According to statistical data in 2009 Adjara was visited by 250 tourists from Iran. In 2010 there were more than 5000 Iranian tourists. Altogether Georgia has been visited by more than 18 000 Iran citizens; presumably the visa free regime will further increase the number of Iranian tourists.

Figure 1. Trade turnover between Georgia and the Islamic Republic of Iran (2000 - 2011) (Thousand USD)

Year	Export	Import	Trade turnover
2000	6,801.5	5,879.8	12,681.3
2001	4,311.4	6,315.3	10,626.7
2002	3,316.4	8,096.8	11,413.2
2003	3,426.3	6,995.7	10,422.0
2004	4,500.7	15,157.9	19,658.6
2005	4,681.2	25,999.8	30,681.0
2006	2,699.4	40,301.8	43,001.2
2007	6,050.0	51,732.9	57,782.9
2008	10,060.0	52,080.0	62,140.0
2009	6,425.8	29,895.0	36,320.8
2010	12, 140.7	55,079.5	67220.2
2011	16,209.8	64,813.3	81,023.1
2012	19,053.0	99,403.3	118,456.3

Source: website of Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Geostat-National Statistics office of Georgia

Conclusion

The nature of current threats and challenges, and the difficulty of anticipating them in advance, requires Georgia to seek close security cooperation within the international community. Although some observers are unconvinced about the need of a visa-free regime between Georgia and Iran – and are concerned over its possible implications for the West – Georgia's current policy towards Iran is not irrational. Closer relations with Iran, despite the extremely tense relations between Washington and Tehran, is an indication of Tbilisi's disillusionment with what it sees as the West's weakening interest in Georgia, as well as its desire to extend its space for political manoeuvring in the region. As Georgia remains tied to the West, the lack of any decisive U.S. and NATO response to the Russian invasion in 2008 has not been forgotten. It will colour the extent to which Georgia believes it can rely on the U.S. for its security, and offering Iran an opening to expand its influence. However, as Georgia plays shrewd game of realpolitik in the region, with Tehran and Tbilisi's partnership, one cannot expect to see Iran playing a superior role in the region for the foreseeable future.

For the time being, the diplomatic agendas of both Georgia and Iran diverge significantly, and neither state seems willing to adjust those priorities in the interest of deepening bilateral ties.

With unstable relations with Azerbaijan and strategic links with Armenia, the real economic and geopolitical dividends of Iranian diplomacy in the South Caucasus are mostly theoretical at this point as Iran's ability to be influential actor in Georgia is limited by geography (there is no direct border between the two countries) and other important geopolitical factors such as dominant Western and Turkish influence. With the rise of the Georgian Dream coalition, assessments of the utility and strategic end of the bilateral relationship may shift. While it remains ultimately unclear to which direction Prime Minister Ivanishvili will seek for Georgia, Tbilisi's heavy economic and political dependence on the West prohibits Tbilisi from crossing certain red lines in its dealings with Tehran. Policymakers in Tbilisi are likely to continue to see ties with the United States as the best hedge against Russian aggression, making it unlikely that they will support Iran in any major security disputes with Washington. Consequently, Georgia, as a NATO-aspirant country, is unlikely to endanger its strategic relations with the United States or its prospects of Euro-Atlantic integration for the sake of improving relations with Iran.

On the whole, Georgia's Iranian foreign policy seems unequivocally pragmatic and driven by economic and to some extent security concerns. With its small state reflex, Georgia assessed the changing international political environment and determined that political dialogue with Iran would help strengthen mutual confidence between the two countries. While trying to maintain a high level of strategic cooperation with the West and simultaneously profit by trade relations with Iran, Georgia's political leadership is aware of the fact that as a small state, its room for manoeuvring and ability to formulate foreign policy are relatively limited. From the Iranian perspective, the advantage of Georgian-Iranian rapprochement is that the Tehran can assert itself more strongly in the neighbourhood, particularly when Iran does not have unlimited outlets. Within this context, and taking into consideration Russia's significantly weakened role in Georgia and

Washington's less affectionate relations with Tbilisi, there is room for Iranian diplomacy in the region. All this suggests, counter to its international reputation, the possibility that Iran's presence on the regional chessboard could serve as a stabilizing force in the volatile South Caucasus. As bilateral relations between Iran and Georgia enter a deeper stage, it remains to be seen how far Iran and Georgia will benefit from their declared friendship.

TWO CANARIES, TWO COAL MINES: THE MIRROR SYMBOLISM OF GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

Hanna Shelest

In spite of political shifts, the "tandem" of Ukraine and Georgian still has potential. A number of factors make the two countries natural partners: similarities in their historical past – the period of post-communist transformation and so called coloured revolutions; joint regional challenges in economic, social, security spheres; and a strategic geographies. It is important to note that relations between the two states has not changed a lot despite internal political changes in both countries. Instead, the two states continue to havepositive and constructive tendencies.

Currently, there are no irreconcilable problems in Ukrainian-Georgian relations that would block the development of bilateral dialogue. Still, there are a number of difficulties determined by objective and subjective factors that inhibit the full potential of relations. For a long time, Georgia was the only Black Sea state that consistently supported the idea of Ukrainian regional leadership. Moreover, in the mid-2000s, Georgia not only considered Ukraine as a state with pretensions to regional leadership, but as a "locomotive towards European integration."[1]

Retrospective of Bilateral Relations

Most cooperation agreements between Ukraine and Georgia were signed in the early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From 1991 to 2012, 497 joint documents of different levels were signed, including 113 bilateral and 384 multilateral agreements, most of which are adopted in the CIS framework. The upgrade of relations

[1] "Саакашвили: Украина – «локомотив евроинтеграции»", *Newsprom*, 25 March 2005, accessed 1 March 2013, http://www.newsprom.ru/news/111176567528570.shtml?sdate=1229990400

during the "colour revolutions" period was not reflected in specific agreements and projects between the two countries, as most of the agreements between Ukraine and Georgia were signed back in 1993. Bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia.

1991 - 1997 was the period of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the development of a regulatory framework for bilateral ties. At that time, because of military conflict in Georgia, there was a lack of real projects and a decrease in people to people contacts. Still, cordial relations between the two countries were observed due to past intensive contacts.

1998 - 2003/2004 witnessed a stagnation of the bilateral relationship and a low level of contact, despite the launching of the multilateral grouping GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova). Cooperation within international organizations such as Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and "BLACKSEAFOR," etc. were the main frameworks for dialogue between Ukraine and Georgia.

The 2004 - 2008 period is marked by numerous bilateral contacts at the highest level and joint initiatives and statements in the international arena. This was due primarily to the personal relationship between Presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili after the "colour revolutions." Relations were concentrated mainly on the political sphere. The visit of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to Tbilisi during the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 and the non-recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were highly appreciated by Georgia.

From 2004 to 2008, the Ukraine-Georgia tandem in the security sphere was also increasingly effective with major future potential. Close cooperation between the two partners in a number of areas made the states real strategic partners. Collaboration included the initiation of projects in the framework of GUAM and the "Democratic Choice Commonwealth" (CDC), the development of energy transit project through the territory of Georgia and Ukraine to the EU, and a shared direction towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

However, it is noteworthy that the surge of organizations' activities (GUAM and the CDC) was mostly due to post-revolutionary enthusiasm and did not involve any concrete projects. The CDC virtually ceased to exist by the end of 2006; GUAM was more successful gradually as it returned to the principles of economic cooperation. However, despite the opportunity to coordinate as another Visegrad Four, the member states did not use GUAM's potential in full. One of the reasons was the ill-defined foreign policy courses of member states in different stages of the organization's development, swings in the organization's priorities, low levels of economic development, unsettled conflicts, and competition of different integration projects in the region.

This period was also marked by joint efforts in the realm of Euro-Atlantic integration. Not only were actions in this sphere concerted, but there was an international expectation that the Ukraine-Georgia tandem should concurrently coordinate the procedures for the entry into the organization. However, the failure of talks during the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008, and Ukraine's foreign policy shift towards non-bloc status in 2010 halted this cooperation. Yet, since that point, Georgia has brought relations with NATO to a new level, having intensified both domestic and international work to become a full member of the Alliance.

2009-2013 was a period of some estrangement between the countries. This was related to both the results of the Russian-Georgian conflict and a cooling in personal relations of the two presidents – as well as the election of a new President of Ukraine. At the same time, relations have become more pragmatic since 2010. Frequent «study» visits in 2011-2012 related to increased interest in the successes of Georgian reforms are rather formal and perfunctory and do not contribute to an increase in the level of real cooperation. Overall, there was noticeably higher activity on the Georgian side, but also a lack of long-term decision-making. Many of the statements on the necessity to boost cooperation were merely repeated statements of previous

years and had not moved to stages of actual implementation (for example in the energy sphere).

During 2011-2012, there were several official visits at the foreign minister and deputy premier levels, a significant number of contacts at the ministers' level, their deputies, directors of departments, businessmen, and local authorities. Still, not a single official visit on the head of government level was held. Despite an apparent active dialogue in the political sphere, the last official visit at the presidential level was back in 2007. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili visited Ukraine several times on unofficial visits that did not result in major agreements or signing of documents necessary to strengthen cooperation.

Current active cooperation is observed in the customs and transport spheres and the work of law enforcement agencies. Most recent agreements between the two countries relate directly or indirectly to cooperation in these spheres. In 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding between Ukraine's Ministry of Regional Development, Construction, Housing and Utilities and the Georgian Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure was signed. It targets cooperation in the field of regional development. However, today, real cooperation between the regions is limited to visits of delegations from regional partnerships.

Similar positions of Ukraine and Georgia on regional affairs and deepening of strategic partnership determines their close cooperation in international organizations: the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, BSEC, GUAM, and "BLACKSEAFOR".

Cooperation in defence and security was partially reduced after the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 and accusations from Moscow that Kyiv operated an illegal arms trade with Georgia. Those allegations have not been formally confirmed, but the tension in relations between the Russian Federation and Georgia does not allow Ukraine to intensify bilateral cooperation in the military sphere. Since 2001, Ukraine and Georgia have been the members of the naval task group "BLACKSEAFOR," in which cooperation in the framework is important, but mostly of technical value.

Economic Cooperation

Despite the fact that Georgia is not a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the framework by which most of their economic agreements have been signed, the World Trade Organization membership of both countries, as well as agreements within GUAM, including free trade zone creation, reduces the likelihood of conflict over bilateral trade. Many experts believe that cooperation between the two countries is not substantive and generally lacks real economic projects – and thus cannot be complete and effective. However, it is necessary to analyse the dynamics, which has rendered a steady increase in the turnover of goods and generally active growth in comparison to many other post-Soviet countries.

Dynamics of trade turnover between Ukraine and Georgia, 2006-2012, in millions of U.S. dollars[2]

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
TOTAL	384	628	847.5	496	663.5	802	717.9
export	312.4	527.7	656	398.2	527.5	657.9	540.7
import	72.3	100.3	191.6	97.8	136.1	144.3	177.2

In May 2012, both Ukrainian and Georgian officials predicted that trade turnover between two states in 2012 would reach 1 billion USD.[3] However, this has not happened and even a certain decrease in trade can be observed. Some perceived this as a result of the parliamentary elections in Georgia. Typically, trade increases at the end of each year, which in 2012 was preoccupied by the parliamentary campaign and its aftermath. This version could be a contributing factor, but it is definitely not the only or primary one, as analysis of the trade turnover of Ukraine in 2012 demonstrates a decrease with all Black Sea states.

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[2] "Geographic structure of foreign trade", State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, accessed 15 March 2013, http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/

[3] "Україна зацікавлена у реалізації інфраструктурних проектів спільно з Грузією, - В.Хорошковський", Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 15 June 2012, accessed 20 March 2013, http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art_id=245308515&cat_id=244276429

Still, Ukraine is the third among Georgia's main external economic partners after Turkey and Azerbaijan. After a six year break, the work of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation was renewed in 2012, which is a positive step towards restoring positive bilateral economic trade. The Commission can focus a dialogue of the two countries on specific cooperation projects.

The main product categories exported from Ukraine to Georgia are agricultural and pharmaceutical products, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, machinery, mineral and chemical fertilizers, and the like. In terms of services, the transport sphere is dominant. Georgian exports is presented in Ukraine by agricultural products (fruits, mineral water, wine, nuts, etc.) and ferroalloys.[4] At present, a storage terminal for Georgian agricultural products for export to Eastern European markets is being built in Ukraine. However, the profitability of this project will depend on the mode of transportation, considering Ukrferry's trans-Black Sea shipping monopoly.

At the same time, it is believed that Ukrainian business has not had much success in Georgia due to significant competition with Russian equity, which, despite the difficult political relations between the two countries, actively penetrates into the Georgian economy. Up to the conflict of 2008, it was the Russian Federation that had been among the most active in business contacts with Tbilisi. Large investments in metallurgy, transport, banking and energy spheres were often in direct competition with Ukrainian companies in open tenders.

As of 2012, more than 50 companies with Ukrainian capital have been established in Georgia. Today, only the Privat group is actively involved in Georgian banking, tourism, and the metallurgical sectors. At the same time, Georgian companies are in no hurry to invest in Ukrainian economy. Not least, because of differences between the two countries in procedures and requirements for doing business, complicated relations between business and the Ukrainian govern-

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[4] "Стан торговельно-економічних відносин та інвестиційної діяльності між Україною та Грузією", Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia, accessed 10 March 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.ua/georgia/ua/12150.htm

ment, as well as the slow reaction of Ukrainian business to investment opportunities in Georgia.

Special attention should be paid to the low level of mutual investments. A of July 2012, the Ukrainian investment in Georgia amounted to only $33 million USD, or only 0.5 percent of total Ukrainian investments in other countries. The State Statistics Service of Ukraine has no official records on the volume of Georgian investments in Ukraine, as they are less than 1 percent of total investments and, thus, Georgia is not included in the list of 15 major investors.

The transport sector is one of the key areas not only for the growth of trade between Ukraine and Georgia, but for shipping from the Caucasus and Asia to Europe. The Poti-Illichivsk ferry connection is the main unit of the E.U. project "TRACECA." This route is efficient, because it does not cross the territories of the unrecognized republics, unlike the direct rail or road transport passing through the territories of Russia and Abkhazia. Georgia, for example, is interested in joining the "Viking" project. This is a combined transport train connecting ports of Illichivsk/Odessa (Ukraine) and Klaipeda (Lithuania). Necessary procedures for Georgia and Moldova's accession to the Agreement on the Development of Freight are almost accomplished. This project will be an addition to the already existed agreement on international multimodal transportation in the GUAM framework, signed in 2007.

In 2013, a Poti-Odessa container line is scheduled to begin operations, which should stimulate trade turnover by shortening the time of cargo deliveries, decrease service costs, and lessen dependence on specific weather conditions compared to current capacities.

Ukraine was also offered to take part in the construction of the new port city Lazika on the Georgian coast. However, the project is unlikely to be carried out under the new government in Georgia that has opposed its implementation. In addition, Georgia is interested in the joint construction of new hydro-power-generating facilities on the Georgian rivers, which would allow the exporting of electricity to oth-

er countries. There is also interest in restoring the telecommunication route linking Poti and Varna (Bulgaria) with an offset to Odessa.

Due to its favourable geopolitical position and its foreign policy orientation, Georgia is also actively involved in the implementation of Caspian energy projects. In May 2012 it was announced that Ukraine and Georgia would cooperate in the supply of Azerbaijani liquefied gas to Ukraine through Georgian territory.[5] However, here the parties may encounter resistance from Turkey and competition from Romania. Ukraine has actually missed an opportunity after the start of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector project. And recently, a dialogue on intellectual property protection in the sphere of legal protection of geographical names of products has been enhanced, which is an important element towards harmonizing internal standards of both states with European requirements.

Social-Cultural Cooperation

Today, 20 Ukrainian NGOs conduct activities in Georgia. They are actively involved in the preservation of Ukrainian culture and traditions among ethnic Ukrainians. At the same time, their work is not supported by the Ukraine state, except for limited assistance from the Ukrainian Embassy in Tbilisi. At present, there are no clear data on the number of Ukrainians living in Georgia. According to the 1989 census, more than 52 thousand Ukrainians resided in Georgia (1 percent of the population). The 2002 census records 7,000.[6] According to data from Ukrainian associations, 20,000 ethnic Ukrainians are currently living in Georgia. Experts note that such data divergences is due to the two factors: the erroneous recording of ethnic Ukrainians as "Russian" and a large number of mixed marriages, where children are automatically recorded as Georgians.

At the same time, the Georgian minority is very active in Ukraine, having about 30 national-cultural communities and organizations.

[5] "Сергій Тігіпко: «Нові проекти з Грузією посилять енергетичну незалежність України»", Official website of Sergiy Tigipko, 16 May 2012, accessed 1 February 2013, http://tigipko.com/news/material/id/3303

[6] "Ukrainians in Georgia", Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia, accessed 22 March 2013, http://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-ge/ukrainians-in-georgia

According to the 2001 Census 34,200 Georgians lived in Ukraine, comprising 0.1 percent of the Ukrainian population and 145 percent more than in 1989.[7] A new census is expected in 2013, but according to unofficial information, there is now around 70,000 Georgians – both Ukrainian citizens and not – who live permanently in Ukraine.

In fact, there is little genuine cooperation in the humanitarian sphere (low level of the academic exchange, almost no possibilities for student exchanges, including European mobility programs). In both countries, Sunday schools are open, but they focus only on diaspora members and not for popularizing their language and customs for others. Existing cooperation agreements between universities remain on paper only, with no real interaction or joint projects due to a lack of funding, among other reasons. The only area of actual cooperation is training of specialists in aviation.

Active development of the Georgian economy needs the involvement of specialists. The recent active development of Georgia's marine complex, including the modernization of the Poti port, has demonstrated the need for appropriate staffing as the necessary professional education is mostly absent in Georgia. Specialists in marine engineering, as well as metallurgy and oil industries, are prepared at the Georgian Technical University in Tbilisi, which is not enough for the expanding labour market. However, Ukraine has appropriate universities specialized in these spheres, for example in Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk.

Despite the absence of major differences between the two states, there are still some obstacles for the successful and efficient increase of cooperation. First of all, one obstacle is the obsolete regulatory framework that does not reflect the current state of bilateral relations. A number of cooperation opportunities remain at the level of intent (military-technical cooperation), or are based on the agreements signed in the mid-1990s (cooperation in the field of youth policy) – none of which meet current needs or trends in those areas.

[7] Ukrainian Census 2001, accessed 20 March 2013, http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality/

Differences in foreign policy priorities of the two countries should be noted separately. Georgia has clearly declared its course to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. In addition, one of the consequences of the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict was the walkout of Georgia from the CIS. At the regional level, Tbilisi increasingly focuses its activities within the Georgia-Azerbaijan-Turkey triangle. Ukraine, in turn, has abandoned its course towards Euro-Atlantic integration and has advanced its involvement in Eurasian projects under the auspices of Moscow, which reduces cooperation opportunities, despite a proclaimed parallel course towards European integration. In addition, there is a competition for attention on the side of the third countries (Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Romania), which prevents focusing on the Ukraine-Georgia tandem, which fell from their height in 2005-2007.

Prospects for the Development of Bilateral Relations

Ukrainian-Georgian relations have good prospects not only in the context of bilateral cooperation, but also in terms of ensuring the stability and development of the Black Sea region. Currently, it is possible to name four possible scenarios for the development of bilateral relations:

1) Comprehensive intensification of political and economic cooperation. This option is the most advantageous for both countries. Its implementation is possible through a clear course towards the European integration and renewed attention to Black Sea projects. However, the implementation of a number of promising economic projects is impossible without active political dialogue.

2) Enhancing economic cooperation despite the stagnation of political dialogue. Currently, this is the most likely option due to the concentration of the countries on domestic issues, as well as different visions of both foreign policy priorities. A certain political isolation of Ukraine and Georgia and counteraction of Russia may contribute to the development of relations under this scenario. At the same time, economic cooperation will be intensified, including through the resumption of the bilateral commission on economic cooperation.

3) The current status quo, characterized by mutual positive attitude without any real content of cooperation. Multiple visits are more informational than practical. This scenario contains no threat to bilateral relations, but it does not provide the opportunity to realize the existing potential.

4) Freezing of the dialogue between the two countries, except for people to people contacts, because of Georgia's active strategy of the European integration and Ukraine's reorientation on Eurasian cooperation. This is the least preferred scenario, although, it is quite probable, if the current trends in the relations between Ukraine and the E.U, remain unchanged and Eurasian integration processes continue.

The Ukraine-Georgia tandem is promising, since it does not claim domination over other states in the region. This is a tandem of equal players, where the goal of each state is stable and democratic development of both their own states and the entire region. Despite a more recent concentration on internal affairs, cooperation between two states has high potential both on bilateral and multilateral levels. Cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia implies the prospects of multilateral projects: in the framework of GUAM and BSEC; cooperation in the Ukraine-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral projects (in the transport and energy sectors); Ukraine-Moldova-Lithuania-Georgia (more efficient transportation between the Baltic and the Black Seas); Ukraine-Georgia-Moldova (within the European integration), and the like. Cooperation within European programs, especially the Eastern Partnership, contains a great potential, as well.

In order to enhance bilateral cooperation, certain steps should be taken by both governments. In the political sphere it could be worth considering the establishment of bilateral intergovernmental commissions on energy security and on European integration, as well as an inter-agency commission on cooperation in humanitarian and tourism activities. Moreover, both countries can strengthen cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. It could be useful to consider providing separate funding for the implementation of Ukrainian-Georgian projects, following the example of the trilateral

Romania-Ukraine-Moldova cooperation program. Within Platform 1, the dialogue on the exchange of experience in the field of administrative and police reform, access to public information, electoral laws and others should be strengthened. Within Platform 2, it should advance the sharing of experience in the preparation and signing of the Association Agreement, as well as the adaptation of E.U. norms and regulations at the local level. Within Platform 3 – strengthening of the framework agreements on energy security. Within the Platform 4, youth policy, student mobility, cooperation of non-governmental organizations deserves special attention.

In the economic sphere, governments should adopt a program of economic cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia for 2013-2018. In addition, they should stimulate relations to create conditions for the renewal of passenger shipping between Ukrainian and Georgian ports and to create conditions for reducing the cost and expanding the geography of flights between Ukraine and Georgia. Over the last few years the cost of a Kiev-Tbilisi ticket has virtually doubled. With an increase in the mutual interest of Ukrainians and Georgians, the high cost reduces opportunities, especially for the exchange of youth, academics, and tourists.

Trade offices should be established in Georgia and Ukraine in order to promote the products of the two countries and spread information on the proposals of economic entities of the two countries, . In addition, the intensification of the GUAM Business Council the work will facilitate trade contacts between the states. The two countries should also consider the organization of bilateral and multilateral meetings on safety of navigation and maritime security according to the European norms and standards, including integrated water resources management principles.

In the security and defence sphere it can be interesting to consider the possibility of establishing a joint Ukrainian-Georgian peacekeeping battalion following the example of the Ukrainian-Polish battalion to participate in peace operations under the auspices of the UN and other international organizations.

AN ALLIANCE BUILT ON UNDERSTANDING: THE GEOPOLITICS OF GEORGIAN-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS

Zaur Shiriyev

Azerbaijan and Georgia have a centuries-old relationship, and have shared similar experiences throughout the 20th century. Both countries gained independence in May 1918, and after Azerbaijan lost its independence in 1920, Georgia survived only one more year. Joint efforts and mutual support during the 1918-1920 period included a joint lobby for international recognition. In 1919, the France-Caucasus Committee was established in order to develop economic relations between France and the republics of Transcaucasia. In the same year, the Azerbaijani and Georgian governments signed an agreement with U.S. Congressman William Chandler to promote their opinions in the West and to gain support from the United States. Furthermore, both countries cooperated on joint efforts for recognition at the Paris Peace Conference, and signed a defensive military pact in 1919. During the Soviet era, they enlarged cooperation across many fields, and then following the dissolution of the Soviet Union they started to cooperate as independent countries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries faced a period of national soul-searching, trying to find the right formula for their foreign policy. Following these tough years, pragmatism became a trademark of the strategic partnership, and this has developed on an equal basis; Georgia has enabled Azerbaijan to deliver its energy resources to the European market. Georgia's role as a key transit country has made it an important bridge in the East-West axis. Georgia's support for this partnership has not been limited to serving as an energy transit route. At the international level, Georgia has a good reputation in European capitals and Washington, enabling Tbilisi to bring regional problems to the agenda of Western decision makers. In this way, it has provided a great service not only to Azerbaijan, but to all regional countries. In 2008, the Russia-Georgia war demonstrated

both Georgia's importance to regional security, and also the negative impact of the continued fragility of the regional security situation.

Both countries identify the relationship as the "Caucasian Tandem", a "time-tested friendship" and, importantly, each country's National Security strategy paper identifies the other as a "strategic partner." In particular, the large-scale energy projects across the region created opportunities for an economic partnership, which consolidated the political relationship.

This chapter seeks to identify the evolution of political cooperation over the last two decades in the context of the energy partnership, security perceptions, and military cooperation.

Political Cooperation: From Neighbours to Strategic Partnership

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Baku and Tbilisi established diplomatic relations on 18 November 1992.[1] As newly independent states, they had to rely on foreign policy as a means of establishing themselves within the international system. Both countries saw the development of foreign and security policies based on alliances with more powerful regional and extra-regional states as a key strategy. However, both initially struggled to develop viable foreign and security policies towards their immediate neighbours, due to a combination of inherited political cultures lacking in democratic tradition, politicians inexperienced in making foreign policy decisions, scarce financial resources, and harsh social conditions. The evolution of the relationship can be divided into several periods.

"Just Neighbours" during period of political weakness

Both countries signed their first agreement on "Friendship and Good Neighbouring Relations" on 12 July 1991, stating mutual commitment to building a peaceful region and establishing good neighbourly relations. Following this agreement, Azerbaijan officially recognized Georgia's independence on 30 October 1991.

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[1] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Republic, "Azerbaijan-Georgia relations: Brief Information on Diplomatic Relations." Last modified August 20, 2013. http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/Azerbaijan - Georgia relations.pdf (accessed September 9, 2013).

In both Georgia and Azerbaijan, nationalistic leaders Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Abulfaz Elchibey (who came to power in Azerbaijan after Gamsakhurdia was removed from the Georgian presidency) both championed independence. During the early period of independence, both countries were involved in territorial conflicts; Azerbaijan with Armenia, Georgia with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The difference was that Gamshakhurdia's ethno-nationalistic doctrine (*Georgia for Georgians*) triggered civil war in Georgia, which gave rise to concerns among the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia, as well as within Azerbaijan. For Baku, this period saw a cooling of bilateral relations.

After a short period of rule as a democratically elected president, Gamsakhurdia was militarily removed in the name of democracy by his former supporters.[2] As a consequence, there was anger towards Gamsakhurdia in Azerbaijan, resulting in a denial of his appeal for asylum.[3] Gamsakhurdia's policies frustrated Azerbaijani authorities; occasional ethnic skirmishes occurred between Georgian and Azerbaijani residents during the initial stage of the Georgian national movement.[4] In the regional centres of Kvemo Kartli, members of the Azerbaijani population were forced to sell their houses and emigrate because of nationalistic sentiments that reigned in the country.[5] These concerns dissipated in due course, as Azerbaijan's strengthening strategic partnership with Georgia bolstered feelings of solidarity among the populations. The Georgian-Azeri population believed that the Azerbaijani influence on the Georgian economy and the strate-

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2 Ghia Nodia, "Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia", in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus,* edited by Bruno Coppieters,(Brussels:VUB University Press,1996), http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0201.htm (accessed September 9, 2013).

3 "The Georgian President Takes Refugee in Azerbaijan" *Christian Science Monitor*, January 7, 1992. http://www.csmonitor.com/1992/0107/07042.html (accessed September 10, 2013).

4 Ghia Nodia, *Ethnic-confessional groups and problems of civic integration in Georgia: Azeri, Javakheti Armenian and Muslim Meskhetian communities*, (Tbilisi: Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 2002), 8.

5 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Azerbaijan and Greek Populations in Georgia." Last modified January-September 2003. Accessed September 10, 2013. http://www.una.ge/pdfs/publications/rcg/ Azerbaijani %20and%20 Greek%20 Populations %20in%20Georgia.pdf.

gic partnership would force the Georgian authorities to address their problems.

After this development, the situation in Georgia began to stabilize, especially after Eduard Shevardnadze came to power. On 3 February 1993, both countries signed an agreement on "Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security." However, the agreement was not implemented for some time due to internal chaos in Azerbaijan.

Overall, two things played an important role in the relationship, and actually became barriers to visionary strategies.

First, with obvious reason; in both countries national identity affected state strategies. In Georgia, President Gamsakhurdia, during his short presidency, did not give particular support either to the West or to Russia. Gamsakhurdia's religious-affiliated domestic policy, which created concern among non-Orthodox Christian citizens, was badly perceived in Muslim Azerbaijan. In the same vein, Elchibey's rule saw Azerbaijan forge a strong alliance with Turkey, ignoring regional powers like Russia and Iran, and a war with neighbouring Armenia. Under Elchibey, Georgia was treated merely as a good neighbour; relations were kept cordial in case of further developments with Armenia, but was not seen to be as valuable an ally as its fellow Turkic states, among which there was support for his pan-Turkic idealism.

Second, both countries faced internal chaos, economic decline, and war (Azerbaijan's war with Armenia and Georgia's with Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists) where neither country had the necessary stability to underpin the development of bilateral ties.

Pragmatism and Period of Changing Perceptions

Only after Presidents Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze came to power did pragmatism become a trademark policy for Baku and Tbilisi.[6] Both leaders had worked together in high-level positions in

[6] Elin Suleymanov, "The South Caucasus: Where the U.S. and Turkey Succeeded Together." *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. Spring (2005): 5. http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2005-01-TRUSrelations/TPQ2005-1-suleymanov.pdf (accessed September 9, 2013).

the Soviet bureaucracy, and their personal friendship had a positive impact on bilateral relations. The two leaders' initial focus was on establishing cordial relations between the two states and building a common foreign policy front.

Notably, both leaders abandoned the anti-Russia foreign policy pursued by their predecessors and in 1993 joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a Moscow-led, multilateral successor organization to the Soviet Union. This was part of a broader strategy to secure geopolitical prizes, such as exporting Caspian oil and gas reserves to world markets and expanding room for political manoeuvring, which was essential until the end of 1990s, at which point Western support was consolidated. However, the actual price paid to Moscow was different. Unlike Georgia, Azerbaijan did not allow Russian military bases on its territory or the presence of Russian peacekeepers in conflict zones. Only the Gabala radar station remained, under a "non-status" classification. The status was settled when Azerbaijan and Russia signed an agreement "On the status, principles and conditions of use of the Gabala Radar Station" in Moscow on 25 January 2002, establishing the station as an information-analysis center, owned by Azerbaijan and leased to Russia for a ten year period. This was never considered a military base.

In trying to build trust and avoid provoking Moscow, Azerbaijan sacrificed national economic interests by choosing the Russian route for early oil exports. Moscow believed it had a direct stake over Caspian resources and opposed U.S. involvement or the selection of Georgian territories a transit corridor for exports – as it did not want Georgia to gain economic independence. To this end, Moscow had political cards to play against Tbilisi, and also to pressure Baku.

The Russian government was divided on how to act regarding the possible selection of the Georgian route. The Russian foreign ministry, the defence ministry, and intelligence services perceived Western involvement as a challenge to Russia's dominance in the South Caucasus. Thus, on 21 July 1994, the backers of this policy convinced Russian President Boris Yeltsin to sign a secret directive "On

securing the interests of the Russian Federation in the Caspian Sea," which envisaged sanctions against Azerbaijan if it proceeded with the enactment of the "Contract of Century" signed between Azerbaijan and Western oil companies.[7] Under these tough conditions, Baku's manoeuvring space was constrained by Russian insistence that the northern route via Novorossiysk had to be the sole export route for Caspian oil.[8] In making the Baku-Novorossiysk the main route for "early oil", and giving a Russian company, Lukoil, a share in the oil consortium, Azerbaijan successfully ensured that the Georgian route would become the main route in the future.

Perceptions of Russia have changed in both Georgia and Azerbaijan, characterised by a shift away from Moscow's orbit towards greater alignment with the West. For Georgia, Russia's military defeat in the first Chechen war (1994-1996) moderated the country's fatalistic attitude towards its great northern neighbour.[9] The passivity of Georgia's foreign policy towards Russia has receded, as is demonstrated by its close cooperation with Azerbaijan and aspirations to membership within various Western economic and security organizations. In the second half of the 1990s, Azerbaijan-Georgian political dialogue was guided by these developments.

First, both sides designed and put forward the Caucasus integration project, which focused on peaceful conflict resolution and regional cooperation, though ultimately it failed to gain traction in the region. In particular, the 8 March 1996 Declaration on Peace, Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus Region was a manifesto of the two countries' foreign policy strategy towards conflict resolution, European integration, and joint efforts to build a peaceful Caucasus. The Azerbaijani President declared that, "the heads of the governments of

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[7] Ilham Aliyev, *Caspian Oil of Azerbaijan*, (Moscow: Izvestiya, 2003) http://ebooks.preslib.az/pdfbooks/rubooks/ilxm.pdf (accessed September 9, 2013), 74-75.

[8] Nazrin Mehdiyeva, *Power Games in the Caucasus: Azerbaijan's Foreign and Energy Policy Towards the West, Russia and the Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 140-142.

[9] Stephen Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy", in *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies*, edited by Rick Fawn, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 99.

Georgia and Azerbaijan are open to the road to peace, security and cooperation in the Caucasus."[10] This was followed by a bilateral agreement on 18 February 1997 – the "Declaration on deepening strategic cooperation between Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan".

Second, the more intense dialogue and increased mutual trust between the Azerbaijani and Georgian governments resulted in an agreement on the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline on March 8, 1996. The pipeline started operating in 1999. The pipeline marked the beginning of a reorientation of Azerbaijani energy exports away from Russia, and created the first alternative route bypassing Russian territory for Caspian energy exports.

Third, as continuation of a regional approach to integration to Euro-Atlantic area, the creation of GUAM in 1997 was the manifestation of the 8 March 1996 declaration regarding development in the broader region, and GUAM became the closest thing in the post-Soviet area to a extra-Russian strategic relationship, even though its members were arguably not as adept at formal strategy building.[11] Towards the strengthening of both political dialogue and bilateral relations, a number of Joint Communiqués were adopted by both sides, such as the one on 22 March 2000. Then in the new political environment following 11 September 2001 terror attacks, the joint communiqué of 29 September 2001 repeated previous commitments, but added the two countries' joint and coordinated policy regarding membership of the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition.

The other milestone was in 1999, when both countries declined to join Moscow's collective security treaty under the CIS, which later became the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Baku's official explanation was that Azerbaijan could not participate in a "security

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[10] Heydar Aliyev Heritage Research Center, "Statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev at the joint press conference held with the President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze following the completion of negotiations and signing of documents between the delegations of Azerbaijan and Georgia " Last modified March 8, 1996. Accessed September 6, 2013. http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/9359991.html

[11] "Remarks by Georgian Ambassador Tedo Japaridze at the GUUAM Workshop." *Azerbaijan International*. no. 8.4 (2000): 61-62.

system" in which one country (Russia) provides military support to another (Armenia) at war with a third (Azerbaijan).[12] Similar grounds were stated by Georgia; from Tbilisi's standpoint, one country (Russia) was providing military and financial support to separatists (in South Ossetia and Abkhazia), which precluded Georgia's membership. Following the 2008 August War, Georgia left the CIS completely.

According to critics, while the personal relationship between Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze helped with the coordination and realization of several intra-regional projects, the bilateral relationship was not institutionalized. This is partly true; the mantra of "official friendship" tended to overshadow the areas that lack of cooperation, but nonetheless a culture of mutual trust was established.

A Period of Stability that Enabled Visionary Thinking

The Rose Revolution in Georgia, which brought Mikhail Saakashvili to power, coincided with the election of Ilham Aliyev as Azerbaijan's president. This raised questions in both societies about the continuation of the previously agreed bilateral commitments. Particularly among Azerbaijan's ruling elite, there were concerns that Saakashvili's early messages about the inevitable spread of the "colour revolutions" across the post-Soviet space. But despite these worries, verbal communication was established within short period, and both leaders continued working on a similar agenda. Though there were differences in political vocabulary, they collaborated on a number of foreign policy issues. In this sense, the short-lived concerns were the result of perceptions of the type of language being used. This initial period soon passed, without serious problems, and on 4 March 2004, during consultations in Baku, the two leaders declared a joint communiqué emphasizing the importance of the strategic partnership on regional security and European integration, which also reaffirmed the legal basis of agreements as proof of the strategic partnership.

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[12] "Azerbaijan to stay out of CIS Security Pact." *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, February 8, 1999. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews% 5Btt_news%5 D=15454&tx_tt news%5Bbac kPid%5D=213 (accessed September 5, 2013).

Beyond the Saakashvili-Aliyev dialogue, prospects for the development of energy and transport projects began to materialize. This period tested the strength of the relationship, as Azerbaijan became staunch friend of Georgia, despite Moscow's displeasure. From Azerbaijan's point of view, both countries gained an ideological and political victory over Russia, especially regarding the realization of energy projects. Secondly, it was a way for Azerbaijan to counter Russia's support for Armenia.[13] Russia's policy towards both countries ultimately strengthened Azerbaijan and Georgia's strategic dialogue, and mutual dependence made the alliance more cohesive.

The first real crisis with the Georgian government was in 2004, when the Rose Revolution government came to power. More recently, there was another brief period of concern following Georgia's October 2012 election. Like many in Europe, Azerbaijan initially perceived a shift in Georgia's foreign policy strategy, moving away from European integration and toward Russia. Azerbaijan's main concern was that the new leadership questioned strategic issues – such as the realization of the BTK railway (specifically in relation to concerns over the impact on port duties in Poti and Batumi), as well as proposing re-opening the Abkhaz railway. While this possibility had also been floated by Saakashvili at one point, the general context of a possible foreign policy shift increased the perceived threat. From the Azerbaijani perspective, opening the Abkhaz railway constitutes a clear threat to national interests and Baku's Karabakh policy, which prioritizes Yerevan's "geopolitical isolation" as the most effective sanction. Both of these shifts are considered by Baku to serve Russian interests. The BTK seeks to dissolve the Russian railway monopoly, and any opposition to the plan helps Russia to cling onto its domination in this sphere. The railway line via Abkhazia would open a new route to Armenia. Statements by Georgia's leadership have raised concerns in Baku about Tbilisi's zigzagging policy on regional matters. Controversies between Baku and Tbilisi are mainly the result of:

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[13] "President Ilham Aliyev discusses regional challenges with senior U.S. diplomat", *Azeri Report*, July 24, 2012. http://azerireport.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=2938 (accessed September 5, 2013).

- Internal reasons – mainly misunderstanding and mistreatment. In Georgia, as in 2004, the change in government meant a cabinet overhaul, with significant changes to staffing. This of course, gives rise to changes in the understanding of regional dynamics. In addition, a new leader is always likely to want to impose his or her own "mark" on foreign policy, acting without consulting officials with more experience in government.

- The public image of Bidzhina Ivanishvili has created unease; before and after the election some quarters of the Western media declared Ivanishvili to be pro-Russian, or "non pro-American". This influenced Azerbaijan's perceptions of new government.

- Uncertainty around the true nature and limits of Georgia's rapprochement with Russia; it is Azerbaijan's interests to know these limits. Official Baku would prefer a cordial normalization of Georgian-Russian relations, but not at the expense of Georgia's alignment with Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Georgian government has emphasized several times that "territorial integrity is the red line" in its relations with Moscow.[14] But while this approach has been fairly consistently presented, official statements are nonetheless not as comprehensive as they should be regarding the government's approach to relations with Russia in the long term, and the priorities have not been made sufficiently detailed for the public.

Nonetheless, the current status of the political dialogue between Baku and the Ivanishvili government is developing in a positive direction. The advantage of an early crisis is that shaking up both sides – along with Turkey, which completes this geopolitical axis – has signalled a shift toward closer cooperation. In this respect, a new trilateral format is emerging, as demonstrated by the June 2012 meeting of the three foreign ministers, which saw the signing of the Trabzon Declaration. Further, a 28 March 2013 meeting in Batumi brought into focus a platform for formalized cooperation between the regional strategic partners, whereby they will pool their material and principled assets in order to achieve clear national interests in multilateral

[14] Maia Panjakidze. Georgia's 8th Defence and Security Conference . Ministry of Defense of Georgia. Batumi. 28 June 2013. Speech.

forums of negotiation. The second trilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia approved the plan that was adopted at the Trabzon meeting, namely the Trilateral Sectoral Cooperation Action Plan for 2013-2015, which determines concrete actions and cooperation plans in all major fields of mutual interest.

Energy and Transport Projects as a Means of Improving the Strategic Partnership

The Azerbaijan-Georgian relationship was cemented by the oil, gas and transport lines, and had tremendous influence on their current status as strategic partners. Although the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline provided the initial step towards the transport of Caspian resources to West, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) introduced significant changes in the South Caucasus. First and foremost, it cemented a regional alignment with the Euro-Atlantic space and consolidated the Baku-Tbilisi-Ankara axis.

The selection and realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline revealed not only the critical importance of U.S. support for the eventual success of the Georgian line but also the indispensable role that Turkey played in acting as a communication and lobbying channel for the project. The other defining aspect was the Western position on Russia's harsh reaction, which contrasted sharply with its more relaxed approach to the "early oil" situation. Undoubtedly, the transformation of the BTC project from pipe dream to pipeline was a challenge to Moscow's purported interests. The BTC pipeline strengthened both Baku and Tbilisi's independence as well as their independent economic foreign and economic policy. There were a number of reasons that Russia wanted to halt the "Georgian route" and several reasons that Moscow was unable to shut down the plan that go beyond the significant role played by the West.

First of all, there were changing perceptions about Russia. Increasingly, the West believed that Moscow was a potential threat to its neighbours; Strobe Talbott, then-U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, indicated

that Western perceptions of Russia were increasingly unfavourable.[15] This invidious stereotyping was mirrored in a tendency among some commentators and political figures in the West to see only the darkest side of the picture, and therefore to propose a return to old policies of containing or quarantining Russia. Talbott stressed that "Russia is how its leaders handle relations with their immediate neighbours – by and large, Russia has kept irredentist impulses in check"; this assessment contained both a recommendation and a warning to Russia.

The second reason was the domestic economic situation in Russia. In August 1998, triggered by the devaluation of the national currency, economic turmoil and political upheaval caused chaos in Russia, leaving Moscow to focus more on domestic problems. Due to the crisis, the price of Russia's most important export product, oil, fell from 26 USD a barrel in 1996 to less than 15 USD a barrel. Thus"with banks closed, its credit worthless, and its main export product earning only 60 percent of what it had two years earlier, Russia saw many of its businesses close or come to the verge of closing, and the prospects for the Russian economy were bleak."[16]

The third factor was Russian internal political instability, namely the Chechen movement in the North Caucasus, which Russian security forces perceived as an internal problem. Russia called upon Western institutions to refrain from getting involved. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a U.S.-Russia partnership emerged in Afghanistan and Moscow adopted the changing perceptions and definitions of freedom fighters/terrorists for its own purposes: namely, to justify the use of force in Chechnya. Certainly, the notorious Beslan school hostage attack in 2004 caused the international community to hold back a little on their condemnation of Russia's human rights abuses and war crimes in Chechnya, but this process had its roots in the immediate post-9/11 period. The positive aspect of this for Azerbaijan and Geor-

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[15] Strobe Talbott. "Dealing with Russia in a time of troubles." *The Economist*. 19 November 1998. http://www.economist.com/node/176944 (accessed September 3, 2013).

[16] Goldman Marshall I., *Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77.

gia was the improved U.S.-Russia relationship; at the May 2002 US-Russia summit, the two presidents issued a joint statement endorsing multiple pipeline routes, implying that Russia was not opposed to plans to build oil and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan to Turkey that did not transit Russia.

In this context, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project (completed between 2002 and 2005, with the first drops of oil reaching the Ceyhan terminal on 28 May 2006) gave further impetus to the strengthening and deepening of economic, political, and cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Another energy project, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline project, also has great importance for Georgian-Azerbaijan relations and for the diversification of Azerbaijan's energy strategy. During the OSCE Summit in November 1999, when signing a legal framework for the realization of the BTC Pipeline, the Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Georgian governments also reached an agreement to build a gas pipeline from Azerbaijan's offshore Shah Deniz gas field that would run parallel to BTC up to the Turkish city of Erzurum, where it would connect to the Turkish transmission. The so-called natural gas pipeline, known either as the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) or the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) opened in 2007. Azerbaijan began to be known not only as an exporter of oil, but also natural gas.

This development of the BTE gas pipeline helped Georgia to escape Russia's blackmailing tactics based on gas supplies, especially after the gas crisis in the winter of 2006. The Georgian government's hand strengthened and gradually Azerbaijan found leverage in Georgia's internal market. Since the signing of the "Tbilisi Declaration" on the Common Vision for Regional Cooperation in February 2007, Georgia and Azerbaijan, along with Turkey, agreed to expand their cooperation in the energy and transport sector. For Georgian interests in particular, the provision on mutual support for sustainable gas supplies, in which the three countries agreed "to continue to cooperate in order to meet mutual needs for reliable and sustainable gas supplies," was imperative. With regards to Russia's blackmailing tactics from the Azerbaijani standpoint, the situation

that Georgia faced was not only a bilateral Russia-Georgia crisis. Despite pressure from Russia, Baku's future development strategy included entering the European market, and accordingly official Baku also pushed Turkey to agree to deliver more gas to Georgia from its allocated shares.

Today, Azerbaijan has particular weight in Georgia's domestic energy market, thanks to bilateral energy cooperation. Azerbaijan gained a much larger share in the Georgian gas distribution network following the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war. On 26 December 2008, SOCAR Georgia Gas, a subsidiary of SOCAR Energy Georgia, purchased 22 small companies with 30 gas distribution networks in various regions of Georgia.[17] Then coverage was expanded and seven regional gas facilities under the management of SOCAR Gas were established on the basis of pre-existing gas supply grids. The initial idea was that SOCAR would acquire the entire domestic distribution network (aside from Tbilisi), and in November 2012, SOCAR bought Itera-Georgia, a subsidiary of Itera International Energy, which supplies around 300 million cubic meters of gas per annum to 100 enterprises in Georgia, including 38 regional gas distribution companies.[18] After that, SOCAR was the main gas distributor, with the exception of in the capital, Tbilisi. After the bankruptcy of TbilGaz in 2005, formerly the main gas distributor in the capital, the Georgian Economy Minister and Kazakhstan KazTransGaz Company signed a memorandum in Tbilisi on 26 December 2005. KazTransGaz bought shares in TbilGazi and became the main gas distributor for the capital.[19]

Moreover, one of the diversification attempts was the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector (AGRI), which resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding on 14 September 2010 in Baku to launch the AGRI project between state owned energy companies from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania. This project aimed to

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17 "SOCAR Takes Over Gas Distribution Networks in Georgia." *Civil Georgia*, December 27, 2008. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20209 (accessed September 14, 2013).

18 "Azerbaijan's SOCAR acquires Georgian gas supplier." *Reuters*, 1 November 2012. http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/01/azerbaijan-gas-georgia-idUS-L5E8M18P020121101 (accessed September 14, 2013).

19 "Kazakh State-Owned Company to Buy TbilGazi." *Civil Georgia*, 26 December 2005. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11418 (accessed September 14, 2013).

transport Azerbaijani gas by pipeline to a Black Sea port in Georgia for liquefaction and from there to the Romanian Black Sea port of Constanta via tanker. The gas would be regasified and pumped through Romania's pipeline system to neighbouring states, thus bringing Caspian gas directly to European markets. The project is still undergoing feasibility studies, given the need to construct a liquefaction plant for liquified natural gas (LNG) exports in the Azerbaijani-owned oil export terminal of Kulevi in Georgia as well as construction of a terminal for importing LNG to a regasification plant in Romania. Overall, the project is seen as expensive and, moreover, the ability to deliver Azerbaijani gas to Europe has been achieved through the June 2012 Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement to build the Trans-Anatolian natural gas pipeline (TANAP). The subsequent selection of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) in July 2013 as the main delivery route for Caspian gas to Europe has strengthened faith in the possibility of delivering gas to Europe. The realization of this project will lead not only to economic growth in Georgia, but also to additional volumes of gas for transit.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway: Strengthening Bilateral Ties with Rail

Despite the refusal of the U.S. and the E.U. to offer financing for the BTK project, Azerbaijan aimed to realize the project through its own resources and issued a soft loan to Georgia. On 7 February 2007, Azerbaijan, Georgian, and Turkish sides signed a deal, and the construction of the BTK railway line was inaugurated by the presidents of the three countries at Marabda in southern Georgia on 21 November 2007.[20] The 29 kilometre-long railway will be constructed on Georgian territory from Akhalkalaki to the Turkish border, and a 192 kilometre portion of the existing railway infrastructure, also in Georgia, will be rehabilitated within the framework of this project.

However, since construction began, work has been delayed for several reasons. Environmental problems, along with the August 2008

[20] "Azerbaijani, Turkish Presidents Visit Georgia", *Civil Georgia*, 21 November 2007. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16384 (accessed September 15, 2013).

War, caused delays. An exact date has not been published but currently 2014 is the estimated date of completion. The BTK railway is significant from various perspectives:

- Construction of the Tbilisi to Kars rail line will help revive the economy of southern Georgia, especially the Armenian-populated Samstkhe-Javakheti region. The railway link will help this region to overcome economic isolation, and, according to the Georgian President "to become not only an important transit point but also an economically active centre."[21] This also helps Georgia to actively support development and creation of economic zones, which provides an important political boost at the domestic level.

- For Azerbaijan and Georgia, in the context of a future Caucasus common market, the railway will solidify their importance as a Caspian trade hub. Further, it will strengthen relations with Central Asia. There is also a key strategic benefit: for the first time, Azerbaijan will have direct railroad access to Turkey. Moreover, as a part of the BTK railway, there is a plan to build a railway between Kars and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan. Currently, Turkey's only connection with Nakhchivan is a short (11 km) border, which keeps the exclave under a de facto economic blockade. This will help reduce Iran's influence on Azerbaijan as Iran currently supplies natural gas to Nakhchivan.

This project is enormously advantageous in economic terms, and even more so politically. The railway opens up a new narrative for the Caucasus region. The BTK railway is expected to transport 1.5 million passengers and 3 million tons of freight per year in its initial operation. Forecasts predict that by 2034, it will transport 3 million people and more than 16 million tons of goods per year.

Economic Cooperation, Businesses, and Entrepreneurs

Since the 1990s, bilateral economic cooperation has improved, and the

[21] "Azeri, Georgian, Turkish Leaders Speak of 'Historic' Rail Link." *Civil Georgia*, 21 November 2007. http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16386 (accessed September 15, 2013).

legal basis of the economic relationship has been consolidated through more than fifty bilateral agreements on, variously, free trade, promotion and reciprocal protection of investments, prevention of double taxation, industrial cooperation, and the like. On 25 March 2004, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan and Georgia established an Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation, and signed an agreement on 11 June 2004.

Improved coordination efforts have had positive effects on trade turnover. Trade between Azerbaijan and Georgia is increasing, in particular since the 2000s, from $76,508 USD in turnover in 2000, to $700 million USD turnover in 2012. Georgia's main exports to Azerbaijan are cement, locomotives and other vehicles, mineral and chemical fertilizers, mineral water, alcoholic beverages, glass and glass products, and pharmaceuticals. Azerbaijan, in turn, exports petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, plastic products, furniture and construction materials to Georgia.[22]

The increase in trade turnover was caused by the expansion of economic relations and increased number of joint projects, which have seen a huge increase in 2013. Beyond bilateral trade, the investment climate has helped boost the economic partnership and the economic health of both countries. For the last five years, Azerbaijani investment in Georgia totals $800 million USD.[23] Total Azerbaijani investment in Georgia exceeds $3 billion USD if one includes the construction of BTC, BTE, and BTK, the Georgian sections of which were partly financed by Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, through its oil and gas sector, has significantly boosted its state revenues, thereby making it more attractive to investors and, as a result, neighbouring Georgia has also benefited. At present, Azerbai-

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[22] Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Azerbaijan, " Relations between Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan." Last modified August, 2009. http://azerbaijan.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=45&lang_id=ENG sec_id=45 (accessed September 9, 2013).

[23] "Economic collaboration of Georgia-Azerbaijan-Turkey." *The Messenger*, 3 September 2012. http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2684_september_3_2012/2684_econ_one.html (accessed September 15, 2013).

jan is making various types of investments across the Black Sea region and is acting as a catalyst for business sector growth. Today, Georgia is host to more than 300 Azerbaijani businesses, and more than 150 Georgian companies are operating in Azerbaijan.[24] Of these 300 Azerbaijani companies, there are more than 50 strong and relatively well-known ones, such as the Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR), Azersun, Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL), Pashabank, Embawood, International Bank of Azerbaijan, Karat Holding, Akkord and Azerinshaat. These companies are from a range of sectors, from energy to banking, clothing retailers, outlets, trading centers, pharmaceuticals, construction, hotels, restaurants and more. In particular, SOCAR has invested more than one billion USD in Georgia's economy. SOCAR Azerbaijan has an official representative in Georgia, as well as a local subsidiary company, SOCAR Georgia Petroleum (SGP) – both are Azerbaijan's companies, but focus on different activities. SOCAR's subsidiary company – SOCAR Georgia Petroleum – has been the largest taxpayer in Georgia for the last three years. This company currently operates more than 110 petrol stations in Georgia,[25] while SOCAR in Georgia made key investments between 2006 and 2012 – such as repairing schools, supporting education programs, rehabilitating public squares, supporting children's homes – amounting to more than $ 21 million USD in philanthropic work.[26] Due to the success of its activities in Georgia, the company was named among the top 25 companies in 2013 by the Georgian Opinion Research Business International (GORBI).[27] In general, Azerbaijani companies operating in Georgia believe that they have a mission to present a good public image for Azerbaijan; one of the ways to achieve this is by helping the population during difficult

[24] "What hinders the free movement of capital, investment in the Black Sea region?". *Free Economy of Azerbaijan*, 30 May 2013.http://freeeconomy.az/loadxeber.aspx?vpbxid=2. (accessed September 15, 2013).

[25] SOCAR Georgia Petroleum, "History," Last modified August 15 2013.http://www.sgp.ge/page.php?lang=eng&page=0001 (accessed September 9, 2013).

[26] SOCAR Representation in Georgia, "Activities in Georgia," Last modified August 15 2013. http://www.representation.ge/page.php?lang=eng&page=07 (accessed September 9, 2013).

[27] "Azerbaijan's SOCAR among top best companies in Georgia," *Azernews*, 23 May 2013. http://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/54286.html, (accessed October 9, 2013)

times. As reported by Faig Guliyev, SOCAR's representation in Georgia, SOCAR provided assistance throughout the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war, helping Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and victims of war, which has improved Azerbaijan's public image. Azerbaijani companies in Georgia have created more than 7,000 jobs and have contributed to the development of Georgian national infrastructure.

Bilateral Military Cooperation with a Multilateral Agenda

Though Azerbaijan and Georgia have worked together to strengthen their relationship across many fields, military cooperation was not the top priority during the first few years of independence. The two countries did not institutionalize military cooperation until 2002.

The delayed institutionalization of bilateral military cooperation was for several reasons. First of all, both countries only started institutionalizing and expanding their relationship across multiple sectors in the mid-1990s when both transitioned out of chaotic domestic and international situations, namely through ceasefire agreements in the Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia conflicts.

Second, both countries sought to modernize their Soviet-era armies through cooperation under the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program; while the financial resources of the PfP program could not fully support this process, Azerbaijan has increased its military budget since 2002.

Third, both countries established a similar foreign policy strategy, based on a common vision of security issues and aimed at reducing Russia's influence in the South Caucasus region. This common approach was demonstrated by the mutual distrust of Moscow: both Azerbaijan and Georgia decided not renew their participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Collective Security Treaty in April 1999, preferring to entrust security issues to NATO. Their aim was to strengthen military cooperation in multilateral contexts, such as GUAM and NATO, rather than exclusively bilateral ties.

The first contract was signed between the Azerbaijani and the Georgian Ministries of Defense (MoD) on 18 March 1999 in Tbilisi, titled "Protocol on the result of the Georgian and Azerbaijan MoD meeting."[28] The 1999 agreement was an attempt to institutionalize bilateral ties between Baku and Tbilisi. The agreement used existing mechanisms for military cooperation and only included priority areas. However, as mentioned earlier, the 1997 agreement on the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the establishment of GUAM, aimed at pooling the countries' diplomatic resources to oppose Moscow's efforts to station its weaponry in the South Caucasus. In 1999, before signing a military cooperation agreement, both countries demonstrated a common position towards Moscow by leaving CIS military structures. In the context of the development of a common energy strategy toward the sale of Caspian energy resources to Europe (supported by the West) and the establishment of GUAM, which sent a clear political signal to the West with the aim of gaining support for the independence of member countries, new areas of military cooperation emerged between Baku and Tbilisi. But, developing a common energy strategy and escaping Moscow's orbit were the primary goals of the two countries and neither the GUAM Charter nor participation in NATO's PfP were perceived as sufficient mechanisms for security at that time.

A major change occurred in the military cooperation between the two countries when the U.S. changed its security policy on the South Caucasus and Central Asia following the 9/11 terror attacks. At that time, both Baku and Tbilisi declared full support for the U.S.; in response, Washington has waived restrictions on U.S. aid to Azerbaijan by Executive Order every year since January 2002.[29] Azerbaijan and Georgia were among the countries that openly pledged their support for U.S,-led operation in Afghanistan, and later Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), with both offering the use of their airbases, and their

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[28] "Protocol on the result of the Georgian and Azerbaijan MoD meeting." *Online Database of Azerbaijan's Legislation*. Database. 12 September 2013. <http://e-qanun.az/print.php?internal=view &target=1&docid=5280&doctype=0.>.

[29] "US lifts Armenia, Azerbaijan weapons sales ban," *CNN*, 29 March 2002. http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/03/29/weapons.ban/index.html. (accessed September 18, 2013).

assistance in rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq.[30]

The positive development in terms of relations with the U.S. side has led to additional positive effects: Turkey signed defence cooperation agreements in 2001 with Georgia. Together with the United States, the Turkish and Georgian militaries have formed a Caucasus Working Group, which seeks to improve bilateral cooperation and provide training for the Georgian military.[31] New areas for cooperation emerged following the events of 9/11, namely counter-terrorism initiatives and work to combat drug trafficking. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia entered a more intensive period of defence cooperation at this stage and on 9 April 2002, both countries' defence ministries signed a framework protocol.

The most important feature of the agreement was that in addition to expanding the areas of cooperating, it also increased the possibility for trilateral cooperation. In addition the "Military Cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia" agreement signed on 16 December 2002 built on and expanded the terms of the 1999 protocol signed by the two countries.[32] The 2002 agreement was the first comprehensive agreement on military cooperation since both countries regained their independence. The agreement emphasized once again the importance of multilateral cooperation in the framework of Euro-Atlantic structures and GUAM. Furthermore, the agreement outlined the structures for cooperation mechanisms, as well as specific areas of cooperation, such as military construction, military reform, and the exchange of experience in the management of armed forces. It also launched the framework for the development of weapons and military equipment, including such equipment's production, supply, mainte-

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[30] Jim Nichol. "Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests." *Congressional Research Service*. 24 Jan 2013: 5-6. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33453.pdf (accessed September 18, 2013).

[31] Justyna Glogowska. "Turkey and Georgia: Strategic Connections." BILGESAM, 23 March 2012. http://www.bilgesam.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=497:turkey-and-geo (accessed September 18, 2013).

[32] "Military Cooperation Agreement between Azerbaijan Republic and Georgia" *Online Database of Azerbaijan's Legislation*. Database. 12 September 2013. <http://www.e-qanun.az/print.php?internal =view&target=1&docid = 2159&doctype=0.>

nance, modernization and repair, and of military-technical assistance for the development of enterprises.

Since 2009, defence industry cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia has been improving. The reason for this is that until 2008, a greater range of opportunities has arisen. Baku demanded long ago that Tbilisi stop allowing Armenia to repair its battle tanks and other armoured vehicles at a Russian munitions factory in Tbilisi;[33] once Georgia cut ties with Moscow and agreed, high level Ministry of Defence visits from Azerbaijan to Georgia commenced, and both sides came to a compromise. This stimulated the development of defence industry cooperation. But defence cooperation between the two countries is likely to become stronger, especially since Georgia's defence minister Irakli Alasania took office and declared that one of the country's priorities as enhancing and strengthening defense co-operation with close strategic allies, namely with Azerbaijan and Turkey. On 18 March 2013, Alasania visited Baku, and both sides signed a bilateral cooperation plan for 2013, the details of which were not disclosed. It is in the interests of both sides to improve opportunities for Azerbaijan's defence industry, with the aim of jointly producing armoured vehicles and equipment. However in the last three years, Azerbaijan's cooperation with different foreign countries has opened up opportunities for Georgia to acquire modern military technologies with Baku's help. Thus, in this way, the Georgian army could obtain the necessary military equipment for its defence industry with the help of Azerbaijan.

In addition, both countries will cooperate with Turkey, which has a much more capable defence industry. Turkey's indigenous defence programs encompass the full spectrum of military operations and include major platforms across the land, air, sea, and space domains.[34]

Beyond the possible trilateral format cooperation in defence industries, all sides agreed to jointly strengthen military exercises. Since

[33] Cesur Sumerenli, (military expert), interview by author, Baku "Georgian-Azerbaijani military cooperation," Record, April 28, 2013.

[34] Nick de Larringa , "Anatolian Ambition," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 50, no. 17 (2013): 24.

September 2006, under a NATO program trilateral co-operation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in pipeline security (known by the computer-based staff exercise as Eternity) has occurred every year. Moreover, under the trilateral format, Azerbaijan, Georgian and Turkish special forces conducted the "Caucasus Eagle" 2012 military exercises for the first time.

Conclusion

The Azerbaijan-Georgia relationship is built on the basis of principles that made them allies, according to the first National Security concept of Georgia, which was introduced by the Georgian parliament in 2005. The document states that "the relationship with Azerbaijan developed into a strategic partnership,"[35] and the latest version of the concept, adopted on December 23, 2011,[36] also underlines the accord of strategic partnership. Likewise, Azerbaijan's National Strategic Concept, adopted in 23 May 2007, stressed the importance of developing the bilateral relationship into a strategic partnership.[37]

Overall, the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Georgia has three determinants:

(i) mutual support for territorial integrity and issues relating to the status of breakaway regions; coordination of positions in relation to other international issues; (ii) unhindered implementation of strategic economic projects, such as BTC, BTE, BTK, and the entire oil-gas infrastructure that exists between Azerbaijan and Georgia; and (iii) support for other ongoing or future projects.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines in particular have solidified interdependence. Given that energy proj-

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[35] Georgia. National Security Council. *National Security concept of Georgia*. Tbilisi, 2005. Print. <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National Security Concept.pdf>.

[36] Georgia. National Security Council. *National Security concept of Georgia*. Tbilisi, 2011. Print. <www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>.

[37] Azerbaijan. Ministry of National Security. *National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku, 2007. Print. <http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Azerbaijan2007.pdf>

ects and close cooperation in developing profitable energy policies are the trademarks of Azerbaijan-Georgian relations, the countries also have similar priorities towards ensuring stability in the South Caucasus region. The most visible aspect of bilateral relations, in addition to cooperation in the energy sphere, is the common view on the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This issue touches on other issues related to international law and international relations. Both countries cite the principle of the "inviolability of state borders" in defending national interests against claims by ethnic minorities. From the very first post-independence years, these factors created favourable grounds for the development of bilateral relations. This co-operation was officially incorporated through the establishment of GUAM in 1997, which has sometimes been seen as a means of countering Russian influence in the area, and as a part of a strategy backed by the U.S.

Moreover, Azerbaijan and Georgia are dedicated partners within the Eastern Partnership framework (EaP), the regional extension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EaP has developed cooperation between the two countries and the E.U. in many areas, including energy security, economic cooperation, border security, institutional capacity-building, as well as rule of law and democratization. While integration into the E.U. is not currently the ultimate goal for Azerbaijan, Tbilisi is expected to initial an Association Agreement with the E.U. in November, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). If the Agreement is signed, Georgia's exports to the E.U. could increase by 12 percent, and imports from the E.U. could grow by 7.5 percent. In short, Azerbaijan and Georgia's productive cooperation with the E.U. can lead to the implementation of European standards in both countries, and bring them even closer to the "European space."

The two South Caucasian states continue to cooperate on various international security and political issues, both bilaterally and through numerous international organizations. Both countries' foreign and defence policies are usually in harmony, and areas of contention have

been relatively few. These harmonized positions indicate that there is clear coordination, understanding and even strategy on joint positions at the international level, regarding the issue of frozen conflicts as well as other international issues.

Despite good relations, there are several issues that could threaten the relationship. Unfinished border delimitation and issues relating to minority rights have from time to time sparked diplomatic rows between Baku and Tbilisi. Though the Georgian and Azerbaijani governments do everything possible to avoid tensions, joint consolidated efforts are necessary to reach *modus vivendi* and to find mutually acceptable solutions. Both sides understand that bilateral disagreements could serve the interests of third parties. Thus, in the long term, their dealings with their minority groups need to become more sophisticated and less patronizing. While this is a sensitive issue for both states, now is the right time to fully involve these communities into political processes, not through symbolic actions but through empowerment and realization of their rights. Fortunately, an important element of the partnership between Baku and Tbilisi is the ability to overcome mutual historic and more recent emotional grievances as well as understanding that unresolved issues can be addressed through bilateral negotiations. Furthermore, in the next couple of years there are impending regional issues that will need to be dealt with, such as Russia's efforts to expand its orbit through its Eurasian Union initiative, as well the Iranian nuclear issues and instability in the North Caucasus. All of these issues will require stronger cooperation and a united attitude.

The strength and durability of the Azerbaijan-Georgian strategic partnership, having evolved over the last two decades, has benefited from its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. A healthy Azerbaijan-Georgian partnership will play a decisive role in the trajectory of East-West geopolitical development.

UNCERTAIN OLD FRIENDS: GEORGIAN-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

Robert Nalbandov

The Georgians and Armenians, with roots in ancient history, are primordialist nations. *Primordialism*, as opposed to modernism, argues that national identity is a naturally developed phenomenon. A nation is created by some inexplicable conjunction of events, as "a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts."[1] The evolution of every nation takes a specific direction, different from others, towards molding unique sets of ethnic, anthropological, linguistic, religious, and cultural factor-variables. Once created, national identity should be accepted as given, intractable, and not constructed or non-construed by changing circumstances and the environments around it.[2] Conversi explains primordialism more elaborately: "Primordialists appeal to emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate explanations for national mobilisation. They typically date the origin of nationhood back to remote epochs, treating them as emotional givens."[3] For the primordialists, thus, the main question defining their essence is "who came to the land first?"

A contesting theory, modernism, via its herald Ernest Gelner, posits the contrary: "nations, like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances."[4] For modernists, the modern concept of a nation started after the French Bourgeois and the British Industrial Revolutions, which

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1 Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-CeQu'une Nation?* Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010.

2 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.

3 Daniele Conversi, Mapping the Field: Theories of Nationalism and Ethnosymbolic Approach, in Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby (eds.) *Nationalism and Ethno-symbolism.History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*.Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 15.

4 Ernest Gellner, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 3.

standardized the ethno-political realities in Europe. From the primordialist perspective, the Georgians and Armenians have many significant historical similarities that found their reflection in modern-day relations between these two nations, as well as the problems they face in their everyday interactions. From the modernist view, however, these ethnic groups are in the process of being molded as modern nations and suffer from concomitant growing pains. For the modernists, the present and future orientation of national politics matters more over historically-motivated ethnic convergence.

Historical Background

For Georgians and Armenians alike, their turbulent pasts play a critical role in shaping the present mode of interactions between each other and with the world around them. Traditionally, the regional environment for these nations was quite harsh, threatening their very existence on nearly an annual basis. Posen claims that all groups tend to assess potential threats (and benefits) coming from other groups "in terms of… cohesion and… past military records."[5] History, usually precipitated with negative episodes of ethnic interactions, is revived; fables and myths of former glory and suppression are put in new contexts depicting other groups as evil.

The resulting situation is what Posen calls the inter-ethnic security dilemma[6] where, in the words of Varshney, "ethnic mobilization in politics is group action not only in favour of one's group *but also against some other group* [emphasis mine]. More rights and power for my group often mean a diminution in the ability of some other group(s) to dictate terms, or a sharing of power and status between groups where no such sharing earlier existed; in the extreme cases, it may even entail the other group's displacement from power or status."[7] Paradoxically, nations tend to remember more of their

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[5] Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict" in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*.Princeton University Press, 1993, 105.

[6] Barry R. Posen, 1993. The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict. In Brown, M.E. (ed.). *Ethnic Conflict and International Security.* Princeton University Press.

[7] AshutoshVarshney, "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Rationality", Perspectives on Politics, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Mar., 2003), pp. 88.

defeats rather than victories: a sense of common stigma seems to be more appealing and unifying than common triumph. Historical grievances lead to mobilization on ethnic grounds and the hardening of in-group identities. Group cohesion is "glued" by the "ethnic entrepreneurs" who, according to Lake and Rothchild, "seek political office and power…and, through their actions, propel their process further"[8] by playing active roles in mobilization of communities to serve the highest cause. These local political leaders use the past sense of solidarity when their groups had faced threats coming from others.

From this point of view, it is important to note that, unlike the situation in the former Yugoslavia, where past oppression played an overwhelming role in their group mobilization, no large-scale and systematic atrocities had been ever recorded between Georgians and Armenians that might have worked as catalysts for some sort of conflict, whether on ethnic or communal grounds. Neither nation have particularly bitter memories of large-scale atrocities or mass suppression conducted by the other group. Both Georgians and Armenians were among the first to adopt Christianity as their state religion in the early 4th century, which placed them together as outliers in the largely pagan and later Muslim Caucasus and Central Asia. Even before Christianity, according to Suny," the endless struggle between Rome-Byzantium and Iran, both of which claimed suzerainty over Caucasia"[9] turned Georgian and Armenian lands into the battleground for major regional powers' parochial interests. The common threat brought these nations together, which on numerous occasions, jointly faced threats to their existence.

It was their common Christian faith that made these nations stand out and placed them in the crosshairs of foreign invaders either directly targeting Georgians and/or Armenians or passing through their lands. The Romans and later Byzantines, the Seljuks, the Mongols, the Ottomans, the Sassanid Iranians, and the Arabs time and again

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[8] Lake, D. A. and Rothchild, D. 1996. Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict, *International Security*, 21(2), 54.

[9] Ronald Grigor Suny, 1994. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 20.

devastated the Georgian and Armenian kingdoms, forcing them to abide by Machiavellian survive-by-all-means politics. The situation had changed dramatically in early 19th century when Georgia, part by part, was taken over by the Russian Empire as a result of Muscovy's numerous wars against Turkey and Iran.[10] The last part of Georgia, Adjara, was ceded to Russia by the Ottoman Empire in 1878.[11] Around the same time, Eastern Armenia was incorporated into the Russian Empire while its Western portions continue to remain in Turkey.[12]

The Soviet era drastically changed the political, ethnic, cultural, and economic landscape of the former Russian Empire. Having been annexed by the newborn Soviet Union in 1921,[13] both Georgia and Armenia suddenly found themselves with new compatriots from distant, alien lands, united under the ideological umbrella of Soviet Communism. The new communist leadership of the two nations emphatically sung praises to the Russian Big Brother and joined together in the celebration of communism's ascendancy. According to Hahn, "Soviet leaders have also sought to promote multinational integration through the diffusion of modernization,"[14] which, in the case of the Georgian and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics, facilitated the rapid boost of their population's education levels and economic development.

Post-Independence

The strength of Communist rule began to abate in the late 1980s. "Glasnost" and "perestroika", according to Suny together with such positive tendencies as "the general democratization of political practices, the delegitimisation of Communist party rule in the centre, and the growing reluctance and

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[10] Donald Rayfield, 2012. *The Edge of Empires.A History of Georgia*.Reaktion Books Ltd., 250-264.

[11] Frederik Coene, 2010. *The Caucasus. An Introduction*. Routledge, 162.

[12] Alla Mirzoyan, 2010. *Armenia, The Regional Powers And The West: Between History and Geopolitics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 21-54.

[13] Simon Payaslian, 2007. *The History of Armenia*.Palgrave Macmillan, 170.

[14] Jeffrey W. Hahn, 1978. "Stability &Change in the Soviet Union: A Developmental Perspective". *Polity*, 10(4), 549.

inability of Moscow to use force to impose its will,"[15] led to the appearance of nationalistic sentiments among large popular masses. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, feelings of belonging to a particular group, rather than to the Soviet Nation as such, began their slow but steady revival. Both Georgians and Armenians were soon dragged into bloody conflicts that lasted several years and stalled the economic, political, and cultural development of their reconstituted nation-states for decades. Georgians became involved in intra-state wars with two of their ethnic minorities, Abkhazians and South Ossetians, who wanted to secede, and Armenians clashed with Azerbaijan over the contested Nagorno Karabakh region in which Armenians formed an ethnic majority.

Among all the Soviet Republics, Georgia was, perhaps, the most multiethnic. Out of approximately 80 nations and nationalities residing in the Republic at that time, the largest ones were Armenians, Azeris, the Abkhaz, and Ossetians. The last two had statuses as autonomous political entities within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Even during the apogee of Soviet power – but even more so when its regime was slowly but surely losing power over its constituent parts – Abkhazians within Georgia proper decided to break the local Soviet public administration hierarchy and to seek direct support from Moscow. The conflict situation was exacerbated by the strong support Abkhazia received from Russia, which "gradually increased preferential policies toward the Abkhazians."[16] South Ossetians, on the other hand, were a part of divided nation together with their North Ossetian brethren and, according to Dennis Sammut and Nikola Cvetkovski, "have seen themselves as having no other choice than to look towards Moscow"[17] to join what Brubaker calls its "external national homeland"[18] – in other words, to become a part of Russia.

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[15] Ronald Grigor Suni, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993), 128

[16] Alexandros Petersen, 2008. The 1992-93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict. *Caucasus Review of International Affairs*, 2(4), 191.

[17] Dennis Sammut, Nikola Cvetkovski, 1996. *The Georgia-South Ossetia conflict*.Verification Technology Information Centre, London 1996, 7.

[18] Brubaker, Rogers, "Nationhood and National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account" in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, #1 (Feb. 1994), pp.55-76

The situation was different in Armenia, which trail-blazed intra-Soviet ethnic conflicts in 1988 by supporting their ethnic kin under Azeri rule in the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. The war started with irredentist claims by the Armenian ethnic majority Karabakh to join with Soviet Armenia.[19] This was followed by repressive actions by Azeri authorities in Sumgait and Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, against their Armenian minority,[20] which, in turn, sparked a large-scale war in Nagorno Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1994, the war ended with an Armenian de-facto military victory,[21] which currently controls more than 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally-recognized territory without, however, any de-jure secession in the conflict.

Quo Vadis?

Current Georgian-Armenian relations continue to be friendly, though somewhat qualified by sometimes-strained domestic interactions. In particular, this pertains to a large Armenian minority in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region bordering Armenia. Armenians represent the largest ethnic minority on Georgian territory – 437,200, or 8.1 percent of the total population.[22] Samtskhe-Javakheti has been traditionally an Armenian ethnic enclave; the number of Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti grew steadily from 100,594 (44 percent) in 1939 to 114,747 (64.5 percent) in 1959 and 65 percent in 1989,[23] but then fell to 54 percent by 2002[24] due to massive migration of the

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[19] Thomas de Waal, 2004. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. NYU Press, 10.

[20] David Rieff, 1997. Case Study in Ethnic Strife.*Foreign Affairs*, 76(2), 118.

[21] Svante E. Cornell The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Report no. 46, Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University, 1999, 42, available at http://www.silkroad-studies.org/new/inside/publications/1999_NK_Book.pdf

[22] Demoskop Weekly, 539-540, January-February 2013. Available at: http://demo-scope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=6

[23] Sergei Minasian, 2005. Situation in Javakhk in the Context of the Withdrawal of the Russian Military Bases from Georgia. (Situacia v Javakhke v KontekteProblemiVi-vodaRossiiskixVoennixBaz in Gruzii), *21-й* Век, 29-32.

[24] Ethnic Composition, National Statistics Office of Georgia, available at http://www.geo-stat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/census/2002/03%20Ethnic%20Composition.pdf.

Armenian population to Armenia proper and Russia in the early years of independence. In addition to Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenians have settled throughout Georgia, living in both urban and rural areas. The status of the Armenian ethnic enclave is periodically raised in the Georgian media, artificially drawing negative attention of the public as well as the local political establishment. This is a clear case of securitization[25] of the minority and a perceived intra-state security dilemma:[26] the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti and their relations with Armenia proper are viewed warily in Georgia for fear of a replay of South Ossetians' aspirations for reunification with their Northern Ossetian cousins. Conversely, Armenians living in Georgia, but especially in Samtskhe-Javakheti, feel their identities threatened and sometimes agitate for greater rights – such as making Armenian a state language in Georgia and greater local autonomy – which are considered borderline (if not outright) secessionist by the Georgian majority.

The quintessential expression of *realpolitik*, the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" further tarnishes Georgian-Armenian relations. A common national problem – the existence of secessionist conflicts on their territories (Nagorno Karabakh for Azerbaijan and South Ossetia and Abkhazia for Georgia) – emotionally unites Azerbaijan and Georgia. Both sides have lost wars and territory: Georgians fought twice against the same enemy, Russia, in 1993-1994 and in 2008, and in both cases were not successful. Azerbaijan, too, lost its war against pan-Armenian forces and thus sympathizes with Georgia. On the other hand, the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh, having been heavily supported by their external ethnic homeland, won the bloody war of 1988-1994 over the Azeri minority and their backers in Baku and duly consider themselves victors. From purely primordialist perspective, even this short-term post-independence history – with completely different outcomes in both cases – adds a grain of uneasiness when

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[25] Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelsrup, Pierre Lemaitre, 1993. *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[26] Paul Roe, 1999. "The Intrastate Security Dilemma: Ethnic Conflict as a Tragedy?",*The Journal of Peace Research,* 36(*2*), 183-202.

all the three South Caucasian republics are present together during international events.

Another factor that, if not distances Georgians and Armenians from each other, but from purely Liberalist perspective limits mutual gains, is the absence of strong economic links. Economic interdependence is considered one of the pillars of the Democratic Peace theory – the others being democratic governance and international law exercised by inter-governmental organizations. The theory of liberal peace originated with Immanuel Kant in "Perpetual Peace" and was later adapted to contemporary political realities by John R. O'Neal and Bruce Russett, which "sees democratic governance, economic interdependence, and international law as the means by which to supersede the security dilemma rooted in the anarchy of the international system."[27] Economic cooperation, being fundamental in creating common interests and cementing the friendship between the nations and their corresponding ethnic groups, is one of the cornerstones of the peaceful relations between states on the global arena.

Economic relations Georgia and Azerbaijan represent the classic example of such interdependence. The two countries benefit from the three large, internationally-backed energy trade projects – the Baku-Supsa and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum gas pipeline, which originate from Azerbaijani territory transit through Georgia to international markets. In 2010, foreign trade turnover between Georgia with Azerbaijan was nearly three times bigger than that with Armenia: $486 million versus $142 million, respectively.[28] Similarly, in 2011 Azerbaijan's share of Georgia's foreign trade was 10.4 percent versus Armenia's comparatively paltry 3.3 percent.[29] It is important to mention that Georgia and Azerbaijan

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[27] John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett, 1999. The Kantian Peace: The Pacific Benefits of Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885-1992, in *World Politics*, 52(1), 4.

[28] Georgia's Foreign Trade Grows 17% in Jan-Sept Civil Georgia, Tbilisi / 25 Oct.'10. Available from http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22781

[29] Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, 2011.Foreign Trade Digest. Available at http://www.economy.ge/?category=4&lang=eng&dn=220

had been headed for over 20 years by two communist party bosses and close friends: Eduard Shevardnadze (though not continuously) and Heydar Aliyev. Notwithstanding the change of leadership in Georgia as a result of the Rose Revolution of 2003-2004 and more recently in 2012, the proximity of the Georgian and Azeri people continues with the path-dependency of a "time-tested friendship"[30] between their current leadership, buttressed by joint economic projects and common political perspectives. This economic closeness also contributes to a growing feeling of uneasiness among Georgia's Armenian minority and in Armenia proper, widening the rift between these nations.

Viewing through the prism of the democratic peace theory, Armenia cannot claim to have complex economic interdependence[31] with Georgia or especially strong personal linkages with the Georgian leadership. Economically, there are not many joint business projects between Georgia and Armenia, apart from the import of electricity from Armenia to Georgia and the transit of Armenian cargo through Georgian ports. Politically, Armenia's lukewarm attitude towards Georgia could be attributed to a confrontation between them in the early 20th century and Georgia's growing closeness with Azerbaijan: Armenians are considered aggressors to Azerbaijan in Karabakh the same way as Russians are perceived by Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The only avenue left through Democratic Peace is their joint participation in regional (such as the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) and global intergovernmental organizations (the United Nations, NATO, etc.), which, again, is overshadowed by the same Georgia-Azerbaijan-Armenia political-economic triangle discussed above.

Without a doubt, the biggest destabilizing factor in bilateral relations between Georgia and Armenia was and remains Russia. Russia has

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[30] Zaur Shiriyev, 26 July 2010 "Time Tested Friendship": Azerbaijan–Georgian Relations, CESRAN International. Available from http://cesran.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=954%3Aqtime-tested-friendshipq-azerbaijangeorgian-relations-&catid=57%3Amakale-ve-raporlar&Itemid=312&lang=en

[31] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. 1977.*Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. TBS The Book Service Ltd.

been traditionally interested in socio-political developments in the South Caucasus. Starting from the first Turkish (1568) and the Persian wars (1651), Russia steadily expanded its territorial possessions in the region. The primary reason for the increased Russian interest in the Caucasus was access to Black Sea outlets for its trade with Europe. The "window to Europe cut through" by the Russian Tsar Peter the Great in the 18th century held to this function, which continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. The same reason arguably guided Russian intervention in Georgia in the early 1990s and the recent war in 2008. Another reason for Russian interest in maintaining a presence in the South Caucasus was the need to defend its southern borders by creating a buffer zone in the form of satellite states. During the Cold War, the Caucasus was the Soviet Union's military outpost against NATO forces represented by Turkey, upon which Moscow conditioned the existence of its Transcaucasian Military District, the Soviet military hub based in Tbilisi.

Russia, while officially having the mediator's role in the conflicts between the Georgians on the one hand and the Abkhazians and South Ossetians on the other, maintained several military bases in Georgia. It was the removal of the 62nd military base in Akhaltsikhe, the regional capital of Samtskhe-Javakheti, in 2007 that aggravated already tense relations between the region's Armenian population and the local and central Georgian government. This Russian base played the dual role: together with its other base in the Georgian Black Sea port city of Batumi, Adjara, it represented what a majority of Georgians called "occupying forces" after the conflicts of the early 1990s in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, it was a major employer of the local Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti, which, though fluent in Russian, generally lacked Georgian language skills and had problems integrating into the Georgian economy. These ethnic Armenians predominantly formed the civilian employees of the base and for a while even earned higher salaries than most of the rest of the Georgian population. But with the base gone, they lost their jobs and have found it difficult to reintegrate into the Georgian civilian economy.

Russia has long been a military, political, and economic "surrogate lobby state"[32] of Armenia. As a result of the war against Iran in 1828, Russia took the control of Eastern Armenia. During the Russia-Turkish war of 1877-78, the former annexed Western Armenia, which remained a part of the Russian Empire until the Bolshevik revolt during the First World War. After Russian troops departed, the newly created Democratic Republic of Armenia was attacked by Turkey, losing most of the land it had regained from the Russian Empire. At the end of the First World War, the Turkish army, following the defeat of its ally, Germany, rolled back once again from the major parts of these territories. After the new Turkish leadership under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk launched and won another war with Armenia, the young Armenian Republic was forced to become a part of the Soviet Union to retain even the small portion of land it had left. In the eyes of most Armenians, they "owe" their nationhood and independence to Russia. In more recent history, during the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the Russian military, according to David Rieff, helped both Armenians and Azeris.[33] Cornell, too, notes that "the participation of whole units part of the 366th CIS infantry regiment was noted in the occupation of Khojaly and subsequent attacks on Azeri settlements."[34]

In addition to a robust military presence in Armenia, Russia is a major economic and political player there. Since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia has been Armenia's leading trade partner and source of foreign direct investment.[35] Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty, according to Article 4 of which an attack to a member-state is considered as an attack on all. Russia keeps its 102nd military base in the Armenian city of Gyumri, close to Turkish borders and is considered by many in Armenia as a viable deterrent against possible

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[32] Erin K. Jenne, 1990. A Bargaining Theory of Minority Demands: Explaining the Dog that Didn't Bite in 1990 Yugoslavia. In *International Studies Quarterly* 48(4), 748.

[33] David Rieff, 1997. Case Study in Ethnic Strife.*Foreign Affairs*, 76(2), 124.

[34] Svante E. Cornell The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Report no. 46, Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University, 1999, 32, available at http://www.silkroads-tudies.org/new/inside/publications/1999_NK_Book.pdf

[35] For example, in 2011 it's share in country's import was 21% and export – 16% (See *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia*, 2011).

future Turkish/Azeri aggression. For its part, Samtskhe-Javakheti has long become the subject of a mutual blame-game by nationalistic actors from all the sides – with Russian in the centre. According to Zaal Anjaparidze, "two factors complicate a solution for Javakheti: the increasing dominance of an ethnic-oriented mentality over civic awareness in the Georgian political establishment and the fear of possible Russian support for separatism in Javakheti."[36] Russia is blamed by both Georgians and pro-Georgian Armenians for fuelling nationalistic tensions of the Armenian population there.[37] The Azeris, too, accuse the government of Armenia in supporting the separatist aspirations of their kin.[38]

Towards The Future

Taking into account the current political situation in and around Georgia it may seem that that Georgian-Armenian relations are ultimately a problem of credible commitment.[39] In multinational countries, according to James D. Fearon, ethnic majorities and minorities compete for the country's finite wealth limited by its geographic borders. In the most extreme cases, when majorities are not able to credibly commit to respecting their minorities' rights, and minorities are not able to credibly commit to their majorities to not to pose any existential threats to the integrity and statehood of the countries they live in, the credible commitment grows into an intrastate security dilemma, which, in turn, leads to inter-ethnic conflicts.

This interpretation of Georgian-Armenian relations would be incorrect due to at least three factors, which limits chances for imminent intrastate security dilemmas. To start with, the worsening of the

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[36] Zaal Anjaparidze, 2005. Javakheti Region Complicated Georgian Relations with Armenia. Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2(101).

[37] "Stepanyan: Russian is Behind the Statements on Separation of Javakheti From Georgia", *KavkazskiiUzel*, March 26, 2012, available at http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/203717/.

[38] "Expert: Georgia and Azerbaijan Should Not Allow For Separation of Javakhk", Georgian Times, April 22, 2011, available at http://www.georgiatimes.info/news/55503.html.

inter-ethnic situation is based on a number of preconditions, among which are "ethnically defined grievances, negative stereotypes, demographic threats, histories of ethnic domination, emotion-laden ethnic symbols, reciprocal fears of group extinction, de facto political anarchy, and the political space and military means to act."[40] In addition, the security dilemmas are fuelled by domestic anarchy where, in the words of Barbara E. Walter, "no central government exists to insure order, no police or judicial system remains to enforce contracts, and groups have divided into independent armed camps."[41] For all these conditions to lead to security dilemmas, there should also be little or no communication channels between the ethnic groups. Ethnic communities living in what Posen calls "ethnic islands"[42] enjoy more of in-group solidarity than their kin living close in the country. Such groups have a definite advantage for in-group mobilization in the event of intrastate confrontations. From the point of view of the security dilemma, the situation is dubious: on one hand, the closer people are to each other, the easier it is for them to mobilize in case of any significant threat to their identities and lives. On the other hand, "encapsulated" habitat patterns lead to increased threat perceptions of other groups, which may at some point catalyze ethnic violence.

By failing to credibly assess the messages coming from other groups, fear and uncertainty incubates between both minority and majority groups, blurring the border between real and perceptional security dilemmas. From that point of view, local Armenians have been living for centuries in close contact and in friendship with Georgians. Intermarriages are very frequent between the representatives of the only two Christian countries of the Caucasus. Georgia and Armenia share common history of submission to the same external oppressors – Byzantium, Turkey, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, as well as a comparable sense of pride for retaining their national and religious

[40] Stuart Kaufman, 1996. Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War, in *International Security*, 21 (2), 175.

[41] Barbara E. Walter, 1997. Critical Barriers to Civil War Settlement, in *International Organization*, 51(3), 338.

[42] Barry R. Posen, 1993. "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict" in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*.Princeton University Press, 109.

identities. The intermingled pattern of Armenian ethnic settlement in Georgia significantly decreases the likelihood of a future failure to credibly evaluate the threats and assurances coming from both sides. Since Armenians are so widely dispersed throughout Georgia, any problems between Armenians and Georgians in Samtskhe-Javakheti would lead to the negative consequences for the remaining Armenian population living elsewhere in the country.

Second, Armenia has been in a perpetual war-footing with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh, which is currently not recognized internationally. Though Armenia has supported this breakaway region both politically and economically, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan recently stated that, "Nagorno Karabakh problem has created an additional economic burden for Armenia."[43] In case of possible worsening of the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Armenia would be in a difficult position economically and politically to support its brethren in Georgia. Also, there is the Armenian diaspora, which is an important domestic player in Armenia and which also accounts for the Armenian "calmness" in Georgia. The diaspora has two causes that it is currently pursuing: forcing Turkey to acknowledge the massacres of Armenians of 1915 as "genocide," and facilitating de jure independence for Nagorno Karabakh, if not (re)unification with Armenia proper. Destabilization in Georgia would bring neither sizable economic benefit nor serve the political interests for Armenia and its diaspora abroad.

Finally, from the point of view of Kantian peace, the international environment also plays a mitigating role in Georgian-Armenian relations. The United States, which has become a politically significant regional actor since the collapse of the Soviet Union, is vitally interested in keeping peace in the Caucasus. According to Cordesman et. al., "the US has three primary geopolitical objectives in the Caucasus: security/stability, democratization, and economic access to the region's underutilized natural resources and the nascent

[43] Serge Sargsyan, "The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict Is An Economic Problem For Armenia", ANS Press, January 22, 2013, available at http://anspress.com/index.php?a=2&lng=ru&nid=185272.

infrastructure corridor for transporting Central Asian products west while avoiding Iran and Russia."[44] Any disturbance in the region would have negative repercussion on US policy by fomenting potential involvement from regional competitive rivals, such as Russia and Iran.

Conclusion

In their coexistence in the South Caucasus, the Georgian and Armenian nations commit, in the words of Ernest Renan, "daily plebiscites" to prove their existence and their "spiritual principles"[45] to withstand the erratic influences of outside factors threatening to change their identities. This plebiscite is both peaceful, in the form of friendly competition inherited from the Soviet times and epitomized in the famous "Mimino" film, and less so when these nations have to showcase their moral claim to the uniqueness of their language, religion, culture, ethnic heritage, and economic rights to each other and the world. Sometimes the interactions between the Georgians and Armenians have been turbulent – culminating in heated debates over political issues, fanned by nationalistic elements from both sides, – and yet quite peaceful and friendly at the same time. However, never has the pendulum of Georgian-Armenian relations swing to the point of no return. They both share the same history of oppression, submission, devastation, and revival; they equally value harmony over disagreement and praise a future of mutual peace over the immediate benefits of dissent.

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[44] Anthony H. Cordesman, Bryan Gold, Robert Shelala, and Michael Gibbs, 2013. US and Iranian Strategic Competition.Turkey and the South Caucasus. Second Edition. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 48.

[45] Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-CeQu'une Nation?*Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010.

FROM BLIND LOVE TO STRATEGIC ALLIANCE? BALTIC-GEORGIAN RELATIONS REVISITED

Kornely Kakachia and
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Since the restoration of independence, Georgia and the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – have established dynamic relationships that have evolved into forms of strategic cooperation. Over the last two decades, many have seen Georgia and the Baltics, along with Moldova and (to a varying extent) Ukraine, as a potential "belt of freedom and democracy" bordering Russia. As Georgia entered the post-Soviet era without natural allies or a history of reliable alliances, the Baltic states have proven to be loyal partners to Georgia and other Caucasian states when they needed support in their various tussles with Russia. Increasingly, geopolitical developments taking place around the Black and Baltic Seas have provided a new impetus for closer Baltic-Georgian relations.[1]

Although Russia has largely reconciled itself with the independence of the Baltic states, Moscow seems to have a difficult time swallowing the idea of independent Georgia. As Georgia tries to balance Moscow's influence in its internal affairs and strives for Euro-Atlantic integration, cementing a close partnership with Eastern European states becomes essential. Similarly, Moscow's brusque policies vis-à-vis its smaller neighbours reinvigorated the Baltic states' traditional security concerns and catalyzed their interest toward further involvement in the Caucasus. A number of factors lie behind this change, including Georgia's rapid transformation, growing energy security concerns, and the Caucasus' mounting strategic importance in light of a potentially looming Iran crisis.

The Baltics and the Caucasus: Two Regions, Two Pathways

In order to understand Baltic-Georgian relations, one must look at the regional dynamics of both regions. After the collapse of Soviet Union,

[1] A shortened version of this paper was published as PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo in September 2012.

both the Baltic and Caucasus regions emerged as battlegrounds for competition among larger actors. Although both regions had their chance to become centres for further integration projects, the two regions chose different ways of development. The Baltic states managed to strengthen their regional bonds and become full-fledged members of the European security system. The Caucasus, on the other hand, struggled to define itself, descended into ethnic conflict, and became preoccupied with state-building exercises.

Likewise, while regional unity in the Caucasus remained elusive, the Baltic states succeeded in overcoming regional problems, constructing functioning states and developing a viable collective security architecture. In the field of security, the Baltic states now consider the possibility of joint defence (including joint procurement to boost efficiency)[2] and participation in international missions[3] – in contrast to the fractured security environment that dominates in the Caucasus.

As observers acknowledge, a certain common cultural background, political rationality, and clear economic advantages have played key roles in the establishment of close ties among the states of the Baltic Sea region. Resistance to the Soviet regime and the struggle for independence brought the three nations together and established a common narrative of victimization. Despite sometimes differing national interests as well as other options for regional allegiances, Baltic regionalism prevailed and proved particularly effective when tackling security concerns towards Russia.

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[2] Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Defence and Military Relationswas signed between the Ministries of National Defence of the Republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in Jaunmokas, Latvia, on 30th of May, 2008. Available on: www.kmin.ee, www.kam.lt, www.mod.gov.lv.

[3] Baltic States agreed on joint ammunition procurement, on contributing a joint unit to the NATO Response Force, and on increasing the HNS-package for the Baltic air policing mission in June 2012. "It was also agreed that in 2016 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will contribute at least one joint battalion-sized unit to the NATO Response Force (NRF). The Baltic States also contributed a joint battalion to the NRF in 2010." Estonian Ministry of Defence, accessed on January 10, 2013, http://www.kmin.ee/en/baltic-ministers-of-defence-agreed-on-joint-ammo-procurement.

The biggest difference between the Baltic region and the Caucasus remains their respective stances toward regional development models. As the Baltic states grew to accept the idea of the Baltic Sea region as an EU sub-region with a certain distinctive identity, the South Caucasus as a sub-region remains without its own sense of "regional identity. With its ill-defined borders, weak economic links, and lack of a shared identity, the regional development and security in the Caucasus remains stunted. While the Baltic countries are united by a common security threat, this factor is lacking in the South Caucasus: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have no common external threat to encourage their integration, and even their defence strategies conflict with each other's. Therefore, the debate over where the Caucasus region broadly belongs, how it more narrowly fits into the EU ballpark – either collectively or individually, as opposed to joint entrance to the EU and NATO by the Baltic states – and what functionality it has in global politics remain unsettled questions in regional and international relations.

Geopolitics Still Matters

As for Georgia in particular, foreign policy has revolved primarily, if not solely, around the imperative of enhancing security vis-à-vis Russia. One could say that after the United States and Poland, Georgians consider the Baltic states to be among the most – if not the most – reliable security partners. Shared visions, values, and aspirations have helped to form close bonds. More than most EU members, the Baltic states have a vision of a wider, stronger, and more open Europe. While Baltic foreign policy and interests might differ significantly in their specifics, they share an attitude of support and camaraderie toward Georgia and other Eastern Europe countries like Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.

In Georgia, the Baltic states have been regarded as an role model of successful integration with the West. After regaining independence in the 1990s, all three countries chose membership in the EU and NATO as their foreign and security policy priorities. However, the process was highly politicized, and the three countries faced significant Western

European skepticism over their readiness for membership, the costs and their strained relationship with Russia – quite similarly to concerns raised today over Georgia's NATO aspirations. Nevertheless, the rapidity and quality of their reforms into viable market economies and, perhaps more importantly, successful transition from communist states into modern democracies helped to obviate even the most ardent criticisms leveled by skeptics. By entering the EU and NATO, the Baltic states shifted away from the Russia-dominated post-Soviet space, minimized their security threats and became part of Western alliances, which allowed them to create new, more proactive foreign policy strategies.

Having successfully transformed their own countries into free market democracies, the Baltic states aspire to pass on their reform experiences to other post-communist states that desire to implement similar reforms. After having successfully achieved the main foreign policy goal after independence - integration into EU and NATO structures - the Baltic countries saw southern Eastern Europe as a suitable direction for their renewed foreign policy strategies. Past experience of cooperation within the Soviet Union, as well as pre-existing social and economic ties with its Eastern European neighbours, allowed the Baltic countries to recognize the importance of bringing Eastern Europe within larger Western structures. Being part of the EU, the Baltic states were among the staunchest supporters of the Eastern Partnership initiative, which went underway in the first half of 2009 as a part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and offered Georgia additional integration opportunities with the EU.[4] Until that point, the Eastern dimension was not even a formal policy of the EU. However, the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian governments, together with Poland and Sweden, especially sought to balance Brussels' attention between the traditionally supported South and their newly approximated neighbours to the East.

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[4] Initially the EU left Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan out of ENP in 2003, and it was argued that these countries would be "outside the geographical scope of this initiative for the time being". They were included after pro-Eastern European forces within the EU could convince to revoke this decision and include the South Caucasus in the ENP. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament "Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", COM 0104,March 2003.

Pursuing closer relationship with Georgia was indicated by all three Baltic states in their foreign policy priorities. As Lithuania prepares to take over the EU presidency in the second half of 2013, Georgia can reasonably expect to be actively involved in the agenda of the EU Council. Strengthening the Eastern Partnership is one of the key stated priorities for Lithuania's presidency.[5] Previous experience shows that while the presiding country cannot steer the whole union according to its own foreign policy strategy, it has a much better opportunity to raise and draw attention to certain issues for discussion. What is more, Latvia and Estonia are also preparing for the second half of 2013, as governments in Riga and Tallinn have announced their support for Georgia's approximation to the EU and intent to speed up the process during Lithuania's presidency.[6]

For Georgia, this presents an opportunity to advance in negotiations in several areas. Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, Georgia has the opportunity to conclude a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), an Association Agreement, as well as visa liberalization talks with the EU. By the end of the Lithuanian EU presidency in November 2013, a summit to determine the goals and the agenda for the next two years of the Eastern Partnership policy will take place in Vilnius – Baltic capitals and Tbilisi both expect a positive message from the summit. While Armenia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Belarus have had difficulties progressing with DCFTA talks due to questions overdemocratic credentials, Georgia and Moldova have a more realistic, near-term chance of success. If the DCFTA with Georgia is negotiatedand initialled by the end of November, this would mark a major victory for the Baltic countries' Eastern Partnership policy.

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[5] "Eastern Partnership:it is strengthening cooperation and support to euro-integration reforms in 6 EP countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). On November 28-29 there will be the third EU and EP countries summit hosted in Vilnius", http://espirmininkavimas.urm.lt

[6] Among foreign policy priorities are further negotiations "with Moldova and Georgia on the political chapter of the Association Agreements and on establishing a deep and comprehensive free trade area" and launching the 1st phase of the EU – Georgia Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation. Accessed on January 26, 2013,http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/press-releases/2013/january/24-2/

While pursuing an active foreign policy within the EU, the Baltic states retain the aim of strengthening Baltic-Black Sea regional solidarity. Exporting the Baltic states' stability and security to the Caucasus is seen as a desirable endeavour. Georgia, in particular, evinces great interest in such cooperation. From the Georgian perspective, the Baltic model of development is a clear success story in the history of EU integration and represents a positive model for Eastern Partnership countries that aspire to closer integration with the EU. Georgia also wants to emulate the Baltic states in their political discourse and transformation of political institutions. Moreover, the Baltic example represents a role model for the kind of security Georgia wishes to achieve

Links with the Baltic space are also important for Georgia from a geopolitical perspective, as partnership means more options for countering Russian influence. Like Georgia, the Baltic states' post-Soviet geopolitical identity has been based on Russia as the overriding external threat. With Russia seeking to pressure Georgia to accommodate to its geopolitical agenda, neither Georgia nor the Baltic states want to see growing Russian influence in the Caucasus. It was no accident that the Baltics were founding members of the "New Friends of Georgia" group established in 2005,[7] which also included Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland. The group's chief goal was to assist Georgia in its bid for European and Euro-Atlantic integration by applying the experiences of the Group's members. This informal gathering of several European states has provided expertise and advice to Tbilisi – they understand what it means to fight for sovereignty and maintain an independent foreign policy under the shadow of a big neighbour.

The specification "new" differentiates it from the original network, which included the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. The "old" group became collectively dysfunctional after

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[7] The New Friends of Georgia group was officially established in 2005, although the member states were actively supporting Georgia's cause as an unofficial group even before, in Lisbon EU summit in 2004. "Gruzijosdraugaisurengėposėdįlietuvoje", last modified September 22, 2007, http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=1171.

it was renamed the "UN Secretary General's Group of Friends of Georgia" and included Russia as a veto-wielding member. Therefore, the Baltic countries, together with Poland, took upon themselves to balance international engagement with Georgia – as part of larger international structures and bilateral relations – which has been more than welcome in Tbilisi.

Bilateral Relationships

In view of the parallels between the Baltic states and Georgia's situations, the emergence of close bilateral relations has been a natural development. The Baltic states' support for Georgia's aspirations to NATO and EU membership has been instrumental for the harmonization of national legislation and institutions, as well as for reforming the Georgian defence sector and other spheres of public policy. Although Georgia is not a NATO member, it has made tremendous contributions to the NATO-led international efforts in Afghanistan by deploying over 1,000 troops[8] under French and U.S. command without national caveats. This has helped create a new dynamic in Georgian-Baltic relations. In fact, relations with the Baltic states has emerged as a foreign policy priority for Georgia. Its National Security Concept, adopted by the Georgian parliament in December 2011, separately notes "active cooperation" with the Baltic states, while emphasizing the "huge importance of cooperation" with Eastern and Central European states, as well as with Scandinavian countries.[9]

Common security interests have led to stronger ties between Georgia and the Baltics, including cooperation on energy, cyber security, and national defence issues. During the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Estonia sent cyber security experts to Georgia and took over the hosting of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website after cyber attacks essentially shut down Georgian government communications.

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[8] In the fall 2012 the number of troops was raised to 1,560, Georgian Ministry of Defence, http://www.mod.gov.ge.

[9] National Security Concept of Georgia, December 23,2011, accessed on January 27, 2013, http://nsc.gov.ge/eng/.

The 2012 Defence Cooperation Plan between Georgia and Lithuania anticipates Georgian participation at the Lithuanian Military Academy and the Baltic Defence College in Tartu (Estonia) for military medical and non-commissioned officer courses.

Lithuania foresees sending representatives of its Land Forces to Georgia's Sachkhere Mountain Training School and conducting meetings for logistics and civil-military cooperation specialists. Exchanges and consultations have also covered the development of the National Security Concept of Georgia, procurement issues, training, and education.

Latvia has not been as active in security cooperation, but like Estonia and Lithuania, the Latvian government identified Georgia as one of the priority countries for its development cooperation strategy. Priority areas for cooperation are: fostering a market economy, promoting sustainable social development (good governance, civil society, and local governments), and education and environment. Following the August 2008 military conflict between Russia and Georgia, Latvia reviewed its priorities to provide "support towards the post-conflict reconstruction in Georgia and towards the liquidation of the consequences of war."[10]

"Strengthening the role of Latvia as a bilateral donor, thus pursuing foreign interests of Latvia" is one the main goals of the development cooperation policy. Similar views are shared in Tallinn and Vilnius. As areas of support differ only slightly between the Baltic states (apart from the above mentioned priorities, Lithuania also focuses on strengthening Euro-integration processes, and, Estonia, on the development of small businesses and the growth of entrepreneurship), the development cooperation policy has emerged as an integral part of a joint Baltic foreign policy.

The Baltic countries also became donor countries after joining the EU in 2004. While assistance to date has been limited in financial terms, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have become stakeholders in Georgian

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[10] "Latvia's Assistance to Georgia", accessed on January 27, 2013, http://www.am.gov.lv/en/policy/DevelopmentCo-operation/info/Assistance-Georgia.

affairs through technical cooperation efforts. For example, the Georgian government has been shaping health care reforms according to the Estonian model and consulted Lithuanian counterparts in agriculture and audit system. Development cooperation also provides a framework to promote political, cultural, economic, and social relationship between the countries. Moreover, the fact that Georgia was chosen as a target country for development assistance is also a statement about the foreign policy priorities of the Baltic states – which Georgian government has actively supported.

In the economic realm, Baltic markets are increasingly important for the Georgian economy in light of still-ongoing difficulties of bringing Georgian products such as wine and mineral water to Russian markets. Great efforts have been made to encourage Georgian exports to the Baltic region and, at the same time, incentivize investments from the Baltic states. After Georgia's Rose Revolution, former Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar advised the Georgian government on the importance of carrying out of liberal reforms. After Russia banned the import of Georgian wine in 2006, the Baltic countries reacted by working to help Georgia to enter the EU market through a number of initiatives. The Baltic Chamber of Commerce (Balcham) was established in the beginning of 2008 to promote economic relations between Georgia and the Baltic Countries. The embassies of all three Baltic countries have been organizing exchange meetings between Baltic and Georgian businessmen. Honorary Consuls of Estonia (Otar Sharadze, in service since 2009), Lithuania (Boris Gamrekeli, 2010) and Latvia (Bondo Davitashvili, 2012) have been instructed to promote economic relations as a the principle task of their office. It is expected that an active Baltic policy toward Georgia will strengthen commercial relations and set the stage for expanded Baltic investment in the region.

Georgian liberalization reforms and persistent pro-West posture, on the other hand, have also helped facilitate foreign investment from the Baltic countries, as it created attractive business environment in the country. The U.S.-based Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom scored Georgia at 72.2, ranking its economy the world's 21st

freest in the 2013 Index.[11] In Europe, Georgia is ranked 11th out of 43 countries for persistent efforts to eliminate corruption and restore fiscal stability. Apart from close Baltic-Georgian relations, the above mentioned factors and Georgia's systemically low import tariff rates have helped attract a growing inflow of Baltic investors. However, deeper institutional reforms to enhance judicial independence and effectiveness still remain critical, and the new government needs to ensure stability in order to revitalize foreign investment, which has yet to recover from pre-2008 war highs.

Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian trade with Georgia 2005-2012 (9 months) (in million Euros)[1]

	Export from EE	Import from EE	Export to LT	Import from Lt	Export to LV	Import from LV
2005	2.3	0.8	2.5	14.2	1.3	4.6
2006	1.8	0.6	4.0	4.8	2.7	4.7
2007	0.9	2.6	4.2	11.0	3.3	6.2
2008	0.9	1.4	5.2	15.6	4.0	8.1
2009	0.8	1.1	5.6	9.5	2.5	12.4
2010	0.8	4.3	6.8	18.2	5.0	11.7
2011	1.1	3.5	12.1	23.7	5.9	13.9
2012 9months	1.7	3.2	9.6	32.3	3.6	15.5

Since the Rose Revolution, people-to-people ties have been strengthened. There has been a considerable increase in Georgian emigration to the Baltic countries, especially boosted in 2010 when the EU and Georgia signed a visa facilitation agreement, opening the way for easier travel. Historical ties from the Soviet era, growing economic relations, and a friendly political atmosphere has encouraged increased numbers of Georgian citizens seeking to emigrate to the Baltics.

[11] 2013 Index of Economic Freedom, http://www.heritage.org/index/country/georgia.

Along with growing immigration flows to the Baltic states, however, the risk of irregular migration to the Baltic states is also increasing.[12] Lithuania is often selected as the purported country of destination for Georgians seeking to gain entry to the Schengen Area. The majority of state border violators and expelled aliens from Lithuania in 2011 and 2012 were Georgian citizens.[13] Although the Baltic countries have consistently supported a EU visa-free regime for Georgian citizens, growing irregular migration from Georgia to the Schengen zone via the Baltic states has been an impediment to the process.

The Russia-Georgia Conflict and its Implications for Baltic-Georgian Relations

The Russia-Georgia war of 2008 stirred painful memories of Soviet occupation in the Baltic states. In the Baltics, there was dismay as the West failed to offer Georgia more robust support during the conflict. Understandably, Baltic capitals rallied behind Georgia against Russia's military incursion. Some Baltic officials and commentators even openly wondered if Russia's invasion presaged a potential threat to their own independence. Even the security guarantees that come with NATO membership, which the Baltic states enjoy – unlike Georgia – failed to eliminate their sense of insecurity as their Baltic relations with Russia remain complicated.

The war also demonstrated to political elites that the territorial integrity of small states still cannot be taken for granted, even within Europe. With their own significant ethnic Russian minority populations, Estonia and Latvia were particularly alarmed by Russia's public explanation that it had invaded Georgia to protect the rights of its citizens. The war also raised a host of uncomfortable questions regarding the future security of the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The overall response of the West, which

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[12] In 2011, 125 aliens were expelled (the majority of them (46) being Georgian citizens); 416 instances of violation of the state border were registered, 392 state border violators were detained (including 137 detained Georgian citizens (the majority of detained violators). "Annual Policy Report: Migration and Asylum in Lithuania 2011", European Migration Network, (Vilnius 2012), http://www.emn.lt/uploads/documents/lt_policy_2011_eng.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

was perceptibly weak, increased to this sense of general uncertainty. On a pragmatic level, the war gave the Baltic states crucial insights into Russian foreign policy toward its small neighbours and solidified their view that underestimating or ignoring Russia's potential threat could be risky.

The Baltic states continue to press Russia more than other EU members to fulfil its obligations under the Six-Point August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement that was concluded with then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy's mediation. Along with Great Britain and Poland, the Baltic states remain in favour of a tougher stance toward Russia's fulfilment of commitments – or its lack thereof – under the cease-fire agreement. Lithuania was the first to condemn Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, followed by similar resolutions by the European Parliament and the U.S. Senate.[14] The Georgian public appreciated the moral and political support they received from the Baltic states during the war. By travelling to Tbilisi as the war concluded and demonstrating their firm support for the democratic choices of the Georgian people, Baltic leaders, together with the Polish leadership, managed to win the hearts and minds of many Georgians.

Relations after 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

Parliamentary elections in Georgia in October 2012 has been a turning point in the country's democracy consolidation. While Georgian politics have entered a turbulent period exacerbated by a difficult cohabitation process, it also marks an important crossroads in the country's emerging foreign and security policy. So far, Georgian withdrawal from Western ambitions and its gradual reorientation into Russia's sphere of influence that some observers anticipated after the election have not come to pass. Nonetheless, in exchange for mending ties with Moscow, worries remain that Tbilisi may be tempted to return to former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze's policy of "balancing" relations between Russia and the West. In such case, there is certain risk that Georgia may take a pause

[14] Lithuanian Parliament Resolution on Situation in Georgia, Nr.XIP-1918, 2010 June 1,www.lrs.lt; European Parliament Resolutionon the negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (2011/2133(INI)) 2011 November 17; US Senate Resolution S.Res.175, 2011 July 27.

on its path towards Euro-Atlantic integration, which could in turn slow institutional reform aimed at bringing Georgia closer to EU standards. As the difficult co-habitation process is still ongoing, it also remains to be seen whether recent political shuffles will propel Georgia towards a Western-style liberal democracy or plunge into violent political turmoil.

As staunch supporters of Georgia's project of modernization and integration to the West, the Baltic states approved of the first peaceful power transition in Georgia through institutionalized tools. However, the new government's plans of reconciliation with Russia have been causing a certain hesitation in Baltic capitals. Considering that Baltic support for Georgia has traditionally meant support for its Westernization and balancing Russia's influence, Tbilisi's more conciliatory foreign policy turn is a new adjustment. On the other hand, Saakashvili has been losing personal support abroad since 2008, as it was understood that transition to full-fledged democracy is crucial to fulfil Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

At least two scenarios are possible in the future: the new government will continue normalizing its relationship with Russia, but at the same time will manage to maintain a strong relationship with the West. The Baltic countries are ready to serve as a link, since they are relatively small players in the region and have tradition of cooperation with Georgia and serving as liaisons to the EU or NATO.

Yet another scenario would be fulfilled if the new government drifts toward Russia wholesale and gradually cools towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Although the Baltic states support Georgia's pro-West policies, they do not have the leverage to impose such a foreign policy course on Tbilisi. Regardless of the direction Tbilisi's foreign policy takes, Georgia is likely to remain in the strategic interests of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania despite the direction its foreign policy takes.

Conclusion

After the war, other European partners sometimes criticized the Baltic states – and particularly Lithuania – for its outspoken position towards Georgia at the expense of "EU solidarity" on foreign policy issues. Their policy was said to not be in tune with that of EU heavyweights like Germany or France, which adopted more conciliatory approaches toward Russia after the war. Nonetheless, the Baltic states continue to concretely assist Georgia in its efforts to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. While NATO members like Germany and France have argued that pushing for a NATO Membership Action Plan for Georgia meant unnecessarily complicating relations with Russia, the Baltic states have nonetheless actively supported Georgia's stance on the conflict.

Although analysts in both regions assert that the foreign policy of the Baltic states toward Georgia has become more moderate, there is no clear evidence of this. On the contrary, the Baltic states have been the leading advocates in pushing for EU-Georgia talks on the establishment of a DCFTA. They also spoke out in favour of launching visa facilitation talks between Tbilisi and Brussels. Coupled with the solid commitments Tbilisi made to enable the EU-Georgia visa facilitation agreement, the Baltic states' firm advocacy likely contributed to its entry into force in March 2011.

In contrast to some Western states' frowning on Georgia's leadership after the conflict and reluctance to accept Georgia as a NATO member, the Baltic states' political support for Georgia has been consistent. Comparing the Georgian plight regarding Euro-Atlantic and European integration to their integration bids in the 1990s, the Baltic states have been strongly sympathetic to Georgia. Likewise, as Georgia seeks ways to ensure its security and work toward Euro-Atlantic integration, the Baltic model inspires it as a vivid example of how small states during a relatively short period of time can transform their security systems and integrate into NATO.

THE SCARS OF SEPARATISM: THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL CONFLICTS ON GEORGIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Mamuka Tsereteli

Internal conflicts played decisive role in the formation of Georgia's foreign policy since it regained independence in 1991. This chapter proposes four stages in the evolution of Georgian foreign policy over the last two decades against the backdrop of developments in and around the conflict areas.

The first stage of the evolution of foreign policy was between-1991and1993, during a period of active military confrontation in the Tskhinvali region, internationally known as South Ossetia, and then in Abkhazia. Georgia's strong political movement for independence from the Soviet Union emerged in the late 1980s, was obviously, not welcomed by nationalists in Moscow. Being a multiethnic society, Georgia became an easy target for manipulation through the country's numerous ethnic minorities. This was compounded by the inexperienced leadership of the national liberation movement, which failed to manage the emergence of the conflicts properly and allow the situation to deteriorate into open warfare – first in the Tskhinvali area during 1991-1992 and then in Abkhazia in 1992-1993. The active military phase in both conflicts ended with Russian mediation, since participation from major international organizations or other nation states in Georgian affairs was not significant. The conflicts resulted in more than 250,000 internally displaced persons in Georgia, hailing primarily from Abkhazia – where significant areas were ethnically cleansed of Georgians – but also from the Tskhinvali area. Russia received an opportunity to station "peacekeeping" forces in both regions, thus providing Russian protection for the separatist regimes.

This was a period of formation for independent state institutions after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it is no surprise that Georgia was not ready for these kind of challenges. It was probably the most difficult time in recent Georgian history, as the country was embroiled in civil and ethno-political conflicts and economic decline for several

years. Georgian foreign policy and institutions were also in the process of formation. During this period, a key priority for Georgian foreign policy was to inform the world community about the real nature of the ethno-political conflicts in the country – to highlight Russia's active role supporting separatist movements and to counter Russian propaganda that portrayed Georgia as violent nationalist state with the intention to suppress minority rights. However, Georgia was not very successful in this regard.

The second stage of Georgia's foreign policy evolution was between 1994-2004, when Georgia achieved a modicum of internal stability and economic recovery. President Shevardnadze's government capitalized on changing geopolitical realities. Working closely with partner countries – the United States, Turkey, Azerbaijan, as well as European States – Georgia achieved significant progress in foreign policy. In a broader geopolitical sense, the most significant success of Georgian foreign policy at the time, and recent Georgian diplomatic history, was the OSCE Istanbul summit in 1999, when Russia agreed to close four of its military bases and another military installation in Georgia. Russia fulfilling its obligations to close military facilities in Georgia and Moldova was set as a precondition for ratifying the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty by OSCE member states, including the United States. Georgia collaborated closely on this agreement with regional partner countries Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. This collaboration led to the creation of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, GUAM, which became an active instrument for regional cooperation in late 1990s and early 2000s.

During this period, Georgia's outstanding conflicts, like other conflicts in the former Soviet republics of Moldova and Azerbaijan, were labeled as "frozen conflicts," reflecting neither progress in the conflict resolution process nor active military confrontations in the conflict areas. During this time, Georgia managed to receive recognition from the OSCE of the Georgian population's ethnic cleansing from Abkhazia during the Budapest Summit on December 6, 1994. The summit documents read: "The participating States …. expressed their deep concern over 'ethnic cleansing,' the massive expulsion of people, predominantly Georgian, from their living areas and the deaths of large numbers of innocent civilians".[1] The international community contin-

[1] OSCE Documents, Budapest Summit December 5-6, 1994, http://www.osce.org/mc/39554?download=true#page=6&zoom=auto,0,695 Retrieved on March 30, 2013

ued to support the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia, faced with its own separatist conflict in Chechnya, also officially supported the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia also supported economic sanctions on Abkhazia, based on a unanimous decision by the 12 presidents of the CIS member countries in January 1996 to ban trade, financial, transportation, communications, and other ties with Abkhazia at the state level – that is, by ministries and state-owned entities in the member countries. Georgia's then-President Eduard Shevardnadze persuaded Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin to push through that decision and all the CIS member countries supported it, since most of them were well informed about potential secessionist trends at home or in neighboring states. Thus Georgia, while not being in control of significant parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and not being able to return internally displaced persons back, still managed to establish an international legal consensus recognizing Georgia's territorial integrity. These realities were reflected later in several UN General Assembly resolutions, recognizing right of return for internally displaced persons.[2]

Building on his pro-Western orientation, President Shevardnadze in 2002 announced NATO membership as an ultimate goal of Georgia's foreign and security policy. This announcement came against the backdrop of ongoing Russian military operations in neighboring Chechnya, with Russia even demanding the use of Georgian territory for military operations against Chechen rebels. At the same time, Russia accused Georgia of harboring Chechen rebels in the Pankisi Gorge area. In the face of strong political pressure from Russia, punctuated by occasional air strikes of Georgian territories by Russian forces, Georgia nonetheless managed to avoid war with Russia. The Georgian government also supported the U.S. sponsored "global war on terrorism" for the purpose of protecting its borders from penetration by radical Islamist groups and clearing Georgian territories of militant Chechen insurgents. The U.S.-sponsored "Train and Equip" program, which was designed to train Georgian troops in managing antiterrorism operations, was the first example of combat training for Georgian troops under NATO standards and had significant political implications for the modernization of Georgia's armed forces.

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[2] First such a resolution was adopted on May 15, 2008, reflecting on hard work of Georgian diplomats at UN for more than decade http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/ga10708.doc.htm, retrieved on March 31, 2013

Georgia also managed to establish excellent relationships with the United States, Turkey, and Azerbaijan on strategic energy pipeline projects that facilitated regional collaboration and increased integration to the global economy. By actively participating in these projects, Georgia became an actor in the global geopolitical picture. By 2003, Georgia was already a member of the European Council and the WTO. Of course, Georgia's active pro-Western policy didn't go unnoticed by Russia and it is no accident that there were at least two major assassination attempts on President Shevardnadze's life in the mid- and late- 1990s.

Despite registering successes in foreign policy and certain internal developments, rampant corruption and the weakness of state institutions limited opportunities for progress. In several regions of the country, the central government's authority was negligible. Different factions inside and outside of government undermined the rule of the legal administration. The political consequence of this reality was the "Rose Revolution," and the change of government in Georgia.

The third stage in evolution of Georgian foreign policy started in 2004, when the post-Rose Revolution government led by President Saakashvili assumed leadership in Georgia. The initial position of President Saakashvili was to distance himself and his government from what was seen as the negative legacy of President Shevardnadze in Moscow. At the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January of 2004, soon after his election as a President, Saakashvili stated that "[Shevardnadze] needed Russia as an enemy, I need Russia as a friend," and was praised for this statement by Russian nationalists.[3] Saakashvili hoped for a good relationship with Russia and concessions on the separatist regions – and Abkhazia in particular. He received quiet acceptance from Russia in the reestablishment of Tbilisi's influence in the Adjara region. But a follow-up attempt in August 2004 to bring the Tskhinvali region under control was total failure and seriously damaged the process of reintegration of the region into the Georgian political and economic space. It has to be mentioned that by 2004, the Tskhinvali region was on its way to economic integration with the rest of Georgia. The so-called "Ergneti Market" near Tskhinvali was one of the main entry points for many Russian products into Georgia, bypassing Georgian customs. The government, instead of regulating the market and collecting taxes or fees, closed it and thus eliminated opportunity for open

[3] Moscow Times, January 23, 2004,

economic collaboration between Ossetians and Georgians. A brief military campaign into Tskhinvali region led by then-interior minister Irakli Okruashvili failed and cost the lives of US-trained soldiers. Both Russian as well as Western governments warned Georgia about the negative consequences of escalating the conflict. This incident made it clear that Russia did not intend to give a free hand to the new Georgian government in dealings with the separatist conflicts in Georgia unless serious concessions were made on its policy of Western orientation.

This development forced the Georgian government to reconsider its reintegration strategy for the separatist regions. The overall position of the government at that time was to break the existing status quo in the conflict areas, but there were differences in approaches among government officials. Irakli Alasania, who was appointed as the special envoy of the President of Georgia on Abkhazian issues, favored direct talks with the de facto Abkhaz leadership along with the internationalization of the conflict with engagement from Georgia's international partners as mediators. But this approach was not shared by the powerful defense and interior ministries and other such elements in government, who saw a military solution to the conflict as a viable alternative. Not necessarily through the direct use of force, for reunification but at least the demonstration of military power as a foundation for a stronger Georgian negotiation position with Russia and the separatist governments. This approach demanded heavy investments in military equipment in the period between 2004 and 2008. President Saakashvili sided with the security ministers and dismissed Alasania from his position as a top negotiator on Abkhazian issues and sent him to the UN as an ambassador in September 2006.

This period was marked by heavy rhetoric by the Georgian government of the imminent reunification of the country and integration with NATO. The Georgian leadership hoped for parallel and rapid successes in both directions, so Georgia's foreign policy focused on these priorities. But this hope was not founded on diligent strategic analysis of the existing and emerging regional geopolitical realities. In the West, NATO expansion was not seen as a strategic priority. Georgia aligned itself with Ukraine's Orange government to move forward with NATO integration, while pursuing pro-active and sometime aggressive actions on issues related to the conflict areas, which was not always well-coordinated with regional strategic partners or the West.

One such move was establishment of parallel governance structures in South Ossetia in 2007. Another was the consolidation of the central government's influence and an increase in its military presence in the Kodori Gorge in the Georgian populated, mountainous regions of Abkhazia. What the Georgian government saw as entirely legitimate actions were considered as escalating tensions with Russia by Georgia's partners. In particular, Georgia's European partners did not feel comfortable moving forward with Georgia's NATO membership on the backdrop of the tense Georgian-Russian relationship. The Georgia-Russia relationship reached a nadir after the arrest of Russian spies in Georgia in October 2006. The television spectacle of Russian spies guarded by female Georgian police officers was seen as a humiliation by Russia's leadership. President Putin retaliated with the forceful deportation of Georgian citizens from Russia, accompanied by gross violations of human rights. The incident also was a pretext for Russia to ban Georgian wines, mineral waters, agricultural products, and even air and postal links. The already complicated Georgia-Russia relationships were made even more difficult by the personalized, aggressive rhetoric of both Saakashvili and Putin, who both used the troubled bilateral relationship for domestic political purposes. By demonstrating "toughness," the two leaders hoped for greater domestic popularity, though at the expense of national interests.

Russia's aggressive moves against Georgia escalated after the U.S. and other Western countries recognized Kosovo's independence in early 2008. Georgian and U.S. diplomatic efforts to present Kosovo's case as unique failed to resonate with Russia. Kosovo was the first case in Europe after World War II of forceful separation of territory from a state (Serbia) without its consent. In response, Moscow claimed this to be a precedent applicable to other cases, referring especially to Georgia. In March 2008, Moscow lifted its economic embargo of Abkhazia, in force since 1996, and began moving military engineering forces into Abkhazia.

Against the backdrop of these moves by Russia, the NATO Bucharest Summit in April 2008 considered Georgia and Ukraine's bids for Membership Action Plans (MAP), the road map for membership for aspirant states. Despite the strong support of the United States and U.S. President George W. Bush, German and French leadership resisted such a move amid fears of Russian reaction. The compromise decision was to promise Georgia and Ukraine eventual membership, reflected in the final

language of the summit declaration, but not to provide a MAP. This decision degraded this promise to the level of a political declaration, without offering substantive support for the membership process.

These processes on the international stage were accompanied by substantial internal political destabilization in Georgia at the end of 2007. After crackdowns on demonstrations and shutting down an opposition television station, President Mikheil Saakashvili resigned, triggering snap elections that he won under disputed circumstances. Under external and internal pressure, Saakashvili's government engaged in belligerent escalation with Russia – a process that did not serve Georgian interests and was more skillfully managed by Moscow.

The combination of these internal and external developments led to the biggest failure of Georgian public policy in the last two decades: war with Russia and the occupation of over 20 percent of Georgian territory by Russian military forces. Moscow used the war as a pretext to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, which are now effectively Russian vassal states. Georgia's political and socio-economic ties with the separatist regions are weaker than at any time in recent history. This development made reintegration of those territories into Georgian state in the future a much more difficult task. Russian troops that once were withdrawn from Georgian territories after many years of extended diplomacy – including from efforts by the Saakashvili government in 2004-2005 – and negotiations under international monitoring process, have returned and are in control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The end of the war marked the beginning of the fourth stage in the evolution of the Georgian foreign policy. Looking at the rhetoric and actions of the Georgian government before and after the 2008 war, it is noticeable that the country's foreign policy became much more rational in the aftermath. But this change simply reflected the devastating results of the war. Georgia's foreign policy priority after the war was non-recognition of the separatist areas as independent states. With the help of the U.S. and other allies, Georgian diplomacy managed to achieve that goal, which must be considered as a success. Only the Russian Federation and four other states friendly to Russia recognized independence of the territories. Even Moscow's closest allies in the Commonwealth of Independent States – such as Belarus and Armenia – would not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, Georgia's NATO prospects were significantly damaged due to the war. The war demonstrated the potential of direct military confrontation with Russia, which strengthened fears of the potential consequences of Georgian NATO membership. Yet Georgia still received helpful instruments for collaboration with NATO, such as the NATO-Georgia commission and the Annual National Program. The Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed with the United States in January of 2009, is also an important diplomatic mechanism that helps Georgia. But these had little effects on the negative attitudes of a number of Western European countries towards the prospect of Georgian NATO membership. The West now works to accommodate the Russian position on Georgia's accession into NATO as a result of the 2008 experience. This has yielded an unenviable task for Georgian foreign policy: to continue the process of Euro-Atlantic integration while its territorial conflicts are unresolved, compounded by Russia's occupation and recognition of the separatist regions.

It will take Georgia substantial time and effort to regain the trust and confidence of its partners and the international community in general. But this does not mean that Georgia needs to reduce its efforts towards NATO membership. Just the opposite; efforts need to be strengthened. The prospect of advancing integration with the European Union in some areas remains promising. Georgia may sign an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the E.U. in 2014. Further evidence of a more rational foreign policy of the Saakashvili government after the war is the acceleration of the negotiation process with the E.U. on different aspects of integration. The new Georgian government elected in October 2012 picked up on that progress and has made significant effort to further accelerate the process. At the same time, actual E.U. membership for Georgia is a distant prospect at best and will require many years of hard work.

It is clear that Georgia's strategic position is weak due primarily to the difficulties in Georgian-Russian relations. This is the reality that every Georgian government is facing. But the new Georgian government that came to power after the elections on October 1, 2012 inherited more difficult realities in this regard than any other previous Georgian government: Russia is militarily occupying Georgian territories. As long as Georgia continues its independent, Europe-oriented foreign policy, and as long as the current leadership remains in power in Moscow, Georgian-Russian relationships are not going to improve dramatically. At the same

time, these relationships can be managed far more effectively to Georgia's advantage. It is important to develop relationships with Russia that would eliminate or at least drastically reduce the possibility of military confrontation. This is important for both the political and economic security of Georgia. Without some anticipation of security, it will be hard to actualize much needed inflows of the foreign direct investments in Georgia, including, from Western countries in particular. Confidence in Georgia's security can only come with some degree of normalization with Russia. This does not mean that Georgia should abandon its policies calling for the de-occupation of the Georgian territories, non-recognition of the separatist areas, and integration with NATO and the E.U. None of these polices preclude Russia from opening its market for Georgian products, nor do they presage more Russian military involvement in Georgia.

The election of the new government in Georgia opened some space in Tbilisi's relations with Moscow. There are indications that Georgia's Western partners welcome this opportunity. Reduced tensions with Russia may improve chances for greater integration into the European and transatlantic political, security, and economic space. This has been and should remain a key priority for the future foreign policy direction of Georgia and it is critical for the current Georgian government to achieve progress towards these goals, as they would contribute to greater stability and economic prosperity for the Georgian people. An essential element of this strategy lies in obtaining foreign support; Georgia's partners abroad are key national assets and the new government needs to be in constant coordination to move to the next chapter in its development.

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