

## INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

DOI: 10.46340/eppd.2021.8.2.1

**Amiran Khevtsuriani, Doctor of International Relations**

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7739-7232>

*Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

**Igor Kveselava, Doctor of Historical Sciences**

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6889-4771>

*Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

### GEORGIA'S WESTERN COURSE AS RUSSIA'S MAIN TARGET

The article deals with the main directions of Georgia's foreign policy and the preconditions for their formation in the context of relations with Russian Federation. The foreign policy of the country is largely shaped by the influence of its political culture. The foreign policy of post-Soviet Georgia was also determined by its political culture. Traditionally, Georgian society has had a strong sense of belonging to Western civilization, and this has had a significant impact on the country's foreign policy orientation. But Georgia's pro-Western aspirations have historically been questioned by geopolitical constraints due to its location. Surrounded by the large states, from the west – Turkey, from the south – Iran, and from the north – Russian Federation, a small country in the South Caucasus has always been forced to pay attention to the geopolitical interests of its large neighbors. As for the restoration of state independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has constantly used various political and economic tools to prevent Georgia from escaping its sphere of influence and hinder its unification into Euro-Atlantic military and political structures.

First of all, the western aspirations of modern Georgia were founded by the unity of ancient Christian values. The democratic legacy of the First Independent Republic (1918-1921) and the national movement that emerged during the Soviet occupation also played a decisive role. In this regard, the merits of the national liberation movement in the late 1980s are particularly significant in terms of both the consolidation of the nation and the popularization of Western culture and values. The vast majority of the leaders of this movement in Georgia were the bearers of the pro-Western foreign policy orientation.

**Keywords:** Georgia; Russia; NATO; EU; USA; Kosovo; conflict; Western Course.

Georgia tried to breakthrough in the euro-atlantic direction until the twentieth century. The travel of the famous Georgian writer and public figure SulKhan-Saba Orbeliani in Western Europe in 1714-1715 also served this purpose. During this trip, as an envoy of King Vakhtang VI, he had an audience with King Louis XIV of France, whom he presented a memorandum on the prospects of future relations between Georgia and France. As it turned out, King Louis XIV already had some idea of Georgia and the ongoing processes there, which was undoubtedly the merit of a fairly large French missionary group working in Georgia at the time.

Vakhtang VI calculated that by establishing diplomatic relations with France he would be able to neutralize the threats posed by the Ottomans and Iran. But the king's desire remained as desire only. As events have shown, SulKhan-Saba's diplomatic efforts were accompanied by quite powerful impediments. Iranian diplomacy at the time made every effort to devastate Vakhtang VI's plan, which eventually happened.

It should also be noted that the failure of SulKhan-Saba Orbeliani's diplomatic mission in Western Europe became a precondition and a real reason for the shift of Georgia's foreign policy orientation to the north – to Russia.

At the present stage, the foreign policy of the Georgian state is focused on strengthening cooperation in the fields of security and economy with the United States, NATO, and the European Union. However, since this process is not developing at the desired pace, the country is forced to think about normalizing relations with Russia. But, it is less possible to combine these two fundamentally different processes. Any activation of official Tbilisi in terms of relations with the West is immediately followed by a whole cascade of aggressive steps by Moscow, which unambiguously hinders the process of Georgia's integration into Western structures. Therefore, we have a legitimate reason to think that Georgia's Western foreign policy course is the main geopolitical target of the Russian Federation.

From Russia, the main attack to Georgia's western course was undoubtedly in August 2008: former US Deputy Secretary of State Ronald D. Asmus in his famous book, "A Little War That Shook the World", describes in detail the evolution of the Russian-Georgian conflict and then comments: "Moscow has repeatedly warned Georgia that its pursuit towards the West would have disastrous consequences. Solving the problem of separatism in Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia would depend on the extent to which Georgia would take into account the requirements of Russia. Georgia, for its part, has stubbornly opposed such pressure, but it seems that by this time, Moscow has moved from words to deeds: the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the West and the promise of Georgia's NATO membership it has responded by strengthening ties with separatist regions. It was very similar to the so-called "Creeping Annexation Strategy"<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, the opinion is highly interesting and, most importantly, based on the constancy of facts. The author explicitly states that both the cause and the purpose of the 2008 August war were Georgia's foreign policy and its change, which Russia ultimately failed to do. Moreover, with this aggression, it left Georgia with practically no other way but to further strengthen its chosen foreign vector. After this fact, Georgia finally realized that the only external guarantee of the country's sovereignty was the unification of the country into Euro-Atlantic structures.

We will certainly agree with Ronald D. Asmus in his statement, where he unequivocally states that the war was action not only against Georgia and its foreign policy but also against Washington, NATO, and the West in general. With this step, Russia has targeted the European security system, the stability and reliability of which encouraged countries like Georgia to take the road to the West. Russia's goal was to eliminate any opportunity for NATO expansion in Georgia and any other country, as well as to show its neighbors what could lead to a desire to get too close to the West<sup>2</sup>.

It is unequivocally clear that the main problem of Georgia's security is still related to the Russian factor. Moscow uses all available means to put pressure on Tbilisi, such as military operations, hybrid tactics, cyber-attacks, powerful propaganda, various types of economic blockades, support for pro-Russian politicians and parties in the country, and of course Georgia's separatist regions and military bases allocated there. The current government, on the other hand, tends to refrain from harsh anti-Russian rhetoric as much as possible, which was a hallmark of its predecessor administration. Today, Georgia's policy towards Russia is more pragmatic: Tbilisi recognizes that the main threat comes from Russia, but seeks to neutralize that threat through dialogue and trade. But the main disadvantage of this "cautious and pragmatic" policy is the opposite outcome. The impression remains that Moscow views the constructive policy proposed by the Georgian authorities as a manifestation of a kind of weakness and in response favors the strengthening of diplomatic, military, and political pressure. If we pragmatically evaluate Russia's foreign policy, specifically in the context of Georgia, we will find that it "does not shine." Recognition of Georgia's separatist regions, not occupation (it occupied those territories until 2008, at least most parts of them) has brought Russia more problems than benefits. According to T. De Vaal, Russia expected much more results from this recognition. He thinks that the decision of recognition by Putin and Medvedev has happened more with the background of minute euphoria than as a result of specific consultations. At the same time, according to him, at that time, this decision was opposed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov<sup>3</sup>.

Of course, at this stage we don't have any evidence as to whether S. Lavrov was against recognition of Abkhazia and the so-called "South Ossetia", however, almost eleven years after the fact, we can draw the appropriate conclusions: after the recognition, President D. Medvedev repeatedly referred to the "Kosovo precedent", which was repeatedly emphasized by V. Putin before the extreme escalation of the conflict

<sup>1</sup> Aghanian, D. (2007). *The Armenian Diaspora: Cohesion and Fracture*. Lanham Md: The University Press of America.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Armstrong, J. (1976). A. Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas. *American Political Science Review*, 70( 2), 393-408.

as well. It seems that the Kremlin hoped that, like Kosovo, the wave of recognition would also postpone to Abkhazia and the so-called "South Ossetia, in which its declared allies should play a decisive role. However, the reality turned out to be different and Russian diplomacy failed miserably in this direction. In the post-Soviet space, none of its allies, including Belarus, recognized these territories. In the end, Russia failed to create "its own Kosovo" and limited itself to the solidarity of countries such as Venezuela, Nauru, Nicaragua, and Syria, which are less rated in the non-regional and international arenas. As a result, it received two incomplete, miniature satellites that act as parasites on its budget.

Instead, Russia eventually lost Georgia as a partner that further strengthened its Euro-Atlantic foreign policy vector, backed up by the vast majority of Georgia's population. The country has started tight military cooperation with the United States since 2008 and is moving closer to NATO standards (based on some statements made by NATO officials). At the same time, Georgia developed political and economic ties with the European Union and signed an association agreement that allowed Georgian citizens to travel to various EU countries without a visa.

Undoubtedly, the 2008 war significantly hampered Georgia's integration process in NATO. At the same time, according to the Charter of the Alliance, a country that has unresolved territorial issues will not be able to join them, which is also an important impediment. However, the decision of the Bucharest Summit that the country will definitely become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance has not disappeared anywhere, which is systematically emphasized by our strategic partners.

At the same time, there is an opinion that in case of the existence of the relevant political will, even without formal registration in NATO, neither Tbilisi nor Washington, in particular, can be prevented with further development of bilateral military-political cooperation. Especially when a similar model of relations already exists in practice and has been applied to US partners who at one point or another were unable to join the Alliance<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, this view has a right to exist. An example of a special case is the strategic alliance between the United States and South Korea, similar is the case of Kuwait, where the United States is the guarantor of its sovereignty. In our case, however, the crucial factor is the margin of US geopolitical interest in the region in the conditions of harsh competition from Russia. According to Western think tanks, as well as widespread opinions, the United States undoubtedly has serious interests in the South Caucasus, although none of them are vital on a geopolitical scale. Its main goals are: preserving regional stability; preventing the resumption of frozen conflicts; and supporting democratic change and better governance as well as the international integration of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

But even achieving these goals will not be easy in a situation where Russia, as the main favorite to gain full control over the region, has such significant advantages over its competitors as geographical proximity, ability and experience in manipulating ethnic conflicts, military bases in the occupied territories of Georgia and Armenia, demonstrative readiness to use force and action-based claims that its interests and stakes in the South Caucasus are much higher than others. Many analysts believe that the main cause of the crisis, first in Georgia and then in Ukraine, is the West's misguided and overly tolerant policy towards Russia, which aimed at Russia's integration into the world economic and political structures after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the West's attitude towards Russia has never been simple and straightforward, but it has included various eclectic aspects and political orientations. Of course, in this opinion, there is a rather "rich grain" of truth. Still, the military aggression against Georgia in 2008 was perceived by the West as a kind of "post-imperial reflex" of Russia in response to NATO's eastward expansion and recognition of Kosovo. Consequently, this military confrontation did not have a proper impact on the Russian-Western relations, which indicates that adequate conclusions could not be drawn. And, a year after the war, the United States generally pursued a policy of reset with Russia, as a result of which US relations with Russia's neighboring post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, shifted somewhat to the background.

## References:

1. Bhatti, R., Bronson, R. (2010). *NATO, Mixed signals in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, 42:3, 129-146, DOI: 10.1080/713660220 [in English].
2. Adalian, R. P. (1995). *Armenia's Foreign Policy: Defining Priorities and Coping with Conflict*. NY. [in English].
3. Aghanian, D. (2007). *The Armenian Diaspora: Cohesion and Fracture*. Lanham Md: The University Press of America. [in English].

---

<sup>1</sup> Astourian, S. H. (2000-2001). From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia. *Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Working Paper Series, Winter*.

4. Armstrong, J. (1976). A. Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas. *American Political Science. Review*, 70( 2), 393-408. [in English].
5. Astourian, S. H. (2000-2001). From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia. *Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Working Paper Series, Winter*. [in English].
6. Babacan, A. (2008). "Calming the Caucasus". *International Herald Tribune. September*, 23. [in English].
7. Berenskoetter, F., Williams, M. J. (2007). *Power in World Politics*. London; New York: Routledge. [in English].
8. Bertsch, G. K. (2000). *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*. NY: Routledge. [in English].
9. Broers, L. (2005). *The Limits of Leadership: Elites and Societies in the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process. Conciliation Resources* <<http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/nagorny-karabakh/contents.php>> (2021, March, 12). [in English].
10. Chorbajian, L. (2001). *The Making of Nagorno-Karabakh. From Secession to Republic*. NY: Palgrave. [in English].
11. Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An introduction*. London: UCL Press. [in English].
12. Cornell, S. (2000). *Small nations and great powers: A study of ethno-political conflict in the Caucasus*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis. [in English].
13. Cornell, S. (1999). The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. Report. *Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University*, 46. [in English].
14. Cornell, S. (1997). The unruly Caucasus. *Current History*, 3. [in English].
15. Croissant, M. P. (1998). *The Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict: Causes and implication*. Westport-Connecticut-London. [in English].
16. Croissant, M. P., Bulent, A. (1999). *Oil and Geopolitics of the Caspian Sea Region*. Praeger. [in English].
17. Crooker, Ch. A., Hampson F.O. (1996). *Managing Global Chaos, Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press. [in English].
18. Bertsch, G. K., Craft, C. B., Jones, S. A., Beck, M. D. (eds.) (2000). *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*. NY: Routledge . [in English].
19. Szayna, T. S., Oliker, O. (eds.) (2003). *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: implications for the U.S. Army*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND. [in English].
20. Fuller, G. (1997). Geopolitical Dynamics of the Caspian Region. *Caspian Crossroads*, 3, 2. [in English].
21. Fuller, E. (1993). Mediators for Transcaucasia's conflicts. *The World Today*, 49, 5, 89-92. [in English].
22. Fuller, E. (1994). *Russian Strategy in the Transcaucasus since the demise of the USSR*. Koln. [in English].