

Why Is a Small State Like Georgia Important for the USA, the EU and Russia?

Written by Tamta Utiashvili

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TAMTA UTIASHVILI, JUN 4 2014

INTRODUCTION

The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave birth to new states, changed the way the international system had worked, opened up new security dynamics and dimensions and facilitated the emergence of the new world order. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a small state like Georgia, as well as other former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) ones, gained independence and showed the world its desire to control its own borders independently. During the early post-Soviet period, this tiny and weak nation faced serious internal and external problems threatening its sovereignty. Georgia was struggling to establish itself as a modern democratic and sovereign country and was suffering from ineffective central administrative power. It as well had to tackle various challenges of the international system. The country had little understanding of modern statehood, was unable to develop effective foreign and security policy priorities, and relied on international aid (Jones 1996: 340). The control and fear of Russia did not enable Georgia to develop its own foreign policy priorities, strategic orientation and national security agenda. Nevertheless, Georgia was saved from collapse and in the beginning of the 21st century important developments were observed as the country became westward-looking.

Georgia, a small state, is located at a strategically important crossroads and is situated in the Caucasian region between Russian and Turkey, the Caspian and the Black Seas. Throughout centuries Georgia had attracted great interest of Turkey, Iran, Mongolia, and Russia. Since independence from the Soviet Union geopolitical circumstances and domestic developments in Georgia have become increasingly significant for the United States of America (USA, U.S.), the European Union (EU) and Russia. Nowadays, the country has attracted increased attention in terms of European and Western energy security and plays an active role due to its strategic geographical location. Particularly, the new energy export infrastructure – the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is important for Europe and the USA as it bypasses Russia and undermines Moscow's hegemony in Caucasus. According to Lynch (2006: 8), Georgia “matters because of its importance as a transit route for energy goods from the Caspian Sea region”.

This dissertation deals with the issue of Georgia's relevance—most importantly its geopolitical relevance—for the USA, the EU and Russia. The research was inspired by the recent developments in Georgia's domestic and foreign policy cycle and its strategic significance for Western countries and the northern neighbour. The methodological framework is set by a mixture of descriptive, analytical and comparative methods.

This dissertation will analyse the international relations of Georgia with the USA, the EU and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The key research question is: Why is a small state like Georgia important for the USA, the EU and Russia? The paper presents the country's pro-Western orientation and striving for North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) membership. It seeks to understand to what extent Georgia is geopolitically relevant for the USA, the EU and Russia. The dissertation will argue that the U.S. and the EU aim to have access to new territory, control the east-west bridge, diversify access to energy, isolate the state from Russian dominance, promote democracy and avoid occurrence of terrorist acts and international threats. Russia, for its part, pursues its own objectives to continue domination in the region and wishes Georgia to stop cooperation with NATO. Moreover, it is widely accepted that only diplomatic relations will facilitate successful and effective negotiations about conflict areas

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(Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

The geopolitical role of Georgia as a small state has become the centre of attention and has been widely debated among many scholars and policy-makers during the last decades. For example, Fuller (1993) analyses domestic and foreign affairs of Georgia since independence. Jones (1996, 1997), Herzig (1999) and Rondeli (2001) investigate Georgia's statehood, sovereignty and security challenges, and foreign policy orientation with great insight into Georgian historical, cultural and social dynamics. The Rose Revolution in November 2003 has generated a substantial amount of speculation. Cornell (2007), Fairbanks (2004), Jaward (2006), Mitchell (2004, 2006), Wheatley (2005) highlight that as a result of the Revolution Georgia has undergone profound changes in all governmental sectors and implemented successful and effective reforms. Moreover, they emphasise a new strategic orientation of the country towards the European and Transatlantic organisations and its geopolitical implications for Great Powers. In particular, security sector reforms and policies were carefully examined by Darchiashvili (2003, 2008).

Georgia's recent history from a political scientific standpoint, security strategy, European way of development, NATO membership as a foreign policy priority, the politics of a Euro-Atlantic orientation and U.S.-Georgian effective relations were scrutinised by the following authors: Cooley and Mitchell (2009), Gogolashvili (2009), Graham and Shaheen (2011), Gudishvili (2003), Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009), Japaridze and Rondeli (2004), Kakachia (2013), Philips (2004), Rifkind (2009), Rinnert (2011). A great insight into the understanding of the international behaviour of Georgia as a small state and its role on the international stage as a transport corridor, the geopolitical game over Georgia and why it matters for the EU, the USA and Russia were analysed by Cornell and Starr (2006), Cornell, Tsereteli and Socor (2005), German (2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011), Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze and Iashvili (2013), Juntti (2004), Lynch (2006), Papava (2005). It is necessary to emphasise that although many scientists investigate Georgia's foreign policy orientation and its geopolitical significance, careful attention and concern are still needed to be given to the implications and relevance of the country to the USA, the EU and Russia.

The dissertation is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter covers the literature review regarding small states, defines the term 'small states' and describes their nature and characteristics. Their role and behaviour in international politics and the position of Georgia as a small state in the current international system will be analysed. The second chapter examines strategic orientation of Georgia towards the West and its foreign policy, oriented on Western ideologies, intensifying relations with the USA and the EU and a strong desire and a chosen way of integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations, in particular to become a NATO member. However, the paper also seeks to understand whether NATO membership will guarantee the security of a small state like Georgia and will examine the cases of Lithuania, which became a NATO member in 2004.

The third chapter analyses Georgia's relations with Russia since 1991 and the distancing policy towards the country, which is unsatisfied with Georgia's pro-Western orientation and considers the territory as its own sphere of interest. The fourth chapter sets out the elements of Georgia's geopolitical role and why a small state matters for the USA, the EU and Russia. In particular, energy security and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is a key corridor and transports hydrocarbon resources from the Caspian Sea to international market bypassing Russia, will be investigated. The dissertation concludes with specific interests that the USA, the EU and Russia have in a small state like Georgia and the geopolitical confrontation between the Great Powers.

CHAPTER ONE: Small states like Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Literature review about small states

The received wisdom in international relations assumes that a concept of a small state and its inclusion in the international community is not a new and unfamiliar phenomenon. The international system has always been characterised by the existence of small states. Many theorists and practitioners have analysed their foreign policy

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behaviour over the past century. Theoretical interest has grown considerably because of the increasing number of small states after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, their political crises and the determination to be heard on the international stage (Jazbec 2001: 38). To be completely clear from the outset, it is important to emphasise that small states are deeply vulnerable and, as it is traditionally argued, they are not able to have a significant influence on global affairs. It is widely recognised that their major threats are “their territorial integrity and security; political independence and security; economic security; environmental sustainability; and social cohesion” (Charles 1997: xi). Moreover, Rondeli (2001: 203) notes the current “process of globalization and the role of international organizations” also have a great impact on small states.

The most noticeable studies of small states were made by Fox (1969). Annette Baker Fox’s book ‘The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II’ is recognised as a starting point for the analysis of the behaviour of small states in the international system and their entrance into the field of international relations and security. Examining small states’ behaviour, Fox (1969: 751) argued that they were threatened by the Great Powers and highlighted that “there is still a role which at least some small states play in the current international system”. Rothstein (1968) puts a greater emphasis on the importance of the security issues, which can be achieved through alliances. He (1968: 1) claims that the small powers, whose status has increased significantly, “think and act differently”. Keohane (1969: 291) also highlights the increased role of small states in world politics and states that they as an “important diplomatic innovation” “have risen to prominence if not to power”.

Elman (1995: 171) suggests that domestic factors of a country play an important role in foreign policy making, and “the distribution of power and the balance of threat do influence domestic institutional formation and change in emerging states”. Rosenau assumes that in an analysis of small states the international environment is a crucial variable (Elman 1995: 176). The Commonwealth analysed small states foreign policy, various characteristics and factors of their disadvantaged position and in 1997 prepared a special report “A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability”, where it was emphasised that “the international community had obligations to ensure their survival and prosperity” (Charles 1997: 1).

Thus, the status of small states plays an important role in world politics and their geographical position as well as political system and economic condition have become essential determinants for investigation for many academics. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), emphasises that small states should contribute “to global peace and development” (UN News Centre 2012).

Definition and characteristics of small states

Despite the fact that the phenomenon of small states has been studied by analysts for a long time, the literature does not provide a general and agreed definition and theoretical framework. The concept is difficult to define and, therefore, remains vague. Some social scientists focus on the size of territory, its population, geographic position and quantity of available resources, others on its behaviour in particular situations of the contemporary security environment and the role it plays in world politics (Jazbec 2001: 39-41). Knudsen (2002: 184) suggests that “a small state is a unit with a relatively modest territory and population”. According to Rothstein (1968: 29), “a Small Power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so”. The Commonwealth report provides the understanding of small states as states with a population of 1.5 million (Charles 1997: 8). Jazbec (2001: 45) uses territory and population size to determine small states and he also describes small European states as well as new states, including GNP per capita in his criteria.

It is necessary to examine various characteristics of small states in order to understand the concept. As small states are different, it is difficult to identify common features. Julien (1992) distinguishes vulnerability, dependency on great economies and isolation as determinants. The Commonwealth report states the following characteristics: “openness, insularity or ‘enclaveness’, resilience, weakness and dependence” (Charles 1997: 9). Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009: 135-136) characterise small states by their vulnerability and adaptivity. They (2009: 136) argue that new small states “found themselves in “the zone of high geopolitical voltage” – in the space of intersection of interests of great powers”.

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Handel (1990: 68), characterising small and weak states, distinguishes four features: “geographical data” (territory), “material data” (natural resources), “human resources” (population) and “organizational capabilities” (political and administrative institutions). He (1990: 36) assumes that military weakness, lack of capacity for self-defence make them vulnerable about the issue of survival. Jazbec (2001: 54), analysing the work Kropivnik and Jesovnik, notes that small states have certain advantages, such as an ability to easily develop important strategies and “to process production more easily than large ones”. Nevertheless, small states possess only limited economic, financial, political, social and military resources. They suffer from insufficient reserves and are highly sensitive and vulnerable to external changes and environment. Thus, general characteristics of small states are the following: a small area, population, GDP, administration and military.

Analysing different characteristics of small states, it is necessary to highlight that small and weak states, in general, are unable to govern their foreign policy (Spence in Handel 1990: 4). Moreover, weak states have little influence on the international system, are passive and are under the impact of Great Powers. For example, Keohane (1969: 296) claims that small states do not make any significant impact on the international system. Rothstein (1977: 42) suggests that weak states are not able to confront security threats without external aid. However, Handel (1990: 6) argues that although weak states are characterised by their weakness, this does not necessarily imply that they are helpless because they “have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to survive despite all the dangers they faced due to their lack of power”. Furthermore, sometimes they can manipulate and “can do maneuver within the international system to obtain help from other states” (Handel 1990: 257).

Thus, due to their smallness, small states have only a limited number of choices concerning their internal and external resources and solving the issue of security dilemma (Handel 1990, Jazbec 2001, Amstrup 1976). Scientific attention particularly focuses on security issues that small states face and their behaviour in foreign politics. For instance, it is generally agreed that when internal resources are not sufficient to resist an external invasion by a Great Power, weak states are compelled to turn to external power. Rothstein (1968) assumes that alliance is the most effective way to survive in the world of strong states and Great Powers. Amstrup (1976) provides the following options for small states: neutrality, alliances and membership of international organisations. Handel (1990) offers a formal alliance between weak states and great states and alliances of weak states. Consequently, being dependent on the external environment and vulnerable to external changes, the security question remains the most important for small states. The advantages they can use are their geographical position, their military position and the availability of their natural resources. Small states have limited options to manoeuvre their foreign policy and through alliances, participation in international organisations and using their natural resources as well as their geographical position, small states can articulate their foreign policy.

A small state like Georgia

It is important to note that although many social scientists explored different dimensions of the concept of small states, suggesting that they are weak, threatened by Great Powers and unable to protect their own interests and form their own foreign policy, the focus on Georgia as a small state has not been thoroughly investigated. It is necessary to understand how Georgia meets the characteristics of small states and what the country can offer to the international community, protecting its own territory and sovereignty. To be clear from the outset, according to Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009), Rondeli (2001), Gvalia, Lebanidze and Iashvili (2011), Georgia is characterised as a small state due to the size of its territory and population. The country does not have a serious influence on the world politics, but its geographical position as well as democratic developments make it important for the Great Powers.

Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009) assume that Georgia is pursuing NATO membership, which according to the government will guarantee security. Gvalia, Lebanidze and Iashvili (2011) analyse the foreign policy of Georgia, which has become oriented towards the West. They argue that ideas and identities play an essential role in changing the foreign policy behaviour of small states. That is why, small states can sometimes choose a balancing policy instead of bandwaggoning (Gvalia et al. 2013). They assume that Georgia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union has tried to distance itself from Russia and intensified relations with western countries: the USA and the EU.

Examining U.S.-Georgian relations, Cooley and Mitchell (2009: 40) state the relations can be “characterized by

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strong personal ties between the regimes and unflinching U.S. commitment to maintaining Georgia's territorial integrity". They note that, as a small state, Georgia needs financial and military support from the U.S.

Rondeli (2001: 199), analysing international relations of Georgia and its behaviour in the international arena, states that in order to implement efficient foreign policy it is essential for a small state like Georgia to "achieve economic and political stability, as well as internal social cohesion". The main concern for a country is to ensure its sovereignty, independence and security as it has to adapt efficaciously to a changing environment in a short period of time. Georgia had begun paying much attention to the role of international organisations and institutions in order to gain international recognition.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union Georgia as well as other post-Soviet countries experienced problematic "transition from communism to democracy" (Jones 1997: 505) and was suffering from political instability, interethnic contradictions and conflicts and economic downturns. The international community was not fully familiarised with the country and its geographic location on the world map. However, the country has been developing and implementing vital political, economic and social reforms and has shown its path towards democracy. Georgia had a strong desire to be respectable in the world arena and tried to find a niche within neighbours and world leaders. The government tried to bridge the gap between Georgia and the world, "oriented the country towards the West" (Rifkind 2009: 92) and pursued the difficult security strategy of becoming a NATO member in order to safeguard its territorial sovereignty. Thus, Georgia as the most pro-Western oriented state in the Caucasus, "desire(s) to be a fully functioning actor on the global stage and contribute(s) to the international security environment as well as its own" (German 2009a: 348).

Furthermore, in order to establish authority within the international community Georgia had begun focusing on its potential in terms of its geopolitical position. As was mentioned above, many social scientists argue that small states nowadays are in the zone of geopolitical interest of the Great Powers. The geographical position of a country, its political system and economic condition are essential determinants, which is why a country can use them for ensuring its own security and future prosperity. Therefore, Georgia had begun deriving benefit from negotiating using its geographical location as it possesses essential energy resources routes.

Georgia, as a small country in the Caucasian region, is located at strategically important crossroads and "lies on one of the most significant energy transit routes of the post-Cold War era – the southern route for oil and gas exiting the Caspian Basin to Mediterranean, European, and global markets" (Macfarlane 2008: 1). Nowadays, Georgia represents successful state-building and its geostrategic and geopolitical relevance has increased significantly during the last decades. Particularly, the new energy export infrastructure the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is important for Europe and the USA as it bypasses Russia and undermines Moscow's hegemony in the Caucasus. According to Cornell (2007: 1), Georgia "is a key strategic pivot for the transportation of Eurasia's energy resources, as well as for western access to Central Asia and Afghanistan".

Thus, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the small state of Georgia in the Caucasian region has undergone considerable changes in the political, economic and social sphere. The country has realised that it should find a special niche in order to survive in the international system of competing Great Powers. The government has established a new concept of not only ensuring territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also finding a way for future prosperity. Georgia sees NATO membership as a solution to its problems and as an option to manoeuvre its foreign policy. Moreover, through using its beneficial geographical position, a small state like Georgia can establish and develop its strategic orientation. The strong desire to become a member of a Euro-Atlantic organisation will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: Strategic orientation of Georgia towards the West

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The early years of independence

In April 1991 a small and not very much known former Soviet republic Georgia declared independence. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP Georgia 2008: 11), Georgia inherited a corrupt and inefficient system of the government based on the Soviet style. The country had numerous domestic and international obstacles to overcome, faced serious issues of survival, important political, economic and security challenges and exceptionally difficult circumstances for development. A small and weak independent Georgia was an insecure and unstable country and struggled to establish foreign policy priorities and strategic orientation. Foreign policy was dominated by the following concerns: gain international recognition and support for its independence and territorial integrity; integration into alliances and international organisations; acquiring humanitarian aid and developing economic resources (Herzig 1999: 94). Georgia attempted to determine national interests, establish effective mechanisms for survival and “to build a new, modern state based on its history, heritage, culture and value systems” (Yakobashvili and Gogolashvili 2006: 3). Several problems caused difficulties in the country’s prosperity, including the low level of international respect for a small, weak state (Darchiashvili 2004). The most difficult political challenge that a newly independent Georgia faced was its inability to fully control the territory and resources (Herzig 1999: 15).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of Georgia, did not have strong and real power to support his leadership and, hence, did not have political control over the territory, or the military and security forces. He lacked the necessary connections with elites, strong administrative institutions and regional powers throughout the state (Jones 2000: 4). The President and the Georgian authorities tried to gain recognition from the Great Powers, take a certain place in the international community and shift policy towards democratic security building. The country faced an urgent need to establish modern democratic institutions. However, Georgia has suffered two civil wars, which produced two unresolved conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After the war in South Ossetia and the activities of an increasingly powerful opposition Gamsakhurdia was overthrown in March 1992 and the foreign minister of the Soviet Union Eduard Shevardnadze was invited to govern the country (Wheatley 2005: 53).

From 1992 to 1994 Georgia was in economic and political crisis, suffered from ethnic conflicts and was unable to secure national interests and develop long-term political orientation. Georgia was interested in integration into the international political, economic and financial institutions. In 1992 Georgia became a member of the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, which in 1995 transformed into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE) (Rondeli 2001: 197), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and in 2000 a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It goes without saying that the memberships allowed Georgia to have a voice on the international stage (Darchiashvili 2003: 124). In 1995 Shevardnadze won presidential elections and began strengthening political institutions. According to Jones (1996: 341), “the new constitution created a presidential republic based on the American model, with a powerful constitutional Court and a two-chamber legislature”. The Constitution provided strong legislative and executive branches of government as well as a judicial one with a Supreme Court built on democratic principles. It is significant to note that although international recognition had begun, “progress toward democracy was minimal” (Fuller 1993: 346), and an attempt to build a modern state was not achieved. It was only an attempt to convince the population and international community of being democratic (Wheatley 2005: 158). The regime was ineffective, entangled in corruption and was unable to fulfill its main obligations. The government could not develop administrative institutions and stimulate economic growth, and its commitment to democratic change was not efficient (Jones 1997: 505). In other words, Georgia faced the major problems of a weak state (Lansky and Areshidze 2008: 156).

Shevardnadze wanted to implement a pro-Western foreign policy, but was unable to as he was afraid of Russia’s reaction. Shevardnadze was forced by Russia to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – an organisation whose member countries are former Soviet republics – and in 1993 Georgia finally became a member. Consequently, Georgia’s foreign policy since 1991 could be described by the following aspects: Georgia always had to take the interests of the Great Powers into account; the collapsed economy did not facilitate effective decision-making; new governors were guided by the Soviet experience; civil society was weak and unable to protect basic human rights. International observers state that being under constant pressure from Russia, Georgia was not able to ensure its national security priorities, develop sovereign foreign policy and achieve its own political goals. Rondeli (2001: 202) notes that the country “represented the clearest and perhaps the worst case of Russian involvement in

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the 'near abroad'".

The Rose Revolution

At the beginning of the 21st century Georgia was considered to be a failing democracy. The international relations of Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union could be characterised by complexity, volatility and vulnerability. To put it another way, there have been equally pronounced tendencies towards inefficiency, and the foreign policy of Georgia was determined by its dependence on Russia and inner weakness. Until 2000 Georgia did not develop the national concept of security and strategic orientation. The country had "experienced a deepening crisis of governance" (Jawad 2006: 19). The citizens of Georgia, tired of the state's inaction and the government's inability to provide basic social services and fulfil its crucial functions, began mass protests in November 2003. This resulted in the non-violent change of power – the Rose Revolution, which forced president Shevardnadze, accused of an authoritarian regime, to resign (Jawad 2006: 1). The Rose Revolution opened a new page in the history of Georgia and impacted the entire post-Soviet space (Japaridze and Rondeli 2004: 40). It enabled Georgia to develop democratic principles and carry out reforms in political, security, economic, financial and agricultural sectors. Thus, new prospects and horizons for the country emerged and a difficult path of democratic transition began (Fairbanks 2004: 110).

The Rose Revolution's leader, Western-educated Mikhail Saakashvili, became the president of Georgia in January 2004. Saakashvili's new government demonstrated from the beginning a strong desire to shift the country towards Western alliances. Concrete reforms were undertaken in the political, security, economic, agricultural and educational sectors. The government was actively and efficiently combatting corruption and within two years it was successfully eliminated (Cornell and Nilsson 2009: 253). After the Rose Revolution the emergence of a strong and transparent central government could be observed, and "citizens gained trust in the education, law enforcement, and tax systems" (Graham and Shaheen 2011: 11). The government was reforming the security sector, establishing the rule of law, facilitating economic growth and restoring central power. It is interesting to note that according to the World Bank Georgia is "the world's leading economic reformer" (Lanskoy and Areshidze 2008: 159) and "is in the top 25 countries in overall rankings for the ease of doing business" (IDA no date). Saakashvili's reforms transformed the country and it underwent profound changes. Changes were also made in the constitution and presidential power was significantly strengthened.

Furthermore, the Rose Revolution resulted in important changes in Georgia's foreign policy and strategic orientation. Since its independence, Georgia, undergoing painful transition period, has been trying to reduce its dependence on Russia and strengthen ties with Western countries. Cornell (2007: 1) emphasises that "Georgia has been the most vocally independent-minded country in the former Soviet Union". The country clearly pronounced its strategic orientation towards Western institutions and organisations, such as the EU and NATO. The government has chosen a clear-cut path towards NATO, which was seen as a solution to its sovereignty and security. Integration into NATO and the EU is "a top priority of Georgian foreign and security policy" and is highlighted in the basic strategic document, explaining the country's national interests, – the National Security Concept (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2005: 7). Moreover, the paper notes that independence, democracy, rule of law, freedom, peace, prosperity and security are fundamental values of Georgia. The country sees the EU as a guarantor of political and economic stability and development, and NATO as a guarantor of the security of the state and its territorial integrity.

Thus, the Rose Revolution of November 2003 demonstrated striving for democracy and the principles and values of liberty, facilitated internal development and impacted stability and security of not only Georgia, but also post-Soviet space (Asmus, Dimitrov and Forbig 2004: 40). The new government formulated and implemented efficient policy, reformed state apparatus and was successful in combating corruption. Mitchell (2004: 342) highlights that "the Rose revolution represented a victory not only for the Georgian people but for democracy globally". The Revolution began the process that extended international cooperation and integration into Georgia. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that it "opened a significant front in the struggle for influence between the United States and Russia in the Caucasus" (Nation 2007: 24).

Striving for EU and NATO membership and a Strategic Partnership with the USA

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As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, a small state often faces security dilemmas and can become an object of manipulation of the Great Powers. Being a victim of aggression by strong neighbours, a small state is vulnerable and dependent on the external environment. Therefore, due to uncertainty and the unpredictable dangers of a globalised world, a small state always looks for the support of international organisations. Georgia is squeezed between the Great Powers and therefore needs to find clear and effective options to manoeuvre and develop pragmatic foreign policy. Georgia tries to ensure its security and sees the solution through NATO membership and states it as the main goal to achieve along with EU membership.

Georgia has always been striving for Europe and considering EU membership as a long-term goal. Since the Rose Revolution the government has tried to put the country on its feet politically and economically and on a track toward integration with the EU. The country has an extremely strong European identity and desires to unite with European structures. In 1991, when Georgia was accepted in the Council of Europe the ex-chairman of the Georgian parliament Zurab Zhvania announced: "I am Georgian, therefore I am European" (Jones 2003: 90). Kakachia (2013: 2) emphasises that the statement confirmed the aspiration of Georgians to integrate into Europe. A majority of the population sees the future in Europe, and public opinion, in general, is described as pro-European as they state that they historically and culturally belong to Europe (Gogolashvili 2009: 91; Jones 2003; Muller 2011). Georgian researchers and academics perceive the country as a part of the European continent and confirm that it can develop and achieve stability only within an EU context (Rinnert 2011: 15). The EU has launched a new concept of expansion, Eastern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and later Eastern Partnership (EaP), which has enjoyed growing attention and resulted in advanced relations between Georgia and the EU. For Georgia the project has meant the advancement of legislation, norms and standards. Moreover, priority areas were strengthening the rule of law, stimulating economic growth and reducing poverty (Rinnert 2011: 8).

Georgia is interested in the European way of development and is in the process of meeting dimensions of EU policy, which are: democracy and good governance; improvement of security and resolution of frozen conflicts; human rights and environmental protection; and trade and cross-border cooperation. In other words, the new government reformed governmental institutions, strengthened the state power, stimulated economic growth and developed infrastructure in order to integrate into European and international political, economic and security organisations. As a result, Georgia chose pro-Western orientation and presented itself as a transportation corridor for goods, people and energy, which has considerably encouraged and increased international investments. Moreover, the president and the Georgian authorities believe that cooperation with the EU will help to resolve conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and will be an essential stimulus for establishing mutually beneficial relations.

A crucial aspect for Georgia in formulating strategic and political orientation was the development of the Eurasian corridor, which would link Europe and the East, and which, in turn, would increase the chances of integrating into the Western sphere (Jones 2003: 92). Furthermore, western involvement is considered to be insurance and security against various conflicts. It is widely accepted that the EU ensures stability and defuses tensions in Georgia and it plays an important role in resolving conflict issues in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Graham and Shaheen 2011: 27).

As far as NATO membership is concerned, it is viewed by Georgians as a chance of survival and preservation of independence (German 2011: 215). In 1992 Georgia joined the North-Atlantic Cooperation Council, which was afterwards renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and in 1999 the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (NATO 2009). The latter strengthened cooperation in defence planning and Georgia began a peacekeepers' contribution in Kosovo (Gudiashvili 2003). Moreover, Georgia supported the U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom and in 2003 provided 69 troops and the number was increased to 2000 in 2007 (US Congressional Research Service: 19). In 2004 Georgia began participation in NATO operations in Afghanistan and in 2010 it dispatched approximately 925 troops, which among non-NATO members was the largest contribution per capita to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (US Congressional Research Service: 7). Although in 2008 Georgia was not offered a Membership Action Plan (MAP), it was decided at the Summit in Bucharest that Georgia would become a member of NATO. However, in 2008, after the Georgian-Russian war, the membership road became even harder and members expressed deep concern over the armed conflict. However, Georgia determined its foreign policy orientation and NATO supported the country in securing its territorial integrity and, consequently, the NATO-Georgia commission was established. Lomsadze (2008) emphasised that the road was still open to Georgia.

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US Congressional Research Service (2013: 47), analysing political developments in Georgia, notes that NATO “called on Russia to make a pledge not to use force against Georgia and to rescind its recognition of the breakaway regions as independent”.

It is generally agreed that membership will make Georgia stronger, secure and more democratic. However, the question arises whether striving for NATO membership could solve security issues of Georgia. According to Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009), the case of Lithuania, which considered membership as the means for security and became a member of the EU and NATO in 2004, proves that NATO can guarantee the preservation of national sovereignty. In order to confront the dangers of the current international system, which is marked by new battles for political and economic influence, Lithuania pursued NATO membership which significantly influenced and consolidated the country’s security policy. That was considered as “the story of success”, how a small state during relatively short period of time can transform its security systems and make integrate into Alliance” (Janeliunas and Kirvelyte 2009: 150). Both population and governmental elite had a positive outlook on the integration and the process led to an effective transformation of the state. According to Miniotaite (2007: 190), NATO strengthened the national security of Lithuania, reestablished relations with the West and “was primarily perceived as a security umbrella against threats from the East”. In 2013 the Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen states that Lithuania has effectively faced and tackled security challenges and shown a commitment to keep defence strong (NATO 2013). Similarly, to ensure its territorial integrity and sovereignty, Georgia has chosen the path towards NATO and has seen membership of it as the main priority of the country. As the case of Lithuania showed, NATO can guarantee security and sovereignty.

Georgia has strong ties with the U.S. and the U.S., in turn, is committed to preserving Georgia’s territorial integrity. Cooley and Mitchell (2009: 40) argue that Saakashvili receives strong support from the USA. Washington is convinced of the democratic intentions of Georgia and provides direct assistance in various government sectors. For example, in 2005 a contract was signed, according to which Georgia received \$295.3 million in order to rebuild the infrastructure and energy sector (Mitchell 2006: 669). Phillips (2004: 3) argues that “Georgia is the second-largest per capita recipient of U.S. development assistance” and since independence it has received \$1.3 billion in foreign aid. At the beginning of 2009 the U.S. and Georgia signed the Charter on Strategic Partnership. The document demonstrates strong U.S. support for Georgia and provides a framework for mutually beneficial relationships. Based on principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity both countries “share a “vital interest” in a “strong, independent, sovereign, unified, and democratic Georgia” (Graham and Shaheen 2011: 19). The Charter deepens and strengthens partnership between both nations and shows the prospects for Georgia’s integration into North-Atlantic organisations (U.S. Department of State 2009). It is interesting to note that after the break-up of the Soviet Union Georgia became the subject of immediate concern for the United States and it has become keen supporter of Georgia on the international stage. Moreover, the U.S. assists the development and strengthening of Georgia’s democratic values, stimulation of economic growth and its aspiration to Western integration.

After the parliamentary elections in October 2012 Saakashvili conceded defeat and the leader of the opposition bloc Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, became the new Prime Minister of the country. The first ever constitutional, peaceful and democratic change of power between rival political forces was the subject of speculation for many academics and policy makers, but it was obvious that Georgia had entered a new political era. It was “called a democratic breakthrough” (Nodia 2012) and democratic and liberal principles in the country took a major step forward. Although the changes in political culture, social relations, local government and employment have begun, it is too early to analyse transformations in Georgia’s developments and the rise of new interests and values. Ivanishvili has formed a new government and affirmed that Georgia will continue on the tough road to Western integration, pledged that he will strengthen democratisation and free market reforms and peacefully reintegrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia (US Congressional Research Service: 4). The most interesting issue was the relations with Russia, and the new Prime Minister emphasised that the country would establish peaceful, non-hostile and diplomatic dialogue and improve relations with the northern neighbour (The Guardian 2012).

To sum up, since independence Georgia has been trying to ensure national security and guarantee territorial integrity. After the demise of the Soviet Union Georgia faced poverty, economic decline, military conflicts and uncontrolled territories. The country has been trying to find “an optimal balance between internal security problems

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and defence from external threats” (Janeliunas and Kirvelyte 2009: 134). However, after the Rose Revolution, Georgia underwent significant reforms and turned into a functioning democracy. The changes in domestic and foreign policy have been utterly notable. In other words, the country turned in the process of political and economic change, and it has been profoundly transformed and modified. Despite the fact that Georgia has undergone crucial changes in the security environment, its foreign policy has remained permanent. Georgia continues to distance itself from Russia and is oriented on Western democratic principles. It is considered as a “beacon of democracy” and has built government institutions based on Western style and principles (Cornell 2007: 8). The country’s main goal is to achieve membership into European and Western structures and sees integration as a guarantor of security and stability. It remains a committed U.S. ally and follows the unchangeable course toward the West.

CHAPTER THREE: Georgian-Russian relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Russia's sphere of influence

The demise of the USSR created new opportunities, and simultaneously new problems for small states. Surrounded by larger and stronger neighbours, small and weak newly independent states (NIS) were vulnerable to the foreign policies and strategies of neighbouring powers. In particular, Russia, which asserted its hegemony over the South Caucasus, was the dominant external power. As the successor of the Soviet state, it continued to influence the former states’ political and economic situation. Most of the former USSR countries wanted independence from Russia, but they faced difficult circumstances for development, lawlessness and crime. Since Georgia gained independence in 1991, the country has been in the process of political and economic change, orienting policy towards the West. The relations between a small state like Georgia and a great power, Russia, which is one of the key players in the global system, had undergone profound changes and were often critical and sometimes extremely tense. Georgia wanted to formulate and implement policy independently, while Russia wanted to control all ex-Soviet countries. Although Russia’s sphere of influence changed after the fall of the Soviet Union, it still remains a powerful actor able to shape developments in post-Soviet space (Herzig 1999: 102). Moscow enjoyed unchallenged domination in Georgia as well as in the former USSR states. Russia has influenced internal developments in Georgia and its political and military presence has allowed Moscow to formulate a specific course of international relations.

There have been a number of efforts to assess the difficult relations between Georgia and Russia, the results of the war in August 2008 and their impact on the international system. Macfarlane (1999: 19) argues that Russia as an economic and military power has played an active role in the South Caucasus states’ strategic orientation and has been capable of interfering in internal affairs. Jones (2003: 95) emphasises that the relations between Georgia and Russia can be “characterised by necessity and ambivalence: necessity because Russia represented a powerful Christian and modernizing neighbour, capable of protecting Georgia from hostile Muslim empires to the south and Caucasian raiders from the north; ambivalence because Russia was culturally dominant and imperial”.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union brought major changes in Russia’s sphere of influence and interest, and Russia was afraid of losing control over the former USSR countries and particularly over the Caucasus. Russia has tried to play a dominant role in foreign policy orientations of former USSR countries. According to Cornell (2007: 19), Russia’s policy was based on the following principles: the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) states should become members of the CIS; Russian troops should be on the borders; and Russian military bases will be in the states. In particular, in 2000 since Vladimir Putin was elected president, Russia has put the emphasis on the strategic importance of the South Caucasus states (US Congressional Research Service: 24). Moscow was afraid of losing its sphere of influence in the Caucasus and in the same year in order to secure its own borders “Russia imposed visa regulations on Georgians for the first time since Georgia regained independence” (Rondeli 2001: 204). However, visa requirements were not put on the inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

After the Rose Revolution in 2003 Georgia openly announced its desire to pursue a Western-oriented foreign policy

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and its aspiration to join Western organisations, which resulted in worsening relations with Russia. Moscow wanted to prevent Georgia and other former USSR states from integration into NATO. Russia, as a global energy superpower, was dissatisfied with Georgia's Western orientation, increased ties with NATO and the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Sergey Lavrov, the foreign Minister of Russia, announced that Western engagement with the South Caucasus signed a return to geopolitical competition in the international system (Muller 2011: 68-69). German (2004: 9) argues that Moscow was displeased with the U.S. presence in Georgia, which had been its traditional sphere of influence.

In 2006 Russia imposed an embargo on all imports of Georgian wine (Irvine 2012) as well as on mineral water and deported thousands of Georgians, which was a political response to the exile of four Russian officers accused of espionage (Darchiashvili 2008: 24). Moreover, Russia cut every transportation link with Georgia and blocked postal services and money transfers (Gvalia, Lebanidze and Iashvili 2011: 41). Georgia after 2008 withdrew as a member of the CIS and more actively pursued the goal of becoming an EU and NATO member. These acts were understood as a political phenomenon as Russia's interests remain present and it tries to maintain and secure its sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union states (Trenin 2009, Friedman 2008). Therefore, needless to say that Russia is a powerful region and has significant political and economic interests in Georgia. Although the Soviet Union collapsed and Georgia was open to other external players, Russia has still continued to consider Georgia as a part of its sphere of interest (Larabee 2004: 147). The Georgian government, in its turn, which is highly concerned about the restoration of the country's territorial integrity and its consolidation, sees several barriers and limitations in establishing peaceful relations with Russia and in conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The obstacles are the following: first, "the continuing presence of Russian bases on Georgian territory"; second, "Russian support for the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia"; third, "Russian "peacekeeping" operations" (Lapidus 2007: 151). In 2004 newly elected president of Georgia Saakashvili announced that to unite the country was his top priority and stated that "(j)ust as President Putin wants to establish control over Chechnya and all other regions, I want Abkhazia's reintegration in Georgia" (German 2006: 8).

Georgian-Russian War in August 2008

Tensions between Georgia and Russia grew into crisis and mutual mistrust resulted in military conflict in August 2008, when Russia invaded Georgian territory. On August 7th Georgia attempted to resolve the conflict in South Ossetia and regain territorial integrity, and the government decided to respond to attacks by secessionists in Tskhinvali by launching a military effort in order to establish control over the territory (Mitchell 2009b: 150). The immediate cause of fighting and the outbreak of the war were unclear and "a wave of accusations about which side was to blame" occurred (Cooley and Mitchell 2009: 27). Moscow, supporting the secessionist government in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, accused Georgia of killing its "peacekeepers" and Russian tanks rolled across the border in order "to protect Russian citizens there" (The Economist 2008). Tbilisi, on the other hand, accused Russia of intervening on Georgian territory, threatening the state's sovereignty and leaving dozens of Georgian citizens in the conflict zone without their homes (BBC 2008). Moscow intervened on Georgian territory with lightning speed, was only 25 miles from the capital, and the Georgian government declared the Russian troops to be occupants (King 2008; Gvalia, Lebanidze and Iashvili 2011).

The war shocked the international community, provoked intense international reactions and increased concerns about Russian dominance in the South Caucasus (German 2009b). International observers were confused about the implication of the war to the world and Moscow's relations with neighbouring states and there were different interpretations of the events. According to Trenin (2009: 14), "the root cause of the Georgia war was Tbilisi's desire to join NATO". Furthermore, German (2009a: 345) claims that the war symbolised "a desire to punish Tbilisi for its overt pro-Western orientation". Chicky (2009: 6) argues that the war symbolised the Kremlin's attempt to dictate order, alter European security and it sent "a clear message to the United States and NATO that Georgia is in a zone of Russia's "privileged interests"". Allison (2008: 1169) emphasises that Russia shows the world that it is ready to react and take strong measures in order to protect its own interests. It is important to note that the war questioned the harsh style of Saakashvili's politics towards Russia. For several years the new government had been implementing undiplomatic decisions against Russia and this harsh rhetoric resulted in a violent response from the northern neighbour (Cornell and Nilsson 2009: 258).

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The Georgian-Russian war made Georgian government very vulnerable. As a result of the war hundreds were killed, thousands were displaced and became refugees, transport was disrupted and energy transition through Georgia was limited (Chicky 2009: 7). The war caused huge damage to a small state like Georgia and, according to US Congressional Research Service, it caused \$394.5 million in damage (2009: 12). In the end Russia recognized both conflict zones of Georgia – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Resisting Russian aggression, aircrafts and tanks, Georgia was unable to protect its civilians and the sovereignty of the state. Not only political and economic development, but also the survival and security of the small, sovereign and democratic state of Georgia were undermined. Despite the fact that Georgia was successful in winning the hearts and minds of the West and attracting the attention of Western media, particularly in the United States, the country was defeated on its own territory (Mitchell 2009a: 87). Georgia, being a vital corridor for gas and oil exports to Europe and international markets, was relying on external aid, but did not get support. In general, the war considerably challenged security, political and economic reforms in Georgia. After the war diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia were extremely severed.

Thus, the Georgian-Russian war symbolised that Russia pursues its national interests and still claims the right to intervene in Georgia, a strategic region for the EU and the USA (Khan 2008: 2). Larsen (2012: 103) assumes that the war demonstrated possible dangers and security threats, limited further NATO enlargement and “for Russia became an efficient means of demonstrating to the Western states that Russia is back as great power on the international scene and that the West should refrain from intervening in Russia’s sphere of interest in large parts of the post-Soviet space”. According to Brzezinski (2008), “Moscow engaged in an arbitrary, brutal and irresponsible use of force to impose domination over a weaker, democratic neighbor”.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, as a result of parliamentary elections in October 2012 Bidzina Ivanishvili took power. The change in government in Georgia sparked a debate among political theorists and practitioners about the future relations between Georgia and Russia. Ties with Russia deteriorated during the presidency of Mr. Saakashvili, but the new Prime Minister emphasised the important role of diplomatic relations with the northern neighbour. He also stated:

“I know that Georgia’s integration in NATO is not very pleasant for Russia, but I don’t think it is a strategic issue for Russia. I think it is possible with correct diplomacy to convince Russia that Georgia’s integration in NATO is not a threat.... The Baltic countries are an example of NATO integration and good relations with Russia. We will not change our strategy of NATO integration for anything” (Kucera 2012).

Although it is early yet to examine policy implementation of the new government, the new Prime Minister has already taken measures and implemented effective policies in order to improve political and economic relations with Russia. For instance, economic relations have been renewed and Georgian wine came back to the northern neighbour, to the huge Russian market, for which many wine companies have been looking for after an embargo in 2006 (Smirnova 2013). Ivanishvili has pursued balanced and diplomatic relations with Russia as well as with Western countries. The newly elected government wants to have friendly relations with Russia, but the main foreign policy objective remains integration in the European structures and NATO.

To sum up, Georgian-Russian relations are characterised by tensions which could result in open violence at any time. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, various actors engaged in policy towards Georgia, but Russia’s interest and influence in the region did not alter. The policy called a sphere of influence, which Moscow formulated towards the near abroad in the early 1990s, has remained unchangeable (Herzig 1999: 106). Russia was perceived as a threat, rather than an ally or defender. Important problems between the countries include the conflict zones of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Russia’s opposition to Georgia’s desire to become NATO member. Although Russia tried to dictate foreign policy to Georgia and maintain its sphere of influence, Georgia still remains a U.S. ally, following its course towards the West. The Russian government was dissatisfied with the Western engagement and the foreign minister of Russia announced that he is discontented with Georgia’s as well as Ukraine’s desire to

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become a NATO member and if they do, it will be followed by a “negative geopolitical shift” (German 2009b: 226).

Georgia faced the biggest challenges balancing perceptions of its northern neighbour. However, it is widely recognised between the theorists and practitioners that in order to restore sovereignty over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia needs to establish diplomatic relations with Russia. The situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia depends on peaceful negotiations between countries. Although Westernisation is significant for Georgia’s sovereignty and security issues, this should not imply ignorance and a turn away from its northern neighbour, with which it had historical and cultural connections and which plays a significant role in a resolution of Georgia’s conflict zones. Only diplomatic relations will facilitate successful and effective negotiations about conflict areas. It is of vital importance to have some form of accommodation with Russia and constitute cooperation agreements. In spite of the fact that there are various questions unanswered and are far from clear about the harsh policy of Georgian government, what is certain is that dialogue must be articulated and stimulated. Moreover, it is traditionally argued that to soften the complex relations between Georgia and Russia, profound changes must take place and it is necessary to put in the effort to modify the dialogue towards the two-way discussion.

Analysing the war and European reaction to the conflict, Larsen (2012: 103) highlights that

“if Georgia earlier could be characterised as being in the ‘grey zone’ between NATO and Russia influence, the brief war in August 2008 left no doubt that Georgia also in the future would find itself in a strategic limbo between Eastern and Western influences”.

CHAPTER FOUR: Georgia’s geopolitical role for the USA, the EU and Russia

The strategic significance of Georgia

After the demise of the Soviet Union, Georgia and other small states in the South Caucasus became increasingly important for Europe and the USA, and they began involvement in the post-Soviet space. It goes without saying that the end of the Cold War opened new dimensions, extended international cooperation into areas that were barred before, and posed a number of opportunities as well as challenges for the West. Georgia, which was isolated from the political, economic and social influence of Western countries, has become a region that is given careful and serious attention. To put it another way, transformation of Georgia as well as other newly independent states from the Soviet system was a frontier for the propagation of the Western ideas. The geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union was considered significant due to the transportation of oil and natural gas. The region is of growing importance in terms of energy security to Western countries, which is an essential factor deepening international engagement. During the last decades the region has engaged multiple international interests, has played an important role as a bridge for Eurasian transport and connects international projects from west to east and from north to south. Georgian territory is a key corridor transporting oil and gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey to international markets, thus bypassing Russia (Juntti 2004: 325). According to Janeliunas and Kirvelyte (2009: 145), the West has become interested in Georgia, especially after wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, because of the following reasons: first, Georgia was viewed as a country ensuring security in the South Caucasus; second, Georgia was interested in NATO membership and, thus, could limit Russia’s influence; and third, the relevance of Georgia was related to the transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to world markets.

German (2009a: 345) emphasises that Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – countries of the South Caucasus – are essential for Western countries because they “constitute(s) a vital land bridge between Asia and Europe, physically linking the Caspian Sea region and Central Asia with the Black Sea and Western Europe”. Moreover, in 2003 NATO Secretary-General noted that the Caucasus is “an area of crucial importance to [NATO’s] common security” (Robertson in German 2008: 64). The advantage of Georgia lies in its geographical position, and, according to Rondeli (2002: 13), it is a transportation corridor of oil and gas and connects Europe and Asia. Georgia is significant

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for the whole Caucasus and is located along the quickest route which links Europe with Asia (Papava 2005: 86). Historically, the country has been a physical meeting point or bridge for several regions and has played an important role as a north-south and east-west trade route (Herzig 1999: 88). Moreover, Georgia along with Azerbaijan and Armenia has roused the interest of the U.S. and the EU and

“is perceived as possessing significance for the West in terms of its strategic location at Europe’s southeastern periphery, bordering Russia and the Baltic Sea to the north and west, NATO member Turkey to the west, the Middle East, the Islamic world and Iran to the south and east, and the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the east” (Herzig 1999: 114).

The U.S. made major investments in the Caspian Sea region, undermining Russia’s control of access to Caspian resources. In particular, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was a key phenomenon in Georgia’s economy. It runs from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean coast and its significance and value has been highly debated between theorists and practitioners. Shaffer (2005: 343) argues that “the BTC pipeline is designed to carry 1 million barrels per day—a little over 1 percent of the world’s daily oil consumption”. US Congressional Research Service (2013) notes that the pipeline can be seen as a European Transport Corridor. Nation (2007), on the other hand, claims that the initiation had political purposes and was beneficial for the Caucasus region and Western countries. Cornell and Starr (2006: 20) note that the BTC pipeline transports needed energy to Europe. Cornell, Tsereteli and Socor (2005: 17), emphasising geostrategic implications of the BTC pipeline, highlight that it “constitutes a strategic milestone in post-Soviet Eurasia”. Furthermore, they (2005: 24) assume that it “is a major step in anchoring Georgia and Azerbaijan to Europe”. From a geostrategic point of view the BTC has considerable symbolic significance. In a complex and dangerous globalised world full of geopolitical tensions the BTC pipeline made Georgia a small player on the international stage. It has posed a number of opportunities and created a new source of supply to many regions that were ever hungrier for oil.

In parallel, the South-Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) transports gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey. Accordingly, both pipelines bypass Russia and Iran, competing for influence and dominance in the Caucasus, and connect the Caspian region and Europe. They are significant in developing the hydrocarbon base in the Caspian region. The BTC oil pipeline provides access to Caspian oil from Azerbaijan to the EU. Gogolashvili (2009) highlights that the pipelines could play an important role in the EU’s energy security as they have become essential factors driving international interest in the region. Therefore, Georgia has been attracting Western investment and establishing a friendly environment for Western operations. It could be argued that the development of pipelines and energy infrastructure is a positive-sum game, which means that all sides can gain mutual benefits.

It is important to emphasise that both the BTC and SCP pipelines have strengthened the political and economic security of Georgia as well as increased Western engagement. They have emerged as an issue of great importance in recent decades as they have helped the country to develop stability and security, overcome its economic difficulties and facilitate various reforms. The pipelines represent an important aspect of the growing international significance of Georgia and play an essential role from various standpoints. First, they have helped to achieve Georgia’s autonomy and facilitated international involvement in the region. Second, they have helped to reduce dependency on Russian energy and, hence, to reduce its influence on internal and foreign affairs. Third, they have enabled Georgia to choose its own foreign policy and strategic orientation freely as well as to strengthen economic security and sovereignty.

The USA’s interest in Georgia

In the early 1990s, the USA became concerned about the independence of the small state of Georgia. The U.S. political agenda there has embodied a consistent set of ideas. One of the most important issues is to support the sovereignty and independence of Georgia. Given the overwhelming weight within the international system the U.S. aims to prevent Russian dominance in the country. The USA is also concerned about the region’s security and

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intends to promote development, counter terrorist acts and pursue the war on terrorism. In particular, the security interest has arisen after 9/11, when the Central Intelligence Agency in the U.S. heard the call from Afghanistan to Georgia (Pankisi Gorge) (German 2004: 6). The U.S. supports former USSR states to overcome their Soviet past and characteristics, such as a planned economy; develops the framework for a free market and a strong private sector and establishes the rule of law. The opening of the region to international markets, the establishment of an environment conducive to the advancement of democracy, the formation of effective democratic political institutions, the promotion of freedom, human rights and the importance of civil society in Georgia became significant objectives of US foreign policy.

It is important to emphasise that the USA is interested not only in the promotion of democracy in Georgia; the geopolitical character of the concern is revealed in the securing of transport links and the energy sector. The strategic value is straightforward: the country is a vital energy-transport corridor for oil and gas exports linking Europe and the Caspian Sea (Forsythe 1996). America found a strategic partner, which supports U.S. operations in Central Asia. Cornell (2007: 5) argues that Georgia is important for America in terms of “sovereignty and democracy, energy and trade, and security”. Lynch (2006: 51) also emphasises the strategic significance of Georgia to the USA and assumes that America is interested in supporting counter-terrorism in Georgia, ensuring the stability of the state and that there will not occur any terrorist activities; and ensuring the secure transportation of resources from the Caspian region to international markets. Hence, the USA is interested in supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, combating the war on terror in the country, underpinning political developments, safeguarding democratisation, strengthening economic mechanisms and infrastructure and developing the East-West energy corridor and transportation processes of the Caspian resources between Europe and Asia.

The EU's interest in Georgia

The European Union, highly concerned about energy security, has varied interests in Georgia, located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. It has been a matter of debate between various member states and institutions of the EU whether Georgia and the South Caucasus region have significant implications to the EU. To be clear from the outset, it is necessary to emphasise that Georgia is not a first order priority for the EU. However, it has become significant for European security during the last decades. In the early 1990s, as a result of European perception of the development of the South Caucasus, the EU launched an important new project, TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), in order to create a transport corridor to connect Europe to Asia via the Caucasus and to facilitate the regional exchange of goods. According to Cornell, Tsereteli and Socor (2005: 29), it was “designed to build a variety of East-West road, rail and sea links across the region”, and was of greatest importance for the Caucasus and particularly for Georgia's economy. It is significant to note that from a geopolitical perspective Georgia's location is of key significance, taking into account the conflict between the two other regions of the South Caucasus – Armenia and Azerbaijan – over Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, the EU has other interests in the country varying from the principles of good governance and the promotion of democracy to the new security challenges and threats of the 21st century such as terrorism and organized crime (Lynch 2006: 59-70).

Firstly, the principles of good governance are important to be established in Georgia. These include accountability, transparency, participation, consensus orientation, the rule of law, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equitability and inclusiveness (UNESCAP no date). After the change of power in 2003 new horizons were opened to Georgia and there was a hope that the state could implement democratic concepts, economic reforms and achieve political stability. Lynch (2006: 59) notes that from 1992 to 2004 the EU gave 420 million euros to Georgia, including humanitarian aid, food security and conflict resolution programmes. Furthermore, guidance was provided to reform law and the justice system and to support cooperation with international organisations.

Secondly, Georgia seeks to become a member of the European Union and it is a state of growing importance for the EU which is interested in its political stability. The EU member states do not wish Georgia to become a place of threats and terrorism activities as well as drug trafficking, illegal migration and organized crime.

Thirdly, the country had two unresolved conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and the EU supported Georgia to restore them peacefully and achieve territorial integrity. Both the EU and Georgia consider the challenges and

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consequences of the status quo of the conflict regions, do not welcome it and are interested in a peaceful resolution. Hence, they have a direct interest in Georgia's stability.

Furthermore, as was mentioned above, Georgia matters because of its geographic location as it serves as a transit route and transports energy goods from the Caspian Sea. After the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Georgia emerged as a transit country of oil from the Caspian Sea to European markets. Access to the Caspian Sea energy reserves is crucial to European energy security.

Russia's interest in Georgia

The previous chapter analysed Russia's sphere of influence and particular interest in the South Caucasus and in Georgia. Russia has several objectives concerning Georgia, but the most important are inclusion in internal affairs and avoidance of any policy contradicting Russia's interests. In other words, the main concern is avoidance of anti-Russian movements and activities in the country (Lynch 2006: 51). According to Baev (2003: 41), it is of vital importance for Russia as a status-quo power to influence and control political and economic developments in the region. Trenin (2009: 15) emphasises that as Russia is a leading energy exporter, it is considerably interested in the secure transit of its oil and gas and is suspicious of new independent states' developments and their role as transit states. In particular, the construction of the BTC pipeline in Georgia, a new export route which bypasses Russian territory, undermines and weakens its influence in the country and its effectiveness in securing its interests. The pipeline reduces Russia's dominance in Georgia as well as in Azerbaijan. Accordingly, Russia is afraid of such developments because it changes the balance of power in the region and Russia might lose a voice in Georgia. In fact, operation of the pipeline on Georgian territory comes into conflict with Russia's de facto sphere of influence and interest. Russia is concerned about Georgia's transit capacities, constraining Caspian exports and is not interested in losing benefit from Caspian resources (Kalicki 2001: 123). It is of paramount importance for Russia to remain engaged in the region and maintain access to essential resources.

Furthermore, Russia is ambitious about Georgia and desires to establish the same hegemony in the country as in the Soviet Union. Russia is concerned about the emergence of hostile forces on its borders and, therefore, about influences on the foreign policy orientation of Georgia (Hunter 2000: 27). It sees its dominance in the state as a necessary instrument to maintain control in the Southern border of Russia, in particular in the North Caucasus (e.i. the regions: Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Stavropol Krai, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Chechnya). Conflict with Chechnya and separatists' movements threatened the stability of Russia (Allison 1999: 28). Accordingly, control over Georgia is utterly essential as it would settle conflicts in the North Caucasus, which is vital to effective public administration in Russia. Russia's security priority was the prevention of the displacement of Russian military from Georgia and the preservation of strategic influence. Consequently, Russia clearly defines the political, economic and security relevance of Georgia. The strategic vision of Russia has included Georgia as an essential feature in its foreign agenda in the near abroad and it considers the country as part of its sphere of interest.

Geopolitical confrontation between the Great Powers

Georgia has become geopolitically, geographically and geologically crucial for the USA, the EU and Russia. Their policies in Georgia are subject to contrasting and contradictory interpretations. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Cold War geopolitics has undergone profound changes and the control over new strategically important territories has begun. In fact, the geopolitical focus of Western countries has shifted to new locations. The Great Powers have struggled to control the Black-Sea-Caucasus and the Caspian resources (O'Hara 2004, Baran 2004). The geopolitical gamble has brought significant interest from outside powers to ex-Soviet countries and oil resources of the Caspian region to the centre of attention of foreign affairs analysts and policymakers, investors and international observers (Croissant and Aras 1999). In the new security environment Georgia has gained its political and economic significance as a transit corridor for energy supplies. To be completely clear, Georgia plays a crucial role for the USA as it is interested in isolating the former Soviet republics from Russia; for the EU as it is interested in reducing EU member states' dependence on energy from Russia; and for Russia as it is interested in dominating the region. The main issue lies in geopolitical competition in the Black Sea region and in geopolitical influence in Georgia. Thus, there are several reasons and examples explaining why Georgia represents a conflict of interests. Some social

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scientists and practitioners characterised the state as “a ‘battle for domination’” (German 2009a: 355). Juntti (2004: 325) argues that Georgia has become strategically important for the U.S., and Great Powers as the USA and Russia have begun geopolitical competition over influence in the state.

The EU has begun engagement with the region and has faced a dilemma of good governance promotion and pursuit of its own energy security interests (Nilsson 2008: 2). The EU tries to implement its key security interests, but simultaneously, avoids challenging Russia's influence and interest in the region. During the last decades Europe has faced various challenges regarding energy security. Growing need of resources and access to markets for key products made the search for viable alternatives for energy security, including the energy supply routes, increasingly crucial. In that regard, the EU was concerned about avoidance of dependence on one source. Europe aimed to explore new ways to diversify its energy supply and the Black Sea region along with the Caspian Sea region served as a new potential – a new hub in energy security. The Black/Caspian Sea region is considered as the new strategic view of European energy development. Georgia in particular, which was pursuing European democratic and liberal values and integration into the EU institutions, was viewed in the EU's agenda as a friendly partner to negotiate with. By achieving a direct link to the energy resources, both the EU and Georgia have mutual benefits. It results in finding a source of alternative supply for Europe and in enhancing sovereignty, security, issues of democratic principles and governance for Georgia. The USA and the EU seek to build transit routes ensuring access to the Caspian Sea resources. The US has become significantly interested in increasing its presence in what is traditionally Russia's sphere of interest (Foster 2004: 14). Georgian territory is crucial in Washington's eyes in order to secure the transit of Caspian resources through the area, which is not controlled by Moscow. The construction of the BTC pipeline, which was strongly supported by the USA, posed certain challenges to Russia as it limited control over Caspian resources. The value of the territory of Georgia is based on being a transit route for the BTC and SCP pipelines. Cornell and Nilsson (2008: 10) argue that the pipelines constitute “the only infrastructure for bringing Caspian energy to the European market, which is not under Russian control”. The example of the BTC pipeline has materialized a successful project based on effective strategic planning. New oil infrastructure provides European access to Caspian oil though in limited volumes. It boosts diversity of supply, reduces Russian dominance, strengthens political and economic autonomy of Georgia and Azerbaijan, reinforces their independence and opens new dimensions to Western engagement. Georgia's cooperation with the EU and the U.S. and its geographic location is of vital importance in terms of East-West energy corridor, and strategic partnership between countries helps to overcome major issues, such as consolidating independent transit routes.

Russia formulates its political, economic and security interests in an uncompromising manner. Gazprom, which is one of the largest companies in the world, Russia's largest state-owned company, a leader in the gas industry, has clear objective – to be a dominant gas supplier in Europe. Therefore, Moscow wants to control transit countries and the development of new infrastructure in these states, such as the construction of strategic pipelines (Tsereteli 2008: 51). This means that the EU and the USA have to compete with Russia over an influence in the state. Russia attempts to limit Western engagement in Georgia, while the EU and the U.S. strive for deepening involvement and encourage integration with Transatlantic structures. Russia prefers Georgia to follow a regime which it can control, and Western countries prefer Georgia's orientation toward the West. Russia on the one hand, and the USA and the EU on the other seek dominance over the region and to secure the route to Caspian supplies. The increasing geopolitical competition is based on two characteristics: first, a secure energy transportation route and, second, conflict resolution. The situation in conflict zones in Georgia highly depends on Georgian-Russian relations as Russia is involved, has an obvious effect and supports de facto regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The EU, on the other hand, is interested in the security of the Caucasus and thus in Georgia's unresolved conflicts, and intends and works constructively to find peaceful solutions. Consequently, engagement dilemmas occur and the difficulty lies in securing one's own interests without challenging others.

To put it another way, on the one hand, Moscow is a key player in the resolution of territorial disputes in Georgia as it has been supporting separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia for a long time. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have certain implications for relations not only between Georgia and Russia, but also between Georgia and the EU and the USA (German 2006: 5). The EU and the U.S. are interested in the stability of the South Caucasus and conflict resolution in dispute zones as small, weak states can threaten the stability of the whole international system. Hence, resolution has gained vital significance and

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the EU and the US have focused their attention on these unresolved issues and support Georgia in achieving peaceful solution and searching for a negotiated settlement.

The received wisdom in international relations suggests that in the contemporary security environment the existence of uncertainty is inevitable. As it was analysed in the first chapter and as many social scientists, examining small states behaviour in the international system, emphasise this uncertainty leads Great Powers to compete for the support of and political, economic and social influence on small states. Moreover, Great Powers are concerned about new issues of the international relations and security environment and geopolitical implications of specific territories have become of paramount importance. Hence, Georgia has become a centre of a specific interest of the USA, the EU and Russia due to its geographical position, political developments and strategic orientation. The influence on and the control of Georgian territory will mean the control of supply of energy resources on the Eurasian continent. The U.S. engagement with the region has resulted in a geopolitical confrontation. Washington's and Moscow's interests in Georgia are based on the increasing relevance of geostrategic politics and a dangerous game for domination has gained global supremacy. Georgia is a new actor and new democracy on the Trans-Atlantic and international stage, but international community has already put a greater emphasis on the importance of the territory as a transport corridor of the energy resources. The country has implemented various domestic reforms and government programmes, which have far-reaching implications and has proved its ambition to integrate with the West. Georgia is a close US ally, participates in NATO operations in Afghanistan and actively pursues the EU and NATO membership as a crucial national concept. Thus, despite the fact that Georgia occupies a small geographical position on the world map, its geopolitical significance should not be underestimated because it has specific relevance to the USA, the EU and Russia and causes certain confrontation between them regarding the influence in the country.

In conclusion, the reasons and examples given above clearly illustrate why a small state like Georgia, which occupies a strategic location, is important to the USA, the EU and Russia. It has certain geopolitical importance and is a significant transport and communication corridor, especially in terms of energy and its secure transition. Despite the fact that Europe neglected the region for a long period, it has gradually begun to formulate essential interests in Georgia. From a geostrategic point of view Georgia along with Azerbaijan are key bridge countries regarding a transportation corridor. Their geostrategic context increases their significance in terms of economic and energy security and is of paramount importance for Europe. Therefore, Georgia plays a crucial role as it is a transit corridor of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to international markets. Georgia is a small state in terms of territory and population, but it is very important as an energy corridor.

CONCLUSION

The relevance of a small state like Georgia has generated a substantial amount of analysis and speculation among many theorists and practitioners throughout the world over the past several years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, which changed the geopolitical situation in the world, and created new opportunities as well as giving rise to new challenges and problems, a newly independent state Georgia was suffering from insecurity and instability. During the early years of its independence Georgia was unable to control its national borders against crime and was searching for the keys to independence, stability and development. The country suffered from two violent conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s. It was struggling to preserve its independence, gain international recognition and support, maintain its territorial integrity and formulate its foreign policy orientation without being dictated to by an outside force – the northern neighbour. The Rose Revolution in November 2003 gave rise to new opportunities for its successful political, economic and cultural development.

The country has undergone vital changes and turned into a functioning democracy. The foreign policy orientation has been clearly announced to distance Georgia from Russia and orient the country to Western democratic principles. Being a keen supporter of U.S. policy and becoming more westward looking, Georgia has been trying to rid itself of

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Russian hegemony and domination. Georgia has demonstrated a strong European identity and interest in the European way of development. Moreover, the National Security Concept of Georgia declared that Georgia pursues integration into European and Trans-Atlantic organisations and sees NATO membership as a guarantor of stability in this increasingly dangerous world. It is important to emphasise that cooperation and diplomatic relations with Russia are necessary to resolve frozen conflicts in the country. Georgia wants to have good neighbourly relations with Russia, but not at the cost of losing true sovereignty. In fact, Georgia sees aspiration for membership of NATO as an essential instrument to achieve territorial integrity and stability and Georgia's new government wants to show Russia that integration in NATO is not a threat.

In the early 1990s many social scientists and policy-makers began paying attention to Georgia, situated on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, squeezed between Russia and Turkey. As a new actor on the transatlantic and international stage, it has become an arena of geopolitical confrontation between the USA, the EU and Russia. Along with the wider Caucasus region Georgia has been given vital significance because it "constitutes a (...) land bridge between Asia and Europe, physically linking the Caspian Sea region and Central Asia with the Black Sea and Western Europe" (German 2009a: 345). In the contemporary security environment and in this increasingly interdependent world it occupies a key strategic location, which makes it geographically convenient as a transport point. It has become a region of rising importance and is situated along the quickest route linking Europe with Asia. The construction of the BTC pipeline has considerable symbolic significance, and it transports oil from Azerbaijan to Turkey through Georgia. One of the largest reserves of petroleum lies beneath the Caspian Sea and that is why Western countries have given vital importance to the region and particularly to a small state like Georgia as a transit route. The operation of the BTC pipeline on Georgian territory considerably strengthens Georgia's economic and political security and creates new opportunities for successful development. Georgian territory is a transit route for hydrocarbons, and it provides a direct link from the Caspian region to Europe. Being a transport corridor is a crucial factor for sovereignty and territorial integrity of a small state like Georgia.

For the Georgian government, having strong ties with the U.S. and pursuing NATO membership are considered essential instruments for freely choosing the country's foreign and security policy orientation. It is a top foreign policy strategy to integrate with European and Trans-Atlantic organisations in order to be politically independent and have long-term and strong security guarantees. The U.S. and the EU, for their part, pursue their own objectives in the country, such as diversifying access to energy, having access to new territories, isolating the state from Russian dominance, promoting democracy and concepts of good governance, and avoiding terrorist acts. Georgia is increasingly important for the USA and the EU "as a major east-west energy supply bridge and also as a barrier against many transnational threats" (Rummer and Simon 2006: 1). Russia, on the other hand, wishes Georgia to cut cooperation with NATO and to use the transportation corridor for its own purposes. For a small state like Georgia, Russian objectives and perceptions pose certain challenges. It is clear that Georgia has important implications and is situated in a zone of Great Power competition. Thus, competing interests could be observed in the country and it is believed to be an East-West transportation and communications corridor, connecting the region to Europe. Georgia is a small state in terms of territory and population, but from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view it is very important as an energy corridor.

To sum up, the issue concerning the relevance of a small state like Georgia to the USA, the EU and Russia is a highly controversial, complex and problematic topic, and it certainly invites further research and myriad analyses and a combination of current international affairs with past practices that influence future dimensions. Many theorists and practitioners have emphasised that careful attention will still need to be focused on this dynamic part of the world, on Georgia's political, economic and security developments, resolution of conflicts and its geographical relevance to the international system. Greater attention also needs to be devoted to the newly democratically elected government in October 2012 and the future prospects of its foreign policy and strategic orientation. These dimensions have opened innumerable investigations of academics and government officials.

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