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## **RUSSIA'S FACTOR IN GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

*The article examines the bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia, as well as the role of these relations in shaping Georgia's foreign policy agenda. The Caucasian direction of Russia's foreign policy is of great importance in ensuring Russia's national security. Peace and stability are vital issues for the South Caucasus region and Russia plays a key role in that agenda.*

*Georgia, oriented towards Euro-Atlantic structures, is aware that it will not become a NATO member, so the problems of the country's territorial integrity and threats to its security will force the Georgian leadership to look for new allies. Russia can become a key ally in this context.*

*The Turkey's growing influence is also of concern to Georgia. Only the support of Russia can help to balance the influence of Turkey and this understanding is growing in Georgia. It should be noted that the awareness of Russia's role and its potential in the regional politics does not come easy, but the fact that the process has started speaks volumes.*

**Key words:** *Georgia, Russia, regional security, international security.*

After the collapse of the USSR, Georgia declared itself an independent state and the legal successor of the Georgian Democratic Republic, which existed in 1918-1921. Independent Georgia started to actively cooperate with all its neighbors. Georgia's neighbors were Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, which broke away from the USSR. Georgia started to establish new relations with Turkey. On May 21, 1992, Georgia and Turkey established diplomatic relations and over time Turkey has become one of Georgia's most important partners.

In its relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia has used its potential as a state with access to the sea. After all, Azerbaijan and Armenia are landlocked states and Georgia became a transit country for Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, from the point of view of transit, it is a very important and sometimes non-alternative partner [6. P. 91-97].

It should be emphasized that the recently published works of Russian and Georgian authors cover a wide range of issues in this subject area [4; 5; 7; 9; 10. Pp. 239-251; 14].

However, the problem of Russian-Georgian relations cannot be called fully covered. Due to many objective circumstances, the study of this topic continues to maintain a high level of relevance.

After the new political forces led by Mikhail Saakashvili came to power in 2003, the first plan (IPAP – Individual Partnership Action Plan) of individual partnership between Georgia and NATO was adopted. Georgia also actively cooperated with the United States in the military-political and military-technical spheres. The US provided logistical assistance to the Georgian armed forces. Training programs for Georgian soldiers were also implemented. Georgia also took an active part in peacekeeping operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But relations between Russia and Georgia were not easy. The conflict between the two countries culminated in the 2008 Caucasus crisis. After this crisis, there are still no diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia. However, it should be noted that Russia plays a very important role in Georgia's foreign policy. Often, changes in the Georgian foreign policy vector are related to the current state of relations with Russia.

Georgia refused to cooperate with Russia in the military-political and military-technical spheres. In 1993, the division of the Russian Federation Armed Forces was formed – the Group of Russian Troops in Transcaucasia (GRVZ), with headquarters in Tbilisi. The GRVZ included Russian military bases in Georgia and Armenia: the 12th military base in Batumi, the 62nd military base in Akhalkalaki, the 137th military base in Vaziani, and the 102nd military base in Gyumri. Georgia demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory. And at the OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999, Russia has pledged to withdraw its troops from Georgia. Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and Georgia became Annex 14 to the Istanbul document of 1999 [11]. In this Statement Russia and Georgia, guided by paragraphs 14.2.3 and 14.2.7 of the Decision of the Joint Advisory group on the adaptation of the CFE Treaty of March 30, 1999, and seeking to promote the development and strengthening of cooperation between Russia and Georgia, agreed at the first stage to reduce the number of Russian weapons on the territory of Georgia. As of December 31, 2001, Russia had to have no more than 153 tanks, 241 ACVs, and 140 artillery systems in Georgia. Then, according to this document, Russia was to withdraw the bases from Gudaut and Vaziani. And the timing of the withdrawal of bases from Akhalkalaki and Batumi was supposed to be agreed through the negotiation process during the year 2000.

By the end of 2007 Russia withdrew its troops from Georgia ahead of schedule. And in August 2008, it received a blow to its peacekeepers in South Ossetia. The result of military actions in South Ossetia was the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia. Despite the fact that in the Istanbul document, Russia and Georgia declared the strengthening of bilateral relations between the countries, the withdrawal of military bases only unleashed a war in South Ossetia. Russia has assumed obligations to ensure the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by placing the 7th military base in Gudauta (Abkhazia) and the 4th military base in Tskhinvali (South Ossetia). However Georgia considers these bases as occupying forces on its territory.

It is very important for Georgia to develop its defense and security system. Georgia's military potential suffered serious losses during the 2008 Caucasus crisis. During several days of active fighting, the Georgian armed forces lost a large number of weapons and military equipment. Georgian troops were unable to hold the warehouses in Gori, Senaki and Poti. The Russian armed forces took control of the warehouses to prevent uncontrolled spread across the Caucasus. Georgia is restoring its potential in the military sphere and reforming its armed forces, without excluding the possibility of military option for the resolution of the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Humanitarian ties between the countries have also suffered greatly. Russia was one of Georgia's key economic partners, but the 2008 Caucasus crisis also hit this sector hard. Although trade relations between the two countries improved with the change of power in Georgia in 2012, no tangible agreements were reached in the political sphere. Table 1 shows the dynamics of trade between Russia and Georgia in the period before and after the 2008 Caucasus crisis. In early 2006 Russia has banned the import of Georgian wines and mineral water. Table 1 shows a decline compared to 2006 in connection with this decision of the Russian leadership.

*Table 1***Trade volume between Russia and Georgia from 2005 to 2018 [16]**

Year	Russia's share in Georgia's export (in thousand of US dollars)	%	Russia's share in Georgia's import (in thousand of US dollars)	%
2005	153 724.51	17,8	381 557,99	15,3
2006	75 393.26	8,0	555 371,83	15,1
2007	45 338.46	3,7	573 879,26	11,0
2008	29 783.44	2,0	423 312,02	6,7
2009	21 146.17	1,8	290 811,44	6,5
2010	34 706.45	2,0	289 726,84	5,5
2011	36 610,39	1,7	387 960,54	5,5
2012	46 805,97	2,0	476 828,48	5,9
2013	190 653,35	6,5	583 939,56	7,3
2014	274 753,98	9.6	575 570.26	6.7
2015	162 885.58	7.4	625 065.58	8.6
2016	206 043.97	9.7	675 627.75	9.3
2017	396 672.04	14.5	796 653.96	10.0
2018	437 303.54	13.0	935 679.63	10.3

Georgia, in turn, made up for the lack of relations in various spheres with Russia by deepening cooperation with Ukraine and Turkey. Turkey, which has participated in international energy and transport projects with Georgia, has increased its role in the region.

Table № 2

**Trade volume between Turkey and Georgia from 2005 to 2018 [16]**

Year	Turkey's share in Georgia's export (in thousand of US dollars)	%	Turkey's share in Georgia's import (in thousand of US dollars)	%
2005	121 856,76	14.0	283 008.83	11.4
2006	123 302.12	13.2	522 560.05	14.2
2007	171 763.87	13.9	727 906.00	13.9
2008	262 910.23	17.6	940 479.78	14.9
2009	225 769.06	19.9	786 908.66	17.6
2010	216 799.33	12.9	885 903.61	16.9
2011	226 387.69	10.3	1 278 677.29	18.0
2012	140 141.63	5.9	1 470 240.61	18.2
2013	184 027.91	6.3	1 410 197.45	17.5
2014	239 301.61	8.4	1 728 815.72	20.0
2015	186 769.64	8.5	1 327 477.82	18.2
2016	173 449.00	8.2	1 353 584.82	18.5
2017	216 673.60	7.9	1 373 738.85	17.3
2018	232 714.29	6.9	1 470 066.04	16.1

In the concept documents of Georgia, Turkey is characterized as the Georgia's leading partner in the region, and the Georgian-Turkish relations as strategic [15]. Georgia and Turkey cooperate on energy and transport projects that are of great political significance for the South Caucasus region. Georgia emphasizes the development of cooperation with Turkey in the field of security.

Turkey is one of the most important economic partners for Georgia. The military-technical and military-political interaction between Georgia and Turkey is also highlighted. Georgia is closely connected with Turkey by military-political, cultural, and economic relations [1. Pp. 49-57].

The deepening of economic cooperation and the successful implementation of joint energy and transport projects, including the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan and Baku – Tbilisi – Erzurum pipelines, the Baku – Tbilisi – Kars railway, have formed the backbone of the system of gas and oil pipelines alternative to Russian routes, as well as railway access to Europe for Azerbaijan and Georgia.



After the Rose Revolution, Georgia's cooperation with the United States deepened even further. Relations in the military sphere with Turkey, the main US ally in the region, have also deepened [2. Pp. 52-58].

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey acquired extensive and efficient nearby markets in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The acquisition of the Eurasian and Balkan markets has played a huge role in the rapid development of the Turkish economy. Proximity to such an economy is of great importance. Turkey with a population of 74 million can also be an effective market for the economies of the South Caucasus. Thus, Turkey, thanks to its economic potential, existing and projected energy projects, has acquired real levers of influence in the South Caucasus. This influence, in turn, implies political influence.

At the same time, Turkey is interested in distancing Adjara from Georgia and in the political independence of this region. Turkey has a special approach to Adjara, since there is a significant number of Muslim population in Adjara. During the years of Ottoman rule, like other Christians, adjarians mixed Islam and Orthodoxy in their everyday life. According to the 2002 census in Georgia, the proportion of Sunni Muslims in Adjara is more than 30%, although in the late 1980s Muslims were absolutely predominant (70%). Islam took a special place in the life of Adjara after the independence of Georgia and the entry of the Adjara region into the sphere of Turkey's geopolitical interests [3].

It should be noted that the Adjara autonomy was formed according to the Moscow Treaty of 1921. According to that Treaty, Adjara was granted broad local autonomy in administrative terms and Turkey received trade privileges in the port of Batumi. After the "Adjara crisis" of 2004 and the resignation of A. Abashidze, Russia's influence in the region decreased, while Turkish influence increased. In 2007, due to the decision to withdraw the Russian 12th military base from Batumi, Russia's military and political influence in Adjara and Georgia as a whole sharply decreased. And after the Caucasus crisis of 2008, it is almost absent. In response, Russia increased its military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Relations between Russia and Georgia are also linked to Russian-Turkish relations. These relations have deepened significantly in the economic sphere and are being strengthened in the political sphere. Naturally, there are also contradictions between the two countries. Energy projects that bypass Russia do not take its interests into consideration. In this context, in recent years, Russia has taken counter-measures against those energy projects that do not coincide with its interests. Ambitious Turkish-Russian projects were implemented. The Blue Stream and Turkish Stream gas pipelines have given a tangible impetus to the deepening of relations between Russia and Turkey.

Based on close economic ties with Russia, Turkey is trying to pursue a balanced policy in the Caucasus. It should be noted that during the 2008 Caucasus crisis, Turkey took a neutral position.

As a NATO member and a neighboring country, Turkey has consistently supported Georgia both economically and politically since the collapse of the Soviet

Union. Turkey's dilemma is that Russia is an important trading partner and main supplier of natural gas, while Georgia has become a key partner of Turkey in the transportation of hydrocarbons and transit railway communication. And Georgia, with the help of Turkey, compensates for the lack of diplomatic relations with Russia.

The Georgian foreign policy is oriented towards the Euro-Atlantic structures. Georgia is seeking NATO membership and EU integration. Georgia also actively cooperates with Turkey within the framework of cooperation with NATO.

The United States is considered Georgia's main ally [8. Pp. 68-75]. Georgia continues to deepen its strategic partnership with the United States. It is very important that the United States supports Georgia on the issue of its territorial integrity and supplies military and financial assistance. However, the US is not yet in a hurry to accept Georgia into NATO.

Georgia has already initialed the Association Agreement with the EU. However, views of the Georgian authorities and certain segments of its population do not always coincide. Certain segments of the population whose interests do not coincide with those of the Georgian authorities belong not only to the so-called "national minorities," but also to people whose interests are somehow connected with Russia. A significant percentage of the Armenian population is closely related to both Armenia and Russia. And Georgia's policy towards Russia causes such people to be perplexed. The Armenian part of the population of Georgia has a negative attitude towards Georgia's accession to NATO. This is primarily due to the factor of Turkey. But the Azerbaijani population of the Kvemo-Kartli region very often looks at Azerbaijan or Turkey.

Thus, the process of self-identification of not only Georgia, but its population is incomplete, and sometimes contradictory.

Transport and energy projects implemented with the participation of Turkey play a very important role in the economy of Georgia, but also leave an imprint on its politics. The Turkish-Azerbaijani Alliance occupies a dominant position in the economy of Georgia. Turkey and Azerbaijan are strategic partners operating on the principle of one people, two countries. And there are already forces in Georgia that express fears that Georgia will become heavily dependent on that Alliance. Although the official authorities are only deepening their relations with Turkey, increasing Georgia's dependence, there are political forces that are in favor of strengthening the country's sovereignty and intent to stop Turkish expansion into Georgia. The most significant political structure with such an ideology is the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia party. The parties that are the former and current authorities declare other values and priorities. The former party in power – United National Movement (UNM) - and the current ruling Georgian Dream (GM) party were alone in the fifth convocation of the Parliament. However, in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia managed to get into Parliament with just over 5% of the vote.

A landmark meeting of Russian and Georgian parliamentarians took place in Moscow in 2017. That was the first official visit of a delegation of the Georgian Parliament to Russia after the 2008 Caucasus crisis. The Russia-Georgia Interparliamentary Dialogue group was established on the initiative of the members of the Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian integration and relations with compatriots of the State Duma of Russia and members of the Georgian Parliament from the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia party.

In July 2019, the second meeting of the Russia-Georgia Interparliamentary Dialogue group was held.

There are practically no pro-Russian political forces in Georgia at present, but the rethinking of Georgia's position in the region and the increasing role of Russia in the world are changing the vision of Russia in the eyes of the Georgian elite and population. The democratic movement – United Georgia party, led by N. Burjanadze, also supports the idea of deepening relations with Russia.

The events that began on June 20 in Tbilisi showed the presence of forces using the confrontation with Russia as a factor in their coming to power. However, these same events have shown that Georgia suffers great losses from the confrontation with Russia. And the confrontation with Russia is clearly not in the interests of Georgia, but in the interests of external forces that are directing forces under their control in Georgia to adjust Georgia's foreign policy. The result of the events in Tbilisi was the decision of the government of Georgia regarding the parliamentary elections in 2020. The removal of the electoral barrier and the rejection of elections under the majority system may lead to a change of power in Georgia. Therefore the bill was not adopted by the Parliament and contradictions between different parties and centers of power increased in Georgia.

It is difficult to predict what path Georgia will take in foreign policy after the elections. Currently, economic relations with Russia are subordinated to political interests, and not vice versa [13. P. 309-317]. Georgia is not able to take any steps in its foreign policy before the 2020 parliamentary elections. But some parties may declare improved relations with Russia as election programs, and if successful in the elections, will try to implement their programs.

Russia is also interested in establishing good-neighborly relations with Georgia. Russia has become more active in the post-Soviet space by creating the Customs Union and the Eurasian Union. With the settlement of conflicts in the South Caucasus, only Russia can act as a likely guarantor of security in the region. At least, Russia is the most acceptable power for all the countries located here. Georgia is an exception, but Georgia's increasing dependence on Turkey will push Georgia towards Russia.

Russia has yet to take real steps to establish good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. Modern Georgia is one of the promoters of anti-Russian initiatives in the post-Soviet space, and in this regard it is associated with certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe [12. P. 34-39]. The current Georgian authorities are

afraid of losing American patronage, so no tangible steps have been taken in the direction of Russia in the sphere of politics. However, most of the Georgian population is in favor of improving relations with Russia. Russia can start the process of deepening relations with Georgia by canceling the visa regime between the countries. Georgia has unilaterally canceled the visa regime with Russia. And, of course, it is necessary to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. Possible changes in relations between Russia and Georgia can be expected after the parliamentary elections in Georgia in 2020. If such parties as “Democratic movement – United Georgia” or “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia” are represented in the Parliament.

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