

Why Non-Alignment?

One of the most demonstrative signals of Azerbaijan's new foreign policy orientation was its decision to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in May 2011. Until then Belarus was the only CIS country which was a full member of this group.

Azerbaijan's action was a symbolic move to show two things. Firstly, it sought to demonstrate to the West that it should not push Azerbaijan too much in terms of human rights and democracy. The timing of the decision to join NAM followed the European Parliament's resolution condemning political persecutions in Azerbaijan. Secondly, as Hikmat Hajizade, a prominent Azerbaijani opposition thinker says, this foreign policy move was designed to address the fears of Iran about the potential use of Azerbaijani territories or airspace for possible attacks against Iran.

Conclusion

Oil money and the leverage energy provides in general made Azerbaijan reconsider its relations with the outside

About the Author

Rashad Shirinov is an independent political analyst based in Baku. He finished his graduate studies in Turkey, the UK and the US and has worked for OSCE Election Missions and US National Democratic Institute.

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

By Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi

Abstract

Georgia, nestled between the Black Sea, Russia, and Turkey, and surrounded by the Caucasus Mountains, occupies a unique geographic space, which gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. Like other Eastern European nations in the middle of transition, it is trying to construct a collective identity which can be projected toward the international arena. While Georgia's foreign policy is considered pro-western and multifaceted, it is not always based on principles of pragmatic expediency. For example, Georgia pays little attention to areas outside the Western world, including the region where it is located. This is largely because its gaze is entirely fixed upon the West. Since the dynamics responsible for this policy grow out of the social, economic, and cultural transformation which Georgia is currently living through, this article argues that Georgian foreign policy priorities are mostly identity driven. It also claims that the predominant idea of the Georgian elites—a group that sometimes acts on behalf of the state—is that Georgia rightly belongs in the West. This devotion to the idea of full-fledged Euro-Atlantic integration as a “sacred destiny” has significant foreign policy implications.

Introduction

Since an effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, the foreign policy of small

world and the ruling elite now feels more independent and self-confident. This growing self-assurance has been the major factor behind changes in the attitude of official Baku towards the EU, US, Russia, NATO and Turkey.

Although with regard to political culture, Azerbaijan has shifted closer to authoritarian Russia, it still tries to preserve its independence. Hence, the decision to join the non-aligned movement, which is highly symbolic.

The Arab Spring has also made the Azerbaijani ruling elite more cautious in its relations with the US and Europe. Government spokespersons in Baku furiously deny even the slightest possibility that events sweeping the Middle East will recur in Azerbaijan.

Overall, for the foreseeable future, the Azerbaijani government will be open to economic projects and closed to any political message from outside regarding democratization.

states is dictated by a number of factors, some realistic, like geography, and some ideological, like identity. Conversely, foreign policy also has a great impact on

national identity, reflecting Graham Fuller's observation that "foreign policy expresses not only what one wants, but also what one is."

Georgia's foreign policy emerged as a product of classic geopolitical factors, where geographic location remains one of the central features for the country's political development. As a small, weak state confronted with issues of survival and a choice of strategic orientation, its national identity is closely linked to different conceptions of sovereignty and statehood. Generally speaking, the Georgian paradigm is more inclined to protect territorial integrity and its foreign policy is largely based on preserving the status quo. Moreover, Georgian identity tends to externalize domestic issues related to the frozen conflicts on its territory and possesses a cognitive map that is mainly shaped by separatism and Russian threat perception. As a result, since 1994 Georgia's major foreign policy objective has been balancing Russian power and influence, which is seen as key to enhancing the country's national security. Forging close ties with the United States and acceding to NATO are the two preferred foreign policy outcomes—as well as the means of achieving that balance. The majority of Georgia's political elite share these goals.

At the same time, while Georgia's foreign policy is considered pro-western and multifaceted, it is not always based on principles of pragmatic expediency. One may even claim that Georgia's foreign policy priorities are identity-driven (the determination to join the "West," EU, NATO) and unlike its neighbors not as focused on realist paradigms, such as national interest, pragmatism, or balance of power. In order to understand the nature of Georgia's foreign policies towards the rest of the world, it is necessary to understand the factors defining them, including identity. This perspective includes measures of continuity, which explains persistent factors in the way the country interacts in the international arena. Similarly, as identity plays a significant role in the construction and application of Georgian foreign policy, exploring Georgia's evolving national identity offers the potential to better forecast the future direction of its foreign policy orientation as well. However, one should not forget that any attempt to analyze Georgia's foreign policy and the country's identity is fraught with risks, as Georgia is constantly changing.

History, Geography and Identity as Factors of State Behavior

Geography and identity define Georgia's political options and determine many aspects of its state behavior. Georgia's location, nestled between the Black Sea, Russia, and Turkey, gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. As a Black Sea and South-Eastern Euro-

pean state, the country has historically been a geographic, political and cultural part of greater Europe. An historical analysis of Georgian foreign relations and its dealings with Roman and later Byzantine civilizations demonstrates the continuity in this trend. However, by the middle of the 15th century, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the fall of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire sealed the Black Sea, cutting off the Christian states in the area from Europe and the rest of the Christian world. As a result of these changes, Georgia suffered economic and political decline and became a battleground for two great rival powers—Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

Since then, fractured Georgian kingdoms struggled to remain connected to Europe, first through the Genoese colonies in the Crimea and later via the Russian Empire. The Russian empire's annexation of Georgia, which Georgians viewed as a great tragedy, spurred the long-sought process of Europeanization, which reduced Georgian fears about the increased Islamic influence over the country. As a result Russia served not only as a positive intermediary between Georgia and Europe, but also played the negative role of "filtering" direct European influence, a role it maintained until the fall of the Soviet Union.¹ Despite having no direct diplomatic links or access to European states, Georgians stayed in tune with European civilization and maintained cultural, political and spiritual connections with Europe.

Since its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia, as an emerging state within a shifting world order, sought direct links to Europe. Tbilisi had to determine its national interest for the first time after centuries of foreign domination by the Russian empire and Soviet Union. With an inherited political culture lacking a strong democratic tradition, an inexperienced foreign policy elite, scarce financial resources, and poorly defined competing social forces, initially Georgia was unable to develop a viable foreign and security policy towards the West. Already at this early stage, Georgia's foreign policy was heavily driven by its identity. Using the historical narrative that it belongs to the West, Georgia continued its traditional quest for a European future.

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

Georgia, as a country with an ancient Christian civilization, frequently claims an European identity and

¹ The only exception is the short-lived period of the first Georgian democratic republic during 1918–1921, when Georgia was able to forge direct political contacts with European powers like Germany, Britain, France, Italy and international bodies like the League of Nations.

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

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

The National Security Concept of Georgia, the basic document that explains Georgia's fundamental national values and interests which was adopted by parliament in July 2005, describes Georgia as "an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and who] aspires to achieve full-fledged integration into Europe's political, economic and security systems... and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe."² The later version of the Concept³, adopted on December 23, 2011, also underlines the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve full-fledged integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region as a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic security system.

Since Georgia considers regional cooperation within the Black Sea area as one of its foreign policy priorities, a fully realized "Wider Black Sea" project is central to Georgia's agenda for ensuring its stability and prosperity. No longer willing to be labeled merely as a post-Soviet state nor wishing to be identified with the volatile and fragmented Caucasus region, Georgia sees its ties with

the Black Sea community⁴ as a way to become affiliated with the rest of Europe.⁵

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

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

An identity-based account has the potential to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex web of problems in Russo-Georgian relations. For Georgia's Western-educated political class, Russia and its political model—which is still evolving—are not attractive, as they do not generate new interesting political, cultural or civilizational ideas, that can change the world as they once did. The Georgian political class would prefer to be united to the core area of global development (the West), not to peripheral areas (such as the CIS or post-Soviet space). From the Georgian point of view, Russia offers no compelling vision of a revived Russian sphere of influence, even for its own allies. Besides this, Georgia's political elite see Russia as the direct successor of the Soviet empire and view any attempts to re-integrate

2 2005 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf

3 2011 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>

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

5 On the question: Do you approve or disapprove? 76% stated that they support the government's stated goal to join the EU and similarly 74% supported the goal to join NATO. See: Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of a September 2011 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf> [see also Opinion Poll in this issue]

the post-Soviet space under the auspices of the CIS (or any other post-Soviet regional organization) as a danger to Georgia's national security. Some of these fears are psychological, with deep roots in the period of the Russian empire and Soviet occupation of Georgia after the establishment of the first republic. However, the real reason Georgia finds Russia so uncooperative lies not in psychology but in objective calculations of national interest. All the grievances accumulated since the time of the Russian empire led the Georgian elite to perceive their interests as utterly incompatible with those of the Russian Federation. They also see little advantage in cooperating with the Kremlin as they do not believe that there is a deal to be had with Russia.⁶ Similarly, Russia's socio-economic model limits its capacity to act as a pole of attraction for Georgia. On the contrary, as Russian expert Fyodor Lukyanov observed, "Georgia has sought to create a conceptual alternative to Russia by providing an example of a complete and irreversible break of historical and cultural ties with its powerful neighbor." In addition, Russia's conduct in Georgia has eviscerated the Georgian elites and made a pro-Russian stance untenable.

Today the Georgians see neither the Russian nor the Soviet empires as "European." They remember the Russian empire as autocratic and emphasize the USSR's ideological anti-Western orientation. Moreover, some part of the Georgian public does not consider Russia as part of the pan-European project (the Kremlin did a good job with its neo-imperial policies vis-à-vis Georgia to strengthen this stereotype) and believe that in fact Russia is a sui generis phenomenon which cannot disassociate itself from its imperial Eurasianist ideology as that ideology nicely fits its geopolitical ambitions on the world stage. As this (mis)perception still prevails over the subconsciousness of Georgia's political elites, many polls⁷ indicate, that while most Georgians support good neighborly relations with Russia, they similarly do not want to

be involved in any Russian-dominated integration process in Eurasia. In short, Georgians perceive their country in the long-term perspective as "European" and part of united Europe and in no way suitable for the "new Eurasian superpower project" promoted by Moscow.

Conclusion

Considering Georgia as the Caucasus region's front runner in terms of European integration in a discussion of the impact of identity on Georgian foreign policy, one would have to distinguish between the majority of the population and the foreign policy elite, as most decisions related to Georgia's stand in international affairs are elite-driven. Despite the fact that Georgia shares a compact geographic area, similar past, common cultural practices, and a long, interlinked history with other Caucasian nations, it faces a dilemma in how to identify itself within the region. Unable to act in concert with its immediate neighbors and considering its past political history, Georgia potentially could associate itself with a post-Soviet, Caucasian, or even Middle Eastern identity if it wanted to. It also could utilize multiple regional identities which cannot be limited just to one regional vector. However, neglecting all three and focusing only on a Black Sea identity as a ticket for its European identity has played a major role in Georgia's pro-western drive.

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

About the Author:

Kornely Kakachia is Associate Professor of Political Science at Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Director of the Tbilisi-based Georgian Institute of Politics.

Further Reading:

- Stephen Jones. "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy." In: Rick Fawn (ed.) *Ideology and National Identity in Post-Communist Foreign Policies*, London: Frank Cass, 2004: 83–110
- Ghia Nodia. "The Georgian Perception of the West," in: Bruno Coppieters, Alexei Zverev and Dmitri Trenin, (ed). *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London-Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998: 12–43.

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

7 Ibid.