

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონული განვითარების გამოწვევები და პერსპექტივები

GIORGI CHAVLEISHVILI

International Relations, PhD researcher
Georgian Technical University
#77, Kostava str. Tbilisi, Georgia
+995551580304 gikachavleishvili@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9344-858X>

EDISHER JAPHARIDZE

Political Science, Ph.D.
Professor of Georgian Technical University
#77, Kostava str. Tbilisi, Georgia
+995557725858 jafaridzeedo@yahoo.com
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9239-4785>

Abstract:

The essay identifies the primary trends in the political-economic structure and geographic distribution of the South Caucasus regional dynamics. The essay will examine the types of barriers that the South Caucasus's regional integration and growth must overcome. What are the potential avenues of prevention that could impact the South Caucasus region's political formation? A reciprocal agreement framework conditioned the geopolitical situation during the Cold War. The global order has altered as a result of recent events, putting several nations in jeopardy of losing their sovereignty. The South Caucasus has been split into two geopolitical vectors since the turn of the 20th century: the Republic of Armenia has moved closer to the Russian Federation, while Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan have moved closer to the West. The way things are now indicates how the political landscape has changed. Official visit of President Putin to Baku on August 18, 2024. During the meeting, President Aliyev noted that the stability and security of the South Caucasus region largely depends on the close relationship between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The principles of politics were carried out throughout the bipolar period via conflict along with the ally. In order to ensure the regional development of the South Caucasus, the implementation of political-economic ideas through the integration of the regional space becomes essential, as the geographical location of the South Caucasus corresponds to the geopolitical fiction: whoever controls logistics defines the supply chain; whoever defines the supply chain dominates international trade.

Key Words: Regional integration; South Caucasus; The European Union; Political vector;

გიორგი ჩავლეიშვილი

საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობები, დოქტორანტი
საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტი
ქ. თბილისი, კოსტავას #77, საქართველო
+995551580304 gikachavleishvili@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9344-858X>

ედიშერ ჯაფარიძე

პოლიტიკის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი
საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტის პროფესორი
ქ. თბილისი, კოსტავას #77, საქართველო
+995557725858 jafaridzeedo@yahoo.com
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9239-4785>

აბსტრაქტი:

სტატია იხილავს სამხრეთ კავკასიის გეოგრაფიულ მახასიათებლებს და პოლიტიკურ-ეკონომიკური რეგიონული ინტეგრაციის ტენდენციებს. სტატია იხილავს თუ რა სახის დაბრკოლებები აწყდება სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონულ ინტეგრაციას და განვითარებას, როგორია მათი პრევენციის შესაძლო პერსპექტივები, რომლებიც ზემოქმედებენ სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის პოლიტიკურ ფორმირებაზე. გასული საუკუნის მოვლენები ცხადყოფს, რომ ცივი ომის პერიოდში გეოპოლიტიკური კონფიგურაცია განპირობებული იყო ურთიერთაღიარებული შეთანხმებების სისტემით. ბიპოლარულ პერიოდში პოლიტიკური იდეების განხორციელება მიმდინარეობდა მოკავშირესთან კონფრონტაციის გზით. ბოლოდროინდელმა მოვლენებმა განაპირობა არსებული მსოფლიო წესრიგის შესუსტება და არსებით საკითხად დააყენა ახალი მსოფლიო წესრიგი, რამაც არაერთი ქვეყანა დააყენა სუვერენიტეტის დაკარგვის საფრთხის წინაშე. XX საუკუნის დასაწყისიდან სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონი ორ გეოპოლიტიკურ ვექტორად გაიყო: სომხეთის რესპუბლიკა დაუახლოვდა რუსეთის ფედერაციას, ხოლო საქართველო და აზერბაიჯანის რესპუბლიკა დასავლეთს. როგორ შეიცვალა პოლიტიკური ლანდშაფტი თანამედროვე ეპოქაში? კვლევის მიზნებისთვის მნიშვნელოვანია რუსეთის პრეზიდენტის 2024 წლის აგვისტოს ოფიციალური ვიზიტი ბაქოში. შეხვედრისას პრეზიდენტმა ალიევმა აღნიშნა, რომ სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის სტაბილურობა და უსაფრთხოება დიდწილად დამოკიდებულია რუსეთის ფედერაციასა და აზერბაიჯანის რესპუბლიკას შორის მჭიდრო ურთიერთობაზე. სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონული განვითარების უზრუნველსაყოფად არსებით მნიშვნელობას იძენს პოლიტიკურ-ეკონომიკური იდეების განხორციელება რეგიონული სივრცის ინტეგრაციის გზით, რადგან სამხრეთ კავკასიის გეოგრაფიული მდებარეობა შეესაბამება გეოპოლიტიკურ ფიქციას: ვინც აკონტროლებს ლოგისტიკას, ის განსაზღვრავს მიწოდების ჯაჭვს; ვინც განსაზღვრავს მიწოდების ჯაჭვს, ის დომინირებს საერთაშორისო ვაჭრობაზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: რეგიონული ინტეგრაცია; სამხრეთ კავკასია; ევროკავშირი; პოლიტიკური ვექტორი;

Introduction:

Georgia and Türkiye have launched a number of initiatives to create and expand regional cooperation in the South Caucasus over the last ten years. This was done with the intention of bolstering the South Caucasus region's states' territorial unity and sovereignty, which is fundamentally a factor in the promotion of sustainable development. None of the aforementioned ideas were able to come to fruition, even with a lot of work and close collaboration amongst the involved parties. President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, initiated the "South Caucasus Regional Cooperation Plan" on his own initiative following the events and resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. The plan presented by the Turkish president was different from the previous initiatives, certainly it included the "3+3 format" - the notion of six countries working altogether regionally (Dzamukashvili, 2022). The up mentioned platform entails collaboration among the three South Caucasus states: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the nations surrounding the South Caucasus region (such as Türkiye, Russian Federation, and the Islamic Republic of Iran). That is to say that the goal of this integration project was to explore the potential for South Caucasus region growth through trade, infrastructure, transportation, and economic initiatives. This type of integration platform caught the attention of either Islamic Republic of Iran¹ also Russian Federation, leading them to take proactive steps towards its implementation. Specifically Javad Zarif (the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Islamic Republic of Iran) traveled to the remaining five nations involved in the collaboration initiative for the South Caucasus region to discuss coordination and cooperation matters (Dzamukashvili, 2022).

To put it in another way it seems that the multitude of conflicts around the globe since the beginning of the 21st century has not fundamentally altered the international system established after World War II or during the post-Cold War era. However, in the last couple of years, we have witnessed conflicts likely to have profound implications for global and regional affairs, institutions, and fundamental perceptions of security and development. While warfare in the early 21st century often involved disproportionately larger forces against terror networks or militarily inferior adversaries (such as ISIS), as well as smaller infighting groups in Africa, today we are witnessing major full-scale confrontations such as the conflict in Ukraine involving potential nuclear power. Additionally, there is the possibility of a larger-scale confrontation in the Middle East, among Israel and Islamic Republic of Iran. These conflicts are not only altering existing military strategies and serving as a test ground for a new generation of weaponry but are also likely to reshape the world order and determine a new one. While it is premature to predict precisely how the world or global institutions will look after these conflicts come to some resolution, we can already speculate about their impact and the options available on regional and local levels (Yakobashvili, 2024).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, sovereign states and legitimate members of the international community were established in Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, and Georgia. On the ground, though, these states soon started displaying several personalities. For instance, the "Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh" (NKR or "Artsakh"), the Armenian state, and the Armenian diaspora are all considered to be part of Armenia. Similar to this, Azerbaijan is made up of three parts: Ethnic Azerbaijan (which includes ethnic Azerbaijani minority in Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the Pan Türkiye family), de jure Azerbaijan inside internationally recognized borders, and de facto Azerbaijan minus the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas. Georgia, on the other hand, was split up right away as a result of losing authority over the majority of the regions of Tskhinvali and Abkhazia. Although this separation may appear artificial at first, each of these components was essential to these nations' sovereignty. For instance, all three components were deeply entwined and connected

¹ According to the 1979 constitution, the Islamic Republic of Iran was declared as the unitary state (Gachechiladze R. 2018, Middle East, Volume 2, Geopolitics)

in Armenia, to the point where two of the country's past leaders held the title "Presidents of Artsakh." The goal of reclaiming the NKR and other lands was also a key component of the Azerbaijani state's identity, and the Turkish Republic's status as the "metropolis of the Turkic world" proved to be crucial to the country's military triumph (Sienrukos, 2006, 10).

Another key thing to remember is the South Caucasus' geopolitical landscape shifted after the 2020 Second Karabakh War and Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine. Thus, international order had been impacted by the conflict in Ukraine, since other nations were in danger of losing their sovereignty. In order to preserve their sovereignty, a number of nations with limited capacity have turned to multi-vector policies. The altered regional and global conditions allowed Azerbaijan to regain all its territories, including Karabakh proper, in September 2023. After regaining its territorial integrity, Azerbaijan has emerged victorious in the war, while Armenia has been defeated. A new period has now begun in the South Caucasus, despite the fact that the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict still needs to be resolved through a peace agreement. Russia's regional power has greatly decreased as a consequence of these advancements (Essen, 2023, Azerbaijan's Uncertain Geopolitical Rise in a South Caucasus Maelstrom). Russia's long-term involvement in Ukraine has prevented it from controlling or affecting events in the region. The more the conflict between Russian Federation and Ukraine drags on, the weaker Russia's control over the South Caucasus will become. In the context of history, the French researcher Edmond Terry examined three primary determinants of the state's power in his book "Russia 1914" prior to the outbreak of World War I: population expansion, production growth, state education, and raising the necessary cash to maintain national security. According to history, the French researcher Edmond Terry examined three primary determinants of the state's power in his book "Russia 1914" prior to the outbreak of World War I: population expansion, production growth, state education, and raising the necessary cash to maintain national security. So, despite the political-economic factor², security and protection assume the major role (Markevich, 2010).

It is surely too much to attribute a causal relation between the two, but it is clear that the EU has not succeeded in its aspirations and is caught up in a relatively reactive, short-term and ad-hoc modus operandi. Key to turning its investments in political and financial terms into a success will be to develop and implement a more holistic vision for the future of the region at large and the countries individually. That means that the EU should more narrowly define its priorities and make clear which objective takes precedence over the others, both in its general approach as well as in specific situations. At the same time, as will be discussed in the section on Georgia, it is possible for the EU to pursue a strategy in which its objectives are not mutually exclusive, but in which the normative approach forms a basis for guarding geopolitical interests and securing longer-term stability (Deen, Zweers, 2023, 36). In this regard, we would like to draw a parallel and note that in the second half of the last century, in response to Germany's persistent request for rearmament, the French government introduced a proposal to form the European Defense Union (abr. EDC) a pan-European army. However, in the 1954 vote, the Assembly did not support the ratification of the project, which led to its non-consideration (Usherwood S. Pinder J. 2018, 31). As subsequent events revealed, the failure of the European defense project did not become a determining and hindering factor of the political-economic union of Europe. In our opinion, the South Caucasus region should take into account the practice of a similar project of the last century in order to provide a basis for moving towards solid integration of the region.

² Although the intellectual weight of materialism is such that no recognized theory of economic development takes seriously consciousness and culture as the matrix within which economic behavior is shaped (Fukuyama F. 1997, The end of history, The National Interest).

Methods:

The relevance of the topic is determined by the challenges that the South Caucasus states face and the possible perspectives of their prevention and development of the region. The current geopolitical background, in turn, creates a number of important challenges regarding the security of the South Caucasus region.

During the research of the issue of the article, we use the following research methods established in international relations: 1) historical-descriptive - on the basis of historical analysis, we studied the relations of the countries of the South Caucasus; 2) Content analysis - we studied and discussed various important documents, as a result of which we made logical and consistent conclusions. Analysts are of the opinion that close attention is warranted for the "3+3 format" initiative and it necessitates in-depth monitoring and meticulous risk evaluation. The current platform aims to promote peace and stability through economic and infrastructural projects, while also taking into account the ambitions of illiberal regional players in the South Caucasus to increase their geopolitical influence by establishing a new political landscape. This implies that the security of South Caucasus nations will encounter significant hurdles when implementing this integration format.

Research and results:

Provided that it is advantage for Georgia to participate in the regional consultation platform "3+3" it should be emphasized, what is the position of the West regarding the above? Washington is seriously concerned that the integration processes in the South Caucasus can take place without other players, primarily the US and the European Union. In this regard, Georgia's participation in large regional projects can end the Americans' control of existing and prospective regional transport-logistics projects. The West does not like the possible dialogue between Georgia and the other countries of the South Caucasus. During his visit to Georgia in October 2021, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin sharply criticized Tbilisi's potential participation in the work of the "3 + 3" format. He said that the Georgian government should not sit at the same negotiating table with Russian representatives. As mentioned, the regional consultation platform "3+3" (Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, Russian Federation, Islamic Republic of Iran) was created at the initiative of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of Türkiye³ Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Sakartvelo-today news politics, 2023, Format 3+3). To give an illustration there should be considered the point that Russia considered the subsidized republics: the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asian republics, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to be a great burden for Russia, from which they should be freed by keeping all their assets. In addition to the above, the elite assumed that Russia would be integrated into the Western elites. The Munich speech of 2007 was a kind of response that echoed how Russia's geopolitical positioning would proceed (Fried, Volker, 2022). The fact that a country's involvement in the platform's activity does not require it to modify its political stance is a crucial component of the initiative in question. All participants can debate subjects of interest on this platform (Sakartvelo-today news politics, 2023, Format 3+3).

For instance, economic interaction in trade, transport and cultural-humanitarian spheres. Georgia's refusal to work in the "3 + 3" format, which has already been joined by our main trade and economic partners, deprives the country of the opportunity to advance its own national interests. The

³ According to the constitutional reform, the government of Turkey was transferred to the presidential form. The president can be elected twice in a row for a term of five years. (Gachechiladze R. 2018: Middle East Volume 2 Geopolitics)

participants of the "3+3" project are the main partners of Georgia⁴. For example, the leader in exports is Armenia, where \$440 million worth of goods were imported. Next comes Azerbaijan (\$411 million). Russia closes the top three with \$344 million (an increase of 34% compared to the first half of the previous year). Imports from the Russian Federation increased by more than 31% this year and amounted to \$927 million. In this regard, Russia is behind only Türkiye (\$1.247 billion). Cooperation with the countries participating in the "3 + 3" format is extremely important for us, as it directly affects the development of the country's economy (Sakartvelo-today news politics, 2023: Format 3+3). Notably we have to prescribe that the political scientist in Azerbaijan, Tofik Abbasov, stated his own position regarding this platform. According to his view, the platform "3 + 3" prevents the collective West, first of all, because he was not called there. At one time, Americans and Europeans opposed the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway route. The problems of the South Caucasus should be solved by the countries of the region. With this in mind the political, intellectual, and commercial elites of all the South Caucasus countries need to adopt new perspectives and strategies in light of current events, which include Azerbaijan's successful restoration of its territorial integrity, Russia's recognition of the Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region as independent states, and Armenia's loss of Artsakh. Security, politics, and the economy are the three key areas that need to be addressed in a thorough makeover. It is challenging to give definite answers in the midst of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, but it is crucial to assess significant developments in the security domain. The crises in Israel, Georgia, Ukraine, and Nagorno-Karabakh highlight two essential components of any nation's security arrangements: technology and adaptability. Resilience encompasses not only the populace's capacity to endure hardship but also the state's ability to manufacture and acquire enough military hardware and ammunition to minimize the risk of attrition. Having a technological advantage can be very helpful when battling opponents with more resources or soldiers. Even if we might not be seeing a new arm race just yet, there is definitely a global competition for highly developed weapons (Yakobashvili, 2024).

In 2023, through a military operation, the Republic of Azerbaijan regained control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which put an end to the issue of the unrecognized republic. The Republic of Azerbaijan is interested in the infrastructure of the transport route between the state of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan exclave. From a theoretical point of view, the mentioned corridor could have passed through the territory of the Republic of Armenia, however, the authorities and population of Armenia are against the mentioned project. It should be noted that the peace treaty between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia has not been signed yet. Thus, the transport corridor through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as an alternative way. The countries signed a memorandum of intent. However, the Armenian side fears that the Republic of Azerbaijan may decide to conquer the territory of Armenia in the light of the success in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. What is the significance of the Zangezur Corridor from a geopolitical point of view? This represents a transport route, the length of which is 40 km. It passes through the territory of Syunik Province, located in the extreme south of the Republic of Armenia (Iskandarov, Gawliczek, 2023, The Zangezur corridor as part of the global transport route, against the backdrop of power games in the South Caucasus region). The mentioned route is considered for the Republic of Azerbaijan as a potential logistic provision between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan exclave. Why does the Republic of Armenia oppose the Zangezur Corridor? At the end of the Second Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani side mapped the South Caucasus by adding Syunik province to the territory of Azerbaijan under the name "Zangezur". The latter historically connected the Republic of Azerbaijan with

⁴ Georgia does not directly border Iran. The relationship between countries is based only on economic benefits. Iran is trying not to complicate relations with Georgia. For example: Iran does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. (Gachechiladze R. 2018: Middle East Volume 2 Geopolitics)

Nakhchivan. Therefore, the Republic of Armenia considers the Zangezur Corridor as a kind of land bridge claimed by the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Armenian side is worried about the fact that if the Republic of Azerbaijan takes the road through the province of Syunik, the Republic of Armenia will be overwhelmed by the Azerbaijani and Turkish peoples in the south. The Islamic Republic of Iran also states its position on the Zangezuri issue. In particular, they see a threat to the northern provinces of Iran, where most of the population of Azerbaijan lives. As far as is known, three times more Azerbaijanis live in the northern part of the Islamic Republic of Iran than in the territorial Republic of Azerbaijan (Shokri, 2022). That seems to be cause why Iran Opposes Azerbaijan's Zangezur Corridor Project. To put it more simply it should be emphasized that during the war phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (1988-1994), Shiite Iran was more sympathetic and economically helpful to the Christian Republic of Armenia than to the Muslim and Shiite Republic of Azerbaijan. Thus, in international relations, state interests are above religious dogmas (Gachechiladze, 2018).

After the end of the Cold War (1990s), the United States paid more attention to ensuring unrestricted access to the world's energy resources to ensure national security and the stable functioning of the economy. The emergence of new world centers of military and economic power undermined US leadership in many strategic areas. In the modern reality, the US is working globally to revive its fundamental advantages in political, economic, military and other fields. However, the global economic situation, characterized by the availability of scarce energy resources, large-scale structural changes, new crises and price instability in global energy markets, obliges the development of sustainable national energy policies worldwide. US energy policy has undergone significant changes in recent decades, driven by factors either global energy system and also transformations significant changes in the US energy balance (DAVTYAN, KHACHIKYAN, 2023, p.38-39: US energy diplomacy in the context of the transformation of world energy markets South Caucasus vector).

On the one hand, Republic of Azerbaijan was likely the first country to fully leverage the capabilities of precise intelligence integrated with firepower, particularly through the use of UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) during large-scale kinetic warfare. It successfully employed "kamikaze" drones and other loitering ammunition. While many of these technologies were acquired through direct military procurement from Türkiye and Israel, Azerbaijan has also developed a formidable military industry domestically. However, Ukraine has become a testing ground for all new technologies, and what Azerbaijan discovered as useful several years ago is now widely known, diversified, and actively used on the battlefield, albeit with advanced countermeasures such as better electronic warfare equipment and new military tactics. Currently, Azerbaijan enjoys a close alliance with Türkiye, a country with the largest army in Europe, but maintaining such a balance may change, and Azerbaijan should seek less dependence on a single ally. Taken this into account which simplifies fact that Azerbaijan enjoys a close alliance with Türkiye, a country with the largest army in Europe, but maintaining such a balance may change, and Azerbaijan should seek less dependence on a single ally (Yakobashvili, 2024).

This year, the leader of the Republic of Azerbaijan turned his attention to the French territory of New Caledonia in the South Pacific, where tensions are rising over a controversial electoral reform that has fueled discontent among the local population. President Aliyev made the announcement at a forum days before the opening of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, following a congress in Baku that brought together pro-independence groups from New Caledonia and other French territories. "We will support you until you are freed," Aliyev told the forum, saying some French territories were still under colonialism. The speech of the head of state is an important precedent, as President Aliyev's attitude towards French policy needs to be emphasized. It should be noted that for the West, as well as for the Russian Federation, it is very important that the Republic of Azerbaijan maintains and acts in

accordance with the sovereign policy in the international arena (which in turn ensures the maintenance of the balance of power). From the geopolitical point of view, the global forum held in Shusha, Azerbaijan in July 2024 is similarly evaluated. The latter is of increased importance from the point of view of integration, as the forum mentioned peace negotiations for the purposes of regional stability. On the other hand, Republic of Armenia's latest moves on security arrangements show that it has gained important insights from its recent loss. Armenia is actively seeking to reduce its dependence on Russia and Russian military institutions like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and is questioning their effectiveness. Military acquisitions have transitioned from Russia to India and, more recently, to France, which has advanced technologies to offer. Armenia has entered into deals with French firms such as Thales, a powerhouse in the defense sector, and this is probably just the start. The influential Armenian diaspora can have a vital impact not just in facilitating access, but also in offering financial support for such acquisitions. If this pattern persists, we can anticipate a significantly more advanced and combat-ready military in the upcoming five to ten years. It's noteworthy to mention regarding the tripartite military ministry of Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye will be hosted by Georgia in 2024. The city of Batumi hosted the military ministers' gathering. Irakli Chikovani, the minister of defense of Georgia, welcomed Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov, the minister of defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Yashar Guler, the minister of national defense of the Republic of Türkiye. The participants at the conference acknowledged the value of the tripartite cooperation arrangement in enhancing security and stability in the area (Aze Media, 2024: Georgia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan discuss regional security, stability, peace challenges at ministerial meeting). Referring to the views of for the aforementioned purposes, it is compulsory to note the statement of Maria Zakharova (the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia) at the ceremony on August 21, 2024. According to him, Armenia is trying to blame Russia for its failure. The diplomat recalled that many works on unblocking communications were stopped due to Armenia's refusal to control transport communications by Russia's FSB border service and insistence on the presence of Russian border guards on the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides. In addition, Zakharova commented on Armenia's violation of the ceasefire in the direction of Nakhchivan on the day of Vladimir Putin's visit to Baku. According to him, the presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan discussed in detail the issue of reconciliation between Baku and Yerevan and called on both sides to exercise restraint and peaceful resolution of controversial issues. In another statement, Zakharova emphasized that the attack of the Ukrainian armed forces on the Kursk region makes negotiations with Kyiv impossible. According to the foreign affairs spokesman, this attack was carried out with the full support and sanction of the West (Vesti.az, 2024, Armenia has abandoned the Russian FSB's control over the Zangezur corridor). Furthermore Türkiye is not neutral in its political stance in the post-war environment. Türkiye's strategy, aligned with the desires of Azerbaijan, is to reach a lasting peace through extensive talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. For this purpose, Türkiye has embraced the 'Armenia-Azerbaijan Commission on Delimitation and Demarcation'. Right after the war, there was hope for both Türkiye and Armenia to improve their relationship and for a peace treaty to be signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia. For Ankara, the policy shifted to prioritize peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia before proceeding with reconciliation between Türkiye and Armenia. This could be because Azerbaijan wants to encourage Yerevan to prioritize signing a long-term peace deal with Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani side views the current deadlock in Turkish-Armenian relations as a tool to pressure Yerevan and intends to maintain this pressure until reaching an agreement with Yerevan. Meanwhile, Ankara closely monitors the efforts made by the US, the EU, and Russia in the peace process. Türkiye's approach to these initiatives is once again influenced by a preference for prioritizing Baku. Ankara openly disapproves of any EU and US initiatives that only benefit Armenia and exclude Azerbaijan. This is why Türkiye has expressed disapproval of the results of the three-way meeting involving Armenia, the US, and the EU in Brussels on 5 April. In this regard, Ankara has labeled this meeting as not neutral, which may hinder long-term

peace. Therefore, it called for a conversation involving Azerbaijan. Another crucial measure that could greatly transform the entire South Caucasus region is the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia. In the end, it is crucial for promoting enduring peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia that aligns with the interests of Türkiye. A few minor measures were implemented following the 44-day conflict. Special representatives were designated, and regular two-way discussions were reestablished. In 2022, Türkiye removed the restriction on direct air cargo flights and reestablished civilian flights between Armenia and Türkiye. Pashinyan was present at Erdoğan's inauguration as president. The foreign minister of Armenia participated in the Diplomacy Forum in Antalya (Çelikpala M. 2024, *Toward a Bright or Bleak Future in the South Caucasus. Türkiye's Role in the Equation*).

The Turkish-Armenian border, closed for three decades, was finally reopened in February 2023 to allow humanitarian aid after the earthquake in Southeastern Anatolia. Despite the raised expectations from these positive actions, Türkiye-Armenia normalization remains unaccomplished. Currently, the possibility of normalization depends on the agreement being signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijan needs to quickly come to a deal with Armenia to protect the interests of its Turkish ally. The present deadlock in improving Turkish-Armenian relations will not benefit Azerbaijan or Türkiye in the near term. September 2024 the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, said that Armenia is ready to implement the agreed points of the peace agreement before the UN Climate Change Conference scheduled in Baku. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia also stated that Armenia is ready to continue talking about border delimitation (Armenia news online platform, 2024, Pashinyan: Armenia has proposed to sign already agreed articles of peace treaty with Azerbaijan before COP29). In order to rectify the abovementioned challenge it shall be considered that The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan accuses French President Emmanuel Macron of bias towards the peace process in the South Caucasus region. According to the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the statements of the French President during his speech at the UN General Assembly that "France stands by Armenia" in the face of Azerbaijan's pressure on Armenia and territorial claims are an example of France's biased pro-Armenian position. It is unacceptable from the side of France to prepare for the revenge of the Republic of Armenia (meaning: providing arms to Armenia from the side of France). The Azerbaijani side demands an end to such a policy (destructive action) on the part of France, as history has shown that a similar approach has failed in several areas of the world (Mammadov, 2024).

Taking this into consideration, Ankara is primarily focused on preventing another possible instability in the South Caucasus as a result of the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ankara should lead the way in establishing a regional enterprise for all Caucasian countries, providing a safe haven for Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. The notion of reviving the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, similar to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), needs to be reimagined with new considerations given its present circumstances. This framework will guarantee that local problems are primarily handled by the parties involved in the current conflicts, allowing for resolution through regional collaboration in the future. In conclusion, finding ways to include the Turkic world in this all-encompassing structure could present a challenging task in the long run (Çelikpala, 2024, *Toward a Bright or Bleak Future in the South Caucasus. Türkiye's Role in the Equation*).

Taking into account the actions that the Republic of Azerbaijan has taken recently, it is significant to highlight that 91% of respondents said they fully approve of the actions that President Aliyev has done in his capacity as head of state. The population's degree of trust and support is strong, according to the survey's results (Azerbaijan Politics, 2024, *Over 90% of Azerbaijanis approve of President Aliyev's course*).

Conclusion:

As a territorial body, the state is in charge of ensuring the welfare of its citizens. By the end of the last century, it had to deal with the critical issue of maintaining the unity and identity of its regions in the face of escalating mutual rejection (e.g., Russia-Caucasus; Georgia-Abkhazia-Samachablo). The historical record indicates that the South Caucasus was split into two geopolitical vectors since the 1990 the closeness of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Armenia and the West to the Republic of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Republic of Armenia is seeking for close connection to the West as a result of the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War. Maintaining its path of European integration, Georgia forges advantageous ties with the People's Republic of China. As a free transit route necessary for optimal operation, China is interested in the Transcaucasian area. A multi-vector approach was also adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan, with fair relations with the Russian Federation, Türkiye, and the Republic of Kazakhstan as well as tight ties with Türkiye. Another key point is that Chinese government views capital investment in foreign real estate, sports and entertainment as unprofitable and requires Chinese companies to invest capital in business services, manufacturing and mining, infrastructure, wholesale and retail trade (Gachechiladze, 2018). So, borrowing from China is dangerous. This was demonstrated by the example of Sri Lanka, when Sri Lanka was unable to repay its debt⁵ and was forced to give one port to China in return. The same fate may await the small African country of Djibouti, 82% of the latter's external debt is taken from China (The risk of varying on Chinese cash, 2018).

In order to evaluate the modern geopolitical position of Georgia, above all we ought to emphasize the announcement⁶ of Georgian writer and public figure, Konstantine Gamsaxurdia (1893-1975): "Only a strong, and powerful being deserves respect on earth, for the earth is the fate of the strong." (Khulordava, 2019, p. 260). Thus, it is essential to note that security comes first when discussing state sovereignty. There will be threats as a result of the worsening of the international situation if the state's political-economic issue(s) are not simultaneously incorporated into the security system. Georgian society is susceptible to the spread of false information. The primary cause of this can be attributed to the state's incorrect legal provisions. Disinformation of the intelligence variety makes it possible for an outside power to easily control the populace of the nation (this is demonstrated in practice by highlighting uncontested facts and then widely disseminating them). Comprehending the present geopolitical landscape, encompassing regional developments, and steering the political path in line with national objectives is a critical concern for Georgia. On close analysis interstate wars arise from domestic instability and discontent, and under these circumstances, war is seen as a way to unite the population. When a project is started, the state structure contains two key agencies to prevent further destabilization: the intelligence agency (which operates internationally) and the counterintelligence service (which operates within the nation's borders). Accurate identification, assessment, and further qualification of political vectors are crucial. A state's vulnerability to external and international players arises from its failure to conduct research and produce analytical materials based on pertinent scientific and technical results. Making a decision about political security: what does it mean? There should be material provision and information protection for a certain group whose work involves processing a particular problem (which goes beyond just analyzing facts) and making pertinent decisions. Which essentially means that information about internal analysis and disinformation should not be shared. The state should prevent the public disclosure of any decision that has strategic significance. Relatively, the

⁵ Iran, which is rich in oil and gas, probably does not face a similar threat, but small countries should be careful (Gachechiladze R. 2018, Middle East Volume 2 Geopolitics)

⁶ Paraphrase: when I was in Germany, my friend used to tell me: Kote, you should know that both individuals and nations, in general, have such kind of psychology - no one likes a degenerate slave. Only a strong and powerful is worthy to gain a respect on earth, this is the fate of the strong.

significant issues for the states in achieving regional integration in the South Caucasus include: 1) The extent of external players' influence in both the region and its neighboring space; 2) Which countries can be relied upon in managing unexpected geopolitical developments; Geopolitical tensions in the region could pose risks to the security of the pipeline infrastructure. Türkiye's ambitious aims prescribe that the country really wants to be a key player in the global energy scene, but to make that happen Türkiye needs to navigate a maze of geopolitical issues, market dynamics and infrastructure topics. Within the support of heavyweights such as Russian Federation and potential partnerships with Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye is aiming to shake the energy transport in Europe and Asia. Although Türkiye has to deal with geopolitical tensions, market fluctuations and security concerns along the way. As Türkiye moves forward how well the state adapts to these challenges might determine success of Türkiye in becoming a major player in the global energy market. In conclusion Türkiye as the gas hub is considered as the real game changer for energy dynamics in the future. To demonstrate the fact regarding security and integration we ought to emphasize that The North Atlantic (abbr. NATO) system is also intergovernmental, but its capacity is ensured by the hegemonic leadership of the USA. There is no hegemon among the member states of the European Union, the absence of which contributes to the unification of the European Union as a functioning democracy (Usherwood, Pinder, 2018, p.159).

In light of regional political processes it should be emphasized that the geopolitical factors such as: the area of the country, the number of the population, the size of the economic potential (GDP) represents the positioning of the state. Perceiving a threat does not necessarily mean that any action taken to eliminate it will be justified from a moral point of view. Different geopolitical interests and frequent sharp confrontations lead to delays in the region's integration processes⁷. Modernization of the region means bringing it closer to the most economically and socially developed countries of the modern world, which meant the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity. The modernization process in the region is accompanied by a number of socio-cultural problems (Gachechiladze, 2018, p.56).

To summarize all mentioned above it should be emphasized that the effective outcomes come from dialogue, which necessitates compromise (diplomacy is essentially the parties making concessions). In the event that this happens, there is a risk that the parties' discussions would escalate and turn into another confrontation. This is a workable way to resolve the conflict among political leaders. In light of the ongoing geopolitical shift and the formation of a new global order, further consolidation of South Caucasus is required in order for the Transcaucasian region to serve as a crossroads and the route for major global arteries, such as the Middle Corridor and the Black Sea cable. There is mutual compatibility between the above-mentioned projects' actual implementation and the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran⁸, Türkiye, the European Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Central Asian nations.

Opponents of this idea maintain that Georgia should move forward the important and necessary process to the west, but regarding that issue it should be emphasized that geopolitical changes have made Georgia's chances of Euro integration more feasible than ever before. Within the correct strategies and efforts from Georgia, this patriotic goal could soon be achieved. Georgia's chances of reclaiming its territorial integrity and advancing its political and economic development would significantly improve the utter fulfillment of Euro integration process including the strong sovereign aspect. The

⁷ The small Georgian nation took on so many responsibilities that were difficult to uphold in such a tense international climate that it basically gave its powerful neighbour a pretext for future aggression (Daushvili A. Kacharava A. Struggle for independence 1918-1921, Tbilisi 2020)

⁸ Iran has a special relationship with South Caucasus. Islamic Iran could theoretically have some foothold among the local Shiites of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but the authorities in Baku will not allow foreign influence to spread on its territory. (Gachechiladze R. 2018, Middle East Volume 2 Geopolitics)

confederation model is inapplicable to the South Caucasus nations. Thus, from a cultural and linguistic perspective, one of the South Caucasus republics need to be predominant. Transcaucasia is not on the same size as the Swiss Confederation's state structure. It is important to acknowledge that the South Caucasus area lacks the economic and financial capacity to merge as a confederation. Although the following processes are moving forward and establishing a foundation for regional political unity. In the new world reality, the South Caucasus is a world trade transport hub. Every state is trying to strengthen its position. The latter in itself indicates how much the influence of the South Caucasus region is growing on a global scale. When the democratic superpower weakens its global influence, regional states create the weather in the regions. The fate of democracy is affected by the changes in the geopolitical balance, mostly everything is probably the fault of the behavior of the superpower, whether it is wrong or not brave enough. As a result, unless the superpower's course is reversed, we may soon see further decline of democracy. As nothing is inevitable in democracy. As the American historian Robert Kagan believes - the liberal world is not the end point of human progress (Kagan R. 2015). To prescribe the recognition of South Caucasus region on the international level we should emphasize the announcement expressed in 1919 by Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Arthur James Balfour "If they (Transcaucasian countries) want to cut their own throats why not let them do it... I should say we are not going to spend all our money and men in civilizing a few people who do not want to be civilized. We will protect Batum, Baku the railroad between them and pipeline" (Daushvili, Kacharava, 2020).

The preparation of this article would not have been possible without the support of the Dean of the Faculty of Law and International Relations of Georgian Technical University, Professor Irakli Gabisonia and the university administration, as well as the support of friends at each and every stage of the research. Many thanks to all those people who gave me a number of significant and important advices. I would like to express my special gratitude to my academic supervisor, Professor Edisher Japharidze, with his critical opinion, broad discussion, advice and analysis provided me an assistance at every stage of the research.

გამოყენებული ლიტერატურა:

აშერვუდი, ს., პინდერ, ჯ. (2018). *ევროკავშირის ძალიან მოკლე შესავალი*. მეოთხე გამოცემა. თბილისი.

პოლიტიკა... (2020). *პოლიტიკა და დემოკრატია*. თბილისი.

გაჩეჩილაძე, რ. (2018). *ახლო აღმოსავლეთი. გეოპოლიტიკა*. ტომი 2. თბილისი.

ჯაფარიძე, ე. (2023). *მეორე საერთაშორისო კონფერენციის თეზისები "საქართველო და კავკასია - წარსული, აწმყო, მომავალი"*. საქართველოს უნივერსიტეტი.

ხულორდავა, გ. (2019). *კონსტანტინე გამსახურდია 126 ამბავი*. თბილისი: არტანუჯი.

Daushvili, A., Kacharava, A. (2020). *The Democratic Republic of Georgia: The Struggle for Independence 1918-1921*. Tbilisi.

Essen, H. (2023). *Azerbaijan's Uncertain Geopolitical Rise in the South Caucasus Turmoil*. Stockholm Center for East European Studies. Sweden.

Markevich, A. (2010). *Great War, Civil War, and Recovery: Russia's National Income, 1913 to 1928*. Moscow Department of Economics.

Sienrukos, H. (2006). *Oil Democracy and the Globalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*.

Zweers, V., Dean, B. (2023). *The European Union navigates a geopolitical labyrinth in the South Caucasus*. The Netherlands: Clingendael Institute.

REFERENCES

ashervudi, s., p'inder, j. (2018). *evrok'avshiris dzalian mok'le shesavali. meotkhe gamotsema [The European Union a very short introduction fourth edition]*. Tbilisi.

p'olit'ik'a... (2020). *p'olit'ik'a da demok'rat'ia [Politics and Democracy]*. Tbilisi.

gachechiladze, r. (2018). *akhlo aghmosavleti. geop'olit'ik'a. t'omi 2*. [Middle East. *Geopolitics*. Volume 2]. Tbilisi.

japaridze, e. (2023). *meore saertashoriso k'onperentsiis tezisebi "sakartvelo da k'avk'asia - ts'arsuli, ats'mqo, momavali"*. sakartvelos universit'et'i [Theses of the Second International Conference "Georgia and the Caucasus - Past, Present, Future"]. University of Georgia. Tbilisi.

khulordava, g. (2019). *k'onst'ant'ine gamsakhurdia 126 ambavi [Konstantine Gamsakhurdia 126 fact]*. Tbilisi: Art'anuji.

Daushvili, A., Kacharava, A. (2020). *The Democratic Republic of Georgia: The Struggle for Independence 1918-1921*. Tbilisi.

Essen, H. (2023). *Azerbaijan's Uncertain Geopolitical Rise in the South Caucasus Turmoil*. Stockholm Center for East European Studies. Sweden.

Markevich, A. (2010). *Great War, Civil War, and Recovery: Russia's National Income, 1913 to 1928*. Moscow Department of Economics.

Sienrukos, H. (2006). *Oil Democracy and the Globalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*.

Zweers, V., Dean, B. (2023). *The European Union navigates a geopolitical labyrinth in the South Caucasus*. The Netherlands: Clingendael Institute.