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ARMENIA - GEORGIA NEIGHBORHOOD: EXPERTS DIALOGUE

ARMENIA AND GEORGIA: SECURITY CHALLENGES OR CHALLENGES FOR SECURITY 2022?

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PREFACE

This is a collection of reports that includes the works written by the participants of the expert dialogue dubbed “Armenia-Georgia Neighborhood: *Experts Dialogue - Security Challenges or Challenges to Security?*” held in Tbilisi on 15-17 September 2022 which focused on regional, bilateral security issues and challenges in public perceptions as well as efforts to overcome them.

The Georgian-Armenian expert dialogue is unique in its nature. It has been around for eight years, and within its framework meetings are held regularly, alternately in Yerevan and Tbilisi, with breaks of several months between. It has been initiated by Georgian and Armenian Civil Society Organizations, since year 2018 presented by Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts and Armenian Committee of Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly – two partner organizations with essential experience in regional cooperation and peacebuilding in South Caucasus on various levels and formats.

Such an expert forum was chosen for the purpose of closer cooperation of Armenian and Georgian experts dealing with Armenian-Georgian and regional issues and to engage the wider public in the discussion of issues that are of vital importance to both countries, as well as to the region at large. Issues of security, democratic development, economy, human rights, media, current trends in society, electoral processes, and orientation projects were openly and profoundly discussed in the scope of this dialogue. Although the participants had different views and evaluated the events that happened in our countries in different ways, the difference and multi-level of views and assessments helped to reflect and create channels for future communication.

Gradually, a new generation of experts has joined the format of the Georgian-Armenian expert dialogue, thus emphasizing the strength and necessity of the format. After all, one of the goals of creating such a permanent platform was to fill the gap in the relationship between the new generation of scientists and analysts who deal with similar issues and do not have close professional and human relations.

Our Dialogue endured the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and did not cease its activities thanks to the use of online platforms. This year, after a year and a half of virtual cooperation, it was finally held in person again to discuss security issues in the global, regional and bilateral context.

The presented reports try to view these issues from different perspectives and find both overlapping interests as well as differing moments.

We are grateful to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and its representative office in the South Caucasus for their continued support of the Armenia-Georgia Expert Dialogue, promoting ideas, and drawing attention to the democratic and liberal values on which our format is based and continues to develop.

Special thanks to Professor Alexander Iskandaryan and the Caucasus Institute who have been there for us since the very beginning of this format and made invaluable contributions to its development.

Nino Kalandarishvili

*Institute for the Study of
Nationalism and Conflicts*

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*Armenian Committee of
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly*

**CHALLENGING WORLD AND
SECURITY IN THE LIGHT OF THE
TURBULENCES SURROUNDING US**

OLD IDENTITIES, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW NARRATIVES: SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE WAKE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Mikayel Zolyan

As the world is experiencing major turbulence caused by the war in Ukraine, the South Caucasus is faced with new security challenges that leave little room for maneuver for the governments and societies of Armenia and Georgia. As both countries are facing new and old threats, the options for Armenia's and Georgia's responses are limited. These options often require - especially in Armenia's case - a reassessment of not only foreign policy options, but also narratives that have become a part of their national identity for decades, or even centuries. Recent developments have triggered a process of re-assessing the geopolitical setting and historical heritage of our countries, which has expressed itself in the advancement of new (or partially new) narratives that seek to redefine national identities and narratives in a way that would allow us to respond to the current challenges. These trends also mean that Armenia and Georgia today may have much more in common than was the case throughout the majority of the post-Soviet period.

The war in Ukraine has brought turmoil to all the world. It has also created, or rather intensified, serious (one could even say, existential) challenges for at least two of the countries of the South Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia. A possible disintegration of Russia's post-colonial dominance in the post-Soviet region, while in the long-term beneficial for both Armenia and Georgia, may bring new threats in the short and medium-term perspectives. In the case of Georgia it is the threat of Russian expansion, which Georgians have wrestled with throughout their independence, especially in the early 1990s and during the 2008 war, and which has intensified today, as the Kremlin seems to be raising the stakes in its confrontation with the West. For Armenia, the threats are more multi-faceted and complex. The obvious threats stem from the conflict with Azerbaijan and Turkey, while another threat, that may be less obvious, but, at least in the view of some analysts, is at least as serious, is the threat posed to Armenia's sovereignty coming from the Kremlin's neo-imperialist ambitions (which they have labelled USSR 2.0).

Both Georgia and Armenia are severely limited in their options of responding to these challenges. In both countries the governments need to tread extremely carefully. Georgia, in spite of its commitment to European integration and its alliance with the West, is extremely careful in order not to anger its northern neighbor and not to provide a pre-text for more aggressive steps. In the case of Armenia the situation is further complicated by the fact that the country is mostly alone in its struggle for sovereignty and survival. Armenia's supposed ally Russia, while it has provided a certain degree of protection in the past, has extracted a hefty price for that protection, which ultimately may be even more dangerous than the threats that protection was supposed to neutralize. In any case, today the level of protection falls short of Armenian expectations, leaving it to face the prospect of conflict with Azerbaijan alone. Moreover, many observers today believe, whatever were the benefits in the past, today the continued "security alliance" with Russia does Armenia more harm than good. So, in this situation Armenia may soon have no choice but to leave the Russia-dominated post-Soviet institutions, particularly the CSTO. However, if it did so, it would have to face both the threat of retribution from the Kremlin, defeated in Ukraine, but still strong enough to crush a small country like Armenia, as well as combined threats from Ankara and Baku, who may use the emerging power vacuum to advance their aggressive policies toward Armenia.

So, the policies implemented by the Georgian and Armenian governments are balancing between careful rhetoric, forced concession, and stubborn resistance. Both governments are resisting aggressive impulses coming from their neighbors, where it is possible, while compromising where it is necessary. In practice, it means that the Georgian government continues its pro-European/pro-Western policies, while at the same time doing its best to avoid unnecessary confrontation with Russians. As for the Armenian government, it is stressing the necessity of lasting peace with Azerbaijan, establishing relations with Turkey, while at the same time doing its best to counter violent attacks by Azerbaijan on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border (which is yet to go through a process of delimitation and demarcation). It is also trying to reinforce Armenia's defenses following the disastrous defeat in the 2020 conflict, particularly by finding new partners that could replace Russia. In particular, Armenia

also continues its low-profile but stubborn resistance to the Russian-Azerbaijani-Turkish project of establishing an extraterritorial corridor in the south of Armenia (a position, which, at least in theory, should coincide with Georgian, Iranian and Western interests). At the same time, when it comes to its relations with Moscow, Armenia is shying away from openly talking about breaking away from the alliance, as it realizes that even a weakened Russia still has vast opportunities to inflict harm on Armenia and therefore can extract a heavy price for what it may consider a treason on the part of Armenian government.

This kind of foreign policy is not one that proves popular in newly independent countries, as the public have a limited understanding of international politics and populist concepts of foreign policy tend to attract the most attention from the media and activists. The concessions and reserved rhetoric that the governments are challenged on from within the societies, makes them vulnerable to both legitimate criticism and populist manipulation. However, apart from populist criticism of governments' foreign policies, interesting and potentially fruitful debates about foreign policy are also taking place in Armenian and Georgian societies. Societies are reacting to the new situation and the new challenges at the level of rhetoric and narratives, which in turn reflect the process of transformation of identities from post-Soviet to a new condition, which might be called post-post-Soviet. The situation that exists today requires new language and new narratives, as the post-Soviet worldview no longer helps to understand what is going on and why. Identities and narratives that have existed for decades and in some cases for centuries, are going through critical reappraisal and re-evaluation. This is particularly true for Armenia, where the age-old idea of alliance with Russia as a security guarantee is being subjected to critical re-evaluation. Armenian society is coming to terms with the reality that not only is Russia either unable or unwilling to provide security to its supposed allies, but, moreover, that relations between Russia and Armenia have never been those of equal allies, but rather a post-colonial form of dependence.

One, somewhat unexpected element of the new reality that needs to be conceptualized by our societies, is the influx of Russian "relocators", which has become a significant factor in political, social, economic and cultural

spaces. This influx has generated a variety of responses in Armenia and Georgia, which show both the similarities and differences between both countries. On the one end of the spectrum is the view of these “relocators” as a new “reincarnation” of the Russian threat, on the other is the view of the “relocators”, as potential allies for strengthening our countries, and even maintaining the struggle against Russian imperialism.

When it comes to new narratives, another interesting development in the context of the war in Ukraine is the emergence of a post-colonial lens through which the post-Soviet experience is viewed (I am grateful for this observation to Olga, a Russian anti-war activist from St. Petersburg, currently relocated to the South Caucasus). This is still an emerging trend, but one with significant potential. During the Cold War and its aftermath, even the staunchest opponents of the Soviet system did not always view the condition of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR as colonialism, due to the association between colonialism and capitalism, which was non-applicable in the Soviet case. However, the post-Soviet model of relations between Moscow and former Soviet states shows significant parallels with the post-colonial patterns of relations between former colonial empires and their former colonies, particularly in such spheres as exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor, political, cultural and economic domination, racism, etc. However, this reality often was unclear to outside observers, as many, especially in the West, preferred to see Russia as a reliable, though difficult partner, rather than an aggressive revanchist state seeking to re-establish its former empire. It was this disregard for Russia’s neo-imperialist ambitions that made it so difficult for Georgia to explain to the international community the real causes of the 2008 war, as some observers in the West even blamed the Georgian government for “provoking” Russians. However, today the situation has changed. The recent invasion of Ukraine has helped to raise the issue of Russian imperialism and colonialism, and allowed the post-Soviet peoples to conceptualize their experience in terms of anti-colonial and anti-imperial resistance. This narrative is gaining strength in both Armenia and Georgia, mostly among activists and intellectuals at this stage, but it has the potential to enter the political space and shape the narratives and identities of these countries in the coming years.

Against this backdrop, it becomes increasingly obvious, that Armenia and Georgia have common interests. Both countries face significant threats from, at least partially, the same outside actors. While in the past Georgia has relied on the West in terms of security and Armenia has been dependent on Russia, currently Armenia is going through a process of a re-orientation of its foreign policy, which opens new opportunities for cooperation with Georgia. Also, Armenia's new "peace agenda" requires establishing long-lasting peace with its neighbors Azerbaijan and Turkey, and in this context Georgia, with its close relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, can play an important role as a friendly mediator. Finally, both Armenia and Georgia have adopted democratic models of governance, a choice that resonates deeply within our societies, and, at the same time, sets us apart from the majority of our neighbors. Commitment to the democratic model in a region, where democracy is hardly the prevalent mode of government, should also bring us closer together. At the same time, we need to admit that successful cooperation between Armenia and Georgia requires efforts on both sides. Yes, there is undeniable sympathy between both societies that comes from common historical heritage and close cultural affinities. But, at the same time, there are various stereotypes and misconceptions, often enforced by propaganda from third parties and ultra-nationalists in both societies, which need to be addressed in order for Armenian-Georgian cooperation to become more comprehensive and efficient.

Summing up, as the world navigates a new period of turbulence, Armenia and Georgia are faced with new and old challenges, some of which present an existential danger to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of our countries. Some of these challenges require completely new approaches to foreign policy, which in turn require a critical re-evaluation of decades-old narratives that have shaped our countries' identities and policies for a long time. Against this backdrop of both internal and external transformation, our countries need to re-evaluate their relationship and seek closer cooperation.

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issues of democratization in a post-Soviet context. After the 2018 events in Armenia, Zolyan became involved in active politics and served as a member of parliament in Armenia's first post-revolution parliament from 2019-2021. Currently, Zolyan has returned to academia and civil society, teaching at Valery Bryusov State University in Yerevan, and working as a consultant with Armenian and international NGOs. He is also the host of a TV show at the recently established Armenian educational channel Boon TV.

CHINA, RUSSIA, AND ATTEMPTS TO BUILD THE “EURASIAN” ORDER

Emil Avdaliani

The world has entered a new period of instability. The existing liberal order is experiencing fundamental problems. Those opposed to the collective West are increasingly united seeking radical changes to the present system. Among those states most prominent are China and Russia, which are hoping to build a new hierarchical or what I would call “Eurasian” order where political prestige coupled with economic and military power will serve as a major disincentive for smaller states neighboring on large Eurasian powers to engage far-flung actors, mainly the West. Hierarchical order is essentially a myriad of small orders of exclusions where small regions will be closed off from Western influence. Central Asia,¹ the South Caucasus,² or South and South-East Asia³ – all these geographically diverse and distant from each other places have one development in common, namely larger neighboring states’ that push for sidelining of non-regional powers, namely the collective West.

Though, in the end what China and Russia pursue still will be an order for controlling Eurasia’s vital resources and infrastructure, the proposed hierarchical system is nevertheless a more elastic way of promoting its influence and excluding the collective West. This order is far more agile than the geopolitical control the Soviets built over the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Hierarchy will involve a certain level of cooperation with smaller states as bigger powers are unable to dominate small regions unilaterally. Hierarchy will also be about re-invigorating balance of power tactics and the creation of loose

1 Jardine, B., Lemon, E. (2021). In Post-American Central Asia, Russia and China are Tightening Their Grip. *War on the Rocks*. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/in-post-american-central-asia-russia-and-china-are-tightening-their-grip/>

2 Avdaliani, E. (2021). The South Caucasus and the New Hierarchical Order. *Georgia Today*. <https://georgiatoday.ge/the-south-caucasus-and-the-new-hierarchical-order/>

3 Pal, D. (2021). China’s Influence in South Asia: Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries. *Carnegie Endowment for International Piece*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/13/china-s-influence-in-south-asia-vulnerabilities-and-resilience-in-four-countries-pub-85552>

economic and military organizations engulfing the regions, which border on Russia and China. Elasticity of the order is already evident in the avoidance by Beijing and Moscow to base their ties on official military and political alliances. Many in the West consider this as a sign of ultimately diverging visions that Beijing and Moscow have, but in the emerging global order where the liberal internationalism retrenches and will likely be limited to only certain regions of the world, avoiding formal alliances might actually prove more beneficial. It increases maneuverability of the Eurasian powers and limits the potential for tensions. It leaves a space for competition too, but since the US will remain a powerful player intent on limiting China's and Russia's projection of power, these two powers' shared interests will gloss over potential conflicts.

The hierarchical order is also inherently close to Chinese and Russian historical visions as civilization states, which claim that they represent not a particular territory, but a distinct civilization reflecting its unique institutions and geopolitical aspirations. For these two Eurasian powers the hierarchical order will be a long-sought correction, return to normality from a nearly two century-long domination by the West back to the times when Eurasia was dominant economically, balance of power ruled supreme in international relations and the so-called Westphalian principles constituted core elements in bilateral relations.⁴ In other words, Beijing and Moscow regard the present troubles in the West, and the rise of Asia as a return to historical normalcy.

As mostly land powers, Russia and China are expected to be more successful in the heart of Eurasia. The space where Western influence has been historically marginal and is far from the major sea lines, is far more susceptible to the new order. Multiple examples such as ongoing changes in the Black Sea, South Caucasus and Central Asia show how this emerging order is playing out.

Surely, there are also significant limits to what China and Russia can achieve. The collective West will remain a powerful player, though with a significantly reduced willingness to engage the depths of the Eurasian

4 Ikenberry, G. J., Etzioni, A. (2011). "Point of Order: Is China More Westphalian Than the West?", pp. 172–76. *Foreign Affairs*. 90(6) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039640>; Panda, A. (2014). China's Westphalian Attachment. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-westphalian-attachment/>

landmass. Occasional disagreements between Beijing and Moscow as well as resistance from India and other Asia powers could be diminishing the prospects for a successful hierarchical order. The US' increasingly evident policy of relying on allies and partners across Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific realm will also serve as a major obstacle to successful construction of the hierarchical order.

Looking Beyond the Partnership of Convenience

The increasingly close military and economic relations between China and Russia could be viewed from a different perspective. Instead of describing their relations as a partnership of convenience, their ties are in fact rooted in a much longer historical process of common enmity with the West. Russia's evolving geopolitical position is critical here as its role in the widening China-US competition has somewhat been overlooked in the scholarly literature. How Russia will be behaving or what Russian political elites and the analytical community think of the country's changing position in the fluid global balance of power – these questions remain largely unaddressed. Knowing what Russia wants and how it intends to behave will provide critical answers to how China-US competition will unfold across Eurasia and will ultimately elucidate the missing parts in understanding the emerging new global order. Ultimately, this section will argue that Russia's increasingly strategic ties with China are driven less by its rivalry with the West and are based more in the history of Russian political thought. This also means that the partnership with China is more long-term than often portrayed.

Unlike any other power on the Eurasian map, Russia's position supersedes any other single player's influence on the US-China rivalry. The Russian political elite sees the nascent US-China confrontation as an optimal possibility for enhancing the country's weakening geopolitical stance throughout what once constituted the Soviet space. Moscow believes that both Washington and Beijing would dearly need Russian support and this logic would drive the Kremlin's preferably non-committal approach toward the US and China. Ideally, Russia would try to put itself in a position where the US and China would strongly compete with each other to win Russia's favor. This thinking is based on what the West fears if Russia becomes exclusively pro-Chinese, and what Beijing fears if Russia is allured into the Western camp. This thinking is also based on what Russia genuinely

thinks of the post-liberal world order – a multipolar system is expected to allow Russia to avoid fixation on either China or the West.

Choosing sides is also always a possibility, but significant benefits should be accompanying such a radical foreign policy shift. In partnering with China, Russia would expect the further solidifying of its influence in Central Asia where Beijing's economic and security interests have grown exponentially since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Although the Russians have refrained from voicing their concerns officially, this is not to deny that such attitudes exist in the Russian political elite. China, however, would not be able to help Russia strengthen its weakening position in Ukraine. Even in the South Caucasus where Russia's growing dependence on military components in formulating foreign policy jeopardizes its prestige and questions long-term peace in the region, China would be of little help. Comfort in working with Beijing is about the latter's disinterest in interfering into internal affairs of other countries. China is also against forming official alliances. In Beijing's view formal alliances rather hinder countries' maneuverability. This stands close to Russia's ideas on enhanced state sovereignty and the balancing between various geopolitical poles without making specific alliance pledges.

Russia has been increasingly reliant on China since 2014 when Moscow's ties with the collective West dipped to the lowest since the end of the Cold War.⁵ This led many to believe that Russia could turn into China's appendage. As will be argued below a more nuanced development might be at work.

How fundamental Russia's Asian pivot is depends on China's evolving foreign policy and that of the collective West. For many simply a short-lived development, Russia's shift to Asia (including the Middle East) is much more than just a result of disenchantment with the West, or an attempt of building a strong negotiating position. Rather the process is rooted deep in the Russian historical tradition – search for what I call "de-Westernization" of foreign policy when the fixation on the West ends

5 Gabuev. A. (2021). As Russia and China Draw Closer, Europe Watches With Foreboding. *Carnegie Moscow Center*. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/84135>

and instead a multipolar foreign policy is pursued with 'Global Russia's' policies evenly directed at all the regions across the globe allowing greater space for balancing and maneuvering. One can trace this resentment and various attempts to 'de-Westernize' Russian foreign policy to previous centuries, which shows how innate this search for foreign policy alternatives has always been in Russia. When Peter the Great reformed Russia and heavily Europeanized the ruling elite in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many praised him ever since, but there were also those who were deeply disenchanted. They believed Peter broke the bridge between the common folk and the Russian political elite. Many also believed that the country's Europe-centrism actually limited Russia's ability to position itself as a true global power. The Romanovs tried to do the same, particularly after the Crimean War of 1853-1856. The Soviets, too, with all the idiosyncratic approaches to the world pursued the balancing game. Both attempts failed because of the lack of resources and strong Asian partners to rely on. In contrast, China's power nowadays offers a historic opportunity for Moscow. Thence comes the Russian president Vladimir Putin's 'de-Westernization' attempts which should be seen as a recurrence of the above-discussed grand historical cycle of the Russian political thought.

All point to a well-established trend, which means that Russia's distancing from Europe is not a temporary affair and breaking up the China-Russia partnership, as happened in the 1970s, is unlikely to happen.⁶ Even if the West moves to engage in a grand geopolitical bargain over Ukraine and other states neighboring Russia, Moscow's pursuit of 'de-Westernization' of its foreign policy is likely to continue. Though often considered as a relatively later phenomenon developed in the 2010s under Putin and as a result of the fallout with the West over Ukraine, the present trend of separation has been at work at least since the 1990s when signs of resentment toward the West's unipolar moment emerged - well reflected in the "Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order" submitted to the UN in

6 Radchenko, S. (2021). *Driving a Wedge Between China and Russia Won't Work. War on the Rocks*. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/driving-a-wedge-between-china-and-russia-wont-work/>

1997.⁷ This suggests that even without the troubles over Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, which prompted separation with the West, Russia was still likely to pursue the balancing and distancing from Europe, albeit in a less traumatic way.

This also means that we should be looking beyond the perspective of 'partnership of convenience' when explaining the Russia-China cooperation. The growing cooperation and Russia's Asian pivot overall are just two interrelated pieces in Russia's evolving understanding of the world order and its place in it. The pivot is inextricably woven into Moscow's attempts to shake off the fixation with the West.

It is often ignored that for Russia both China and the US are equally long-term geopolitical rivals of pretty much the same caliber. In Moscow trust toward both powers is low. The Russian inherent geopolitical worldview is about abstention from engaging the US-China competition; leveraging its geographic and military position by making the US and China approach Russia for geopolitical support. The longer the competition between the two economic and military powers lasts, the more beneficial it will be for Moscow's geopolitical aims in the South Caucasus, Ukraine and the Middle East. The rivalry could also give some time to Russia to establish itself as a separate pole of geopolitical gravitation, albeit of a much smaller scale.

Thus, as against the proposition that Russia will be increasingly attached to China thus losing its ability to maneuver, it could be quite the opposite. Russia sandwiched in between two great geopolitical centers, China and the West, will have far more agility to play one against the other. Its pivot to Asia was dictated not only by complication of ties with the West over Ukraine, but was also a continuation of long-pursued policy of 'de-Westernization' of Russia's foreign outlook. Getting rid of geopolitical fixation on the West was a paramount aim of Russian diplomacy in the Imperial and Soviet eras. Powerful alternatives or rather balancers to the

7 "Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order". (1997). <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=7131&lib=tax&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword=>

West did not exist back then. With the rise of China, however, the pattern changed. Pursuit of 'de-Westernization' gathers steam. From Moscow's perspective, this creates promising circumstances for balancing its ties with the West with the growing partnership with China.

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**SECURITY IN REGION OR
REGIONAL SECURITY?
WHAT TO AWAIT FOR?**

THE WAR IN UKRAINE - HOW IT AFFECTS THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Zurab Menagarishvili

Introduction

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent situation on the battlefield significantly affected not only the security of Ukraine and Russia, but also the rest of the world, including the South Caucasus. Consequently, this war had an impact on the foreign and domestic policies of the small states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The new geopolitical reality has created new challenges, threats and opportunities for the South Caucasus, as a unified region, and for each of the states included in it.

In this paper I will discuss these new opportunities, risks and anticipated challenges. As well as what the war has changed for Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

However, before that, in order to understand how the war is affecting the region, it would be right to discuss what is happening in the war itself.

Preoccupied with the war

Seven months have passed since the war started in Ukraine, but Russia still has not achieved its primary goal. It is also still unclear when the conflict might end.

As a result of observing the conflict, it can be said that Russia has suffered several main defeats in Ukraine:

The first and the most important defeat is that it failed to achieve the goal set at the beginning of the war, which envisaged a change of government in Ukraine and the return of the country to the sphere of Russian influence.

The clearest manifestation of the failure to fulfil this goal was the withdrawal of troops from the Kiev, Sumy and Chernihiv regions and the initiation of

the second phase of the war, the goal of which was relatively modest - to shift attention to Donbass.

It should be noted that the war that started between Ukraine and Russia was not a territorial dispute between two neighbors, where even the occupation of a small village by any of the sides would constitute a great success. As noted above, this was a war the major aim of which appeared to be to overthrow the government of the neighboring country and, therefore, enact a geopolitical change - although Russia could not achieve this.

Although Moscow was powerless to fulfil its pre-set objective and leave the battlefield victoriously, it was still possible to obtain a beneficial outcome from the war. It could have turned Ukraine into an unstable, dysfunctional, chaotic country, but even in this case, Moscow failed to do so due to Western aid to Ukraine. This is Russia's second failure in Ukraine.

The third and one of the most visible failures might be considered the counter-offensive in the Kharkiv region, when Russia was defeated not only in terms of political parameters, but also on the battlefield. The loss of Snake Island (Zmein) was a similar, but relatively modest event. As a result, with the loss of Zmein and Kharkiv Oblast, it became even clearer that the war was not going the way Russia wanted it to.

Considering this, the current situation in Ukraine requires greater attention from the Kremlin, the logical manifestation of which is the announcement of a partial mobilization throughout Russia. This means that Ukraine, which was the number one task until now, is becoming even more crucial for Moscow.

Shifting most of its efforts and attention to the war in Ukraine and not achieving the goals set out in this conflict weakens Russia's influence in other regions, including the Caucasus and Central Asia. All this subsequently creates a certain space for local or regional parties to act independently from the Kremlin.

Impact on the region

As a result of directing entire resources to Ukraine and being fully engaged in the war, Russia's attention towards the South Caucasus has been diverted. Russia is not able to be present and equally effective everywhere.

During the current escalation between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azerbaijan's attack on the territories of Armenia on September 12-14, which has never been experienced on such a large-scale before, is an excellent example of Russia's distraction and preoccupation.

Although Baku denies Armenian accusations about the attack, it is obvious that this was the most colossal and severe escalation since the second war of Karabakh in terms of the number of victims and geopolitical consequences as well.

After what Armenia called an Azerbaijani attack, Yerevan appealed to both Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for help (TASS, 2022), but they did not actively respond. Instead, Russia called on Armenia to resolve "all disputed issues through diplomatic and political ways" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2022).

Russia did not actively defend Armenian interests in the past as well, that could be seen as an eagerness to punish the new Armenian government, more specifically (Prime Minister) Pashinyan, who opposed the Russian style of ruling. However, Russia did not allow Azerbaijan to cross the "red lines", which was due to the inviolability of territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia and also due to having the will to stop the fighting after the superiority of Azerbaijan in the 2020 war became clear.

But now, after Russia became too busy to pay enough attention to the South Caucasus, it becomes even clearer that Russia is not able to ensure the safety of Armenia.

The relaxation of attention in the region by Russia, which until now was considered to be a mediator between the parties and also an ally of Armenia, is a signal to Baku, that in the case of possible escalations when it is usually difficult to determine who started the shooting, to use its military

advantages to the maximum in order to put pressure on its adversary. In an extreme case of escalation and border disputes, this may also mean targeting the territory of Armenia, a member of the collective agreement organization.

On the other hand, for the population and government of Armenia it is becoming clearer that they should not rely only on Russia in order to guarantee their security when it has more serious issues to resolve than South Caucasus right now. The country needs a new global power who will play the role of fair mediator in negotiations with Azerbaijan. This might be the “collective West”, the USA or the EU which will remain unbiased during the negotiations. Strengthening the West should be the interest of Azerbaijan as long as it would be a relatively neutral mediator during the conflict.

Theoretically, at this stage when Russia has no time for the Caucasus, opens up the window of opportunity for Georgia to find a common language with Abkhazians and Ossetians, although the fact that Abkhazians and Ossetians and Georgians are fighting on different sides of the war complicates a possible dialogue between the peoples.

As noted above, in addition to the impacts on the region, which were highlighted in the weakening of Russia and the activation of local actors, the war initiated by Russia affected the security as well as domestic and foreign policies of each country.

Thanks to the start of the war, Azerbaijan was able to sign a new gas supply agreement with the European Union, (Aljazeera, 2022) which naturally means an increase in revenues for the country. Georgia will also benefit from this, as pipelines connecting to Europe run through their territory.

Amid the recent escalations and second Karabakh war with Azerbaijan, pro-Russian sentiments have strengthened among the opposition groups in Armenia (IRI, 2022), which means increased opposition against the Pashinyan government as he is not considered an ally of Russia among the opposition electorate.

Immediately, after the war started, hundreds of thousands of Russian and Belarusian migrants headed for Georgia (IDFI, 2022) and Armenia (Voice of America, 2022). As a result, it increased demand on real estate and the housing price has skyrocketed in big cities. It created significant problems for the local population (Netgazeti, 2022), as their monthly income is far lower than the Russian migrants'.

Thus, we are facing an emerging housing crisis, to which the governments should have an adequate response.

Georgia has received an increased number of cargoes from the east-west connecting corridor, which has a positive impact on the country's revenues, however, these have also shown that the country's road infrastructure needs to be modernized.

Also, it should be noted that it was after the start of the war in Ukraine that it became possible for Georgia to be granted the status of a potential EU candidate state, although Ukraine and Moldova, which participated in this process together with Georgia, were also able to obtain the status of a candidate country.

Instead of a conclusion

The war in Ukraine seems set to continue for a long time, and it will not be easy for Russia to win an unequivocal victory. Consequently, the Caucasus will remain deprived of Russia's attention for an unknown period of time.

Once again, this, obviously, does not mean that Russia will leave the region entirely, but local states, especially those under the threat of Russian aggression, should prepare for a stronger return of Russia to the region, so that they do not again manage relations with the Kremlin from a colonial perspective.

For this, it is vital to find powerful allies. As for me, the collective West should be it.

Although, obviously, it is difficult to interest the West, or rather to "force" it to balance against Russia in the region, the Caucasian states, especially

Georgia, should continue attempts to discover more power that will balance Russian or other influences.

This can be achieved through peace and, in the case of Georgia, simultaneously by supporting democratic reforms and reminding the West that Georgia, and therefore the region, are facing the same threats that are currently occurring in Ukraine.

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THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

Hayk Toroyan

The current geopolitical changes in the world, mainly the war in Ukraine, the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war, and an energy crisis in the European Union is shaping a new reality where the roles of the countries and regions can change drastically. This paper will look deeper into the role of the South Caucasus region in these changes and the current political climate. Primarily, the paper will investigate the opportunities and challenges posed by the new reality for the three Caucasus countries and potential developments that can change the region forever. Looking at the potential opening of communication networks will be the central theme of the article, more precisely at the potential East-West corridor that will connect China to Europe and South-North corridor that will connect India to Europe. Both projects potentially can go through the South Caucasus and would have an impact on the politics of the countries and on the conflicts they are engaged in.

The South Caucasus – a region seen as the center of the world by its inhabitants and edge of nowhere by outsiders. This is a quote from an article published recently by one of my friends.

Usually, I would agree with her and mock the highly exaggerated view of my homeland. However recent geopolitical events – the war in Ukraine and the war in Nagorny Karabakh shifted the geopolitical situation radically. In this article I will argue that the abovementioned wars, the Russia-West conflict, Chinese expansion, EU energy crisis and other factors can potentially create a bigger role for the region. Probably one of the biggest in the long history of exaggerated self-importance.

To understand the potential role of the South Caucasus in the current geopolitical shifts we need to look beyond the region. Let us start from a project as old as the Armenian and Georgian alphabets – the Silk Road. Firstly, renamed One Belt One Road investment plan and now rebranded as the Belt and Road project by China, the road - or I should say roads - are meant to connect Chinese markets to European markets. Essentially, the

new initiative is the updated and reshaped version of the Silk Road. The initiative, developed by China in 2013, is meant to connect the Chinese market with more than 70 countries across Eurasia. The initiative proposes three trajectories from China:

- 1) **The North Belt**, going through Central Asia and Russia to Europe.
- 2) **The Central Belt**, passing through Central Asia and West Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean; additionally, a road connecting to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan is planned.
- 3) **The South Belt**, running through Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean connecting to the African continent and then Europe through the Suez Canal to Greece and beyond. This route is more maritime while the others are crossing more land and countries.

The main emphasis was put on the Northern route as it crossed fewer countries and created interdependent relations between Russia and China. The route contributed to the blooming cooperation of two major powers. However, the war in Ukraine has changed the situation drastically. With the Russia-West confrontation the main communication channels connecting Russia to Europe have been shut down thus affecting also the transfers coming from Chinese markets through the Northern route of the Belt and Road initiative. While China was affected by Russian actions in Ukraine in terms of connectivity it gained a lot from Russia as well. Mainly, China is buying natural gas from Russia at a 30% discount and is establishing food processing factories in the Russian Far East to mitigate potential famine that might become a serious risk in Russia due to its war in Ukraine.

With the complication on the Northern belt, the Southern belt can also become a huge problem for China. The maritime route crosses through the Malacca strait - one of the most important strategic locations located between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Eighty percent of crude oil that is transferred to China from the Middle East and Africa are transported through the strait, additionally an estimated 36-44% of exports from China pass through this narrow body of water. Beijing sees the strait as both an important strategic location and the "Achilles' heel" of China, since the blockade of this narrow would lead to a total collapse of the Chinese

economy. Hence China is actively looking for alternative trading and energy routes.

This is where Central Belt comes into the picture. With the extra money saved from energy resource discounts China started to look at the central route of Belt and Road as an alternative to the Russian dominated Northern Belt and its Achilles' heel Southern Belt. The Central belt was not properly functioning as there were way too many conflicts and obstacles in the way. The Russian-Georgian war, the never-ending crisis in Afghanistan, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani tensions with its neighbors across the Caspian Sea, the sanctions against Iran, and many other conflicts, tensions and other circumstances all served as an obstacle for the Belt and Road central route to function to its fullest potential.

The main obstacle in the South Caucasus, however, was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – which was serving as a knot that closed all communications, not only between the neighbors but also for other actors beyond the region.

The 2020 war in Nagorno Karabakh has changed the situation in the South Caucasus radically. The war that lasted 44 days concluded with Azerbaijani troops taking control over seven regions around the former Armenian populated Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous region as well as additional territories in the former NKAO region. The newly gained territories led to the extension of the Azerbaijan-Iranian border and an establishment of the new Armenian-Azerbaijani border in the southern part of Armenia. The November 9th agreement that stopped the war includes points on the opening of all the communications in the region as well as ensuring a connection from Azerbaijan to its enclave Nakhijevan through Armenia.

The “big” players also had their involvement and contributions to the war. China was an invisible player in the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, however according to the civil aviation of Armenia China sent 27 planes with allegedly humanitarian aid to Baku in the period when most of the other countries tried to keep their neutrality and not send anything to either side.

If this information is correct, we can assume that China was interested in an Azerbaijani victory and particularly in the opening of the corridor that will connect Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan. Additionally, the war also saw the forming of a strong alliance between Israel, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Pakistan with all three supporting Baku in its war against Armenia. As a result of the war Turkish influence in the region and in Azerbaijan itself grew immensely.

Iran kept its neutrality during the war with some attempts to mediate negotiations towards a ceasefire. Some tensions arose between the Islamic Republic and Azerbaijan when several Azeri rockets landed in Iranian territory instead of Armenian. This led to the mobilization and deployment of the Iranian Air defense systems very close to the conflict zone, however there was no further escalation between Iran and Azerbaijan, much to the disappointment of the Armenian side. The results of the war however did not satisfy Tehran whatsoever, although publicly Iran congratulated Azerbaijan for its victory in the war the Islamic Republic has its reservations. Firstly, the elongation of the border between Iran and Azerbaijan might lead to expansion of Baku's influence on the ethnic Azeri population in the Northern part of Iran. Secondly, Israeli influence in Baku is a big concern in Tehran and surely enough the war allowed this influence to increase to the extent that the Israelis are buying vast farmlands from Azerbaijan in the newly gained territories close to Iran. The third concern of Iran is its border with Armenia, the Armenian-Iranian border was the main connection of Iran to other markets and the Iranian leadership was clear in its position to oppose any change of this border. Initially, Baku was demanding to have the creation of a so-called Zangezur corridor - a corridor that will connect Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan and that would have an extra territorial status and essentially will cut off Iran and Armenia. The Iranian leadership more than once expressed its opposition to the plan, with the most recent warning taking place in October, when Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned against any border changes in the region during his meeting with President Aliyev. In addition to the verbal warnings the Islamic Republic also opened a consulate general in the city of Kapan – the regional center of the Syunik region. This can be seen as a direct hint of Iran's plan to expand relations with Armenia and to warn Azerbaijan once more against border changes and especially invasion into Syunik region.

Russia on the other hand tried in one way or another to assist Armenia but did so in its own specific manner. According to some experts the Russians were mostly testing their weaponry in the war on the parameter of effectiveness against the glorified Bayraktar unmanned aerial vehicles or drones. According to local soldiers in Nagorno-Karabakh the airspace was closed and opened by Russia whenever it felt like it. The swift modernization of Russian armored vehicles and anti-aircraft systems undertaken between the end of the war in NK and the beginning of the war in Ukraine can be considered as a proof for this theory. Additionally, Russia decided to punish Armenia and the Armenian leadership for its Velvet revolution in 2018 and increasing cooperation with the West – a scenario that is rather familiar for Georgia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet states. However, the main goal of Russia was making sure to have a physical presence in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Armenia – particularly somewhere from where they can control the potential Northern Belt alternative – the Central Belt. A goal that has been achieved by them through the deployment of the peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh and through the statement of November 9th. As the ninth point of the agreement states “All economic and transport connections in the region shall be unblocked. The Republic of Armenia shall guarantee the security of transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to arrange unobstructed movement of persons, vehicles and cargo in both directions. *The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections*”.

After the Nagorno-Karabakh war difficult and long negotiations are still being held on the topic of opening communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Additionally, Yerevan and Ankara engaged in a normalization process between the two countries whose borders were closed since 1992. These processes might lead to the unblocking of all the communications in the region and eventually serve as a part of the BnR initiative. The aftermath of the NK war also saw another long-standing issue solved. Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan had a 30-year-old conflict around the usage of a disputed hydrocarbon field which was accompanied by mutual threats and disagreements. However, a few months after the war a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the two countries, which

opened new doors for potential new communications over the Caspian serving as another part of the BnR puzzle. Additionally, the TransCaspian pipeline seems like a possible project to implement in the new reality.

Further east another piece of the puzzle was connected on September 14th on the sidelines of a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Samarkand. China, Kirgizstan, and Uzbekistan signed an agreement to move forward with the construction of a railroad link that will connect the three countries to Europe by bypassing Russia.

In parallel to the Central Belt Road - or let us call it the east to west road, there is another route being considered by another set of actors. This one starts in India, goes through sea to Iran's Chabahar port, which is exempt from western sanctions, from Chabahar it separates into two directions, one going to Central Asia bypassing Pakistan, the other going to the Black Sea and Europe through Armenia and Georgia. For this road as well, the South Caucasus could be key to connecting to Europe given the current complicated state of the world.

The so-called International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) has been in development for many years and was to connect India to Russia and Finland through the port of Chabahar in Iran and Azerbaijan, another route has been in planning through Central Asia. However, the war in Ukraine had a major influence on this route the same way as on the Northern Belt. India is now disconnected from Finland and the rest of Europe due to sanctions against Russia. Thus, an alternative route needs to be developed to connect Indian markets to Europe.

The new possible route will most probably go through the South Caucasus, once again elevating the region's importance in global trade routes. And this is where a chance is opening for Armenia to be part of the infrastructure. The latter is trying to build on its good relations with India and Iran to make sure the corridor goes through the country connecting the part between Iran and Georgia. Early indications show some development in the project, Armenia is rebuilding its roads at a high pace – especially the north-south highway that connects the countries border with Iran to the border with Georgia. The progress was halted due to the Nagorno-Karabakh war in

2020, where Armenia lost control over part of the route connecting the southern cities of Kapan and Goris and had to build an alternative road. The road is built with the usage of a 2.6 billion euros aid package from the EU that was given to Armenia in 2021 to promote democracy and recover from the NK war. Additionally, the Armenian government signed new agreements on economic cooperation with India and contracts on military cooperation.

Thus, currently we have two routes that potentially can have major implications for global trade and transportation: the East-West or Central Belt and North-South. Both routes most probably will go through the South Caucasus. However, the South Caucasus countries have their own ideas on the logistics of the projects. Politically, we have clear divisions into different sides: the first side is represented by the alliance of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Israel and the second one consists of Armenia, Iran and India. Georgia is trying to play a neutral role as it will benefit from all the connections unless there is a specific scenario development. And then there is Russia.

To understand Russian interest and goals in these communications and crossroads I will refer once again to the November 9th statement and specifically to the part that states *“The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections”*. Russia made sure to include this sentence in the agreement, since Russia wants to have control over the road connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhijevan that will go through the Armenian province of Syunik. This will also mean Russian control over the Armenian part of the Central Belt. The control of this corridor will also mean indirect control over the North-South Road that will have to cross the Russian controlled corridor. Thus, Russia will once again oversee all the communications connecting the Asian markets of India and China to Europe.

However, it seems like the current Armenian government and society have had enough with Russian influence in the country and essentially the hostage situation the country found itself in since the signature of strategic alliance with Russia and entering CSTO. Russia was Armenia’s strategic partner and CSTO was to guarantee Armenia’s security against

its hostile neighbors of Azerbaijan and Turkey. After the Nagorno-Karabakh war Azerbaijani forces attacked and occupied sovereign territories of Armenia to which neither Russia nor CSTO had any reaction. The last Azerbaijani attack on September 13-14th, 2022 resulted in over 200 dead Armenian soldiers in just two days and the occupation of around 60 square kilometers of Armenia's territory. Once again Russia and CSTO did not come to Armenia's aid although it is specified in CSTO stature and the Russian-Armenian strategic alliance agreement. The September escalation led to massive protests from Armenian society against Russia and CSTO, it also resulted in the visit of U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Armenia. The September escalation changed the situation on the ground massively. On one side now we have Azerbaijan backed by Russia or at least Russia gave the green light to Azerbaijan to make sure Armenia signs a deal indicating the opening of the corridor under Russian control. On the other hand, Azerbaijan threatens to open the corridor by force and insists on the extraterritoriality of the created corridor. Armenia in this case has nobody to rely on, although we can see clear signals from the U.S. trying to support Armenia in its struggle to keep its democracy and the sovereignty of the country. The main objective of Armenia is to keep sovereignty of its territory and the roads going through it, whether it is going to connect east to west or north to south. Otherwise, the control will be given to Russia with the helping hand of Azerbaijan who will continue to use force against Armenia to pressure Yerevan to sign the deal.

To conclude I will let myself be naïve and optimistic. If Azerbaijan agrees not to use force against Armenia and does not pressure Armenia to sign an agreement which will ensure Russian presence on the road connecting its territory to Nakhijevan, the South Caucasus can get rid of Russian influence and become independent and an interdependent hub of transportation which will connect east to west and north to south. And in such a circumstance this will make the South Caucasus the crossroad for all sides and literally the center of the world - as its inhabitants have thought of it for the last 2000 years.

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**ARMENIA AND GEORGIA –
SECURITY FOR BOTH VS FOR
EACH INDIVIDUALLY**

ARMENIA-GEORGIA RELATIONS BEYOND POLITICAL TEXTS: STRONG COOPERATION WITH WEAK TIES

Anna Gevorgyan-Davtyan

Neighbors and the region: When talking about regional cooperation and its difficulties, the Armenian political establishment usually assumes it refers only to restoring cooperation between states that have conflicts and have little or no cooperation at all. But we also have shortcomings in the relations between states with good political relations at a high level, as well as with good attitudes towards each other at society level, but still no or very little regional institutional cooperation. As political scientist, Anna Ohanyan, stressed in her book *Networked Regionalism as Conflict Management*: “the South Caucasus is an institutional desert” with weak states and weak ties between each other. But is this because of the big powers of the region only, or shall we assume that countries in the region themselves don’t acknowledge the importance of cooperation between each other without interference of other actors?

Relations between Armenia and Georgia are a very vivid example of good relations at political, societal and personal levels but almost no leverage of strong, sustainable institutional interactions. Whenever we do have institutional projects, they are still strongly related to external actors or personal initiatives and motivations. My assumptions are that this is because of the image of the region each country has as a milestone in foreign policy planning. Both Armenia, and Georgia have created an image of their surroundings anchored on the mythological perceptions of the self and others.

When mapping the region Armenia and Georgia have different methodological tools to do so. For Armenia “region” means first of all closed borders and - as a result - few opportunities.

When speaking about the region Georgia usually speaks about European countries and its desire to be part of their region. Thus, there are imagined and real regions, and their borders do not always coincide.

In the electoral program of the now ruling party of Armenia, Georgia is mentioned as a strategic neighbor and a country with whom Armenia

should have and maintain good relations. The same formulation had its place also in the National Security strategy of Armenia adopted in July 2020.

When referring to Georgia, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan uses words like “friendly, strategically important”...and so on. The same vocabulary is used by the president and the parliamentarians. But there is a little work implemented beyond these words to achieve better institutional ties and more interactions between midlevel statesmen and diplomats. Nikol Pashinyan has already met with three prime ministers of Georgia each time accompanied by different advisors. So, there is an obvious lack of institutional memory which creates a closed circle atmosphere where each member of the government starts a dialogue from the same point and creates little possibility by the end.

There is little work done in parliamentary diplomacy, too. The groups of friendships give the impression of formality, without a proper platform for the discussion of sensitive issues and without joint programs to overcome existing political and social obstacles.

Due to these images of each other and the region, neighboring countries are playing reduced roles in the lives of one another. But extraordinary situations like pandemic and wars are stressing the reality that geography does matter, and we can't – and shouldn't - neglect its importance. Thus, during the Russian-Georgian war, the Armenian economy experienced huge negative impacts, which some officials say were worse consequences even than during the Karabakh war in 2020. During the Pandemic, both countries felt the importance of joint efforts towards controlling the virus “without borders”, and during the Karabakh war in 2020 it was obvious that the position of Georgia could be crucial in the isolation of Armenia.

What lessons have we learned from all these developments and how are we going to deal with the future threats that can work against the cooperation of the countries? These questions should have been addressed in the political programs of the countries. However, political developments in both countries, combined with the atmosphere of the region and in light of the overall global crisis mean small possibility of it.

Security: At the political level, security assumptions, different regional threats and as a result, different security systems in which Armenia and Georgia find themselves, create a sizeable wall between neighbors. Russia, who is Georgia's enemy, is a so called "security guarantor" of Armenia: This guarantee is anchored on the agreement of Armenia-Russia bilateral military cooperation, signed in 1997, as well as on Armenia's membership in the Russia-led Military block, CSTO. Though, the status of "security guarantor" has been shaken following the Karabakh war in which Russia intervened only after Armenia's defeat and has "rescued" only the territories crucial for the presence of Russian peacekeepers. Armenian society and some political parties were sure the war started and was lost not only because of the lack of proper diplomacy and mismanagement by the Armenian government, but also because of Russia's desire to show to Armenia that the democratic path the country had chosen can be deadly for its security. After Azerbaijani troops invaded Armenian sovereign territory on May 12 2021, and then also on September 13-14, 2022, these assumptions gained even more popularity since Russia and CSTO have done little or nothing to disprove accusations of indifference towards Armenia's fate and security. There is also an opinion that the passive role of Russia as a mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is due to the fact that it's now too busy with war in Ukraine and as a result has lost its strength in the region. In this atmosphere the new role of mediator Georgia has shown can be an important step forward in the framework of regional cooperation. The issue of war prisoners is indeed one of the most sensitive ones after the war itself (if it is even possible to say that it is over, considering the ongoing atrocities, breaking of ceasefires and the endless war crimes of Azerbaijan). Mediation by the prime minister of Georgia which resulted in the returning of 15 Armenian soldiers to their homeland was indeed welcomed and raised hopes that these actions can be continued.

Georgia's new status of possible candidate state of the EU and not having received actual candidate status as Ukraine and Moldova have done, has fostered an assumption in Armenia that the EU is not interested in the South Caucasus region and that Georgia's request has been delayed not due to unfulfilled duties, but because of geography and strategic importance. This has been circulating hand in hand with another popular notion that

democracy and security can't be achieved together and that one should choose between these two. The latter claim had become extremely strong after the 2020 war in Karabakh and especially during the parliamentary elections of 2021. The catastrophic consequences of the loss in the Karabakh war, as well as uncertain developments in and around Armenia, internal rumors, as well as continuing discussions about the possibility of a new war keep society in a stressful condition of insecurity. Thus, the snap elections that were supposed to relieve this stressful political atmosphere were a massive source of manipulation for the parties that are against democracy. "The democratic policy of the government was the reason for all the failures of Armenia especially on the battlefield": this was the main argument of the representatives of the previous political elites aimed at Pashinyan's party. This false attitude had a crucial importance on the electoral decisions of the citizens. It can be one of the reasons why citizens have elected the political party defeated in 2020 Karabakh war assuming that by doing that they will win in the framework of democracy. The debates on the dichotomy of these two are still in place in Armenian political discourse. Though the bigger engagement of the EU in the mediation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the unprecedented activity of Washington in the region (meetings of representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments including Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliiev with their American counterparts, the visit of the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Congress to Yerevan, and frequent telephone conversations of the Americans with the representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan are vivid proof of that), has a considerable capacity to change the dichotomy. Additionally, if some concrete steps can be made in the field of military security of Armenia and putting pressure on the Azerbaijani side, a new "democracy means security" assumption will prevail in the country. In that case Armenia and Georgia will have a joint perspective on security issues even without Armenia's withdrawal from the CSTO.

Societies: For Armenia and Georgia, relations between their populations have been and still are a major marker of the importance of the relations between the states. The attitudes towards each other are created both through the Armenian community of Georgia as well as through joint history and shared cultural and civilizational values.

There are several sensitive issues that create an atmosphere of psychological tension. The Political correctness of the states during the important and tragic events in history and modern day of both countries - although being accepted with proper understanding - create a field where a little disinformation can be the cause of a massive critical wave.

Armenia during the Russian-Georgian war and Georgia during the second Karabakh war both adopted a policy of equidistance.

In the age of disinformation and with a variety of propaganda tools available. There is a significant risk of intentional crises created both by neglecting the importance of fact checking and via external actors working to destabilize relations.

There are some issues that are super risky if neglected and allowed to wait for yet another opportunity to be flamed.

- Using Georgia as a transit for weaponry by Azerbaijan and using the Russian military base by Russians against Georgia are among them. During the closed discussions between the experts on both sides as well as during the cataclysms on social media both these topics regularly become the key reasons for distrust toward each other. There is little possibility that these blames can be true but in socio-political discourses these topics are still very popular.
- Using the Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti to destabilize Georgia by Russia is yet another sensitive topic in the field of socio-political discourse. Although during his first international visit to Georgia Nikol Pashinyan stated that the main mission of the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti would be being a good citizen of Georgia and through that help to improve the Armenia Georgia relations, there are still discussions emerging concerning the possibility of a national uprising supported and directed by Russia. In this atmosphere the ethical mistake of Nikol Pashinyan during the 2020 war when he referred to the Armenians of “Samtskhe-Javakheti” as Armenians of “Javakheti”, the Armenian name of the region, created a considerable wave of anti-Armenian rumors on social media.

Creating strong institutional ties, establishing a joint media security platform, and strengthening individual cooperations by mid-level governmental representatives and also members of expert communities, can demonstrate an important investment in the future of Armenia Georgia cooperation and - as a result - in the peace of the region.

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GEORGIA AND ARMENIA FACING NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES

David Bragvadze

The South Caucasus has never exactly been pampered with peace, however, in the wake of recent developments, the states of the region are now facing new security challenges on top of those which have endured from the past.

In this regard, the second Karabakh war and its outcomes were significantly important. The results of this conflict were completely disastrous for Armenia (and could arguably have been even worse). At the same time, its dependence on the Russian Federation has not diminished just as the Karabakh problem has not disappeared for Yerevan. Armenian society also faced other important challenges, including the risk of internal political destabilization.

The Russian Federation did not provide effective assistance to Armenia as its strategic partner, but on the contrary, it used this war to further its own best interests. The placement of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh was a significant achievement for the Kremlin, as Karabakh was the only post-Soviet conflict without Russia's military participation, while Azerbaijan was the only country in the South Caucasus where Russian soldiers were not stationed.

Azerbaijan has manifested a strong and organized military power able to restore its territorial integrity using force. At the same time, Aliyev's regime strengthened its position inside the country, and today its aggressive policy with Armenia is supported even by those who had never supported his regime.

It is noteworthy that as a result of the second Karabakh war, Turkey entered the region in the role of a military power for the first time. At the same time, Turkey, unlike Russia, took a stance of a reliable and strong ally for its strategic partner.

Iran, in this context a perceived permanent ally of Armenia, found itself overlooked. The entire Western world was also left out of the game.

The results of the second Karabakh war added to the challenges for Georgia too, primarily because of a stronger Russian presence in the region. The appearance of Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh was also a problem for Tbilisi. Although, it is less important from a military point of view, as Russia had fully occupied and militarized two regions of Georgia, and at the same time there has been a large Russian military base on the territory of Armenia for many years. The appearance of Russian peacekeepers in the region was perceived in Georgia as an additional leverage for the Kremlin's pressure on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

There have been some negative expectations regarding the issue of border delimitation in the already procrastinated -and difficult - negotiations with Azerbaijan. Fortunately, this process did not develop in its worse scenario, although no positive outcomes have been achieved so far either.

On the other hand, Georgia managed to maintain its traditionally neutral position even during the second Karabakh war. Tbilisi was able to play a certain positive role too, especially in mediations for the exchange of prisoners. It was symbolic that the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan met in Tbilisi for the first time.

Security challenges for Armenia and Georgia increased further with the start of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. It should be noted herein that the official position of Tbilisi with regards to this aggression is not the behavior expected from the Ukraine's strategic partner and clearly runs contrary to the national security interests of Georgia.

From the beginning of the war, the Georgian government assumed that Russia would win a quick and absolute victory and built its own rhetoric on this very position. Tbilisi's rhetoric has not changed in light of the successes of the Ukrainian armed forces. Taking Russia's non-provocation policy to a new height and using this topic for internal political entanglements – these are the two most clearly negative manifestations of this policy.

The ruling party uses this tragic situation against political opponents and the opposition-minded population. According to the official government propaganda, all citizens of Georgia, except for the supporters of the ruling

party, want to instigate war in the country and open a second front against Russia. This propaganda rhetoric, apart from being insulting to the citizens, also presents the country with significant security challenges.

Unfortunately, the government of Georgia in this most difficult time is driven by instincts alone and does not have a clear strategy of actions. Tbilisi does not have any concrete vision regarding the increased migration flows of citizens from the Russian Federation fleeing military mobilization. Under the pretext of not irritating Russia, it simply has an open-door policy for them, claiming that it contributes to the country's economic growth. Eventually, the country will face more pressing security challenges, be they economic, demographic, crime related, social or other. It should also be noted that Russian citizens can stay in Georgia without a visa for 360 days. After the expiration of this period, if a person crosses any border for one hour, this period starts again.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered new security challenges for Armenia too. The government of Azerbaijan has clearly sensed the opportunity and pursued its own agenda using aggressive methods when Russia was preoccupied by the issues other than the Caucasus. This manifested in the occupation of new settlements in Karabakh, as well as the early transition of the Lachin corridor to fall under its control.

The tensions ratcheted up this September amid another large-scale military escalation between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This episode of escalation went beyond the territory of Karabakh and moved directly to the border of the two states. According to the Armenian side, Azerbaijani units occupied a part of the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

The situation in Armenia is aggravated by the fact that it does not have security guarantees at all. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), chaired by Armenia at the moment, refused to protect its member state. CSTO is not in a position to enforce its mandate and instead calls on Armenia to negotiate with Azerbaijan. In principle, the ineffectiveness of CSTO was clear even during the second Karabakh war, but if there were still some formal grounds to explain why the mechanism of collective security does not cover the territory of Karabakh, there are no more of such

arguments now. While Azerbaijan had greater economic advantages, a stronger army and Turkey as its reliable ally, Armenia with its fragile economy and weakened army found itself left alone in the face of the enemy.

Azerbaijan's ambitions grow proportionally to the weakening of Russia. Today, it is interested not only in the permanent solution of the Karabakh issue: Aliyev also wants to gain control over the Syunik (Zangezur) corridor through the territory of Armenia to allow a direct connection to the Nakhichevan exclave.

This demand is completely unacceptable and humiliating for Armenia, therefore it does not agree to such a concession. Aliyev is trying to use the window of opportunity and get the most out of the situation.

Obviously, Karabakh and the Armenian population remaining there should not be left out of the equation, as their chances of remaining in their homes are decreasing steadily as Azerbaijan is strengthening its position.

At the same time, Armenia once again faces the threat of internal political destabilization.

Under these circumstances, Yerevan has three most difficult tasks to solve:

1. To find a reasonable compromise regarding the Syunik Corridor that would not be humiliating for it as a sovereign state and at the same time would be sufficient to deter Azerbaijan's aggressive actions.
2. To keep safe the Armenian population of Karabakh and provide guarantees for their security.
3. To escape domestic political destabilization.

All three issues are strongly intertwined and any one of them cannot be solved in isolation. It will be difficult for Armenia to protect its interests, if in such a difficult situation the society supports the development of events with a revolutionary scenario. Regardless of whether anyone likes or dislikes Pashinyan, today he is needed there to save Armenian statehood. He succeeded in receiving the mandate of trust from the population in the most difficult situation, - after the lost war. In this situation, internal

political destabilization and revolutionary scenarios for a country at war would actually reduce the probability of achieving the desired results for Armenia to zero.

Reaching an agreement around the Syunik corridor will be a certain guarantee for the security of the Armenian population of Karabakh. But how should this happen?

Many analysts point out that today the West needs Azerbaijan especially as an alternative source of energy resources. Therefore, the West will be relatively loyal to it. This opinion is right and wrong at the same time. Yes, the West really needs Azerbaijan for this purpose, although, it is unlikely that it will tolerate the occupation of Armenian territories, as it has imposed the strictest regime of sanctions on the much needed and powerful Russia. At the same time, this need is mutual. Azerbaijan also needs the West to realize its economic interests, so Aliyev will avoid this kind of confrontation.

Aliyev is a pragmatic politician and despite his superiority today, he knows very well that he is not omnipotent. The leader of Azerbaijan is well aware of the limits of the opportunities, and therefore will always avoid taking a step that would make him lose this advantage. The military occupation of settlements on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia would definitely be such a step. Considering this, Aliyev would not make this step. However, he will try to make the best of this opportunity.

This could be the enactment of the Syunik corridor with international security guarantees. This idea may seem utopian to many, but exactly as this article was being written, Nikol Pashinyan's initiative regarding placing an international observers' mission at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan was announced. I had an opportunity to discuss this idea with my Armenian colleagues.

I believe that the opening of the corridor with international security guarantees, be it the United Nations, OSCE, European Union, or any other organization, on the one hand, will satisfy the ambitions of Azerbaijan, and on the other hand, will not be humiliating for Armenia. At the same

time, such a format would increase Western involvement in Armenia and significantly reduce Russian influence.

At the same time, Armenia needs to diversify its foreign and security policy. Decades of ties with Russia will not be cut off in one day. In this regard, immediate withdrawal from CSTO is not a solution, nor is there a demand for the withdrawal of the military base from Gyumri (especially since the mandate of the base has been extended until 2059). Under the circumstances, it is simply unimaginable. However, strengthening ties in different directions, especially in the West, is vital. The West has interests in Armenia, and at the same time, there is some sympathy for it. The visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who played an important role in neutralizing the last stage of escalation, is clear proof.

Given the circumstances, the stability of Armenia is important for Georgia as well. Despite the fact that Georgia has a strategic partnership with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the role of Armenia is definitely not insignificant. Three of Georgia's four land neighbors are ruled by leaders with strong authoritarian tendencies. Georgia itself has a serious crisis due to the lack of politicians in politics. Therefore, Nikol Pashinani is the only democratic leader in the region. The survival of Armenian democracy, especially if Yerevan is able to reduce its dependence on Russia and strengthen ties with the West, will be a strong incentive for the further development of democratic processes in Georgia.

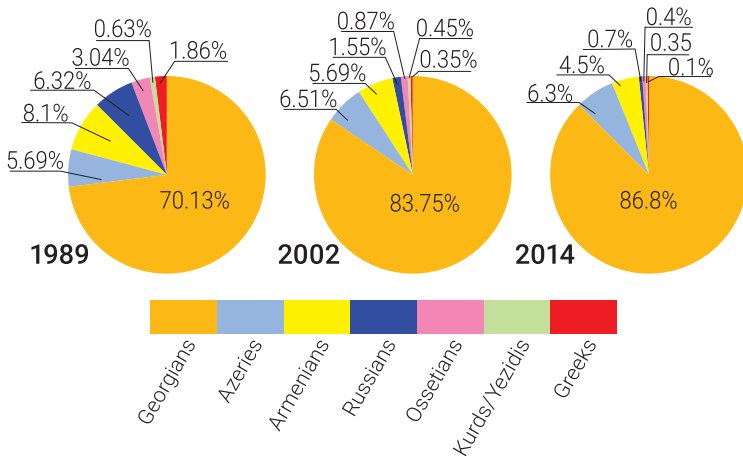
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**ARMENIANS AND GEORGIANS –
SOCIETIES AND INDIVIDUALS IN
NEW REALITIES 2022**

CURRENT STATE AND CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN GEORGIA

Shorena Kobaidze

Historically Georgia is home to many diverse ethnic and religious groups. According to the latest census, conducted in 2014, national minorities constitute 13.2% of the population, the largest ethnic groups being Azerbaijanis (6.3%), and Armenians (4.5%). Other ethnic groups, which together account for 2.4% of the population, include Ossetians, Russians, Greeks, Kurds, Assyrians, Chechens (also known in Georgia as Kists), Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, and others⁸. Azerbaijanis and Armenians are mostly residing in the regions of KvemoKartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, respectively. However, they are also well represented in the regions of Kakheti and ShidaKartli and the cities of Tbilisi and Batumi.



Dynamic of ethnic minority populations' migration since 1989 -2014

Since its independence, Georgia as a country has made good progress in creating a policy framework that promotes minorities' inclusion. But despite the state's efforts aimed at decreasing the gap between majority ethnic Georgians and minority populations, the outcomes are not straightforward. The overwhelming majority from ethnic minorities feels marginalized as

⁸ GeoStat, Total population by region and ethnicity (<http://census.ge/en/results/census1/demo>)

members of Georgian society. It is popular for decision makers in Georgia to believe that the main challenge to overcoming disparities in economic wellbeing for non-ethnic groups comes down to language. The inability of most of these minority populations to speak Georgian, isolation and systematic ignorance of minority specific concerns hinders their ability to fully integrate economically, politically and socially into Georgia. The argument among ethnic Georgians is that despite numerous opportunities for language courses offered to minorities, they simply are not interested in learning. The burden is clearly placed on minorities.

During the time of the Soviet Union, national minorities were able to study at so called 'minority schools', where the Georgian language was taught only as a separate subject and teaching was conducted in the mother tongue. This, among other reasons, contributed to the isolation of national minorities, especially Azerbaijanis in KvemoKartli and Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti; the two regions where these minorities are settled compactly. Even after many years of independence, a significant part of the ethnic minority population of Georgia, primarily residing in KvemoKartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, still to this day do not speak the state language Georgian. Fluency in Georgian amongst minorities is concentrated in the capital and other regions of the country with mixed populations, while fluency in more remote regions with monoethnic minority populations is lower. Approximately 82% of Azerbaijanis in KvemoKartli and 71% of Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti do not speak fluent Georgian.⁹

The so-called "1+4" program initiated by the government of Georgia has made a significant impact on the inclusion of ethnic minority students in the Georgian higher education system. Before it started, only a handful of ethnic minority representatives were entering Georgian higher education institutions. The program allows ethnic minority students to study at Georgian higher education institutions by passing only one general skills exam in their mother tongue. Each year, the government provides scholarships to about 100 ethnic Armenian and 100 ethnic Azeri students to study the Georgian language for one year with the help of an intensive

9 Gorgadze, N. (2016). Rethinking Integration Policy-Dual Ethnic and Cultural Identity. *International Journal of Multi-lingual Education*, December 2016 edition

language program. Then, after passing a language exam, the students continue studying at Bachelor level. Some of the biggest high education institutions in the country participate in the “1+4” program, including the Tbilisi State University, Iliia State University, the Georgian Technical University, Akhaltsikhe State University, the National Defense Academy and the Academy of Internal Affairs (Police Academy).

While the “1+4” program is largely considered to be a success, various resources point out that the program fails to deliver one of its key components - promoting the integration of students from different backgrounds. At the initial stage of the program, the classes used to be segregated along ethnic lines to avoid potential conflicts between ethnic Armenian and Azeri students. Although ethnically diverse classes were created at a later stage, interaction and socialization between the two groups remained limited. Contradicting opinions between public officials and civil society representatives on the government’s measures to integrate minorities and policies implemented in general highlight a lack of agreement between the two on how citizens are treated and minority-majority disparities are being reconciled. Information to track evidence on the primary integration effects of the State Policies on minorities is incomplete. The government of Georgia at the central level focuses on regional data collection and does not disaggregate the data by ethnicity. Local government offices do not have the means, skills, or motivation to collect this information in any systematic way. This lack of reliable data presents a problem for understanding ethnic and/or religious disparities, hampers evidence-based decision making, and may exacerbate vulnerabilities during times of crisis. Moreover, assessments at the regional level to identify local needs and concerns are not usually conducted, nor are citizen’s satisfaction surveys on the provision of state services undertaken. Planning efforts for diversity management and minority sensitive reporting lack evidence to determine, if decisions to respond to minority challenges and disparities are effective and if inequalities faced by minorities are being really addressed.

Furthermore, lack of trust among ethnic Georgians towards minorities is often expressed with the views that minorities don’t share the same values and aspirations, therefore they are often portrayed as potential

threat or as second-class citizens. Beyond the language possession imbalances, inequity also has a negative impact on social cohesion. There are no quotas available for minority populations to increase their political participation. Ethnic minorities are hardly represented on the local as well as on the central government levels. The majority of active Georgian political parties, largely due to a chronic lack of resources, never sufficiently “invest” in the regions with national minority populations. As a result, Georgia’s national minorities remain underrepresented and with only limited options for participating in the political life of the country. Neither the Georgian parliament, nor Georgia’s political parties, adequately reflect the population share of the national minorities in their composition and therefore, do not have any policies that would effectively address the issues that are of systematic concern to national minorities. Nor do the political parties invest sufficient time or effort to establish systems and networks to help improve their own organizational presence in ethnically diverse regions. For that reason, a host of inter-ethnic, national and political concerns accumulate and, due to the absence of effective institutions for their political manifestation, these concerns escalate to create grievances that are difficult to tackle in the absence of genuine political participation of national minority representatives and a scarcity of platforms for political expression and engagement.

Recent studies on electoral participation highlight that minority attitudes towards party affiliation lean toward decreasing support for the ruling party, contrary to the prevailing stereotype among the Georgian political establishment that minorities always vote for the incumbent party¹⁰. According to the numerous reports and studies ethnic minorities’ engagement in politics as candidates, constituents, and activists remains limited in Georgia. There is a widespread belief that due to the limited access to news about domestic politics and issues in minority languages their ability to engage in elections is impacted. Minorities take part in the process as voters and elections administration officials, but there is very limited involvement of minorities into shaping party programs as well as nomination of minorities as candidates. Parties’ approaches to the needs

10 Kakhishvili, L. (2018). Competing for Votes of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia: The 2017 Local Elections. *Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism*

of ethnic minorities are characterized as superficial, often focusing on language training and elimination of discrimination, but neglecting to engage the communities in meaningful participation¹¹.

In recent years, growing levels of intolerance could be observed between various groups of the Georgian population especially among Christian and Muslim populations. There have also been some cases of overt tensions, with a few even turning violent¹². While the biggest outcry has been about the increased violence between the Christian and Muslim populations in the KvemoKartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions of Georgia, some cases of hate speech that went largely unnoticed also occurred towards different ethnic minority groups. There are often cases when certain groups are mobilized in municipalities with minorities compact settlements to support radicalization of the local population and separatism in the region. There is a tendency in media to perpetuate negative stereotypes by sensationalizing stories that portray Armenians as separatists or sympathizing with Russia, usually without fully investigating the facts of the case. The most widespread stereotype about ethnic Armenians is that they are not interested to learn the Georgian language and refuse to be a part of the integration process. Besides allegations of separatism, some Armenophobic groups in Georgia include that Armenians claim aspects of Georgian culture as their own and have a wealthy international lobby in the West.

Infrastructure is poorly developed in the municipalities with minority compact settlements. Rural areas with ethnic populations are more often prioritizing basic community needs while areas populated by an ethnic majority tend to prioritize modern technologies to be developed by donors and local governments. When it comes to distribution and division of the agricultural lands, minorities are believed to suffer from unfair distribution of the lands. There have been numerous cases when minorities complained about the lack of access to irrigation system etc.

¹¹ Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (2017). Integration of National Minorities in Georgia

¹² Massive Disturbances in Dmanisi after Local Shop Incident, <https://civil.ge/archives/419991>

Ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti region often mention the lack of contacts and networks on the central government level, which hinders the process of attracting larger resources and assistance from the government. Many men who work in agriculture annually migrate to other countries for work because they do not earn enough money from agricultural production to support their families. Ethnically Armenian minority men tend to migrate to Russia and Armenia, where they can speak the local languages. Most migrate for roughly six months a year to work in construction as well as agriculture, earning more than they can earn in Georgia. Approximately two thirds of the ethnic Armenians from Samtskhe-Javakheti migrate to Russia, while the others migrate to Armenia¹³. Many ethnic Armenians have Russian citizenship which makes migration legal, and most minority farmers speak Russian, so they are able to communicate in the local language. Youth from minority regions is increasingly looking beyond subsistence farming practiced by their parents and grandparents and leans towards the service industry, including tourism sector. However, the ability of some to speak the Georgian language and their awareness of other potential options does not relieve them from different factors impacting their participation in various value chains. Inequities that hinder minority youth entrepreneurship empowerment in these regions include at most access issues and often top-down control of the centralized government structures. Some young people consider that their ability to access resources, including public services and infrastructure, job opportunities, and agricultural support programs, are limited by political power dynamics and prevailing attitudes. Youth from the remote municipalities often migrates to their historic homeland to continue studies and rarely returns. After completion of the universities in Armenia and Azerbaijan, many young people do not return back to Georgia.

Challenges and inequities faced by minority populations in the country often put them at a disadvantage in comparison with the majority of ethnic Georgians. This exacerbates when decision makers implement policies without disaggregated data and based on common stereotypes, and when

13 Babayan, K. (2018). Armenians Seasonal Matriarchy in Georgia. *Chai-Khana*. <https://chaikhana.media/en/stories/747/armenians-seasonal-matriarchy-in-georgia>

minorities cannot get information or access to potential assistance. Such factors contribute to the exclusion of minorities from quality state services and development opportunities. That also contributes into the creation of the long-term cycles of exclusion where minorities are faced with lower levels of education, political representation, and income. Despite numerous legislative initiatives such as the adoption of the State Strategy on Civic Equality and Integration¹⁴, communication between different minority groups and between the minority and majority population remains limited, and there has been no particular practical or effective intervention made to address this issue. While the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language is often stated to be the key problem by the authorities, in those cases where there is no language barrier the actual inclusion and participation of minority groups remains limited. This is due to the long history of isolation and systematic exclusion of minority communities from the political processes.

Current geopolitical situation and sharp ethnic divisions heavily elevate socio-economic concerns for the South Caucasus region. The focus on inclusion and reconciliation by the states, political elites and others has missed the advantage of the region's greatest asset- diversity. An important step towards reconciliation and integration is to recognize the ethnic heritage and economic potential of minority populations, as well as an understanding that economic growth is possible if structural inequities are removed. Decision makers often do not fully understand the problems and challenges faced by minority populations because they do not consult with these groups. As an example, identity in Georgia, defined by affiliation to one's homeland, mother tongue spoken, and membership in a religion, has created an "us vs. them" mentality around majority-minority relations. At best, this attitude ignores diversity; at worst, it treats minorities as a security or social threat, further marginalizing and exposing them to deep prejudices and biases, discrimination, hate speech, and nationalism.

14 Office Of The State Minister Of Georgia For Reconciliation And Civil Equality. State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action. <https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/31/state-strategy-for-civic-equality-and-integration-and-action-plan#collapse1>

Economic gains have not been equitably translated into greater welfare and opportunity among all groups equally. During times of crises, when poor and marginalized communities are exposed to the risks of becoming poorer and more marginalized, greater and more equitable economic and social mobility has to be secured, consolidating fragmented sides and populations across the region. Understanding and removing the constraints to the development of peacebuilding processes will require more efforts and dedication of the governments, leveraging socio-economic opportunities, linking peoples, fostering equality in access to jobs and basic services to all minority or majority populations. Subsequently applying these crucial efforts into policy and resource's allocations involves changing the narratives in the South Caucasus's ethnically sensitive landscape.

Shorena Kobaidze has 15 years' experience in human and minority rights protection and integration and has supervised and provided technical support to integration programs including working closely with a number of state institutions. Ms. Kobaidze possesses strong adult learning capacity building skills and has supported government officials in increasing their skills, knowledge and practices around minority issues and diversity management. She has exceptional knowledge of USAID, EU and other donor activities across Georgia and the region of the South Caucasus, particularly those aimed at integrating ethnic, religious minorities and other socially excluded groups in various aspects of life. With over 12 years experience collaborating closely with key state and non-state institutions and facilitating effective coordination and communication of relevant policies among various marginalized groups, Ms. Kobaidze has extensive networks and understanding of the development landscape in Georgia.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND ENDANGERED IDENTITY

Armen Ohanyan

Armenians nowadays live in anticipation of an imminent disaster, terrified of the skeletons being thrown out of the closet of history.

More precisely, they live in anticipation of an unprecedented imminent disaster since anticipating familiar disaster is a normal state of being in an Armenian context, while the aforementioned skeletons used to still wink at the Armenians from behind the unclosed doors of the past.

The emotional state of the modern Armenian is “unprecedented”¹⁵ due to the circumstance that the mega narrative of “Blessed is the moment when the blessed foot of the Russian stepped into the light of the Armenian World”¹⁶ that worked continuously for almost two centuries is no longer functional - though it is yet to collapse for good, which has led to cognitive dissonance in the public consciousness.

For almost two centuries, due to the entry of the Russian Empire into the region, for the colonial/postcolonial/Soviet/post-Soviet Armenian the Russian was “a savior,” in some sense “the big brother” that was the security guarantor, while the “hostile other” was first the Persian, then the Turk (having acquired the status of the eternal enemy, particularly following the Armenian Genocide). This narrative worked flawlessly as a dogma and a cornerstone of identity. It is worth noting that even the Karabakh Movement, which was once seen as anti-Soviet, did not turn into an anti-Russian wave. Quite the opposite, its newly found “nationalism” ultimately led to the old logic of winning freedom from “the Turk” and not “the Russian” (in newly independent Armenia, the “other” that served as the target for the establishment of nationalism became the Azerbaijani, whom Armenian society Turkified and found itself back to square one historically for the second time).

15 The choice of the word is a bitter joke because the current authorities like to use the word “unprecedented” out of place.

16 A quote from Khachatour Abovyan’s novel “The Wound of Armenia”, where he welcomed the arrival of Tsarist Russia to the region to free Christians, including Armenians, from Muslim rule.

The widespread apathy as a backdrop to the collapse of national ambitions and dreams makes it impossible to overcome the traumas which accumulated layer by layer for more than a century and have become untreatable. No matter how much people try to be guided by the “life continues” axiom, at the end of the day they still find themselves trapped alone in a room with four walls, persecuted by the skeletons that escaped from the closet of history. What are these skeletons and why are they so intimidating as to cause a profound identity crisis among regular Armenians?

These skeletons are many, but let’s look at three of them: the fear of dispossession, the fear of assimilation, and the fear of annihilation, which are based on the great pan-national phobia that comes from unresolved national disasters – Turkophobia.

The fear of assimilation is more characteristic of the Armenian Diaspora, whose traditional occupation is to pursue “Armenian preservation” in addition to the Armenian Question. However, due to demographic realities (2.5 million Armenians live in Armenia, and at least three times more Armenians live abroad), this exclusively ‘Armenian’ fear has ‘infiltrated’ mono-ethnic Armenia as well. The aggravation of fear implies that many people of different languages, religions, and nationalities will come to Armenia, and the small number of Armenians will immediately “degenerate”, forget their language, religion, and culture, will become Turks, “gay Europeans”, Russianized, etc.

The second is the fear of dispossession, which also has the idea of migration at its core, and is connected not only with the unresolved trauma of the Armenian Genocide but also with the Soviet past and post-Soviet “looting”. Here it is worth looking back and mentioning several facts. First, in the 90s, despite all the difficulties, people had a sense of ownership and when they fought, they did not fight against the “eternal enemy”, but for their rights, especially, their right to property. Thus, they fought not against mythical “others” but against their compatriots, the neighboring Azerbaijanis, whom they knew very well. As anthropologist Aghasi Tadevosyan states in one of his interviews, in Karabakh, there was no middle class of owners who had something to lose, while the handful of owners of accumulated wealth

did not even live in those areas. Therefore, the fear of losing property is one of the skeletons that was at the basis of the slogan “Karabakh is ours” (the right to property was the most important for the Armenians who were dispossessed by the genocide and did not receive compensation, and for overcoming the gulags and the Soviet system that rejected property). Therefore, such a resolution of the Karabakh issue further exacerbated this fundamental fear of dispossession.

Another important aspect was that the first war was being waged in the context of the so-called “Evil Empire”, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the great expectations of Armenians to be part of the new liberal democratic world. The second war unfolded, and according to some analysts, is still ongoing, because there is yet to be a peace or reconciliation accord, in the same context of the restoration of the Evil Empire bordering on a point of madness, whereas Armenia, which has not gone through de-Sovietization, lustration or decommunization, has appeared in the position of the bride of Frankenstein. This dichotomy exists from top to bottom, both among elites and ordinary citizens. This widespread division creates a predisposition among ordinary people to take the side of the strong, and therefore people fear that even a mortally wounded “Russian bear” will have enough strength to cruelly punish “treacherous” Armenians if they step over to the side of the conventional West as most people judge based on the bipolarity of the Cold War.

Manvel Sargsyan, a public intellectual, considers Armenians to be a “patron-seeking” people, that is, their security system is always under the umbrella of a bigger power. Leaving aside the validity of such an assertion, it must be pointed out that the potential fall of the big brother caught up in great problems exacerbates the fundamental fear of annihilation among Armenians, which is the most terrible of the skeletons that have managed to escape from the closet of the past.

In one of their interviews, Masha Gessen talks about the dichotomy of the consciousness of Russians, a kind of widespread bipolarity, which is characteristic of the post-Soviet consciousness. For example, no matter whom you talk to, everyone considers the Gulag evil, at the level of human relations, Stalin’s repressions left almost every other person with a

history of human behavior, but at the political, more “abstract” level, the same people who just a little while ago were speaking of the atrocities of Stalinism, suddenly turn into fighting Stalinists and worship the times of the “iron fist”. This dichotomy of consciousness specific to the Homo-Sovieticus is also characteristic of Armenians. Today, whomever you talk to, everyone wants peace, everyone remembers stories about how Azerbaijani neighbors or friends saved someone’s family, how they lived in peace and harmony, etc., but the next moment they can make a claim that is 180 degrees different from what was just said, i.e., “the Turk shall be a Turk”, or “as soon as the Russians withdraw, the Turks will come and devour us”.

Another dead-end dilemma inherent in bipolar thinking is the contradiction between democracy and ‘security’. If in the 90s, the national struggle for the self-determination of Karabakh and the democratization of Armenia were not in direct conflict, at least in the minds of most people, today “security” or “democracy” are contradictory things in the minds of most people. Especially following the victory of authoritarian Azerbaijan, very few people see democratization as a guarantee for strengthening security.

The people have not experienced the enjoyment of democracy. Apart from the suffering, wars, and economic and social disasters in Armenia, which was declared democratic, the people did have much to rejoice over. Moreover, they were broken, beaten, or bribed, or battered at the polling stations during every national election. The waves of post-election protests faced the brute force of the police and the joint suppression by state-sponsored gangs. The devaluation of democracy is one of the most common topics in Armenia, according to which Armenians fought for decades for the establishment of democracy, and finally, when they managed to get their voice back, they suffered again. And then there is Azerbaijan, which has never beaten itself up to become a democracy, used its unmatched military and economic advantage to bring the democratic country to its knees and succeeded. So maybe it is true that without military force, democracy is defenseless and powerless in our region, where aggressive behavior and show of force are more accepted than the dialogue where the common man believes that “the

weak are always to blame before the strong”, where the common man is convinced that “without a patron, we are lost.” Thus, the entire political discourse boils down to this idea that when in the jungle or in muddy waters, in order for small fish like us not to be easily swallowed by the big ones, we must either be thorny and poisonous or swim while clinging to the tail of the biggest fish, and “diplomacy” will only be breaking away from the tail of one big fish and grabbing the other’s at the right moment. Unfortunately, these are currently not only the average views of ordinary citizens but also rumors circulating among the “expert” community that are publicized by all media outlets.

Looking back again, let’s state that waiting for disaster is a normal state. First of all, Christianity has promised us the Great Judgment, and Armenians are proud of having the first Christian state in the world, then all kinds of alarmists are constantly calling for not only the end of the world, but especially the end of Armenia (“They wanted to leave one Armenian, but only in a museum,” *The Unstoppable Bell Tower* by Paruyr Sevak). So, in Armenian perceptions, disasters come and never go. On the contrary, they always stay with us. A relatively recent example is the catastrophic earthquake of December 7, 1988, after which a significant part of Armenia was called the Disaster Zone, and to this day the Disaster has not been overcome here, neither economically, socially, nor psychologically. In addition, the trauma has been passed on from generation to generation, and even those born after 1988 are the bearers of that catastrophe, and they will tell you thousands of stories so authentic and accurate, so terrifying that for a moment it will seem that you are talking to an eyewitness. Of course, war is not a natural disaster but rather a product of human choice. However, there is a common thread in the stories of war and earthquakes that is hard not to notice: the inevitability of the disaster or fatalism, which we sometimes call “Armenian bad luck”. So, we are in a general socio-psychological context, where the Disaster spreads over the past, remains unresolved in the present, and causes its own anticipation in the future. This applies to all disasters, both natural and man-made. At the root of all this, perhaps, is the unrepentant pain of the genocide, which has turned into the greatest national phobia, the fear of annihilation, which is inextricably linked to the Turks, therefore, Turkophobia is as

natural and “inevitable” for Armenians as the natural disasters that plagued Armenians. Therefore, the fear of annihilation was mitigated by the existence of the Iron Curtain, then by the reality of a closed land border, but the Karabakh conflict equated the image of the Turk with the Azerbaijani, and the “victory” of the first war created the illusion of overcoming fear. And now, the fear of annihilation is transferred to the Armenians of Karabakh. In a sense, history is repeating itself, and what happened to the Armenians of Anatolia during the First World War is attributed to the Armenians of Karabakh with an almost as identical narrative construct as the inevitability of ethnic cleansing, which creates a strong connection between Karabakh Armenians and the traditional Diaspora, because for Diaspora Armenians, who have not overcome the trauma of genocide, history repeats itself, and everyone is convinced that Karabakh Armenians will be annihilated in an instant if there is no one to support them. So, the “made-up” trinity of Armenia-Diaspora-Artsakh, proclaimed at the beginning of the 2000s, has been destroyed, the “diasporaization” of Artsakh Armenians prevents Armenians from perceiving Karabakh Armenians as an ethnic minority living within Azerbaijan despite the fact that there are such communities in all the neighboring countries, and they often outnumber the Armenians of Artsakh in Georgia, Iran, and Turkey. It should be noted that Armenians live comfortably not only in democratic countries but also in many autocracies, such as Iran if we don’t look too far. Erdogan’s Turkey does not shine with democracy either, but lo and behold, the Armenians of Istanbul have a patriarch and a church, schools, press, organizations, and a certain pluralism within a small ethnoreligious community, involvement in the political life of Turkey, both in ruling and opposition parties.

Fear wins. Security is opposed to democracy, and fear wins again, as the international relations expert Davit Isajanyan so rightly defined: “The evangelism of fear is at the basis of Armenia’s security concept.”

The fear of annihilation is winning, a most consuming fear that sits in almost every Armenian, a fear that has been transmitted from generation to generation, transformed, that has spread and engulfed all of Armenia, even those whose ancestors were not direct victims of the genocide.

It is the fear of annihilation that guides the group of skeletons that escaped from the closet of history, it is this fear that has a specific name: Turkophobia.

The last existing relic of the Iron Curtain, the Armenia-Turkey land border, can be destroyed or, on the contrary, fortified. It is difficult to predict what tomorrow's Armenia and the region will look like, but the citizens of Armenia can play their part in building that future only if they overcome the onslaught of skeletons from the closet of the past, not give in to these hollowing national fears, review their identity and formulate anew the concept of a democratic Armenia, which is doomed to no longer be an isolated Armenian "paradise ghetto" under the auspices of the Russians, but will have to open up in order to get out of the political, economic, demographic, multi-layered and complex impasse and overcome the identity crisis through eventually turning the "other" into one of "its own" and overcoming xenophobia.

Unpredictable regional developments can lead to Armenia deviating from the path of democracy again, which already happened once in the late nineties when the power in the country was monopolized by the Karabakh clan. The Velvet Revolution was a successful attempt to dismantle the kleptocracy and return power to the people, restoring the constitutional order that resulted in the citizen's right to vote being returned to him. The war destroyed the national aspirations and dreams of many people, and left them empty-handed, but did not nullify the main achievement of the revolution: the freedom of the citizen. If the skeletons manage to finally drive Armenians crazy, then that freedom will be caged again, and if this identity crisis is overcome, Armenia will have every chance to be a multi-ethnic democratic state and an open society.

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