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*A strip of land situated between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, the post-Soviet Caucasus embarked on a painful identity quest at the turn of the third millennium. This – still ongoing – quest involves several daunting choices: between Moscow, Washington and Brussels, between oil and democratic values, and between feudal realities and revolutionary ideals. Throughout the last decade, the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute has been conducting in-depth research of the conflicting and often subtle trends in the regions' politics. This volume contains a selection of research papers published by the Caucasus Institute since 2001 in Armenian, Russian and English, which best represent the challenges faced by this varied region at this crucial stage of development.*

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PUTTING THE “COLOR REVOLUTIONS” BEHIND OR  
WELCOME BACK, FLASHMAN(?)<sup>1</sup>: WESTERN POLICIES  
TOWARDS THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN 2007

*by Vladimir D. Shkolnikov<sup>2</sup>*

INTRODUCTION

The year 2007 was not the most exciting for the relations between the West and countries of the Southern Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> The year did not feature a high-profile attempt for a breakthrough of frozen conflicts similar to the high-level proximity talks on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that took place in Key West, Florida in the spring of 2001. There were no visits by Western leaders to the region to rival the visit of President George W. Bush to Georgia in 2005. There is no obvious candidate for *the event* of 2007 in the relations between the West and the countries of the South Caucasus. Observers of the region with a healthy sense of humor could point to one event of importance to two out of the three countries in the region directly due to both its symbolism and its emotional significance for a great deal of the region's population. This sphere is football and the event is the decision by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) on June 25, 2007

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1 This paper was published by the Caucasus Institute in Russian in its *Caucasus Yearbook 2007* as: Shkolnikov, Vladimir. “Politika Zapada v otnoshenii Yuzhnogo Kavkaza v 2007 g. Proschanie s “tsvetnymi revolyutsiami,” ili s vozvrascheniem, Flashman(?)” *Kavkaz – 2007. Yezhegodnik Instituta Kavkaza* (“Western Policies towards the South Caucasus in 2007: putting the “colour revolutions” behind or welcome back, Flashman(?)” *Caucasus 2007. CI Yearbook*). Ed. Alexander Iskandaryan. – Yerevan: 2009 (in Russian). – Pp. 218-233.

2 At the time of writing of this paper the author had been with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) for over 12 years. Since 2003 he had been the head of the ODIHR's Democratization Department.

3 The definition of the West used throughout this paper is identical to the one introduced by Richard Giragosian in the *Caucasus Yearbook 2006*: “Although not fully comprehensive, the most concise definition for this context is to define the West as the European Union and the United States, but also including the Western institutions (NATO, CoE, PACE, OSCE, etc.) as the main vehicles for engagement.” Giragosian, Richard. “Prisutstviye zapada na yuzhnom kavkaze: natanutoye sotrudnichestvo ili strategicheskoye sopernichestvo?” *Kavkaz – 2006. Yezhegodnik Kavkazskogo Instituta SMI* (“Western Engagement in the South Caucasus: Strained Cooperation or Strategic Competition?” *Caucasus – 2006. CMI Yearbook*). Ed. Alexander Iskandaryan. – Yerevan: 2008 (in Russian). – P. 190.

to cancel the European Championship qualifying matches between Armenia and Azerbaijan and not to award any points to either team, after the football federations of the two countries could not reach an agreement on the location of the matches.

This decision merits mentioning not only because it sent Armenian and Azerbaijani football teams to the bottom of their qualifying group, but because it symbolized notable trends in Western policies towards the South Caucasus. These include:

- Increasing efforts by the West to institutionalize its relations with the states of the Caucasus and impose some rules to govern these relations. The examples of these are the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), programs of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the discussion of the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia. As these programs include certain benchmarks, the symbolism of the aforementioned UEFA decision is the notion prevalent throughout the region: it is the West that sets the rules and awards points (or assistance) to the Caucasus countries;
- Clear signs that the West is losing hope for regional cooperation and perhaps coming to terms that regional cooperation is somewhat an illusion (i.e. if Armenia and Azerbaijan want to end up with zeroes on the board by disagreeing on where to hold their games, the West is not going to stand in their way).

Yet there is also something in the UEFA ruling that differs, if only accidentally, from what has emerged as Western policy toward the region. The UEFA ruling represented a principled position being enforced, and not only stated. In 2007, the West often tolerated what has been the norm in the behavior of the governments of the Southern Caucasus: an absolute unwillingness to compromise in conflict situations (both vis-à-vis the neighbors and domestically vis-à-vis the opposition) even if it leads to a lose-lose outcome for the parties concerned. As long as the opposing side gets no benefits, the Southern Caucasus states are willing to bypass compromise even if would have been to the mutual benefit. The UEFA's ruling was an exception to the Western acceptance of the *status quo* in the region. In general, the year 2007 could be described as the year of return of Western *realpolitik* towards the region and the countries of the region. Some observers and politicians in the region and in other CIS countries may have developed a belief that in recent years, democracy promotion and democratization have been becoming prominent in Western policies. The Western governments and Western-funded organizations have been seen giving inspiration to the "colour revolutions" in some of the former Soviet states. This paper examines the apparent tension between democracy-promotion and *realpolitik* considerations and argues that in 2007, in Western policy towards the three

countries of Southern Caucasus, the *realpolitik* view of stability – support, open or tacit to existing governments – has prevailed over other considerations such as support for democracy, let alone “colour revolutions.”<sup>4</sup>

## ARMENIA

In 2007, Armenia was the primary example of the Western shift from democracy-promotion to the policy of emphasizing stability over other – democracy, human-rights, and even historical justice – considerations.

While there are many observers in the West who believe that Armenia can be more democratic, the reaction to the May 2007 parliamentary elections in the country showed that Western governments have taken a hands-off approach towards shortcomings in the country’s electoral processes. Some democracy-promotion organizations such as Freedom House have lobbied the US government to take a more critical look at the Armenian electoral processes and consider suspending the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) program for the country. Ultimately, the OSCE’s line articulated in the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions made at a press conference on 13 May in Yerevan, some 24 hours after the holding of the elections, to the effect that the Armenian parliamentary elections “demonstrated improvement and were conducted largely in line with ... international standards for democratic elections” over past elections was sufficient for the US and European governments to refrain from the suspension of the MCA program or from other hard-line options. The post-election interim report of the OSCE/ODIHR that reported the resignation of three out of nine Central Election Commission members who refused to sign the protocol for the final results of these elections, citing violations that could put into question the accuracy of the results, was simply disregarded by the US and the EU.<sup>5</sup>

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4 It should be noted the trend of democratization in the region coming to a grinding halt in the region was mentioned in some contributions to this volume’s predecessor of last year. See Muskhelishvili, Marina and Gia Zhorzholiani, “Gruziya i Rossiya v 2006 g.: novyye realii.” *Kavkaz – 2006: Yezhegodnik Kavkazskogo Instituta SMI* (“Georgia and Russia in 2006: New Realities”. *Caucasus 2006, CMI Yearbook*). Ed. Alexander Iskandaryan. – Yerevan: CMI, 2008 (in Russian). – Pp.33-56; and Yunusov, Arif. “Azerbaidzhan v 2006 g.: nekotorye itogi.” (“Azerbaijan in 2006: some conclusions”). Iskandaryan, Alexander (ed.), *op. cit.* – Pp. 7-32. Yunusov, in particular, writes about the political “Uzbekinization” of Azerbaijan’s domestic scene.

5 See OSCE/ODIHR *Election Observation Mission Republic of Armenia Parliamentary Elections 2007 Post-Election Interim Report No. 1*, 13-22 May, 2007.  
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/25337>

The Armenian government also benefited from the position of the West on the “frozen conflict” over Nagorno-Karabakh. The US and French co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group agreed with Russia to thwart Azerbaijan’s efforts to move the negotiations over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the OSCE to the UN, where Azerbaijan would likely enjoy the support of the Islamic countries and where the role of the West and Russia as mediators could be diluted.<sup>6</sup> For Armenia, a move of Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations under the UN aegis could spell isolation and erosion of its negotiating position. Thus the position of the West supporting the *status quo*, namely, the role of the OSCE as the venue for the negotiations, while predictable, was also reassuring to Armenia.

Another element of *realpolitik* at play in the West’s relationship with Armenia is the Western acquiescence to the construction of the Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline that was inaugurated by the Presidents Ahmadinejad and Kocharyan in March 2007 and discussions to build a second gas pipeline from Iran to Armenia. Despite the tension between Iran and the West, Armenia’s cordial relationship with Iran is not being contested by the West. It is clear to the West that Armenia needs this relationship in order to deal with its geographical realities of limited access to the outside world due to closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Curiously, informed observers believe that it was the Russian monopolist Gazprom, rather than the West, that insisted on the reduction of the diameter and, therefore, throughput of this Iran-Armenia pipeline.

If there is one element of Western *realpolitik* that may not satisfy Armenia, it is the politics surrounding efforts to gain recognition of the tragic 1915 events as genocide. This highly emotional issue continued to be an important agenda item for Armenia’s relations with the West. In 2007, this issue came to the forefront in the United States. Armenia and the Armenian diaspora were seemingly close to achieving US Congressional recognition of the genocide when the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs approved House Resolution 106, a bill that categorized the 1915 as indeed genocide and condemned the Ottoman Empire for it, on October 10, 2007, by a 27-21 vote.<sup>7</sup> However, some of the support for the bill

6 See *Joint Statement by the Minsk Group Co-Chairs*, February 15, 2007, in which they call on “the parties to avoid any action anywhere, including the United Nations General Assembly, that could undermine the positive developments of recent months.” <http://www.osce.org/mg/24049>

7 Incidentally, for the first time the American Jewish community showed cracks in 2007 over its heretofore stalwart opposition of the recognition of the Armenian genocide, motivated by many factors, including the fear of jeopardizing Turkey’s support for Israel and worsening the situation of Jews in Turkey. The Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL), for the first time in its history, issued a statement in which it admitted that “the consequences of those [1915 Ottoman] actions were indeed

from both Democrats and Republicans eroded after the White House and the State Department injected a dose of *realpolitik* into the issue by warning Congressmen about the possibility of Turkey restricting airspace as well as ground-route access for US military and humanitarian efforts in Iraq in response to the bill. It was simply not worth it for the US executive branch to spoil already damaged relations with a NATO ally, especially as Turkey made a strong signal – and the only one that Turkey could make – when ordering their ambassador to the United States to return to Ankara for “consultations.”

## GEORGIA

In Georgia, geopolitics also came first, with US and some “new Europeans” being more “geopolitical” than the “old Europeans” and countering Russia’s hostile policies towards that country with virtually unconditional support of President Saakashvili. Among the new EU states, Estonia played a particularly active role, as the country’s former Prime Minister and current MP, Mart Laar, continued to be visible as Mikhail Saakashvili’s adviser. To put it simply, Georgia has been a beneficiary of its deteriorating relations with Russia, and Russia’s overt hostility towards Georgia essentially forces the West to embrace Georgia.<sup>8</sup> For Tbilisi, the participation of Georgian soldiers as a part of the NATO contingent in Afghanistan is a very low price to pay for the favorable Western policy. NATO, in particular, has taken a number of steps in 2007 to demonstrate its support for Georgia. In October, a NATO week was held in Georgia. Also, then Acting President Burjanadze and Prime Minister Gurgenzidze paid successive visits to Brussels at the end of the year. Both visits seemed to symbolize EU and NATO acceptance of what many saw as a troubled and increasingly undemocratic domestic scent and a very stark example of a *realpolitik* response to the use of force to disperse the November 7 opposition rallies in Tbilisi and to the closing of the *Imedi* television station, the loudest voice of dissent among the Georgian media. For example, the US State Department’s reaction to the events of

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tantamount to genocide,” but reaffirmed its opposition to the Congressional resolution on the issue claiming that the latter is “a counterproductive diversion and will not foster reconciliation between Turks and Armenians and may put at risk the Turkish Jewish community and the important multilateral relationship between Turkey, Israel and the United States.” See ADL *Statement on the Armenian Genocide*. New York, August 21, 2007. [http://www.adl.org/PresRele/Mise\\_00/5114\\_00.htm](http://www.adl.org/PresRele/Mise_00/5114_00.htm)

8 On the background of Russia-Georgia relations, see Muskhelishvili, Marina and Gia Zhorzholiani, *op. cit.*

November 7 was muted and the press statement of the State Department's spokesman on the following day was as follows:

"The United States welcomes the Georgian Government's decision to hold early presidential elections and a referendum on timing of parliamentary elections. At the same time, we continue to urge the Government of Georgia to lift the state of emergency and restore all media broadcasts. These are necessary steps to restore the democratic conditions for the election and referendum. We call on all parties to maintain calm, respect the rule of law, and address their differences through serious discussions to strengthen Georgia's democratic political system. These discussions should take place in a spirit of compromise and in support of Georgia's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and commitment to human rights."<sup>9</sup>

The EU's report on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) mentioned the November 7 events only in passing and chose to highlight social problems. Nevertheless, the report is instructive in showing the EU's more critical stance towards the social policies of the Georgian government than that of the US on labor rights, lack of social dialogue, and women's rights. However, the report does not in any way suggest making the EU's assistance contingent on progress in those areas. Perhaps the more interesting aspect of the report – read between the lines – is its implicit criticism of the Georgian government's embrace of harsh market reform, which many Europeans see as "too American."<sup>10</sup> In short, their minor differences on economic reform notwithstanding, the United States and the European Union made a *realpolitik* decision to disregard the erosion of democratic institutions in Georgia in 2007 and focus on other aspects of their relations with that country.

In 2007, Western views on the potential for a Georgian NATO Membership Action Plan, very much hoped for by the Georgian government, were not yet made clear by all members of the alliance. While a number of papers have been floated suggesting that Georgia could join NATO without solving its frozen conflicts, the *realpolitik* of 2007 led to the postponement of the debate until 2008.<sup>11</sup> This was

9 See *Press Statement: Georgia: Need for Restraint and Respect for Rule of Law*. Sean McCormack, Spokesman. November 8, 2007.

<http://statelists.state.gov/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind0711b&L=dospress&D=1&P=209>. Reference by the US State Department's spokesman to Georgia's political system, believed by many experts to be super-presidential, as "democratic," is especially telling.

10 *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 'Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007' Progress Report Georgia*. [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/progress2008/sec08\\_393\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/progress2008/sec08_393_en.pdf)

11 Yakobashvili, Temuri and Jonathan Kulick. *Can Georgia Join NATO Without Solving Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?* The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Black Sea Paper Series, No. 3.

possibly the only fallout of the new Western policy towards the Caucasus that affected Georgia negatively in the entire year.

## AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan's relationship with the West in 2007 also fit the *realpolitik* model of the West's policy towards the region. Despite the concerns over the situation in the sphere of human rights and democracy, especially in the sphere of media freedom, Western states by and large refrained from criticizing the Azeri leadership. Notably, Azerbaijan is the only South Caucasus country to have gained membership in the UN Human Rights Council. And despite the repeated criticism of the Azeri authorities for restrictions of media freedoms by specialized international NGOs and inter-governmental bodies such as the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media, which have repeatedly brought to the international community's attention the problems in this sector, the response of the Western states has been muted.<sup>12</sup>

On the diplomatic front, 2007 was the year of business as usual and increasingly *realpolitik* as usual. In May 2007, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mammadyarov, visited NATO headquarters in Brussels for what appeared to be routine talks on the partnership activities. 2007 was the first year of the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan signed in late 2006.

In May 2007, a Caspian energy-focused summit of heads of states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania took place in Krakow. However, the summit appeared doomed to failure and served as a reminder that in the Caspian energy game, the West is very vulnerable to actions of other actors, as three other Caspian states – Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan – signed a joined agreement on the exploration of the Caspian just a few days before the Krakow gathering. And, if *realpolitik* was not evident in the very fact of holding an energy summit aimed at excluding Russia, it was manifested by the conspicuous silence of the summit conveners, Poland and Lithuania, both of which had been on the forefront of pointing to human rights and democracy problems in Belarus and the Russian Federation, on human rights issues in Azerbaijan (and Georgia) at the meeting. This silence was replicated at the October 2007 energy summit in Vilnius.

Finally, since June 2007, Azerbaijan – its problematic human record evidently ignored – was invited, just as its South Caucasus neighbours, to align itself on a

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12 See, for example, *OSCE media freedom representative condemns sentencing of journalist, says Azerbaijan media under serious threat*. OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media press release, Vienna, 23 April 2007. <http://www.osce.org/item/24113.html>.

case-by-case basis with the EU's Common Security and Foreign Policy statements. It should, however, be noted that since that time, Azerbaijan has aligned itself with about one half of those statements, a much smaller figure in comparison to the number of EU statements with which Armenia and Georgia aligned themselves.

The only fallout for Azerbaijan from the *realpolitik* approach of the West was the aforementioned refusal to the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group to consider moving the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations under the aegis of the UN. But, as for the other governments of the countries of the South Caucasus, the balance sheet of relations with the West was very positive for Baku.

### NOT BY REALPOLITIK ALONE?

To complete an overview of Western policies towards the countries of the South Caucasus, the above arguments have to be qualified. Indeed, the Western approach is not as black and white or as simple as suggested by the above narrative. Issues of human rights, democracy, and rule of law occupy a prominent place in most EU and US policy documents related to the Southern Caucasus. Officials like Ambassador Peter Semneby, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, have spoken out on the failures of the three countries to live up to expectations. Ambassador Semneby was one of the first outsiders to visit the closed *Imedi* TV station after it was raided by the authorities during the troubled parliamentary election campaign, and poignantly rejected the official explanation for the raid as did US officials.<sup>13</sup> Compared to his colleague, Ambassador Pierre Morel, who holds the EU Special Representative post for Central Asia, Semneby is far more outspoken on democracy and fundamental freedoms issues, which suggests the entire Western agenda has not been fully captured by the *realpolitik* approach, at the very least on the rhetorical level.

Also, Western democracy-promotion programs continue, despite palpable “donor fatigue,” albeit perhaps with diminished expectations. The US State Department's human rights reports are still scathing of the records of the South Caucasus governments, and underneath the veneer of diplomatic formulations, the election reports of the OSCE/ODIHR reveal very troubled processes in Armenia and Georgia. The issue is more about emphasis and priorities, and in 2007, the priorities of the West appeared to drift away from pressing the countries of the South Caucasus

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13 See “Georgia: Criticism Mounting Over Media Crackdown.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 13, 2007.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/11/0783d13c-3f59-4911-9509-c5ecd373b155.html>

on the need for greater individual freedoms and for truly democratic institutions, such as independent courts.

## EVALUATION OF WESTERN POLICIES

How can Western policies towards the Caucasus in 2007 be evaluated? Western policies towards other post-Soviet countries could provide a useful measuring stick. By this standard, it is clear that the South Caucasus countries are enjoying very good relations with the West. The West is far more critical of electoral processes in countries such as Belarus and is much less engaged in Central Asia than in the South Caucasus (e.g. there are still only two Western embassies – of the U.S. and Germany – in Kyrgyzstan; and Uzbekistan is under sanctions from the Western community). One could compare the erosion of democratic principles and freedoms in Azerbaijan and Belarus and argue that the two countries have been moving in the same direction at approximately the same pace. For example, Freedom House's authoritative *Nations in Transit* study shows a nearly identical decline in Azerbaijan and Belarus (in Azerbaijan the Freedom House index shows a 0.42 deterioration between 1999 and 2007, from 5.58 to 6.00, and in Belarus, Freedom House shows a deterioration of 0.43, from 6.25 to 6.58.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that Azerbaijan's democratic deficit is looked upon with a much less critical eye than other countries', given the country's oil and gas reserves and its cooperation with the West on the anti-terrorism front. Similarly, Armenia's and Georgia's declining democratic ratings are not an obstacle to the inflow of the Western assistance to these two countries. These amounts dwarf the assistance figures to all other post-Soviet states on the per capita basis, as shown in Table 1 and Chart 1.

The Western aspirations for the region presented in the early years of independence provide another measuring stick. The year 2007 marked the ten-year anniversary of then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott's well-known "Farewell to Flashman" speech in which this high-level Clinton administration official laid out four pillars of US assistance to the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia, where the promotion of democracy was the first, with others being the creation of free market economies, the sponsorship of peace and cooperation within and among the counties, and their integration with the larger international community. In this speech, Talbott decried the traditional "Great Game" in the Caucasus and

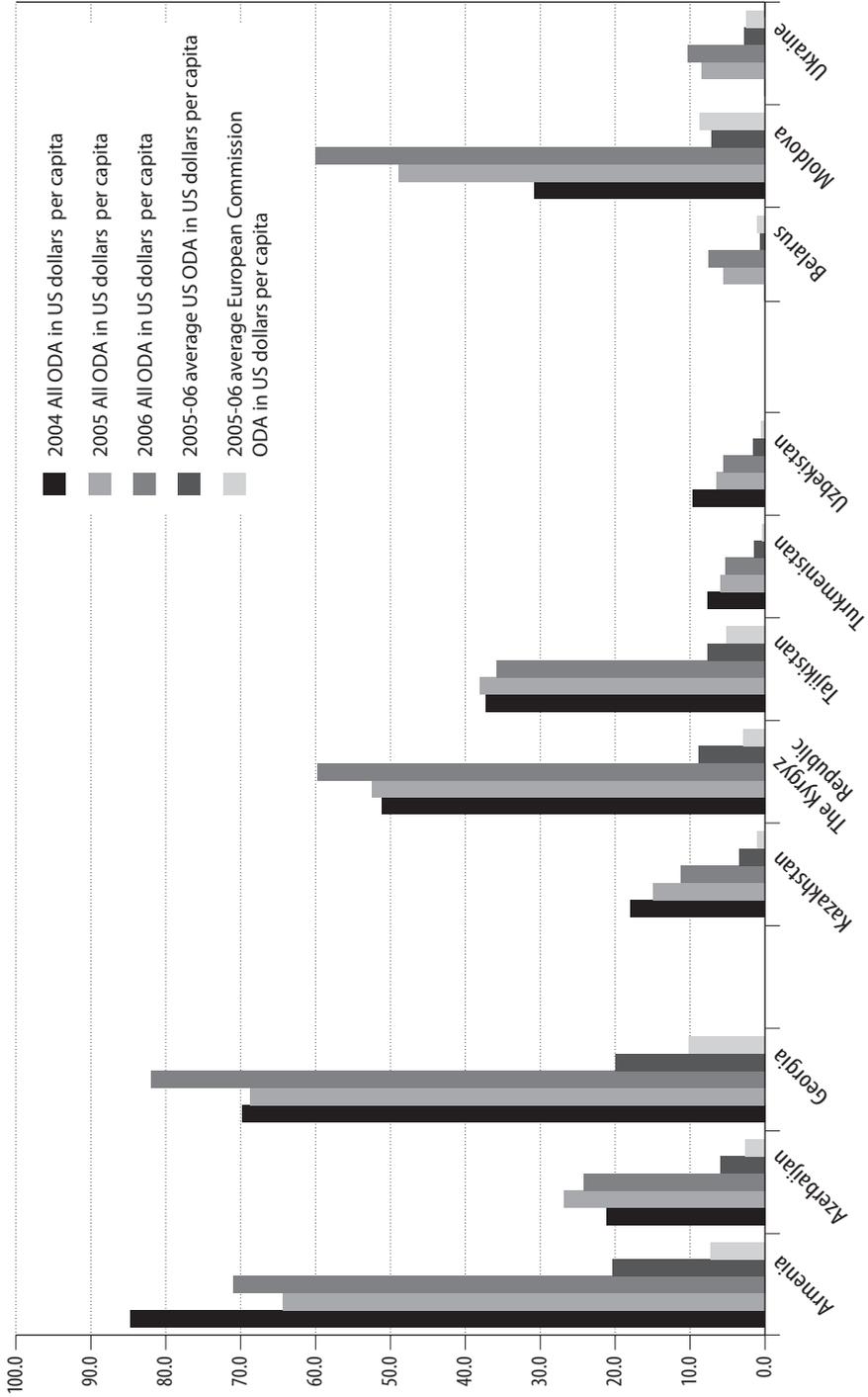
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14 For Armenia, Freedom House shows a deterioration of 0.42 for the same period, from 4.79 to 5.21, while Georgia shows the worst backsliding in the region: from 4.17 to 4.68 or 0.51 on the Freedom House scale.

*Table 1. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) receipts by selected countries of the former Soviet Union (in US Dollars per capita)*

Country	2004 All ODA in US dollars per capita	2005 All ODA in US dollars per capita	2006 All ODA in US dollars per capita	2005-06 average US ODA in US dollars per capita	2005-06 average European Commission ODA in US dollars per capita
Armenia	84.7	64.3	71.0	20.3	7.3
Azerbaijan	21.2	26.8	24.2	5.9	2.6
Georgia	69.8	68.7	82.0	20.0	10.2
Kazakhstan	17.9	14.9	11.2	3.4	0.7
The Kyrgyz Republic	51.2	52.5	59.8	8.8	2.9
Tajikistan	37.3	38.0	35.8	7.6	5.2
Turkmenistan	7.7	6.0	5.3	1.4	0.2
Uzbekistan	9.6	6.5	5.6	1.6	0.4
Belarus	N/A	5.5	7.5	0.7	1.1
Moldova	30.8	48.9	60.0	7.1	8.7
Ukraine	N/A	8.4	10.3	2.7	2.5

*Chart 1. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) receipts by selected countries of the former Soviet Union (in US Dollars per capita)*



Central Asia where “the driving dynamic of the region, fueled and lubricated by oil, will be the competition of the great powers to the disadvantage of the people who live there.” Talbott went on to note US opposition to the “Great Game”-type of thinking and to stress that “our goal is to avoid, and actively to discourage, that atavistic outcome. In pondering and practicing the geopolitics of oil, let’s make sure that we are thinking in terms appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and not the 19<sup>th</sup>. Let’s leave Rudyard Kipling and George McDonald Fraser where they belong – on the shelves of historical fiction. The Great Game which starred Kipling’s Kim and Fraser’s Flashman was very much of the zero-sum variety. What we want to help bring about is just the opposite, we want to see all responsible players in the Caucasus and Central Asia be winners.”<sup>15</sup> In 2007, not only the football calculus of Armenia, Azerbaijan and UEFA but the policy calculus of the actors in the Caucasus was sliding to the very zero-sum thinking that Talbott sought to avoid, and to the one with which Brigadier-General Sir Harry Paget Flashman, to whose spirit Talbott sought to bid farewell, could feel more comfortable with than the democracy-promotion and “colour-revolution” world of just a few years ago. In 2007, the Western actors did not give an appearance of being troubled by this trend.

Hence, from the point of view of the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, there was no reason, on balance, in 2007 for any of the South Caucasus states to complain about their relations with the West, save for the aforementioned decision of UEFA regarding Armenia and Azerbaijan. But, even regarding the latter, UEFA President Michel Platini is on the record as stating that in the future, Armenia and Azerbaijan would simply have to be placed in different qualification groups.<sup>16</sup> And this statement is symbolic of the inclination by Western governments to accept things pretty much the way they are in the region. As already mentioned, one needs to see compelling long-term evidence to conclude definitely that the main Western actors will stick with *realpolitik* as their overarching approach to the region, but 2007 was certainly the year when the spirit of Flashman found its way back into the South Caucasus.

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15 “A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia.” *An Address by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies*. Baltimore, Maryland, July 21, 1997. <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/nis/970721talbott.html>

16 “UEFA and FIFA set to keep Armenia, Azerbaijan apart in future qualifying groups”, *International Herald Tribune*, October 17, 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/10/17/sports/EU-SPT-SOC-UEFA-Azerbaijan.php>

## IMPLICATIONS

- The developments of 2007 suggest that the opposition forces in all three countries cannot expect Western support for other than capacity-building and training programs, some of which may have a long-run impact.
- At the same time, any actions of the region's leaders against the opposition forces invoking a threat of revolutions would seem fully unjustified. The "colour revolutions" are not on anyone's current agenda and raising their spectre would clearly be disingenuous.
- For the West, the pursuit of naked *realpolitik* is fraught with risks. The surrender of the moral high ground is a slippery slope. First, it will render obsolete the institutional frameworks, the conditionality and, thus, the political leverage of many of its assistance programs, such as the Millennium Challenge Account and the ENP. Consequently, the legitimacy of the West as an arbiter that can speak out on the democratic progress of states in the region will dwindle. This, in turn, may result in the disillusionment of the free-thinking part of the population with the West. In Georgia, for example, it could erode the prevailing pro-Western consensus.<sup>17</sup> It may also lead to the erosion of the West's role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is worth remembering the lessons of US involvement in South America: the policy of supporting leaders lacking democratic credentials may have short-term benefits of stability but entails long-term costs as such policy risks engendering the popular resentment against external supporters of such leaders. Second, reflexive anti-Russian policies, especially in Georgia, may not be sustainable. As an Israeli expert on the Caucasus, Brenda Shaffer, has warned, "overall, Russia is strategically inferior to the U.S., but in the Caspian region, *Moscow retains levers of influence that the U.S. cannot, or is not, willing to apply: i.e., Russian "relevant" versus American "relative" power.* Moreover, some actions are available to Russia in the region at much lower costs than they are to the US, such as the use of military troops. Actions resulting from the US-Russian rivalry can be very destabilizing to the region and, as a result, contrary to US goals. Attempts by the US to push Russia out of the region would be equally destabilizing."<sup>18</sup> This analysis suggests that the West's deficit of "hard power" in

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17 On this point, see Ghia Nodia and Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach (eds.) *The Political Landscape of Georgia*. – Delft: Eburon, 2006. – Pp. 72-74.

18 "Prepared Statement of Brenda Shaffer, Ph.D., Research Director, Caspian Studies Program, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University." *The Caucasus and Caspian Region: Understanding U.S. Interests and Policy*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe of the Committee

the region could be compensated by “soft power” such as support for democracy. The Western *realpolitik* is clearly not the way to project “soft power.”

- Yet it should be kept in mind that the year 2007 was only one year. The year 2008 is scheduled to be rich with elections in the region to which the West may react by policy changes, especially if the elections are not seen as democratic. It will also be the year during which the Western countries have to make some sort of a decision on Georgia’s membership in NATO. All of these factors may put Western realism in the region to the test, and it is not inconceivable that by beginning of 2009, the policies of 2007 may be significantly altered.
- This implies that the leaders of the three countries of the region cannot take Western policies of 2007 as set in stone. They will have to be engaged and try to show progress within the Council of Europe, the OSCE and in bilateral programs. In other words, and somewhat paradoxically, to induce the West to maintain the general momentum of *realpolitik*, the leaders of the region will have to make steps towards democracy, even though these steps may go against their own instincts. This is because competition for Western assistance money is stiff. Western resources are moving to the Middle East and other regions of the world on which Western policymakers are currently focused, and if the countries of the South Caucasus do not want to jeopardize their current position as significant beneficiaries of Western assistance, they may actually need to pay attention to the conditions which have to be fulfilled for the funds to continue flowing. As the UEFA has demonstrated, the West is occasionally capable of sticking by principles – albeit inconsistently – and of putting zeroes on the scoreboards of the countries of the region.

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on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, October 10, 2001.

[http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa75632.000/hfa75632\\_0.htm](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa75632.000/hfa75632_0.htm)