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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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BETWEEN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA, OR BETWEEN MOSCOW, WASHINGTON AND BRUSSELS? GEORGIA'S CHOICES¹

By Ivlian Khaindrava²

I was puzzled by the title of this paper at the time it was suggested by the conference organizers. It sounded as if Georgia was located at the interface between the two regions, facing a choice: which one of them to prefer, or in which one of the two the Masters of Destiny will grant Georgia a place in geopolitics. It would be more logical to think that Georgia, being naturally a South Caucasus country, is just as naturally a Black Sea country. Peter Semneby, the Special Representative of the European Union (EU) in the South Caucasus, shared this vision with regard to Georgia, as well as with regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan; he qualified the EU as “a Black Sea power” and a part of the extended Black Sea coastal area, the region embracing the three states of South Caucasus.³

The influential Caucasus-Caspian Commission produced a report intended to stimulate the generation of common policies for the EU and other European institutions with regard to the future region. It suggested yet another global, or rather, globalistic, vision: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, located between the Black Sea and the Caspian, and forming what is commonly designated as the South Caucasus, constitute the core of the Caucasus-Caspian area enclosed in a “shell” (Russia, Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the EU) which is in turn enclosed within the outside world, including the countries of the Near East, the United States, China and India.⁴

By no means questioning the appropriateness of this idea, and deliberately trespassing beyond the framework that has been set for me, I propose to regard herein

1 This paper was published by the CI as: Khaindrava, Ivlian. “Georgia: between the South Caucasus and the Black Sea (in the midst of Moscow, Washington and Brussels).” *Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South Caucasus*. Ed. Alexander Iskandaryan. – Yerevan: Caucasus Institute, 2008. – Pp.48-62.

2 The author directs South Caucasus programs at the Tbilisi-based Center for Development and Cooperation – Center for Pluralism.

3 Semneby, Peter. “European Union – South Caucasus: Prospects for Partnership and Some Challenges.” *South Caucasus – 2006. Main Tendencies, Threats and Risks*. Ed. Gayane Novikova. – Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007. – Pp. 16-22.

4 www.caucascom.org.

the South Caucasus as a sub-region of the Extended Black Sea Coastal Area, with both these projects treated as mutually complementary. With respect to Georgia, however, those projects are not just complementary, but in a way, alternative, as will be shown below.

THE BLACK SEA AND THE SACRED CAUCASUS

The “South Caucasus Region” remains a rather volatile concept, a fact that has been frequently underscored.⁵ This sceptical, or rather, realistic, view is shared by many in Georgia, e.g., by Irakli Menagarishvili, the former minister for foreign affairs, who said “the region of the South Caucasus can actually be viewed as a geographic entity, rather than an economically or politically integrated body.”⁶

Indeed, the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union has proven to be a time of mutual estrangement for the three largest (and most of the smaller) nations of the South Caucasus, the time of searching for new identities in the new reality, as well as for new partners and allies, the time of laying the cornerstones of new statehoods, formulating and implementing national projects. And although the Georgians, the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis have retained certain similarities of their cultures and lifestyles, with a visible Soviet legacy still remaining in things big and small, with the old and medium generations still conversant in the Russian language, the divergences between the three nations are still largely underestimated.

Indeed, these nations:

- have differing historical experience, attaching to their own history a differing, mostly overestimated, significance;
- identify themselves with parts of diverse geographic and sub-cultural communities: some Armenians perceive themselves as related to the Greater Middle East, Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly gravitate to the Turkic world, while Georgians, although having no relational worlds outside the Caucasus, attribute themselves to the Europeans;
- each country has a dominant religion: the Gregorian Church in Armenia, the Orthodox Church in Georgia, Shiite and Sunni Islam in Azerbaijan;

5 Menagarishvili, Irakli. “Three Main Problems of the Region: the View from Georgia.” *South Caucasus – 2006. Main tendencies, threats and risks*. Ed. Gayane Novikova. – Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007. – P.52.

6 *Ibid.*

- Armenia can actually be viewed as a mono-ethnic and mono-religious country, Georgia is quite heterogeneous in terms of ethnicities and religions, while Azerbaijan sits somewhere between the two.

No wonder that foundations that differ that much give rise to differing identities, leaving no room for a common South Caucasus identity. As to the dubious label of “persons of Caucasian nationality,” put into circulation in Russia, it conveys no more common identity than the phrase “persons of Slavic nationality.” With due respect for the linguistic community, I will venture the following parallel: the Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis are only as similar as their languages are, which share some common words but pertain to diverse linguistic groups (Kartvelian, Indo-European and Turkic, respectively) and are completely different and mutually incomprehensible.

Naturally, the carriers of differing identities and differing or even conflicting national projects have divergent temporal and spatial orientations (let us call them “foreign policies”):

- In its quest for national security guarantees, Armenia has established strategic partnerships with Russia and Iran, and is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), although cooperating with EU and NATO within the framework of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), respectively. Armenia calls this its “Complementarity Policy.” Georgia and Azerbaijan have left the CSTO, the former seeking to join the NATO as soon as possible and not concealing its European ambitions, the latter remaining cautious towards both NATO and EU, and maintaining nothing more than stable relations with Russia.
- The Russian military presence is retained in all three countries of the South Caucasus, but to different extents and in different formats. The Russian military base and the presence of Russian border guards in Armenia are fully legitimate. Azerbaijan and Russia have agreed on using the Gabala Radar Station. From Georgia, the Russian bases have been almost withdrawn (“almost” because the one in Gudauta is still there). In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian peacekeepers remain although Georgia refuses to regard them as such.
- Each of the South Caucasus states has had various complications with one of the region’s immediate neighbours: Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Turkey, relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation have gone to

pieces,⁷ while Azerbaijan-Iran relations fluctuate and for various reasons have not attained the level of trusting neighbourly relations.

Finally, relating to each other and to the rest of the world as independent states is a new experience for the young and relatively inexperienced political elites of these South Caucasus countries. This brings to mind the words of an Armenian politician who said that Armenia had only one border and the rest were front lines.

Consequently, prospects for trilateral cooperation or integration in the South Caucasus, with its stalemate in Nagorno-Karabakh, are not discernible, at any rate until a way out is found from that stalemate. Therefore, it is now difficult to attach any meaning, other than geographic, to the concept of the “South Caucasus Region.” The above-quoted Peter Semneby once called the South Caucasus a “broken region” which could only be put back together in a wider format.⁸

Despite its Black Sea-Western drive, Georgia is naturally developing relations with its closest neighbours in the South Caucasus. However, it is constrained to build them with Armenia on a de-facto bilateral basis. This asymmetrical situation (Georgia has more common interests with Azerbaijan), has emerged not through free choice or determined action, but by virtue of the objective reality.

It can be argued that “the Black Sea Region” or “the Extended Black Sea Coastal Area” is a concept at least as volatile as “the South Caucasus Region.” This is true to some extent, since various multilateral formats of Black Sea cooperation, whether economic, political, or military, cannot be regarded as altogether efficient. At the same time, three countries of the Black Sea coastal area - Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania - are NATO members, the latter two also EU members, and all maintain dynamic and good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. Mustafa Aydin, a Turkish researcher, has noted that with the EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU has become a regional player both in the Black Sea region and in the South Caucasus.⁹ As to the Black Sea basin, in the last few years it has started to enjoy increasing attention by the EU and US, having gained special importance due to the transit of energy carriers, and to other things as well. As stated by Judy Garber, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, the US and EU have agreed to conduct coordinated policies in the region with regard to problems such as Iran, non-proliferation of weap-

7 The actual Georgia-Russia war happened after this article was written.

8 Semneby, Peter. “The Role of the EU in the Resolution of Conflicts in the South Caucasus.” *Turkish Policy Quarterly* Vol.5 No.2, summer 2006. – P.20. (www.turkishpolicy.com).

9 Aydin, Mustafa. “Europe’s New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider European Neighborhood.” *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*. London, 2005, no 5. – P.257.

ons of mass destruction, counterterrorism and energy security.¹⁰ Put together, that amounts to an overall security policy. US Senator Richard Lugar was even more specific when he called for supporting Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in their joint transportation and energy projects, as well as for supporting the Nabucco gas pipeline as an alternative to the South Stream pipeline.¹¹ Although officially, Washington has a markedly reserved position with regard to the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway line, the project is underway. The railway line is to start operating in 2010, and is particularly attractive in the light of plans to build a tunnel under the Bosphorus. There are some more common issues in the domains of tourism, environmental protection, etc. Considering the pro-Western policies of Georgia and Ukraine, the Black Sea has the prospect of becoming an inner European sea, like the Baltic; some refer to these developments as to the Black Sea transforming into a “NATO Lake.” Last but not least, Abkhazia is also located on the shores of the Black Sea, and under certain circumstances its path to Europe may coincide with that of the Georgians.

Clearly, if we regard the US and the EU as stakeholders in developments on the Black Sea coast, the factor of Russia should never be underestimated. Itself a Black Sea power, Russia has the most serious interests in the region, pursues them in every way, and never misses the slightest opportunity to extend the spheres and vary the instruments of its influence within the region, and also beyond the region as wide and deep as it can go. Here, too, the operational factors are communications and energy projects and issues. There is also the concept of border security inherent to the Russian mentality, as well as the search for a permanent abode for the Russian Black Sea navy and submarine force. With the approaching Winter Olympics in Sochi, tourism is also rising on the agenda. In light of the looming expiration in 2017 of the Russian-Ukrainian agreement on the Russian naval base in Sevastopol and the pro-NATO aspirations of official Kiev and Tbilisi, on one hand, and Russia’s ever-growing regional and Eurasian ambitions on the other hand, Moscow is keeping up tension around Crimea and the Straits of Kerch, suppressing all attempts at resolving the conflict in Abkhazia within the framework of Georgia’s territorial integrity, and acting most inventively in hindering the joint multilateral military exercises in the Black Sea under the auspices of NATO.¹² In a word, the Black Sea and the

10 Judy Garber: Keynote Address at the Woodrow Wilson Center Conference: “Trans-Atlantic Perspectives on the Wider Black Sea Region.” Washington, DC June 10, 2008 (<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/105827.htm>).

11 Senator Lugar’s speech to the U.S.–Ukraine Energy Dialogue Series, April 15, 2008 (<http://lugar.senate.gov/energy/press/speech/ukraine.cfm>).

12 See, e.g.: Blank, Stephen. “Russia as a Black Sea Power.” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.2,

Black Sea coastal countries (Georgia, Ukraine, plus Moldova which is often viewed as such) that have not yet integrated into European structures today constitute an arena of direct competition between Russia and the West.

The time has come to comment upon the already mentioned alternative character of the “Black Sea” and the “South Caucasus” projects. The “Black Sea trends” are voiced more distinctly in Georgian politics than South Caucasus trends, for very clear reasons: on the one hand, the Black Sea is perceived as the road to the West, while the Euro- and the Euro-Atlantic vector of Georgian policy has overall priority; in fact, in Georgia this priority is a rare occasion of a solid public and political consensus on a specific issue. On the other hand, there are concerns that the South Caucasus may become a closed or semi-closed region, with Russia playing the dominant role, and the three regional countries bound to one another for no special reason. The cause for these concerns has been provided by both Russia and the European Union, initially quite indifferent to the South Caucasus, and subsequently showing a kind of “regionally symmetrical” approach to this sub-region, as if saying: very well, we shall give you some money, but it is up to you, the South Caucasus nations, to sort things out among yourselves and with your neighbours. Settle your conflicts, learn to integrate – in a word, learn to be good, and only then come together and knock on the doors of Europe. There is logic in this approach, but today’s logic does not always agree with a long-term strategy. Quite clearly, this approach caused legitimate discomfort in Georgia: the country felt doomed to either persuade Armenia and Azerbaijan to jointly move towards the EU and NATO, which would be unrealistic from any viewpoint, or else cast its Euro-Atlantic ambitions to the winds and stagnate, which would go against national interests.

Another reason why this “package approach” of the EU to the South Caucasus countries caused disappointment in Georgia was the fact that the EU approach to the Balkans had been just the opposite. There, the EU adopted a step-by-step strategy, and the countries which displayed the strongest drive and highest preparedness to join the united Europe were integrated into the EU one by one. It should, however, be mentioned that the required standards were not the same for everyone in the Balkans either.

Now the EU has made a shift from the “package approach” to the step-by-step strategy. This has been due, firstly, to the crystallization of European interests on the Black Sea, as noted above, and secondly, to the active pro-Western policies of the two Black Sea Coastal states – Ukraine and Georgia. Lithuanian analyst Audrius

Poviliūnas made a comparative study of the ENP Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and discovered that, apart from standard (or stereotypic) formulations, in some issues, the EU has adopted differentiated approaches to the countries of our sub-region.¹³

In the context of international politics with regard to the Black Sea region and Georgia in particular, it seems appropriate to speculate on the subject of “Georgia between Moscow, Washington and Brussels.” I have even put this phrase as the sub-headline of this paper, as I believe that this digression will still keep us on the right track.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY (THE BIG, THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL)

The name of a once popular film came to my mind as a sub-heading for the part of report dealing with the role of the US, EU and Russia in Georgia’s life today. However, when my eyes fell upon an article by Kęstutis Paulauskas entitled, “The Big, the Bad and the Beautiful: America, Russia and Europe’s Mellow Power,”¹⁴ I decided that what fits Lithuania can also be used to describe the roles of the three outside players in the fate of Georgia. In a nutshell, while still faithful to my two-way heading, I offer the reader a choice of whichever they prefer; they can also choose which of the attributes fits which actor. I will now share some fragmentary observations, not necessarily pretending at originality, which seem to be determinant within the current context, and will *pro tanto* make it easier to follow the author’s logic, if any.

Russia

Since the first day of Georgia’s independence, Russia has remained the principal external player directly involved in key events concerning Georgia. It would be unnecessary and impossible to account for every detail of Russian-Georgian relations: that subject has been thought over (mostly badly), spoken about (mostly out of place), described (mostly inadequately), and dealt with (badly, out of place and inadequately), so that sorting it all out is going to be a protracted and painful effort.

The thing that now infuriates Russia especially badly is Georgia’s strive to join

13 Poviliūnas, Audrius. “South Caucasus in the Context of European Neighbourhood Policy.” *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 17, 2006. www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2006/Poviliunas.pdf.

14 Paulauskas, Kęstutis. “The Big, the Bad and the Beautiful: America, Russia and Europe’s Mellow Power.” *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 20, 2008. http://www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2008-20/Paulauskas_ENG.pdf.

the NATO (implying Georgia's irreversible withdrawal from the Russian sphere of influence). Naturally, Russia would not like to relinquish control over the transportation and energy corridors running across Georgia; however, this is just a secondary reason for its attitude to Georgia. There is a third, fourth, fifth, etc. reason too, but I will not discuss them here.

Russia made use of the Kosovo situation to increase its pressure on Georgia; however, it had openly warned Georgia beforehand of its intentions to do so. Russia's main leverage over Georgia (or, if you will, the instruments it uses for blackmailing Georgia) are the unresolved conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Without speculating on which of them is more difficult to resolve, I will only underscore that the Abkhazian coastal area of Georgia holds a special appeal for Russia in a whole range of domains: naval, transportation, tourism, Olympics, etc. However, with regard to "practical" military strategy, the breakaway South Ossetia presents even a greater threat to Georgia's security than Abkhazia.

Russia's long-term strategy with regard to Abkhazia went through two stages. The first one pertains to the late 19th century and can be called "Abkhazia without Abkhazians." At that time, most ethnic Abkhazians were deported to Turkey and countries of the Near East (where they are now known as Muhajirs). However, Abkhazia's depopulation did not last long. Incidentally, in contrast to the widely propagated idea that the Abkhazian component of the local population was replaced by Georgians, facts prove that between 1897 and 1939, the number of Abkhazians remained practically unchanged (56-58,000), the number of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia grew by a factor of 3.5 (from 25,900 to 91,900 thousand), whereas the number of Russians grew by a factor of 12 (from 5,100 to 60,200), and of Armenians, by a factor of 8 (from 6,500 to 49,700).¹⁵

The second stage of Russia's strategy was implemented during the Abkhazian conflict in the late 20th century; it can be called "Abkhazia without Georgians." This time, the population of Abkhazia became over two and a half times smaller, and the number of ethnic Georgians decreased by a factor of four. No one knows how long the current depopulation will last, but I doubt that the expatriated Georgians, if disallowed to return, will be replaced by the Muhajirs' posterity. Russia needs Abkhazia for its territory and water area, and is little concerned about the fate of ethnic Abkhazians or Georgians. Incidentally, this is a case where the interests of Abkhazians and Georgians may coincide.

15 Lezhava, Georgiy P. *Izmeneniya klassovo-natsionalnoy srunktury naseleniya Abkhazii. (Changes in Class and Ethnic Structure of the Population of Abkhazia)*. – Sukhumi: 1989 (in Russian).

The United States

Sergey Markedonov identifies three phases of US policy with regard to the South Caucasus. According to him, prior to 1997, US diplomacy did not regard the South Caucasus as the sphere of its strategic interests, leaving Russia to play the leading role on the CIS territory. After 1997, the Americans enrolled the South Caucasus into the scope of their geopolitical priorities. 9/11 and the subsequent Iraqi campaign stepped up the American involvement in the region, boosting their influence upon the domestic policies of the South Caucasus countries. This was manifest, for instance, in US support for Georgia's Rose Revolution¹⁶.

The basic characteristic of American policy with regard to post-revolutionary Georgia has been keeping its eyes "wide shut" on many of the country's problems, primarily concerning its (under)developing democracy. As far back as May 2005, President Bush, while visiting Tbilisi, named Georgia a "Beacon of Democracy," and since then, the US administration has behaved as if that beacon had been shedding light on something else beside the Tbilisi street named after President Bush. The American glorification of Saakashvili is best exemplified by the words of Richard Holbrooke, former US Ambassador to the United Nations: "in fact, the 38-year-old Saakashvili represents almost everything the United States and the European Union should support."¹⁷ An alternative opinion was brewing in US analytical circles, and after the events of November 7, 2007 it saw light at last. "The U.S. policy of praising Georgian accomplishments in other areas but not criticizing the increasingly clear shortcomings in the democracy area led the Georgian government to believe that they could move further away from democracy without consequences. So they did," wrote Lincoln Mitchell, US expert in international politics who had worked in Tbilisi in 2002-2004.¹⁸ Even an analyst as loyal to Saakashvili as David Smith (Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Washington and Director of the Georgian Security Analysis Center in Tbilisi) suggested that "truncheons and tear gas in Tbilisi on November 7, and the shuttered Imedi television station have faded Georgia's prospects" for obtaining a NATO Membership Action Plan in Bucharest.¹⁹ However, governance methods demonstrated by Saakashvili

16 Markedonov, Sergey. "South Caucasus: Competition of Geopolitical Projects." *Aspects of Regional Security: 2007*. Ed. Gayane Novikova. – Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007. – Pp.81-94.

17 Holbrooke, Richard. "David and Goliath." *The Washington Post*. November 27, 2006. – P.A19.

18 Mitchell, Lincoln. "Beacon of Democracy or Khachapuri Republic?" *The National Interest*, December 13, 2007. <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=16352>.

19 Smith, David J. "Georgia's Railway to NATO Passes through Turkey." *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.3, fall 2007. – P.68 (www.turkishpolicy.com).

on November 7, 2007, while shocking many of his supporters, did not affect US policies. No wonder: the “Beacon of Democracy” is one of the few international phenomena that the Bush administration lists as one of its assets. Admitting that the project turned out less successful than they had been telling everyone for four years would amount to undermining their own prestige on the eve of the US presidential election.

A propos: as a reward for keeping their eyes wide shut, the Americans received an increased Georgian presence in Iraq (2000 troops) at a time when most other countries were moving out.

Though a champion of Georgia’s territorial integrity, the United States had persistently promoted the Kosovo independence project in the centre of Europe all the way until it became reality. Some Americans seem to underestimate the background of the Abkhazian conflict and the existential significance that the problem has for both its parties, including the Abkhazians.

Sometimes one gets the impression that the Americans love Georgia more than the Georgians themselves can and, therefore, the Americans know better what the Georgians must think and how they must behave outside, and, interestingly, also inside their own country. With the help of Congressman Hastings who bore the burden of leading a short-term OSCE Election Observer Mission for a whole two days, the early presidential election of January 5, 2008 acquired “external legitimacy.”²⁰ As to Matthew Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, he is very good at explaining, whenever the need arises, both to his European colleagues and to the citizens of Georgia, that the Georgians’ life is far better than it really is.²¹

The US lobbies for a MAP (NATO’s Membership Action Plan) for Georgia, patrons it in other international organizations, and supports direct financial infusions into the Georgia of Saakashvili at a very enticing level.

In other words, it appears that Georgia would hardly have survived without sizeable US support in the sphere of politics, finance, diplomacy, military expertise, etc. In any case, it would not have had the opportunities or capacities that it now has. At the same time, I believe part of those opportunities has been missed mostly as a result of the Americans’ abovementioned “eyes wide shut” and easy-giving approach.

20 At a press-conference on January 6, 2008, Alcee Hastings called this election “a triumphant step toward democracy.”

21 See, for example, the interview Matthew Bryza gave the Russian Service of the BBC on May 29, 2008: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_7426000/7426403.stm.

The European Union

Although incapable of elaborating a consolidated approach to the Kosovo problem, the European Union has allowed this precedent to exist. The heavy dependence of some EU countries upon Russian energy carriers can impact those countries' policies with regard to Georgia (and not only Georgia).

The failure to have the European Constitution ratified, followed by Ireland's non-ratification of the Lisbon Agreement, prove that rank-and-file Europeans, whether consciously or unconsciously, would like the EU elite to implement policies that avoid creating new headaches on top of the ones Europe already has. It should be noted that the European political elite is somewhat more inclined to heed public opinion at home than do the political elites of the South Caucasus countries.

Since most new EU members are enthusiastic regarding to Georgia's Euro- and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and Old Europe is mostly apathetic or even sceptical, this dualism enables external actors like the US and the Russian Federation to play their own game on the European political field.

European "soft power" is not always as much of a power as intended, particularly with regard to those who fail to or pretend not to understand the European diplomatic language. Indeed, Georgia has blatantly disregarded international recommendations, even the most adequate and unambiguous ones, for example, the November 29, 2007 resolution by the European Parliament on the situation in Georgia, wherein, among other things, Georgia's authorities were called upon "to carry out a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the serious violations of human rights and freedom of the media, notably the allegations of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them to trial and apply the penal and/or administrative sanctions provided for by law."²²

Nevertheless, the apparently growing EU involvement in Georgian affairs is certainly welcome. It is enough to mention Javier Solana's recent visit to Tbilisi and Sukhumi, the regular trips to Sukhumi and Tskhinvali made by European ambassadors to Georgia, and the German plan for settling the conflict in Abkhazia. All this is encouraging because it means that the future of Georgia on the world's political map is not that of the 51st state of the US, or of one more administrative region of the Russian Federation, but that of an EU member country. Another reason to welcome EU involvement is that European standards with regard to small nations

22 European Parliament Resolution of 29 November 2007 on the situation in Georgia.
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0572+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

and ethnic minorities constitute a potentially solid (if hypothetical) foundation for normalizing Georgian-Abkhazian relations based upon a “together-to-Europe” approach.

Now the time is probably ripe to look at Georgia’s place inside the Moscow-Washington-Brussels triangle.

Under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia’s anti-Russian orientation has been the cornerstone of Georgia’s foreign policy, and strangely enough, of its domestic policy too. Such a simplified vision of the challenges faced by the country is not appreciated in Europe, or at least, not appreciated by many Old Europe leaders. Georgian authorities do not merely ignore fundamental European values in their domestic politics, saying one thing and doing another; in fact, they have renounced the very idea of developing democracy or observing democratic procedures. As a result, Saakashvili’s Georgia is becoming more and more similar to Putin’s Russia, a fact that has already been noted by unbiased and knowledgeable analysts and independent international institutions.²³

In the post-revolutionary years, there was a clear misbalance in Georgia’s international policies, whereby all eggs were being put in a well-padded Washington basket in the hope that the Americans would help, drag, squeeze and push through. In fact, those hopes have for the most part come true. The European vector of Georgian external policy only started to gather the necessary momentum immediately prior to and following the Bucharest fiasco at the NATO summit at which the vigorous onslaught by the Americans and their allies on the Eastern EU borders failed to overcome the resistance of the old Europeans, led by the Germans, to giving Georgia a NATO MAP.

A Stopover in Bucharest

I now suggest we stop over briefly in Bucharest during the month of the April, because the story of the MAP for Georgia (and Ukraine) has highlighted many interesting aspects in relations that are now under our scrutiny. Despite the predictably negative position of Germany, the Americans, along with the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Estonians and some other Central and Eastern Europeans, spared no efforts to get MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine. The main argument of the German leadership against granting MAP to Georgia was the existence of unresolved conflicts and the

23 See: de Waal, Tom. “Putin’s Copycats.” *New Statesman*, November 29, 2007. <http://www.newstatesman.com/200711290030>; “Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?” International Crisis Group, December 19, 2007. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5233&l=1>.

absence of any positive developments in them. A few hints were also made at domestic troubles, particularly, at repressive measures against the opposition.²⁴

For the good of the business, it would be better to reverse the order of these two arguments, for the way to the peaceful solution and prevention of conflicts lies through dynamic and irreversible democratization and liberalization of Georgia in all directions, rather than otherwise. Presenting or accepting conflicts as a justification of the authorities' anti-democratic behaviour is a disservice to the Georgian nation, and serves to delay conflict resolution. It was however no great secret that lingering behind the German obstinacy was the oil-and-gas shadow of Russia; in fact Russia made several harsh pre-emptive statements (coupled with equally harsh steps) targeted against the Georgian (and Ukrainian) integration to the NATO. The position of France, also negative, was more straightforward: France made it clear that strained relations with Russia were too high a price to pay for the support of Georgia.²⁵ In fact, this issue, which had to be decided by consensus, drew a clear line between New and Old Europe. Statements made by Saakashvili right before and after the summit were quite typical of this orator. In an interview to *The Financial Times*, he said that any decision made in Bucharest short of awarding Georgia a MAP would be "a great Russian victory."²⁶ However, when the MAP was predictably refused, and all the summit document contained was a "consolation prize," i.e. a statement that Georgia and Ukraine would be admitted to NATO at some undefined later date, Georgia's president proclaimed (at least, for domestic consumption) another great victory of Georgian diplomacy. In a spectacular word-juggling act, the president and his team told the nation that Georgia got even more than it had hoped for, i.e. a definitive promise of NATO membership instead of just an ordinary MAP. What they preferred not to mention was that the final stretch on the way to NATO always lies through a MAP, and that as a result of the Bucharest Summit, Georgia's MAP will be postponed until the NATO Ministerial in December in the best case scenario, and indefinitely, in the worst.

Incidentally, the German three-stage plan of the Abkhazian settlement (the Steinmeier Plan) can be seen as a preventive measure against the American insistence on awarding a MAP to Georgia: we have developed this very comprehensive plan, why don't you try to achieve some progress in its realization so that we can wholeheart-

24 Williamson, Hugh. "Germany Blocks Ex-Soviets' NATO Entry." *Financial Times*, 31 March 2008.

25 "France won't back Ukraine and Georgia NATO bids." *Reuters*, April 1, 2008.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/04/01/us-nato-france-ukraine-idUSL0115117020080401>

26 Williamson, Hugh, *op.cit.*

edly vote for a MAP for Georgia? However, the target of this message it is not quite clearly set: is it aimed at Georgia, or the US, or Russia after all, or at all three?

In any case, the very fact that the central country of the EU has come up with a plan for settling one of the conflicts in the South Caucasus raises the level of EU involvement in the sub-region and the degree of European responsibility for developments in this part of the world.

It can't be (a time of paradoxes)

Summing up this cursory and fragmentary review of recent years' developments around Georgia, I would like to propose a thesis that might sound paradoxical: although Russia is playing the role of Georgia's worst enemy, and the United States, of Georgia's best friend, Moscow and Washington are in fact working together to consolidate antidemocratic tendencies in Saakashvili's Georgia. Washington strengthens these tendencies by giving Saakashvili *carte blanche*, by excusing or encouraging his actions regardless of their overall efficiency. Moscow is strengthening the same tendencies by hostile steps which almost inevitably cause the nation to consolidate around the authorities in the face of an external threat, regardless of the policies implemented by those authorities (the same was happening under Edward Shevardnadze). In the international arena, Russia's pressure on Georgia makes many countries wish to support the weak in its struggle against the strong. This response is especially typical of those European nations which had suffered under Russia's yoke for decades and even centuries, and have first-hand experience of how hard and how important it is to shed it. Saakashvili is very good at understanding current trends and using them to his advantage, although the political stakes are sometimes too high.

As it is, Washington and Moscow have willingly or unwillingly nurtured Saakashvili and allowed him to become an *enfant terrible* for the EU, in particular, for the Old Europe governments. One should, however, bear in mind that the stake Saakashvili is gambling is the fate of Georgia and not just his own.

In conclusion, I shall cite data from opinion polls conducted in March 2008 by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.²⁷ I am quite sceptical about public opinion polls carried out in my country, particularly in the post-election period. In this case, however, I believe that neither the sponsors nor the implementing agencies had any political bias. Another reason to take the results of this poll seriously is its timing: the

27 Religion und Politik in Georgien. Eine Umfrage unter der Stadtbevölkerung. – Tbilisi, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 1 Juli 2008. <http://www.kas.de/suedkaukasus/de/publications/14254/>

poll was done at a time when the presidential election passions had already subsided and the date of the parliamentary elections had not yet been set.

A total of 1000 respondents in three Georgian cities (500 in Tbilisi, 200 in Gori, and 300 in Kutaisi) were asked to assess the influences that foreign countries have upon the public and religious developments in Georgia. Their answers are shown in the table below:

Countries	Positive	Rather + than –	Rather – than +	Negative	Don't know	Sum +	Sum –
US	5.0	29.3	35.4	23.0	7.3	34.3	58.4
Germany	9.7	51.3	16.4	5.7	16.9	61.0	22.1
Ukraine	25.0	60.4	5.8	1.4	7.4	85.4	7.2
Armenia	3.7	37.2	32.3	7.1	19.7	40.9	39.4
Azerbaijan	5.8	26.1	25.0	6.2	16.9	31.9	31.2

When asked how they would like those influences to change (to increase, remain the same or decrease), the respondents answered as follows:

Countries	Increase	Status quo	Decrease	Don't know
US	9.1	22.1	65.4	3.4
EU	48.1	24.0	22.4	5.5

There is no need to comment on this data, they are self-explanatory. One should just note that the polling questionnaire contained questions about attitudes to religion, so that an especially positive attitude to Ukraine could have been determined, amongst other things, by the fact that Georgians and Ukrainians share the same faith, Orthodox Christianity. Meanwhile, the figures for Germany (in this case standing for the entire EU) and for the US in the first table, and those for the EU and the US in the second table, clearly show that anti-American feeling is gaining momentum in Georgia's domestic discourse. These figures will not just surprise the people who glide along the surface of Georgian political reality and limit their experiences of Georgia to visiting government offices and leaving them as optimists, enthusiasts or altruists. Those figures are apparently a complete surprise for the officials sitting

in those offices, who also glide on the surface of reality and are now heading in the direction of the nearest abyss.

The EU remains quite popular in Georgia, although the poll was conducted prior to the NATO Summit in Bucharest; indeed, the position held by Germany (and “Old Europe” as a whole) at that summit could have had a negative impact upon the Georgians’ attitudes to the EU.

In a word, US policy, perceived in Georgia today as one more incidence of the our-son-of-a-bitch doctrine, is now less attractive to the Georgians than Europe’s offer of its values, which one can either accept or reject without risking to lose respect as an individual or as a community.

Conclusion

I believe all the parties would do well by drawing appropriate inferences from the above.