

GEOPOLITICAL STRUGGLES IN THE GEORGIA-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP: THE CASE OF ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

KAREN GHAZARYAN

Yerevan State University

E-mail: kar.ghazaryan5@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

To understand the character of Georgia–Russia relations and the political issues at play, it is essential to analyze the political developments between the two sides, which have not only influenced bilateral relations but also had a broader impact on the entire region. Geopolitical developments, particularly the Ukrainian crisis and the policies of the new U.S. administration, have also had a significant effect on the South Caucasus.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the evolution of Georgia–Russia relations (the case of Abkhazia and Ossetia) and explore why, despite Russia's role as one of Georgia's leading economic partners, there has been little political progress. The paper also discusses the key political issues at the heart of Georgia–Russia relations and potential future developments, considering global geopolitical shifts.

In the course of writing this scientific work, systematic methods such as historical-comparative analysis, event analysis, and content analysis were employed.

Achievements: The dynamic growth of economic relations between Georgia and Russia under the Georgian Dream government has not resulted in any positive political changes for either party. The continued presence of Russian troops in Georgian territories remains a significant obstacle to improving Georgia–Russia relations, with no resolution in sight. The ongoing divergence of views on the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia continues to exacerbate tensions and strain diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Keywords: Georgia, Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflict, bilateral relations, region, multilateral diplomacy, politics.

Introduction

A new stage in Georgia–Russia relations began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. From the early 1990s, Russia actively began initiating processes aimed at restoring its influence and gradually became a major player in Georgia and the entire South Caucasus. By the late 1990s, Russia already had a military presence in Armenia and Georgia and had signed strategic

cooperation agreements in various fields with both countries. Russia also had a significant role in the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts, and the deployment of Russian troops in the region was by no means accidental. The South Caucasus acts as a “buffer zone” between NATO member Turkey and Russia, further increasing Russian interests and stakes in the region.

The South Caucasus also draws the attention of external powers due to its rich resources and important geographical position for economic and other directions. In addition to the above, the U.S. is also interested in the region as part of its efforts to counter Iran's presence and reduce Russian influence, making the region even more strategically important. France, India, China, the EU, and other actors also have vital interests here, often leading to confrontations between great powers, changing the nature of relations between regional countries and key global actors. This transformation occurred in Georgia–Russia relations starting from the years of Saakashvili's rule.

The 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia ended the government of Eduard Shevardnadze, who had maintained relatively good relations with Russia, and marked the beginning of a new phase in bilateral relations. The shift in foreign policy direction initiated by Georgia's leadership in 2003 eventually led to the August 2008 war, after which Georgia lost control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2008, Russian forces advanced to the city of Gori, just a few dozen kilometers from Tbilisi. The "Five-Day War" that began on August 8, 2008, resulted in significant losses, placing Georgia before major economic and security challenges. The perspectives of the two sides on the events of that period are particularly interesting.

Prerequisites of the War

On April 7, 2008, the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* wrote that during a closed session of the “Russia–NATO” Council held in Bucharest, Putin directly threatened his Western counterparts with the annexation of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine should Kyiv become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. In the case of Georgia, according to the publication, the Kremlin leader promised to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia ("Georgia: A Changing Situation", 2007).

This publication represented a media leak by Russian diplomacy—primarily targeting Kyiv and Tbilisi—and the developments that subsequently emerged regarding Georgia (specifically, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' April 16 publication, stating that the Kremlin had decided to begin a new level of cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia) served as further confirmation of this. However, in our case, primary attention should be directed toward a different circumstance. In Bucharest, the United States and its allies decided to be the first to cross the red line by declaring the inevitability of Ukraine's and Georgia's accession to NATO.

All of this could have led to military confrontation, which, from Moscow's perspective, continued to be viewed as the only effective means to deter Georgia from joining NATO. However,

by 2008, the main conclusion was perhaps that the United States and its allies had failed to provide Georgia with security guarantees through the diplomatic pressure exerted on Russia during the ongoing crisis. Evidence of this included the May 6, 2008, statement from the White House calling on Russia to "cease further provocations" against Georgia, as well as the information that emerged on May 14 indicating that the Pentagon might deploy an "X-band" radar—part of the U.S. missile defense system—in Georgia.

Essentially, it was clear that the Russo-Georgian war had been long in the making, and it did not delay its onset.

In this context, on August 7 at 22:35, a large-scale attack began on South Ossetia. Some Russian media outlets claimed that part of the Russian 58th Army unit had started moving from North Ossetia into South Ossetia on August 7. Later, a representative of the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that the previously indicated timeline of the Russian troops' incursion had been incorrectly specified (Spiegel, 2008).

The American Newspaper *the New York Times* reported that on August 7, certain units of the Russian 58th Army moved into South Ossetia from North Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel. Russian Lieutenant General Nikolai Uvarov, in an interview with the publication, presented a possible explanation: the routine rotation of the Russian peacekeeping battalion, along with the need for reinforcement and supply (Chivers, 2008).

At 00:15 Moscow time on August 8, Georgian troops opened fire in the direction of Tskhinvali, and at 03:30 launched a tank assault on the city. Just minutes before initiating the operation, Tbilisi had notified via telephone that it was revoking the ceasefire. During a press briefing held in Tskhinvali, Kulakhmetov told reporters that Georgia had effectively declared war on South Ossetia. At 00:30 Moscow time on August 8, the commander of Georgia's peacekeeping operations, General Mamuka Kurashvili, called on Russian peacekeepers to refrain from intervening in the situation (Allenova, 2008).

The South Ossetian Parliament appealed to the Russian leadership for assistance. At Russia's initiative, on August 8 at 07:00, an emergency session was convened with members of the UN Security Council. Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, declared that the UN Security Council must demand the immediate cessation of violence in South Ossetia (United Nations, 2008). According to Churkin, just a few hours after reaching an agreement, Georgian military units launched a massive assault on Tskhinvali. Georgian peacekeeping commander Kurashvili stated in front of cameras that a decision had been made in Tbilisi to restore constitutional order in South Ossetia, that is, to resolve the protracted conflict by military means (Lenta.ru, 2008). Nevertheless, the Security Council members failed to reach consensus on a joint

statement text. It had already become apparent that the geopolitical interests of the Security Council members were clashing.

The main news on August 11 was that Russian forces had crossed administrative boundaries that were outside of Tbilisi's control and had directly invaded Georgian territory. The Russian army invading from Abkhazia captured the western Georgian cities of Zugdidi and Senaki without resistance. Georgia's Prime Minister Vladimir Gurgenedze announced that Russian troops had also invaded the port city of Poti (Lenta.ru, 2008).

A representative of the Russian Ministry of Defense denied the information regarding the seizure of Poti, stating that Russian troops had never set such a task before themselves (Interfax, 2008).

On August 12, the city of Gori was subjected to bombardments, and by the following day, Russian forces were stationed there—just 76 kilometers from Tbilisi—and were awaiting orders to advance toward the Georgian capital.

On August 16, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the peace plan for the Georgian–Ossetian conflict. Prior to him, the plan had been signed by the leaders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. The signing of this document marked the end of military operations.

To understand the nature of the outbreak of the Georgia–Russia war and the broader pattern of military actions, it is necessary to examine the views of the parties involved in the conflict, including the perspectives of the actors and institutions that maintained the status of “observers.”

Russia's viewpoint: During the military operations, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that the reason for the entry of Russian troops into the conflict zone was Georgia's aggression against the uncontrollable South Ossetian territories and the consequences of this aggression, which included a humanitarian disaster, the flow of 30,000 refugees from the region, the deaths of Russian peacekeepers, and many South Ossetian civilians. Lavrov characterized the actions of the Georgian army against civilians as genocide. He pointed out that the majority of the population of South Ossetia are Russian citizens and that "no country in the world would remain indifferent to the killing of its citizens and the expulsion of them from their homes (Human Rights Watch, 2009)." Lavrov explained the necessity of bombing military infrastructure outside the conflict zone by saying it was used to support Georgian offensive operations. The accusations directed at Russia, claiming it attempted to overthrow the Georgian government and establish control over the country by hiding behind the South Ossetian conflict, were labeled as "nonsense" by Lavrov. He mentioned that the Russian president had announced the end of military operations once security in the region was ensured (Geopolitics.am, n.d.).

South Ossetia's viewpoint: In South Ossetian commentary, the war is seen to have been initiated by Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia, which occurred just before the Olympic Games. The President of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, reported that the first days of Georgia's planned military aggression led to significant losses for the Ossetian people and accused Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili of committing genocide against the Ossetian people. "Only the enforcement of peace brought an end to the senseless and brutal war. South Ossetia will never forget and will never forgive the crimes of Georgian fascism. The Georgian authorities have dug an endless bloody abyss between Georgia and South Ossetia (Kokoyti, 2008)." Overall, the South Ossetian side refers to all of the Georgian side's claims as "cynical lies" and accuses Georgian high-ranking officials, including the president, of organizing war crimes. South Ossetian officials hope to see the Georgian government in the defendant's chair (Geopolitics.am, n.d.).

Abkhazia's viewpoint: On August 22, the head of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Abkhazia, Anatoly Zaitsev, declared that after Georgia had completely captured South Ossetia, it planned to begin offensive military operations against Abkhazia three hours later (Interfax, 2008). According to the Abkhazian viewpoint, the entire organization of the military operations was carried out by Georgia, and the operations would not have been limited to South Ossetia alone. In this way, Georgia was inclined to solve its territorial issues. This viewpoint is rejected by the Georgian authorities.

Georgia's viewpoint: According to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's version, the beginning of the military operations was a reaction to a South Ossetian provocation and an immediate threat of a Russian attack. According to him, Georgia had reliable information, obtained from intercepted phone conversations, which indicated that by the morning of August 7 (Regnum, n.d.), "the Russians had already crossed the Roki Tunnel, and thus entered South Ossetian territory."

Abkhazia and Ossetia in the Georgia-Russia Relations Agenda

The Russia-Georgia "Five-Day War" brought new realities not only to bilateral relations but also to the region. Against the backdrop of the break in diplomatic relations and strained ties between the two countries, there was considerable activity from the West, aiming to involve the region in regional developments and weaken Russian influence. Many believed that the "Five-Day War" sealed the fate of Saakashvili and his political team, sentencing them to defeat in the upcoming elections, as the idea was gaining wide support among the people that the war and the loss of territories were primarily the result of the Georgian authorities' short-sighted policies and the failure of their poorly calculated foreign policy. The manipulation of the Abkhazian and Ossetian issues and the accusations against Russia of violating international norms became a priority for post-war Georgia, often fueled by the West, especially Washington.

In essence, the Georgia-Russia conflict and the "Five-Day War" were largely an information war that has continued since the cessation of hostilities and remains ongoing, as long as a resolution to the situation has not yet materialized. Even the characterization of the conflict itself reflects bias. In this case, we refer to the war as Russo-Georgian, which is also the stance of Georgia and the West, while Russia calls it South Ossetian, emphasizing that it was between South Ossetia and Georgia, and Russia was merely forced to become involved in the conflict.

In the process of resolving the Georgia-Russia war, the key issue after the end of the conflict became the legal status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On August 14, 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced that the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be determined by their people and Russia (Kommersant, 2009). As a security guarantor in the Caucasus, Russia intended to agree with the decision they had adopted. On August 21, Abkhazia appealed to the Russian President, requesting recognition of Abkhazia as an independent republic (Interfax, 2008). On August 25, the Russian State Duma unanimously recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Rossiskaya Gazeta, 2008). On September 9, 2008, Moscow established diplomatic relations with Sukhum and Tskhinvali, promising to station around 4,000 Russian soldiers in the republics' military bases. At the same time, a fund for victims of the conflict was created. In response, on August 28, the Georgian parliament held an emergency session and adopted a document determining the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of Georgia, declaring them "occupied territories."

This process coincided with military operations. Thus, between August 14-16, 2008, the heads of states involved in the military operations signed the plan for peaceful resolution of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict ("Medvedev-Sarkozy plan"), which officially confirmed the cessation of hostilities in the conflict zone. The conflict became political and diplomatic, transitioning into the realm of international politics. However, the situation was not settled by this. On August 16, the railway bridge in Georgia's Kaspı city was blown up. Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs Shota Utiashvili blamed the Russian troops for the action, while Russia issued a denial (Lenta.ru, 2008). A statement was released that on August 17, Russia began withdrawing its troops from South Ossetia. Later, Dmitry Medvedev announced that the withdrawal would be completed on August 18 (Lenta.ru, 2008). On the same day, South Ossetian forces entered Akhagori (Leningori), thus South Ossetia came completely under the control of the unrecognized republic's authorities. By August 19, Russian forces began to withdraw from the Georgian city of Gori, and by August 22, most Russian troops were expected to leave Georgia. Especially on August 21, a Russian convoy, heavily equipped with military vehicles, left Gori and moved from Tskhinvali towards Vladikavkaz. On August 20, South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity signed a decree lifting the state of emergency. The threat of military operations was now a thing of the

past, and the conflict moved to the platform of information warfare, where effective diplomacy had to be employed. Serious steps were already being taken through diplomatic levers in the face of the conflict and mutual accusations, which were mostly characteristic of the Georgian side, while the Russian side largely remained in a position of denial. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that no more than 500 Russian peacekeepers would remain in the South Ossetian security zone. By August 22, Russian troops had completely left Gori (UAClub, 2010). However, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia did not end there, as the question of the country's western regions remained. On August 23, General-Colonel Nogovitsin announced that Russian units would patrol the port of Poti. On the same day, the Georgian parliament unanimously adopted a decision to extend the state of war in the country until September 8 of that year, justifying it with the claim that as long as even one Russian occupant stood on Georgian soil, Georgia would remain in a state of martial law (Geopolitics.am, n.d.). Overall, during the military operations, Georgia held high hopes that the West—especially the USA and NATO—would stop the Russians and intervene in the conflict, but this did not happen. The first material assistance from the United States came only on August 24, when the American naval ship "USS McFaul" arrived at the Batumi port with humanitarian aid for Georgia (Interfax, 2008). Two more ships, "USCGC Dallas" and "USS Mount Whitney," were expected to arrive. Prior to this, American support for Georgia had been arriving by military aircraft. Notably, by August 25, nine NATO ships were located off the coast of Georgia in the Black Sea, operating under the guise of "Humanitarian Assistance to Georgia." However, all this seemed to be a delayed response, and little changed in favor of the Georgian side. The delayed Western support did not stop Russia from sending its troops into Georgian territory, which the Russian side exploited and directly intervened in the conflict. On August 25, a certain tension was noticed. Boris Chochiev, the Minister for Special Affairs of South Ossetia, announced that Georgian armed forces had entered the village of Mosabruni (Akhalgori). In such a situation, and under the conditions of the presence of Western military forces, Georgia responded with a diplomatic counterattack, which, in essence, was predictable. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, Grigol Vashadze, in accordance with the decision of the Georgian Parliament, announced the severing of diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation, while maintaining consular relations. To this day, diplomatic relations between the two countries have not been restored. Immediately following this decision, Georgia declared the 1994 Moscow Agreement null and void, and also announced the cancellation of the simplified visa regime for Russian citizens entering Georgia. On September 1, 2008, the Georgian authorities declared the cessation of Russia's peacekeeping mission in the territory of Abkhazia and called for the withdrawal of all peacekeeping forces from the region (Simonyan, 2008). Georgia unilaterally withdrew from a number of conflict resolution agreements in South Ossetia, notably withdrawing

from the Joint Control Commission (JCC), which had been established based on the 1992 agreement and was later dissolved. The documents signed within the framework of the JCC, as well as the mandate of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (the document that confirms their rights), were also annulled (Geopolitics.am, n.d.). After these events, on September 2, Temur Yakobashvili, the Minister for Reintegration of Georgia, announced that Russian military forces had definitively lost their peacekeeping role in Georgia and must immediately leave the territory of the republic (including Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Georgia officially informed the Russian Federation about the severance of diplomatic relations (Lenta.ru, 2008). Russian President Dmitry Medvedev also expressed his stance regarding the leadership of the Republic of Georgia: "As for the Georgian government, the current administration is bankrupt, and President Mikheil Saakashvili does not exist for us; he is considered a 'political corpse (Kremlin, 2008)'." On September 3, the closure of the Russian embassy in Georgia, including the consulate, was announced. The Georgian Parliament, in an emergency session, annulled the state of emergency and general mobilization across all of Georgia's territory, which had been in effect since August 9, and declared a state of emergency in regions where Russian forces were stationed. On September 4, it was announced that President Mikheil Saakashvili had signed a decree simplifying the visa regime for Russian citizens, a provision that had been delayed on August 30. On September 9, after the exchange of notes on the severance of diplomatic relations, Sergey Lavrov clarified the status of Georgia and the permissible number of Russian troops in the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: "Now they are in the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the order of the President of the Russian Federation. With the signing and ratification of the agreement, they must remain within the boundaries of international law. They should not be peacekeepers, but armed forces from another country, which must ensure security at the request of the receiving side." Later, there were violations, about which both sides issued informational statements. On September 13, the process of withdrawing Russian troops from the Georgian port of Poti began. By the end of the day, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Russian peacekeepers had moved to the Poti-Senaki border and left Georgian territory, in accordance with the preliminary agreement reached on September 8 between the Presidents of Russia and France, Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy. On September 23, 2008, the first group of European Union observers arrived in Georgia, consisting of 28 people. By October 1, 200 EU observers were to be stationed in the areas adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in accordance with the Russian-Georgian ceasefire agreement. Starting October 1, the EU-appointed observers began their work in the conflict zone with the goal of withdrawing Russian troops from Georgian regions. The Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs later announced that Russian troops had not allowed monitoring groups to enter buffer zones. Similar reciprocal accusations had been made multiple times (Radio Svoboda, 2008).

Although the sides were not taking real constructive steps, they were trying in every way to convince the international community of the justice and reasonableness of their actions. On September 27, 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov addressed the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly with a statement: "Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is the only possible way to ensure security, given the chauvinistic attitude of the Georgian leadership towards them (UN News Center, 2008)." According to the "Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan," an international consultation on Abkhazia and South Ossetia was supposed to take place, which was scheduled for October 15 in Geneva (the overall negotiation process was conditionally referred to as the Geneva Consultations). However, the first meeting was a failure, as the Georgian side refused to sit at the negotiating table with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For the second round, scheduled for November 18, the European side proposed an interesting working format: two working groups were formed, with the countries participating without their own national representation. One group dealt with issues of stabilization and security in the region, while the other focused on refugees and humanitarian aid. Although no concrete solutions were reached, it could still be considered a success that the parties tried to find a solution together to address the created situation. The third stage of discussions took place on December 17-18. The Europeans proposed the "Document on Prevention of Incidents and Conflicts." However, once again, no significant changes occurred. Despite the efforts of France, the EU, the UN, and the OSCE to engage in discussions regarding the status of the newly recognized republics, there was no change in the situation (Batrak, Derry, Neef, & Schepp, 2021).

On February 17-18, 2009, the final stage of the Geneva consultations was held. The outcome was the adoption of a concrete document for the first time, which would ensure mechanisms for specific cooperation in the region. Although the adopted document does not carry legal obligations, it is still considered very important. According to the terms of the document, representatives of the institutions should meet weekly on security issues in the conflict zone. This process was meant to help coordinate actions, exchange assessments, and make forecasts (Dzhioyev, n.d.). In general, it can be said that after the end of the conflict, no significant progress occurred in the negotiation process, which still persists today. This is conditioned by the specific interests of global geopolitical players related to the South Caucasus region. Georgia will do everything possible to restore its territorial integrity, and this issue is not subject to discussion as long as the Russian side continues its aggressive rhetoric. Russia must withdraw its forces from Georgia's internationally recognized territories and refrain from interfering in Georgia's internal affairs, as declared by Saakashvili during a meeting with Georgian media in March 2009. Thus, on August 12, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee representative, Secretary of State Joseph Biden, expressed the opinion that "...Russia could become the side that suffers the most if the war

continues." He emphasized that as a result of the conflict, US-Russia cooperation in nuclear energy, the suspension of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Sochi Olympics would be affected (Regnum, 2014). On the same day, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili announced that Georgia was leaving the CIS, and on August 14, the Georgian government confirmed this decision. NATO had its specific interests in Georgia as well.

On August 17, 2008, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, while in Tbilisi, stated: "...If Georgia wishes, the decision of NATO's Bucharest summit will not change, and NATO's doors will open for Georgia." On September 4, an official White House representative announced that Ukraine and Georgia had met the necessary requirements for NATO membership, and the decision to join would be made in December. On September 15-16, a NATO summit was held in Tbilisi, with Georgian President M. Saakashvili and NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer opening the event. During the summit, the Secretary-General stated that the events of the past month could have hindered Georgia's NATO accession efforts, but still, the "alliance" doors remained open for Georgia. No other country has a veto in this matter. On September 19, 2008, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that Russia would face a military response from the US if it attacked Georgia after NATO membership. In September 2009, the EU special commission investigating the armed conflict concluded that Georgia initiated the military operations, but the use of force, including against Russian peacekeepers, was not justified under international law. The version propagated by the Georgian leadership and pro-Georgian sources about Russia's alleged significant forces invading the territory of South Ossetia by August 8th was not sufficiently confirmed by the commission's view. Since 2009, there have been periodic attempts to resume air traffic between Russia and Georgia at least at the statutory level, but all of them were unsuccessful. In August 2010, Russia reopened direct air communication with Georgia.

On February 17, 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared Saakashvili *persona non grata* for Russia. On October 11, 2010, Georgian President Saakashvili signed a decree, stipulating that a 90-day visa-free regime would apply to Russian citizens registered in Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria when crossing the border. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarded this decision by Georgia as a provocation, as it unilaterally declared a visa-free regime for Russian citizens residing in the North Caucasus. In February 2012, Georgia approved a visa-free regime for short-term travel to Georgia for Russian citizens. From that day onward, all Russian citizens were allowed to freely enter Georgia and stay there for 90 days without a visa. However, Georgian citizens still require a visa to travel to Russia, which they obtain at the Swiss consulate, as there are no diplomatic relations between the countries.

In April 2010, the Georgian Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee addressed the legislatures of 31 countries, requesting the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as occupied territories

of Russia and condemning the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in those territories. In March 2011, the Russians demanded the annexation of the village of Aibga, located in the northwestern part of Abkhazia, to the Krasnodar region. During the Soviet Union, the village was divided into two parts, with the southern part under Georgian SSR control and the northern part under the Russian SFSR. Later, the Russian authorities also demanded 160 kilometers of land from the Gagra district in Abkhazia. Despite all this, the Abkhaz authorities were able to prove that the southern part of the Aibga village had been part of the Georgian SSR, and the village was partially annexed to the Russian Federation. On June 11, 2014, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili denied BBC News's statement that Russia "is not interested in relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Members of the opposition United National Movement Party criticized Garibashvili's statement, considering it contradictory to the protection of the country's national interests (Geopolitics.am, n.d.). In November of the same year, Russia signed an agreement on "alliance and integration" with Abkhazia, and in March 2015, with South Ossetia (International Crisis Group, 2016). These serious internal and external shocks occurred during Mikheil Saakashvili's years in power, which, alongside great enthusiasm, were filled with significant losses. In the presidential elections held on October 27, 2013, the candidate supported by Saakashvili's party, Davit Bakradze, was unable to win (Kldiashvili, 2012). This was the most loss-filled period for independent Georgia since the collapse of the USSR.

Achievements

Thus, it can be concluded that the Georgian side still cannot take significant steps to exert pressure on the Russian side that would lead to actions aimed at the return of territories. The Western response to the Georgia-Russia war had a more economic sanctions nature, which caused significant losses to Russia, but at the same time, there was no other progress towards resolving the issue. To this day, Georgia's membership in NATO and the EU remains a dream, which is also a result of Russia's policy of deterrence. It is also a fact that after Saakashvili, anti-Russian sentiments have gradually decreased. There were some impulses that brought new signals of tension between the sides, such as the incident after the 2019 Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy, yet the Russian side has somewhat increased its influence in the region and in Georgia. Despite numerous documents that make Russia a security threat to Georgia, in the economic sphere, Russia has already been one of Georgia's leading economic partners for several years, and in 2022, it even rose to the second position, only behind Turkey. Against the backdrop of developing economic relations between the sides, there is no noticeable activity in political relations. Georgia's position on the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has not changed, and officials regularly state on various platforms that there cannot be political dialogue with Russia as long as Russian troops are present on Georgian territory. Georgia is as much as possible refraining

from participating in formats that are initiated or involve Russia. In particular, Georgia did not join the “3+3” format, which has already hosted several meetings of foreign ministers from six countries in the region. The format includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, and Turkey.

Georgia's exclusion was also mentioned by Georgia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maka Botchorishvili, at the Antalya Diplomatic Forum on April 12, 2025, emphasizing that as long as Georgian territory is under Russian occupation, Georgia will not participate in such a format. The Karasin-Abashidze format, as well as meetings mediated by Switzerland and discussions on various issues, had a positive effect on the process of resolving Georgia-Russia relations, but politically, the views of the parties continue to remain contradictory. Russia, which recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, does not retreat on this issue, and the same applies to Georgia. It is hard to say whether the sides could restore relations politically without this territorial issue, but it is almost impossible to imagine the resolution of their political relations without resolving this issue. The position of the West, particularly the USA, in the context of regional policy is also important here, which, under the new administration of President Trump, seems less favorable for Georgia. President Trump has shown, through various actions and statements, that he holds a softer position towards Russia, which differs from the policy of former President Biden’s administration. The development of events in Ukraine is also important, where it seems that Ukraine is losing its strategic positions. The Russian side also has significant losses, but in the context of positional advancements, it appears that Russia's successes will become more noticeable starting from 2025. The issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although initially more international in nature, can now be said to have a more regional character and is gradually becoming a frozen conflict. Of course, there is a possibility of it heating up, as is the case with all conflicts, but due to the geopolitical realities, the policies of the new US administration, and the stance of the USA on the Ukrainian issue, we consider this less likely.

The West’s certain passivity and lack of full support for Georgia’s western integration and NATO and EU membership has created new problems for Georgia. Yes, there is talk of full support from the West, but practical steps have been insufficient. A vivid proof of this is that since the start of the conflict in 2008, there have been declarations about the importance of Georgia's membership and practical steps, but to this day, Georgia is not a member of Western institutions. Despite the adoption of the “Foreign Agents” law by the Georgian authorities in 2024, followed by parliamentary elections and the removal of Salome Zourabichvili Salome from the presidency, which attracted harsh criticism from Western countries and the EU, Georgia’s membership in NATO and the EU remains a priority, as enshrined in Georgia's Constitution. The nature and developments of Georgia-Russia relations directly affect the entire region both economically and politically, so the stability of these relations also serves the national security interests of Armenia.

After the Artsakh war, a new reality has emerged in the region, which could potentially change the nature of the West-Armenia relations, making them deeper, and this may also affect Russia's regional policy decisions and its relations with Georgia.

ԳՐԱԿԱՆՈՒՅԱԿ ՑԱՆԿ

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ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆ-ՌՈՒՍԱՍՏԱՆ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԱՃԽԱՐՀԱՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՅՔԱՐԸ. ԱԲԽԱԶԻԱՅԻ ԵՎ ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ՕՍԵԹԻԱՅԻ ՕՐԻՆԱԿԸ ԿԱՐԵՆ ՂԱԶԱՐՅԱՆ

Վրաստան-ՌԴ հարաբերությունների բնույթը և քաղաքական խնդիրները հասկանալու համար անհրաժեշտ է հասկանալ, թե կողմերի միջև քաղաքական հարցերում ինչպիսի գարգացումներ են եղել, որոնք ազդել են ո՛չ միայն երկկողմ հարաբերությունների վրա, այլ ամբողջ տարածաշրջանի վրա: Աշխարհաքաղաքական գարգացումները ուկրայինական ճգնաժամով և ԱՄՆ նոր վարչակազմի քաղաքականությամբ պայմանավորված ազդել են նաև Հարավային Կովկասի վրա: Հոդվածի նպատակն է քննարկել, թե ինչպե՞ս փոխվեց Վրաստան-ՌԴ հարաբերությունների բնույթը (Աբխազիայի և Օսեթիայի օրինակը) և ինչո՞ւ Վրաստանի առաջատար տնտեսական գործընկերներից ՌԴ-ի հետ հարաբերություններում քաղաքական առաջընթաց չի նկատվում: Քննարկում ենք նաև Վրաստան-ՌԴ հարաբերություններում քաղաքական խնդիրների բնույթը և աշխարհաքաղաքական գարգացումների ֆոնին հնարավոր գարգացումները:

Այս գիտական աշխատությունը գրելու ընթացքում օգտագործվել են համակարգված մեթոդներ՝ պատմական-համեմատական, իրադարձությունների և բովանդակության վերլուծություն: *Ձեռքբերումները:* Վրաստանի և Ռուսաստանի միջև տնտեսական հարաբերությունների դինամիկ գարգացումը Վրաստանի «Վրացական երագանք» կուսակցության կառավարության օրոք չի հանգեցրել քաղաքական դրական փոփոխությունների՝ ոչ մի կողմի համար: Ռուսական գործերի շարունակական ներկայությունը Վրաստանի տարածքներում լուրջ խոչընդոտ է Վրաստան-Ռուսաստան հարաբերությունների բարելավման համար՝ առանց որևէ լուծման հեռանկարի: Աբխազիայի և Հարավային Օսեթիայի հարցերում կողմերի հակադիր կարծիքները շարունակվում են սրել լարվածությունը և խանգարել երկկողմ դիվանագիտական հարաբերություններին:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Վրաստան, Ռուսաստան, Աբխազիայի և Հարավային Օսեթիայի հակամարտություն, երկկողմ հարաբերություններ, տարածաշրջան, բազմակողմ դիվանագիտություն, քաղաքականություն:

РЕЗЮМЕ

ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ СТОЛКНОВЕНИЯ В ОТНОШЕНИЯХ ГРУЗИИ И РОССИИ: СЛУЧАЙ АБХАЗИИ И ЮЖНОЙ ОСЕТИИ КАРЕН КАЗАРЯН

Для понимания характера отношений между Грузией и Россией и политических проблем, с ними связанных, необходимо проанализировать политические события, которые оказали влияние не только на двусторонние отношения, но и на всю региональную ситуацию. Геополитические события, особенно украинский кризис и политика новой администрации США, также оказали значительное влияние на Южный Кавказ. *Цель* данной статьи — исследовать эволюцию грузино-российских отношений (на примере Абхазии и Осетии) и выяснить, почему, несмотря на роль России как одного из ведущих экономических партнёров Грузии, политического прогресса достигнуто мало? В статье также рассматриваются ключевые политические вопросы, лежащие в основе отношений между Грузией и Россией, а также возможные будущие развития событий с учётом глобальных геополитических изменений."

В процессе написания научной работы использовались системные методы, такие как историко-сравнительный анализ, анализ событий и контент-анализ. *Достижения.* Динамичное развитие экономических отношений между Грузией и Россией при правительстве «Грузинской мечты» не привело к позитивным политическим изменениям для обеих сторон. Продолжающееся присутствие российских войск на территории Грузии остается серьезным препятствием для улучшения отношений между Грузией и Россией, и в будущем не ожидается разрешения этого вопроса. Противоречивые взгляды сторон по вопросам Абхазии и Южной Осетии продолжают усиливать напряженность и осложнять дипломатические отношения между двумя странами.

Ключевые слова: Грузия, Россия, конфликт в Абхазии и Южной Осетии, двусторонние отношения, регион, многосторонняя дипломатия, политика.

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