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FROM THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THE POST–SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATIONS OF THE RULING ELITE IN GEORGIA: A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK

The main purpose of our tour is the scientific understanding and, therefore, leading to a common denominator stories which is an extremely difficult and painful process to form the post–Soviet foreign policy orientations of the ruling elite in Georgia. During the last 22 years since regaining its independence the main goal of Georgian foreign and internal policy was to dissociate itself from its Soviet past and escape from Russia's historic, strategic and civilizational space. Similarly, it often alienated itself from the post–Soviet institutions and regional groupings like the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Customs Union, etc. dominated by Moscow. In this context, the important task of clarifying the specific reasons for the refusal of Georgia to participate in the significant post–Soviet education – the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The solution of this problem is determined by the current Russian–Georgian relations. After the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia last question of membership in the CIS was firmly out of the agenda. The problem permanently was transferred to history. However, the future settlement of interstate relations between Moscow and Tbilisi seems possible if only set forth in the previous article, the negative trends and phenomena will be overcome by both sides.

The disappearance of the Soviet Union has been facilitated by the fact that the legal consolidation of this fact was presented not as liquidation, and as a transformation of a pre–existing state into a new quality – Commonwealth. The process of «construction» CIS passed without Georgia, as its new political elite, fundamentally refusing to take part in the post–Soviet integration projects, strongly rejected

the possibility of their country's membership in the organization. Given that by virtue of Russia will play a dominant role in the CIS, the Georgian public opinion strongly exaggerated the idea of «decolonization» and «deoccupation» of Georgia that is breaking all former ties with Moscow.

The collapse of the USSR has created a situation of political and legal uncertainty in relations between the former Soviet republics. Union within the CIS to determine the potential shape and direction of the new interaction. The Russian leadership hoped to keep the CIS format integrated security system, which implies the existence of a military – strategic space. Initially, even the hope of saving smoldering within the CIS unified the army. This, however, was not fulfilled. Relations between Russia and its closest neighbors soured. New states began an intensive search for new political and economic allies in the world, especially among the EU and NATO. The Russian leadership is satisfied that at first giving Georgia itself, yet tried, whenever possible, do not let her out of their influential area.

Russian policy in the Caucasus in the 1990s was often inconsistent and contradictory. This is partly due to nomenclature crisis that struck the Russian political elite after the collapse of the USSR. Internal political struggle in Russia led to the formation of two roughly equal camps with nearly opposite to the foreign policy program. Each of the two groups had one of the branches of the government and tried to pursue their own policies, regardless of the other one. This state of «dual power» aggravated inevitable bureaucratic «tug of war» over whether, in whose competence will be security issues and who will finally control over foreign policy. Most important of all was the fact that due to the collapse of the Soviet armed forces commanders of all ranks have gained a certain degree of independence. The final result was that because of the constantly arising between them and civil official contradictions decision–making process was temporarily torn apart.

It is better to state that the Russian military played the most prominent role in the South Caucasus in 1992–1993. The control forces were scattered throughout the region, and they had a significant impact on local policy makers. Significance of Russian generals relied solely on the most important asset in any conflict situation, namely the control of arms and other military infrastructure. Authorities then established independent states often acted as unimportant Russian military customers. Consequence of the new political alignment was

the transformation of Defense Minister P. Grachev to the main adviser to President Boris Yeltsin of Caucasus Affairs[1]. A key element of Russia's influence in the South Caucasus began delivering armament. Militarization of Russia's Caucasian policy, thus led to the politicization of the Russian military in that region.

Compared with the military, whose strength was based on the physical state on the ground, the Russian Foreign Minister clearly weakened because its employees were initially virtually incompetent in Caucasian affairs. One result of the lack of embassies, experts or trusted contacts was the reduction of diplomatic activity before the 1993 bilateral negotiations in Moscow and the occasional trip to the region Minister A. Kozyrev or his deputies.

Russian policy towards the CIS countries in the 1990s determined confrontation between the two tendencies. Part of the politicians considered it necessary to maintain the Commonwealth as a cohesive geopolitical association with the Russian prevailing role. Preservation and strengthening of multilateral cooperation within the CIS was seen as the main direction of Russian policy. Another approach, most peculiar to the Russian neoliberals, recognized the inevitability of geopolitical and geo–economic diversity and pluralism in the post due to formerly known limitations of political and economic resources of Russia itself. Until the mid–90s, however, only the first line prevailed, largely due to previous relapses, «imperial» policy of the Kremlin. There was a lasting impression that the CIS system was considered as an effective instrument for the preservation and strengthening of Russia's influence in relation to other members of the Commonwealth, which were considered as «satellites» and had to follow the common policy produced in Moscow.

The inevitable consequence of this policy was the realization that Russia should play the role of a great power in the Caucasus. The aim of the Russian leadership, apparently was to try every possible way to restore the Kremlin's influence throughout the region and prevent conflicts in South Caucasus gaining momentum shifting to the phase, which inevitably would have opened the floodgates for the intervention of the third, more powerful extra–regional forces.

The Russian political elite may have made a contribution to return the former communist leader that of the Caucasian republic Eduard Shevardnadze to Tbilisi in March 1992. After the violent overthrow of

[1] Д. Тренин, Интересы безопасности и политика России в кавказском регионе. Спорные границы на Кавказе, Москва, 1996, с. 111.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, other governments were reluctant to recognize the legitimacy of his successors. The former exiled president Gamsakhurdia was a motley group intended to use the name of the former head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry to legitimize its semi–criminal regime, including abroad. The ex–president of Georgia and his supporters – «Zviadists», unanimously asserted, that the organizers of the coup clearly ruled «the hand of Moscow»[2]. It is possible that a number of senior politicians in Moscow indirectly, and some Russian military were directly involved in the chain of events that eventually led to a military coup and the removal of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. While it supposed to happen, certainly, it was wrong to say that Shevardnadze was put to power as a «puppet» of the Kremlin. We can't deny the fact that «personnel policy» of Moscow against Shevardnadze was in those circumstances the best possible choice for preserving fast melting of Russian influence on Georgia. This position is shared by the former military elite of the Russian Defense Ministry, which ran a special policy in the South Caucasus, and for Yeltsin there was no visible reason not to trust her in this respect. Russia recognized Georgia's independence and appointed an ambassador in October 1992. Russia's official position was that security was needed for a stable Georgia along Russia's southern border.

Shevardnadze's diplomatic contacts and personal relationships with many of the world's leaders ended Georgia's international isolation in 1992. In March, Germany became the first Western country to post an ambassador to Georgia; Shevardnadze's close relations with German foreign minister Hans–Dietrich Genscher were a key factor for that decision. By December 1992, six countries had diplomatic missions in Tbilisi: Germany, Russia, China, Israel, Turkey and the United States.

Among the former Soviet republics, the neighboring Transcaucasian nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan have special significance for Georgia. Despite Georgia's obvious cultural and religious affinities with Armenia, relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan generally have been closer. Economic and political factors have contributed to this situation. First, Georgian fuel needs to make good relations with Azerbaijan vital to the health of the Georgian economy. Second, Georgians have sympathized with Azerbaijan's position concerning the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over of Nagorno–

[2] Независимая газета, 21 февраля, 1992.

Karabakh because of similarities to Georgia's internal problems with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both countries have cited the principle of «inviolability of state borders» in defending national interests against claims by ethnic minorities. In February 1993, Georgia, ruled by Shevardnadze, concluded a far–reaching treaty of friendship, cooperation, and mutual relations with Azerbaijan, including a mutual security arrangement and assurances that Georgia would not re–export Azerbaijani oil or natural gas to Armenia. Turkey and Azerbaijan exerted some pressure on Georgia to join the blockade of Armenia.

Armenia maintained fundamentally good relations with Georgia and Shevardnadze signing a friendship treaty with Armenia in May 1993. The main incentive for this policy was the fact that blockade of Armenian transport routes and pipelines meant that routes through Georgia were Armenia's only direct connection with the outside world.

Of all countries, Georgia's relations with Russia were both the most important and the most ambivalent. Russia (previously the Soviet Union) was deeply involved in the conflicts in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and in 1993 Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze also declared Russia the protector of their interests. Thus Russia seemingly holds the key to the resolution of those conflicts in a way that would avoid the fragmentation of Georgia.

According to the point of view shared by the majority of Georgians, namely Kremlin Center provoked all the conflicts in the post–Soviet Georgia. It certainly had an obvious exaggeration, since the potential for conflict in them had largely been laid before the formation of the USSR. In addition, the Georgian position towards this issue can be regarded as the desire to absolve themselves of all responsibility. Georgian society reacted to any manifestations of non–Georgian identity within Georgia inadequately, hysterically, thereby contributing to further radicalization of the separatist movements. Russia really had a great influence on the events in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which largely contributed not to discharge. Armed conflicts in these regions had been considered by the Georgian side as a conflict primarily with Russia.

In early summer 1992, Russia was really on the edge of war with Georgia over South Ossetia. Some Russian officials (Khasbulatov, Rutskoi, Gaidar) declared harsh statements against the Georgian side[3]. Conflict situation was temporarily resolved through tripartite

[3] Независимая газета, 23 июня, 1992.

Russian– Georgian–Ossetian «Dagomis agreement» signed in June 1992 cessation of hostilities in South Ossetia opened for official Tbilisi way to get part of the Soviet weapons based on the «Tashkent Agreement» (May 1992). Georgia, unlike the other former Soviet republics, declared that procedure rather complicated by the fact that it was not a member of the CIS. In Dagomis, Shevardnadze obviously persuaded the Russian president of the desire for an early entry into the CIS, but only after the consolidation of his power in the country. At this meeting, Boris Yeltsin, in his turn, assured the Georgian leader to help Georgia become a member of the UN[4]. Georgia became the 179th member of the United Nations in July 1992; it was the last of the former Soviet republics to be admitted. Of course, some politicians and military officials of Yeltsin's inner circle alarming position of the Georgian leader, who, despite promises, did not hurry to join his country to the CIS and under various pretexts, delayed the solution of this extremely important issue (from the Russian point of view). Opposing this context, the Abkhazians, apparently had all the chances to rely on a more careful attitude of the Russian militaries[5].

The war in Abkhazia re aggravated Russian–Georgian relations. With regard to this conflict Russian leadership apparently did not have a unified and coherent policy. It was quite clear what was at Russia's interest in the Caucasus: to see Georgia as strong and united or weak and disjointed. There was a confrontation between Yeltsin, fully focused on Shevardnadze, who saw him as their political ally in Georgia, and Ruslan Khasbulatov, standing on a pro–Abkhazian positions[6]. Deteriorated anti–Russian sentiment in Georgia after the first failure of Georgian troops in Abkhazia. Russian military was accused of helping the Abkhaz separatists. Georgian parliament demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops from the country. Under such circumstances similar statements about the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia were calculated at putting pressure on Russia in order to get her to help guide military victory of Georgians in Abkhazia. The Georgian side realized that it does not have enough troops to reverse the military situation in their favor. In this scenario, the theme of Georgia's participation in the CIS had

[4] Независимая газета, 27 июня, 1992.

[5] С. Лакоба, Абхазия де–факто или Грузия де–юре? О политике России в Абхазии в постсоветский период 1991–2000 гг., Саппоро, Хоккайдо, 2001, с. 52.

[6] В. Митяев, Грузино–абхазский конфликт и гражданская война в Западной Грузии. Грузия: проблемы и перспективы развития, Т. 2–й, Москва, 2002, с. 51.

been subject to much political bargain between Tbilisi and Moscow. At the top of debate, even Shevardnadze said that his country would never be a member of the Commonwealth[7]. At the same time the Russian leadership matured quite clear its geostrategic plan – to force Georgia to join the CIS through the war in Abkhazia.

There are several versions of the commonplaces about the role and participation of the Russian leadership in the development of the Abkhaz conflict. According to one of them, the Kremlin had linked the changing attitudes to Tbilisi on the participation in the CIS with Shevardnadze coming to the power. Without realizing his plan, he set forth with a change of sentiment in Moscow against the Georgian state. Russia had begun to provide substantial military assistance to the Abkhaz side. Another version claims that the decision to help the Abkhaz separatists took no political leadership of Russia, and a certain portion of its generals, who allegedly believed Shevardnadze one of the main culprits of the collapse of the Soviet Union[8].

Military defeat in Abkhazia, Georgia, triggered a fierce but short–term anti–Russian campaign, though, forcing the Georgian leadership to a significant rapprochement with Moscow. Rapprochement with Russia gave hope to preserve Abkhazia within a single Georgian statehood. Therefore, it was important for Tbilisi to confirm the position of the Russian Federation recognizing the integrity of Georgia within its previous borders, as well as favorable mediation Kremlin negotiation with Abkhaz leaders.

With the beginning of October 1993 under the influence of the recent fall of Sukhumi, in the conditions of an anti–government uprising development in Samegrelo under the leadership of the former President Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze apparently assessed the situation as catastrophic for his government and frantically searched a way out. It was no longer just about saving Abkhazia within Georgia, but also about how to prevent the Gamsakhurdia's come back to power in Tbilisi.

Possibility of Georgia to join the CIS was one of the few trump cards that had been in the hands of Eduard Shevardnadze. Radical solution to this problem was to preserve their power. Another, no less important point, which was agreed was to maintain the continual presence of Russian troops in Georgian territory. Such commitments

[7] Независимая газета, 22 сентября, 1993.

[8] Шакарянц С., Политика постсоветской России на Кавказе и ее перспективы, Ереван, 2001, с. 131.

were given by Shevardnadze on October 8, 1993, during his visit to Moscow. «Zviadists» were in close proximity to the second largest city of Georgia – Kutaisi. As a result, railway Batumi–Poti–Tbilisi–Yerevan was completely blocked. The country was clearly at the edge of collapse. Thus, agreed between Tbilisi and Moscow, wording of urgent measures «to eliminate military reasons preventing the normalization of the situation on the railway lines»[9], standing commitment to assist the Government of Russia Eduard Shevardnadze military assistance against the broad offensive «Zviadists» in western Georgia. After this agreement the ex–President Gamsakhurdia's armed actions supporters lost the total meaning: Russian troops took custody of settlements and other strategic sites, and any attempt to «Zviadists» meant to take their inevitable clash with the army of the Russian Federation. Russian Marines entered the center of rebellion – Zugdidi, to completely demoralize «Zviadists» and provide a quick and final victory of the pro–government forces.

A more obvious retrospective analysis of the events shows that the Russian military assistance played the most important role. Weakening central leadership of Georgia, Boris Yeltsin's refusal to assist perishing Shevardnadze regime inevitably led to his downfall. In this respect, Shevardnadze traveled to Moscow immediately after the defeat in Abkhazia and took a sharp turn in policy towards Russia. Supporting the regime of Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia had to pay entry into the CIS. The highest point in the development of friendly relations between the former Soviet republics – Georgia and Russia – was the visit of Boris Yeltsin to Tbilisi on February 3, 1994 and the subsequent short–term rapprochement between the two countries. Moreover, the fact that this could not prevent the political opponents of the Russian president, it led to the removal of R. Khasbulatov and A. Rutskoi from power in October 1993.

Georgian political elite felt too weak to withstand the pressure of Russia. Symbolic act of joining the CIS was mostly observed from Georgian political spectrum as the beginning of the end, as surrender to Russia, gradually being followed by a refusal from the rest of Georgia's independence. Shevardnadze's agreement on the presence of Russian military bases on its territory, was considered as the de facto loss of sovereignty[10]. Moreover, becoming a member of

[9] Дипломатический Вестник, 1993, № 21–22, с. 26.

[10] Г. Нодиа, Образ Запада в грузинском сознании. Этнические и региональные конфликты в Евразии, Общ. ред. Б. Коппитерс, Кн. 3–я, Москва, 1997, с. 167, 171.

the CIS, Tbilisi did not receive any explicit guarantees regarding the Abkhaz and South Ossetian problems[11]. Immediately after joining the CIS, place chief of the Georgian security services took I. Giorgadze, creature of the Russian special services. Soon another Moscow protegee got appointment, General V. Nadibaidze, who headed the Ministry of Defense of Georgia.

Thus, Eduard Shevardnadze, being almost in despair over the loss of Abkhazia, subjected to strong pressure from the military forces «Zviadists» in western Georgia, as well as political pressure from Moscow. The point was to watch how he either will be forced to resign voluntarily or be forcibly replaced. Instead, the «old white fox» survived – and put Georgia in the CIS in November 1993 and in February 1994 signed an agreement with Russia, which provided space for five Russian military bases in Georgia and the joint protection of its borders.

Union with Russia was all the more humiliating for majority of Georgians that it had concluded with the state that they were not without reason, accused of aiding the Abkhaz separatists, had effected almost complete expulsion of the Kartvelian population of Abkhazia. However, Eduard Shevardnadze and his supporters in no way agreed upon the «pro–Russian» politicians label. At that time, the West was still distracting problems from Yugoslavia and throughout Eastern Europe, informally recognized Georgia as part of Russian. The Georgian leadership could determine its policy, only on the basis of this fact. In addition, fear of neo–communist restoration in Russia, the West in 1992–1996 actively supported Boris Yeltsin that he would not do it. Then in the relation with his northern neighbor Georgia he had to adhere to the policy of the West, and in fact «pro–Russian» impulse stemmed from there. Temporary concessions Russian neo–expansion in Caucasus Shevardnadze did not worsen his relations with Western leaders, but rather strengthened them. Western community, in fact, saved the hands of Moscow regime of Eduard Shevardnadze, and thus paved the way for pro–Western in fact the «Rose Revolution».

Thus, in late 1993 – early 1994 favorable conditions were created for a radical improvement of relations between Russia and Georgia on the previous constructive cooperation within the CIS. However, this potential had not been developed sufficiently. Due to the Moscow political and military promotion, Eduard Shevardnadze's power in the country was stronger, in 1995 he was elected the president of

[11] Независимая газета, 12 октября, 1993.

Georgia. Gradually weakened motives drove him to join the CIS, to seek an alliance with Russia, to a significant rapprochement with Moscow on political and military basis.

Essentially, in February 1994, the government of Georgia, signed Russian– Georgian «Treaty of friendship, good–neighborliness and cooperation», to persevere in Kremlin to support the restoration of their full and undivided control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Using Russian central military authorities in Chechnya, a new reason was given to the Georgian establishment to demand from Russia a military support. Chechen syndrome had strengthened Yeltsin's desire to rely on Shevardnadze in Caucasian affairs. In September 1995, a high–level Russian delegation led by Prime Minister V. Chernomyrdin visited Tbilisi. The parties entered into a number of important agreements. During this visit, it was agreed that the Russian leadership would help the Georgian side in restoring its control over Abkhazia. Instead, official Tbilisi agreed to a large–scale presence of Russian army in Georgia. Political reconciliation between Georgia and Russia marked complete land and sea blockade of Abkhazia, the implementation of which took the Russian «siloviks»[12]. Due to fierce obstruction of the Abkhaz side, however, the Russian Defense Ministry failed accurate action for the return of Georgian refugees to Sukhumi[13]. After this event, the accusations against Russian peacekeeping forces, which highlighted the futility of their stay in Georgia, became regular in the Georgian press, political and government circles. However, charges against Russian demanded that it obviously could not accept and therefore perform which was the basis for a new round of anti–Russian sentiment in Georgian society. Once the first Chechen war ended in full failure for the Kremlin, the Georgian government had turned away from its northern neighbor, looking again at the NATO countries. Trumped strategic partnership came to its end. To the maintenance of anti–Russian propaganda by the Abkhazian question the government of Georgia went to a sharp curtailment of military ties and cooperation with Russia. In November 1998, the Georgian side refused to join protection of its borders with Russian border guards. In November 1999, during an OSCE meeting in Istanbul, Russia agreed to withdraw its troops from Georgia. Another

[12] В. Чирикба, Грузино–абхазский конфликт: в поисках путей выхода. Грузины и абхазы: путь к примирению, Москва, 1998, с. 80–81.

[13] Д. Иоселиани, Три измерения: Мемуары, Вечерний Тбилиси, 23–25 февраля, 2011.

milestone in the aggravation of Russian–Georgian relationships was the introduction of unilateral visa regime on the border with Georgia in December 2000. But the Russian authorities have refrained from similar actions against the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was extremely negatively perceived in Georgia, as a policy aimed at consolidating the division of the country[14]. Thus, relations between official Moscow and Tbilisi steadily became complicated, and after the «Rose Revolution» it finally became openly hostile.

In its turn, the Western powers, being leaders in Georgian elementary order, began to show an interest in it as a transit country, providing access to energy resources of the Caspian Sea. West dramatically increased aid in the provision of economic and financial spheres in Georgia. Official Tbilisi headed by Eduard Shevardnadze, feeling such an interest by the part of the leading Western countries, resumed his former pro–Western course. The previously achieved results in terms of convergence of Georgia with the CIS and Russia were seriously eroded. The main reason we denote by the Georgian leadership role in the West at the expense of the unity of the CIS and relations with Russia were also significant economic difficulties of the latter, which did not have sufficient financial resources to provide the needed assistance to Georgia. Moreover, the financial crisis in Russia in August 1998, noticeably shook the budget sector of Georgia, the Georgian currency devaluation contributed the significant growth of prices. The Georgian public opinion about the Russian authorities dealt with another severe blow.

Within the CIS managed to mitigate the effects of the collapse of the USSR, but integration purposes controlled mainly from Moscow were not achieved. For the majority of the CIS member states, this organization was rather a form of civilized divorce of the former Soviet republics. In Russia, on the contrary, it was very much like to see in the shape for their future reintegration into the new «union». However, over the past two decades on the basis of the CIS it failed to create any well–functioning economic union, not even the effective free trade zone. Neither successful cooperation in the military–political sphere nor fully implemented Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (1992), dramatically reduced the Russian military presence in the Commonwealth, it was an unrealized concept of joint protection of borders. Geopolitically the main long–term geostrategic interests of Russian task failed to be solved – to transform the CIS into a political union of states.

[14] Свободная Грузия, 7 декабря, 2000.

Since the early 2000s, Russian policy towards the CIS designated important changes. Russia ceased to insist on endowing of CIS supranational powers, against which strongly objected the majority of participants. Awareness of the geopolitical and cultural– historical peculiarities Russia revived interest in the Eurasians' ideas, which currently form the basis of important aspects of Russian foreign policy. Russia has firmly committed itself to the implementation of diverse asymmetric integration projects with a number of partners in the CIS. The treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union is proof of this.

Modern Georgian political thought persistently exaggerates the idea of Georgian access exclusively to west, the European community of nations. «Georgia, – proclaimed the president Mikheil Saakashvili, – is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries»[15]. Georgia's accession to the CIS now communicates only with the personality of Eduard Shevardnadze, only with his previous political commitments. After the «Rose Revolution» the need for the new Georgian leadership in the CIS disappeared, and it hastened to leave the Commonwealth, «offended» after «August war» in Russia. As far as it's the post–Soviet construction period, it finally and irrevocably turned into a nominal organization, a «club of presidents».

«Rose Revolution» put an end to the post–Soviet era in the history of Georgia. Despite the transformation changes of power in Georgia there is clearly visible continuity in foreign policy concerning relations with the West. Mikhail Saakashvili continued to target the foreign policy of the country, primarily to the United States. This foreign policy of the former President Saakashvili (2004–2013), the entire apparently, in the short term would not experience significant changes as the main strategic goal of Georgia – integration into the European and Euro–Atlantic community, remains a priority for the new head of the state G. Margvelashili. This line of the Georgian leadership for the period, no doubt, however, the orientation towards the West is due, above all, the advantages of economic and political nature that can give Georgia the U.S. and the EU. Georgia became the first country in the CIS, which was to sign the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with the North–Atlantic Alliance in 2004[16]. Two years later, in 2006, after successfully completing the IPAP, Georgia was granted Intensified Dialogue, the final step before

[15] M. Muller, Public Opinion toward the European Union in Georgia. Post–Soviet Affairs, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2011), pp. 64 –65.

[16] For more information, see: http://www.nato.int/issues/ipap/index.html, accessed at: 17 April 2011.

receiving the Membership Action Plan (MAP). In 2006, after completing the IPAP, Russia imposed several economic and energy sanctions on Georgia. Russia was Georgia's number one trading partner before 2006, accounting for almost 20 percent of Georgia's total trade[17]. Georgia – is the key to the Caucasus, so Russia under any circumstances can't voluntarily relinquish control over this country. Despite losing most of its global influence as a result of the Soviet Union's disintegration, Russia still remains the most influential political, military, and economic player in the South Caucasus. For Russia, Georgia was the most difficult state to cooperate within the CIS. Georgian political elite considers modern Russia as a direct successor to the «Soviet empire» and any attempt to integrate the former Soviet Union under the auspices of the Eurasian Economic Union (or any other post–Soviet regional organizations) perceived in the country «Golden Fleece» as a direct threat to national Georgia's independence. In addition, the problems associated with the settlement of the Georgian –Abkhazian and Georgian–Ossetian conflicts became a stumbling block in Russian –Georgian relations. Kremlin, acted as guarantor of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from official Tbilisi, once again appeared in the image of a political opponent and enemy of the Georgian state. Therefore, it is natural that between power elites of Russia and Georgia, there is a serious and prolonged crisis of confidence.

Summing up the above mentioned facts we can conclude we that finding a certain equilibrium or «modus vivendi» between the parties to the conflict in the Caucasus is extremely difficult, if not impossible, because of the thrust of their desire to achieve maximum benefits for themselves. The Georgian side is clearly disingenuous when demanding from Russia to abandon the «imperial» policy in the region, recklessly believing that in this case it will be able to restore its «small empire».

[17] See: Department of Statistics of Georgia // www.statistics.ge.