

The Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan and Georgia

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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA

Special Editor: Lili Di Puccio

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Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Seeking a Balance

By Rashad Shirinov, Baku

Abstract

Azerbaijan's initial preference for the West has evolved into efforts to balance among the established democracies, Russia, and Iran. The growth of the country's energy wealth has given the country's elite greater confidence that they can pursue an independent foreign policy course. The most symbolic manifestation of this new policy was the decision to join the non-aligned movement.

Introduction

Last year Azerbaijan celebrated twenty years of independence. In 2012, the Azerbaijani people will mark twenty years from the moment when the first (and probably the last) democratic elections of modern times took place in their country. Starting in 1993, Azerbaijan became an authoritarian country with a powerful presidency at the top of the executive branch, which completely monopolizes power and blocks legislative and judicial independence.

In this overview I will provide a holistic picture of Azerbaijani foreign policy as run and advocated by the government and also will describe different views from inside society on what the government does. Also I will explain the underpinnings of the state's behavior vis-à-vis the rest of the world. My argument here is that it would be difficult to understand Azerbaijani foreign policy and relations with other countries without taking into account the nature of the regime and the domestic political context of the country.

What Has Influenced Azerbaijan's Relations with the West?

Azerbaijan's foreign policy throughout the last twenty years has gone through oscillations that can best be described as a "policy of balancing", which reflects realist as opposed to idealist stances. There was a short period in Azerbaijan's foreign policy (between 1992 and 1993) when the new democratic leadership of the country based its policies on extremely idealistic and nationalistic principles. The Popular Front government under Elchibey emphasized Western integration at the expense of relations with Russia and Iran. This was a foreign policy based on the ideals of anti-colonialism and ethnic brotherhood. Russia and Iran were seen as two evil powers ready to encroach on Azerbaijan's sovereignty at any moment.

The defining feature of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after 1993 was that it never took sharp turns. Its steadiness reflected the fact that it expressed the will of the same political force since 1993. However, with the change from father to son (from Heydar Aliyev to Ilham Aliyev) in 2003, we can see a different approach to foreign policy that will be examined later in this article.

Thus, Azerbaijan's foreign policy, like that of many countries, is tightly linked to its domestic context and reflects the features of the political regime inside the country. Azerbaijan's foreign policy is based therefore on two issues: national interest and the interests of the ruling elite. Certainly, sometimes these two overlap and succeed in working together. At the beginning of independence, the ruling elite under Heydar Aliyev opted for a pro-Western orientation (joining the NATO Partnership for Peace, Council of Europe and other Western institutions). This stance promoted the broader national interest of European integration, while also providing the ruling elite with useful Western and international recognition as well as opportunities to realize economic benefits from the production and sale of oil and natural gas on global markets. The newly independent Azerbaijani ruling elite had just left the cage of the Soviet Union, so it made sense for them to look to the West, which had always seemed attractive from the "prison of nations." Energy contracts with big western companies provided the desired security for the regime and helped to establish necessary networks. During these first years, Azerbaijan's dependency on the West was visible in the behavior of the country's leaders: they were very attentive to everything spelled out in the West. Heydar Aliyev once joked that "the Politburo is in Washington nowadays." The survival of the ruling elite was closely connected to its relations with Western powers interested in oil and gas and Azerbaijan accepted without much discussion all the conventions, treaties and agreements in order to become a well-mannered member of international and, most importantly, Western institutions.

In the 1990s Azerbaijan took seriously the obligations it made to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and, later, the Council of Europe (after 2001). Also, Heydar Aliyev and his establishment paid considerable attention to using the OSCE and CoE as international forums to promote the country. The Lisbon Summit of the OSCE in December 1996 was remarkable in this respect. The Azerbaijani government managed to include in the resulting resolution a clause which confirmed "Azerbaijan's territorial integrity." This success was widely celebrated by the govern-

ment and the local mass media promoted stories about “the great victory of Azerbaijani diplomacy.” At the time, the opposition criticized and ridiculed this exaggerated feeling of self-importance.

“It’s All Our Domestic Issue”

A turning point came when Azerbaijan’s ruling elite started to become more self-confident and more independent. The rule of Ilham Aliyev has brought a different logic into the management of the country and its foreign relations. As one observer correctly explained: “Under Ilham Aliyev the country is run like a huge company. Heydar Aliyev was a statesman, Ilham Aliyev is a businessman. This is the biggest difference between policies before and after 2003.”

Heydar Aliyev was an old-time politician, who appreciated the political arena, enjoyed playing political games, and, most importantly, knew how to calibrate political action to achieve the desired result. Ilham Aliyev does not engage in political struggle; as a man of business, he is more excited about profit, efficiency and results. Under his rule, the authorities’ political restrictions and the changing economic situation effectively restrict opposition parties and civil society organizations. The current government possesses huge energy resources that it can use to mitigate any foreign or domestic risks.

After 2003 the role of European institutions in Azerbaijan’s foreign affairs decreased significantly. President Ilham Aliyev made it clear that “Europe does not wait for us with outstretched arms” and Azerbaijan’s entry into either the EU or NATO has never been a realistic possibility.

During this period, Baku was particularly displeased with Western criticism of Azerbaijan’s poor human rights record, widespread corruption and lack of good governance. Sometimes the government became paranoid and blamed western governments for critical articles published in those countries’ newspapers. For instance, the US came under attack by Azerbaijan’s official, pro-governmental media after a *Wall Street Journal* article disclosed the existence of extremely expensive property belonging to the president’s family. Recently, the speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament accused Germany of “being envious of Azerbaijan” following the NDR channel’s short program criticizing both the Azerbaijani government for violating the property rights of people in Baku on the eve of the Eurovision song contest to be held in May 2012 and the European Broadcasting Union for condoning these illegalities.

Regarding other countries’ comments and interventions on the issues of democratization and human rights, Baku’s position is clear: “Human rights are a domestic issue.” The West can do little in response. As a senior offi-

cial from the European Commission said off-the-record, “the EU has no leverage on Azerbaijan, because the government of Azerbaijan is not in need of money as they are in Georgia, Armenia or Ukraine. Thus, conditionality is not working in relation to Azerbaijan.”

Russia and the “Hegemony of Culture”

After Azerbaijan started to benefit from the influx of oil revenues, it has moved closer to Russia in terms of its political culture. Russian understandings of “sovereign” or “managed” democracy reflect the thinking of the Azerbaijani ruling elite in terms of its preference for avoiding any external interference into domestic issues based on “excuses of human rights and democracy.”

Russia as the “other side of the balance” became more attractive vis-à-vis the West, although the Azerbaijani establishment realizes that it cannot trust Russia. The Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 confirmed that these fears are legitimate. The Russian leadership made it clear “who’s the boss in the Caucasus” and the Azerbaijani leadership did not make any statement in support of Georgia, although it allegedly tacitly sent humanitarian support to its besieged neighbor.

Another sign of Azerbaijani–Russian rapprochement was that both of President Aliyev’s daughters married Russian businessmen of Azerbaijani origin and live in Moscow. Some observers say that these family ties are a factor that makes Azerbaijan vulnerable in its relationship vis-à-vis Moscow.

Relations with the US

Although the relations between the US and Azerbaijan have been cold in recent years, the ruling elite in Azerbaijan enjoys the current situation in which the US states its priorities for Azerbaijan as “energy, security and development” in that particular order. As US officials point out, development includes building institutions and improving governance. The rhetoric shows how policies have changed throughout the last decade and how the current US administration prioritizes security and energy over other issues. This stance has provoked constant criticism from civil society groups and opposition parties in Azerbaijan, who also blame Western governments and institutions for failing to defend Azerbaijani rights more forcefully.

In 2010 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Azerbaijan allegedly to improve relations between the two countries. Clinton’s message was interesting, since she did not meet opposition parties but did find time to sit down with youth activists. She sent the signal that the US has long-term plans for Azerbaijan, but for now the Americans will not “rock the boat” and will work with the current government.

Why Non-Alignment?

One of the most demonstrative signals of Azerbaijan's new foreign policy orientation was its decision to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in May 2011. Until then Belarus was the only CIS country which was a full member of this group.

Azerbaijan's action was a symbolic move to show two things. Firstly, it sought to demonstrate to the West that it should not push Azerbaijan too much in terms of human rights and democracy. The timing of the decision to join NAM followed the European Parliament's resolution condemning political persecutions in Azerbaijan. Secondly, as Hikmat Hajizade, a prominent Azerbaijani opposition thinker says, this foreign policy move was designed to address the fears of Iran about the potential use of Azerbaijani territories or airspace for possible attacks against Iran.

Conclusion

Oil money and the leverage energy provides in general made Azerbaijan reconsider its relations with the outside

About the Author

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Georgia's Identity-Driven Foreign Policy and the Struggle for Its European Destiny

By Kornely Kakachia, Tbilisi

Abstract

Georgia, nestled between the Black Sea, Russia, and Turkey, and surrounded by the Caucasus Mountains, occupies a unique geographic space, which gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. Like other Eastern European nations in the middle of transition, it is trying to construct a collective identity which can be projected toward the international arena. While Georgia's foreign policy is considered pro-western and multifaceted, it is not always based on principles of pragmatic expediency. For example, Georgia pays little attention to areas outside the Western world, including the region where it is located. This is largely because its gaze is entirely fixed upon the West. Since the dynamics responsible for this policy grow out of the social, economic, and cultural transformation which Georgia is currently living through, this article argues that Georgian foreign policy priorities are mostly identity driven. It also claims that the predominant idea of the Georgian elites—a group that sometimes acts on behalf of the state—is that Georgia rightly belongs in the West. This devotion to the idea of full-fledged Euro-Atlantic integration as a “sacred destiny” has significant foreign policy implications.

Introduction

Since an effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, the foreign policy of small

world and the ruling elite now feels more independent and self-confident. This growing self-assurance has been the major factor behind changes in the attitude of official Baku towards the EU, US, Russia, NATO and Turkey.

Although with regard to political culture, Azerbaijan has shifted closer to authoritarian Russia, it still tries to preserve its independence. Hence, the decision to join the non-aligned movement, which is highly symbolic.

The Arab Spring has also made the Azerbaijani ruling elite more cautious in its relations with the US and Europe. Government spokespersons in Baku furiously deny even the slightest possibility that events sweeping the Middle East will recur in Azerbaijan.

Overall, for the foreseeable future, the Azerbaijani government will be open to economic projects and closed to any political message from outside regarding democratization.

states is dictated by a number of factors, some realistic, like geography, and some ideological, like identity. Conversely, foreign policy also has a great impact on

national identity, reflecting Graham Fuller's observation that "foreign policy expresses not only what one wants, but also what one is."

Georgia's foreign policy emerged as a product of classic geopolitical factors, where geographic location remains one of the central features for the country's political development. As a small, weak state confronted with issues of survival and a choice of strategic orientation, its national identity is closely linked to different conceptions of sovereignty and statehood. Generally speaking, the Georgian paradigm is more inclined to protect territorial integrity and its foreign policy is largely based on preserving the status quo. Moreover, Georgian identity tends to externalize domestic issues related to the frozen conflicts on its territory and possesses a cognitive map that is mainly shaped by separatism and Russian threat perception. As a result, since 1994 Georgia's major foreign policy objective has been balancing Russian power and influence, which is seen as key to enhancing the country's national security. Forging close ties with the United States and acceding to NATO are the two preferred foreign policy outcomes—as well as the means of achieving that balance. The majority of Georgia's political elite share these goals.

At the same time, while Georgia's foreign policy is considered pro-western and multifaceted, it is not always based on principles of pragmatic expediency. One may even claim that Georgia's foreign policy priorities are identity-driven (the determination to join the "West," EU, NATO) and unlike its neighbors not as focused on realist paradigms, such as national interest, pragmatism, or balance of power. In order to understand the nature of Georgia's foreign policies towards the rest of the world, it is necessary to understand the factors defining them, including identity. This perspective includes measures of continuity, which explains persistent factors in the way the country interacts in the international arena. Similarly, as identity plays a significant role in the construction and application of Georgian foreign policy, exploring Georgia's evolving national identity offers the potential to better forecast the future direction of its foreign policy orientation as well. However, one should not forget that any attempt to analyze Georgia's foreign policy and the country's identity is fraught with risks, as Georgia is constantly changing.

History, Geography and Identity as Factors of State Behavior

Geography and identity define Georgia's political options and determine many aspects of its state behavior. Georgia's location, nestled between the Black Sea, Russia, and Turkey, gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. As a Black Sea and South-Eastern Euro-

pean state, the country has historically been a geographic, political and cultural part of greater Europe. An historical analysis of Georgian foreign relations and its dealings with Roman and later Byzantine civilizations demonstrates the continuity in this trend. However, by the middle of the 15th century, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the fall of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire sealed the Black Sea, cutting off the Christian states in the area from Europe and the rest of the Christian world. As a result of these changes, Georgia suffered economic and political decline and became a battleground for two great rival powers—Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

Since then, fractured Georgian kingdoms struggled to remain connected to Europe, first through the Genoese colonies in the Crimea and later via the Russian Empire. The Russian empire's annexation of Georgia, which Georgians viewed as a great tragedy, spurred the long-sought process of Europeanization, which reduced Georgian fears about the increased Islamic influence over the country. As a result Russia served not only as a positive intermediary between Georgia and Europe, but also played the negative role of "filtering" direct European influence, a role it maintained until the fall of the Soviet Union.¹ Despite having no direct diplomatic links or access to European states, Georgians stayed in tune with European civilization and maintained cultural, political and spiritual connections with Europe.

Since its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia, as an emerging state within a shifting world order, sought direct links to Europe. Tbilisi had to determine its national interest for the first time after centuries of foreign domination by the Russian empire and Soviet Union. With an inherited political culture lacking a strong democratic tradition, an inexperienced foreign policy elite, scarce financial resources, and poorly defined competing social forces, initially Georgia was unable to develop a viable foreign and security policy towards the West. Already at this early stage, Georgia's foreign policy was heavily driven by its identity. Using the historical narrative that it belongs to the West, Georgia continued its traditional quest for a European future.

Georgia's Narrative and the Struggle for Its European "Destiny"

Georgia, as a country with an ancient Christian civilization, frequently claims an European identity and

¹ The only exception is the short-lived period of the first Georgian democratic republic during 1918–1921, when Georgia was able to forge direct political contacts with European powers like Germany, Britain, France, Italy and international bodies like the League of Nations.

calls for close EU association as a matter of historical justice. Georgia claims that as a result of its difficult historical circumstances, it became separated from European civilization and culture and thus has been unable to move in parallel with European advances. Since liberal democracy is considered a part of European civilization, the aspiration to establish Western-style democracy became a part of the Georgian subconscious. Likewise, it perceives modernization and Westernization as complimentary.

Zurab Zhvania, the late Georgian Prime minister and former speaker of the Georgian Parliament, declared on his country's accession to the Council of Europe in February 1999, "I am Georgian, therefore I am European." This statement underlined the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve full-fledged integration into European political institutions as part of Georgia's national narrative and articulated its foreign policy agenda for the coming decades. Since the Rose Revolution in November 2003, European integration acquired new momentum as Georgia loudly reclaimed its European identity and set EU and NATO membership as its goals.

The National Security Concept of Georgia, the basic document that explains Georgia's fundamental national values and interests which was adopted by parliament in July 2005, describes Georgia as "an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and who] aspires to achieve full-fledged integration into Europe's political, economic and security systems... and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe."² The later version of the Concept³, adopted on December 23, 2011, also underlines the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve full-fledged integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region as a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic security system.

Since Georgia considers regional cooperation within the Black Sea area as one of its foreign policy priorities, a fully realized "Wider Black Sea" project is central to Georgia's agenda for ensuring its stability and prosperity. No longer willing to be labeled merely as a post-Soviet state nor wishing to be identified with the volatile and fragmented Caucasus region, Georgia sees its ties with

the Black Sea community⁴ as a way to become affiliated with the rest of Europe.⁵

Georgia's Political Class: Erasing the Traces of the Soviet Past

During the twenty years since regaining its independence, the main goal of Georgia's foreign and domestic policy was to disassociate itself from the Soviet past and escape from Russia's historic, geographic and civilizational space. Likewise it often distanced itself from post-Soviet institutions and regional groupings, like the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Customs Union, and others that were heavily dominated by Moscow. In some ways "fleeing the Soviet Union" became a nationwide mantra drawing from an identity-based narrative. In addition to its efforts to find security through its "Black Sea identity," Georgia also developed another national narrative that considered Russia as an existential threat given its political, security, and economic realities and prolonged period of tension with Moscow. In some sense it seemed quite logical and even necessity as Georgia was (and still is) in the process of shaping its identity and determining its corresponding national interests.

An identity-based account has the potential to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex web of problems in Russo-Georgian relations. For Georgia's Western-educated political class, Russia and its political model—which is still evolving—are not attractive, as they do not generate new interesting political, cultural or civilizational ideas, that can change the world as they once did. The Georgian political class would prefer to be united to the core area of global development (the West), not to peripheral areas (such as the CIS or post-Soviet space). From the Georgian point of view, Russia offers no compelling vision of a revived Russian sphere of influence, even for its own allies. Besides this, Georgia's political elite see Russia as the direct successor of the Soviet empire and view any attempts to re-integrate

2 2005 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf

3 2011 National Security Concept of Georgia. Available at: <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>

4 Jonathan Kulick and Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia and the Wider Black Sea" in: Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott. (eds). *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: strategic, economic and energy Perspectives*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, 2008.

5 On the question: Do you approve or disapprove? 76% stated that they support the government's stated goal to join the EU and similarly 74% supported the goal to join NATO. See: Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of a September 2011 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf> [see also Opinion Poll in this issue]

the post-Soviet space under the auspices of the CIS (or any other post-Soviet regional organization) as a danger to Georgia's national security. Some of these fears are psychological, with deep roots in the period of the Russian empire and Soviet occupation of Georgia after the establishment of the first republic. However, the real reason Georgia finds Russia so uncooperative lies not in psychology but in objective calculations of national interest. All the grievances accumulated since the time of the Russian empire led the Georgian elite to perceive their interests as utterly incompatible with those of the Russian Federation. They also see little advantage in cooperating with the Kremlin as they do not believe that there is a deal to be had with Russia.⁶ Similarly, Russia's socio-economic model limits its capacity to act as a pole of attraction for Georgia. On the contrary, as Russian expert Fyodor Lukyanov observed, "Georgia has sought to create a conceptual alternative to Russia by providing an example of a complete and irreversible break of historical and cultural ties with its powerful neighbor." In addition, Russia's conduct in Georgia has eviscerated the Georgian elites and made a pro-Russian stance untenable.

Today the Georgians see neither the Russian nor the Soviet empires as "European." They remember the Russian empire as autocratic and emphasize the USSR's ideological anti-Western orientation. Moreover, some part of the Georgian public does not consider Russia as part of the pan-European project (the Kremlin did a good job with its neo-imperial policies vis-à-vis Georgia to strengthen this stereotype) and believe that in fact Russia is a sui generis phenomenon which cannot disassociate itself from its imperial Eurasianist ideology as that ideology nicely fits its geopolitical ambitions on the world stage. As this (mis)perception still prevails over the subconsciousness of Georgia's political elites, many polls⁷ indicate, that while most Georgians support good neighborly relations with Russia, they similarly do not want to

be involved in any Russian-dominated integration process in Eurasia. In short, Georgians perceive their country in the long-term perspective as "European" and part of united Europe and in no way suitable for the "new Eurasian superpower project" promoted by Moscow.

Conclusion

Considering Georgia as the Caucasus region's front runner in terms of European integration in a discussion of the impact of identity on Georgian foreign policy, one would have to distinguish between the majority of the population and the foreign policy elite, as most decisions related to Georgia's stand in international affairs are elite-driven. Despite the fact that Georgia shares a compact geographic area, similar past, common cultural practices, and a long, interlinked history with other Caucasian nations, it faces a dilemma in how to identify itself within the region. Unable to act in concert with its immediate neighbors and considering its past political history, Georgia potentially could associate itself with a post-Soviet, Caucasian, or even Middle Eastern identity if it wanted to. It also could utilize multiple regional identities which cannot be limited just to one regional vector. However, neglecting all three and focusing only on a Black Sea identity as a ticket for its European identity has played a major role in Georgia's pro-western drive.

The formulation of Georgia's national interest and foreign policy was a direct result of the internalization of identity preferences that were shaped by cultural patterns of social and economic life. The notion that Georgia belonged in "the West" provides a certain foundation for Georgia's pro-western orientation and its identity-driven foreign policy. However, properly understanding its impact requires a far more systematic study of specific groups, institutions, public opinion and political decision-making, which is beyond of the focus of this particular article.

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6 On this account see: Hans Gutbrod and Nana Papiashvili. Georgian attitudes to Russia: Surprisingly positive. Russian Analytical Digest, no. 68, 23 November 2009, http://kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/RESSpecNet/109833/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/4e1ea849-74f9-4bc3-bc0a-30c674f3cd5f/en/Russian_Analytical_Digest_68.pdf

7 Ibid.

Georgian Foreign Policy: Holding the Line amid Uncertainty

By George Khelashvili, Tbilisi

Abstract

Georgia's foreign policy in the last few years has been an oddity in the post-Soviet space. With no solid security guarantees, domestic or international, Georgia tried to defy Russian influence and try to integrate into the transatlantic political structures. Unsurprisingly, this ambitious project is under serious threat of failure, due to international systemic and domestic political reasons. Georgia is likely to continue to rely on Western political and economic assistance in its efforts to hold the line amid uncertainty.

Georgia's Foreign Policy Predicament

Close to the end of President Saakashvili's second term in office, Georgia finds itself in a difficult political situation, as its national security remains fragile, its territorial integrity unravels, and its domestic political stability remains in doubt. Georgia has failed to join any significant political, security or economic regional cooperation organisation, or form a meaningful strategic alliance. Georgia's democratic image, which distinguishes it from its neighbors, is tarnished, and the country failed to make a decisive breakthrough either in terms of economic sustainability or social development.

Yet, Georgia manages to stay its course toward the rapprochement with the West and finds certain sympathies in the capitals of the leading European countries and the United States. This gives hope to the mainstream Georgian political establishment, both the Government as well as the opposition, that Georgia's perseverance in its efforts to become part of the Western world will bear fruit one day.

Georgian Foreign Policy: A Basic Conceptual Framework

Successive Georgian governments since independence considered Georgia a pivotal state in the region, and perceived international politics in terms of continued epic struggle between the United States and Russia, in which the West would eventually triumph. Therefore, Georgia's political line was to assist the West in its struggle against Russia. Even the war of 2008, in which Georgia was left to its own devices in the face of Russian military intervention, did not shatter this dualistic and simplified image of world politics.

Georgia's most recent presidents, Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili, drew slightly different policy prescriptions from the above mentioned political worldview. In terms of continuity and change, there were two major differences that distinguished Saakashvili's foreign policy from his predecessor. First, while Shevardnadze tried to 'hide' the Georgian question from the confrontational agenda of the American–Russian relationship, Saakashvili tried to emphasise the differ-

ences between the two larger powers and Georgia's role as an irritant in this relationship.

The second novel trait of Saakashvili's presidency has been too much reliance on political rhetoric and the belief in the overwhelming importance of ideas in world politics. One aspect of this belief was the idea that an ideological appeal could fill the gap created by the absence of the West's tangible 'material' interests in Georgia, either in the security or economic fields.

The George W. Bush Administration offered strong rhetorical support for democracy promotion in the post-Soviet space and the Middle East in the second half of the 2000s. This seemed to vindicate the Georgian Government's view of the importance of its ideological take on foreign policy. The first three years of the Barack Obama Administration left the Georgian Government out in the cold in its aspirations to obtain support and encouragement from the West in its showdown with Russia, still dominated by Saakashvili's arch-enemy Vladimir Putin.

The line that the Georgian Government chose since the August 2008 war was to heavily rely on the apparent strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States, while defying Russia. This policy has been based on little strategic rationale or political calculation, but simply represented an attempt to maintain the line in circumstances of strategic uncertainty. Georgia's gamble partly paid off due to the inertia of American and European support and some remnants of credibility as of a relatively democratic state in the surrounding area.

The December 2011 National Security Concept reiterates all of the above perceptions of the current Georgian Government. It designates Russia as a major threat to Georgia's independence and sovereignty, and counts on Western political and security assistance in coping with Moscow. The basis for expecting such forthcoming support are Georgia's alleged democratic achievements and liberal reforms of the last few years.

Integration into the North-Atlantic Structures

The main vision of Georgia's national security—integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

(NATO) –virtually vanished from mainstream Georgian foreign policy. Despite the explicit promise of NATO membership, given in April 2008 by the Alliance, Georgia is not likely to get any tangible results from NATO in the foreseeable future. The Georgian Government has recently downgraded its expectations with respect to the NATO Chicago Summit, realising that NATO will only reiterate its promise of membership at best.

There is more progress in another direction of Georgia's 'pro-Western' foreign policy. The Georgian Government started negotiations with the European Union over an agreement on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in December 2011, following Georgia's consent to allow Russia into the World Trade Organisation. The agreement requires Georgia to allow more regulation, curb monopolisation and conduct meaningful institutional reforms. These negotiations would lead toward more transparency in Georgia's economy, fewer technical barriers to trade, and most importantly, proper protection of intellectual property rights.

After a virtual embargo imposed by Russia against Georgia since 2006, the share of the EU's trade with Georgia has risen significantly. Therefore, Georgia is interested in augmenting trade with Europe, but the terms of the DCFTA agreement are difficult to fulfil for Tbilisi. Much of Georgia's economy lacks transparency. Therefore, adaptation to the European trade area may be problematic, even if highly desirable. President Saakashvili hopes to implement the agreement during 2013. Given the previous history of Georgia–EU negotiations on the subject, as well as the poor condition of Georgia's economy, such estimates seem overly optimistic.

Relations with the United States

Georgia's foreign policy is strongly driven by perceptions of American attitudes toward Georgia. President Saakashvili has tried hard to restore American–Georgian relations to the same level of political intimacy that they enjoyed under Bush. Despite these efforts, it took President Obama three years to invite Saakashvili for a meeting in the Oval Office. Saakashvili claimed to have scored a major victory with this meeting, securing America's massive defence aid to Georgia and the opening of Free Trade Agreement negotiations with Washington. These claims may be significantly exaggerated.

The promise of American aid in Georgia's 'self-defence,' as Georgian officials put it, may be related to Washington's readiness to continue helping Georgia in building institutional capacity at the Ministry of Defence. It is also plausible that the Americans will provide help in training higher ranking Georgian officers than was the case before. These plans cannot be

estimated as a breakthrough in American–Georgian security relations. It is highly unlikely that the United States will provide Georgia with armaments or ammunition. This is especially doubtful as President Obama rejected the section of a congressional bill that required the president to extend military assistance to Georgia. Obama's interest in meeting Saakashvili was in silencing his domestic critics, who had alleged that the current administration 'sold out' Georgia for the sake of its reset with Russia.

A New Gambit with Putin's Russia and Relations with Neighbors

Oddly, among all directions of Georgia's foreign political activity, relations with Russia show an apparent promise of improvement. Last November, Georgia gave the green light to Russia's long-awaited membership in the World Trade Organisation. This happened against the background of foreign pressure on Tbilisi from the United States and the European Union. In exchange, Georgia received better prospects for free trade relations with both Americans and Europeans. According to the Georgian–Russian deal, both Russians and Georgians gained access to monitoring cross-border activities on all borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, via a third party, a Swiss private monitoring company.

Moreover, air traffic between Georgia and Russia was restored last year after more than five years without direct flight connection. Also, in late February 2012, Georgia unilaterally waived visa requirements for Russian citizens entering Georgia. Such a waiver had only existed for the inhabitants of Russia's North Caucasian republics, much to the annoyance of Moscow. In fact, since last year, the Georgian Government largely silenced its negative rhetoric about Russian handling of the North Caucasus. Georgia's government-controlled media still vehemently denounces Russia and its leaders but Tbilisi offers much less criticism toward Moscow on the international arena.

It would be premature to expect any breakthrough in Georgian–Russian relations in the foreseeable future. Georgia's concessions toward Russian membership in the WTO were largely involuntary and externally imposed on Tbilisi. There is no progress in the question of Georgia's secessionist regions—Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The so-called Geneva talks, the trilateral negotiations over these questions between Georgians, Russians and the secessionists, are at a virtual impasse.

The Georgian government does not shy away from looking for opportunities for the diversification of its foreign alignments, including somewhat awkward moves to improve relations with Iran. Relations with traditional political and economic partners—Turkey and Azerbai-

jan—remain solid even if somewhat stalled in development. Despite the new opening toward the EU, relations with the leading European powers—France and Germany—remain shallow. This is largely due to Saakashvili's discontent with the French and German take on Russian–Georgian relations. While relations with the formerly communist states of 'New Europe' remain rhetorically robust, these states have little to offer Georgia either in terms of security or economic cooperation.

Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy

The major issues affecting Georgia's foreign policy are not so much external as internal. The dramatic rise in revenues since 2004 and the virtual absence of checks and balances on President Saakashvili's power allowed the Georgian Government to conduct its foreign policy with few restrictions imposed by domestic politics. This freedom was enhanced by the existence of a virtual national consensus over foreign policy, defined in terms of integration with Atlantic structures—NATO and the EU.

More recently, however, almost all these prerequisites for giving Saakashvili unrestricted control over foreign policy-making by Saakashvili are weakening. Georgia's mounting foreign debt, the decline in foreign direct investments, and the relative stagnation of economic growth have restricted the Government's ability to neglect restrictions imposed by the Russian embargo on Georgian exports. Moreover, Saakashvili's sway over power in Georgia is challenged by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili who has created his own political force to contest the 2012 Parliamentary elections, promising

to oust Saakashvili's United National Movement from power. While Georgians are still well-disposed toward the idea of integration in NATO and the EU, some political forces have called for reconciliation with Russia.

The current Government's political pact with the population was predicated on the provision of effective governance in exchange for loyalty to Saakashvili's rule. This pact also included a consensus regarding foreign policy. This deal is likely to persist as long as the Government remains effective in providing public services and relative economic welfare. The other two major pillars of Saakashvili's legitimacy—his promise to restore Georgia's territorial integrity and democratisation—have already become obsolete. It remains to be seen whether the only remaining basis of the government-population pact remains effective.

Conclusion

Georgian foreign policy is based on President Saakashvili's grip on power and is rooted in the historical narrative of Georgia's belonging to the European civilisation as opposed to the Russian socio-cultural space. Even if Saakashvili loses power eventually, it is unlikely that Georgia will permanently denounce its ambition to follow the path of Central European nations toward joining the European Union. Meanwhile, the Russian factor may be a permanent fixture in Georgia's domestic and foreign policy. However, because of this very Russian factor, Georgia may still get some political assistance from the West. This assistance remains the only tangible basis for the vitality of Georgia's current foreign policy.

About the Author

George Khelashvili is an assistant professor of International Relations and Graduate Studies Director at the Centre for Social Sciences at Tbilisi State University, Georgia. He recently finished his doctoral thesis at Oxford on US policy toward Georgia between 1991 and 2008. His research interests include foreign policy, post-Soviet politics, and the role of ideas in international relations.

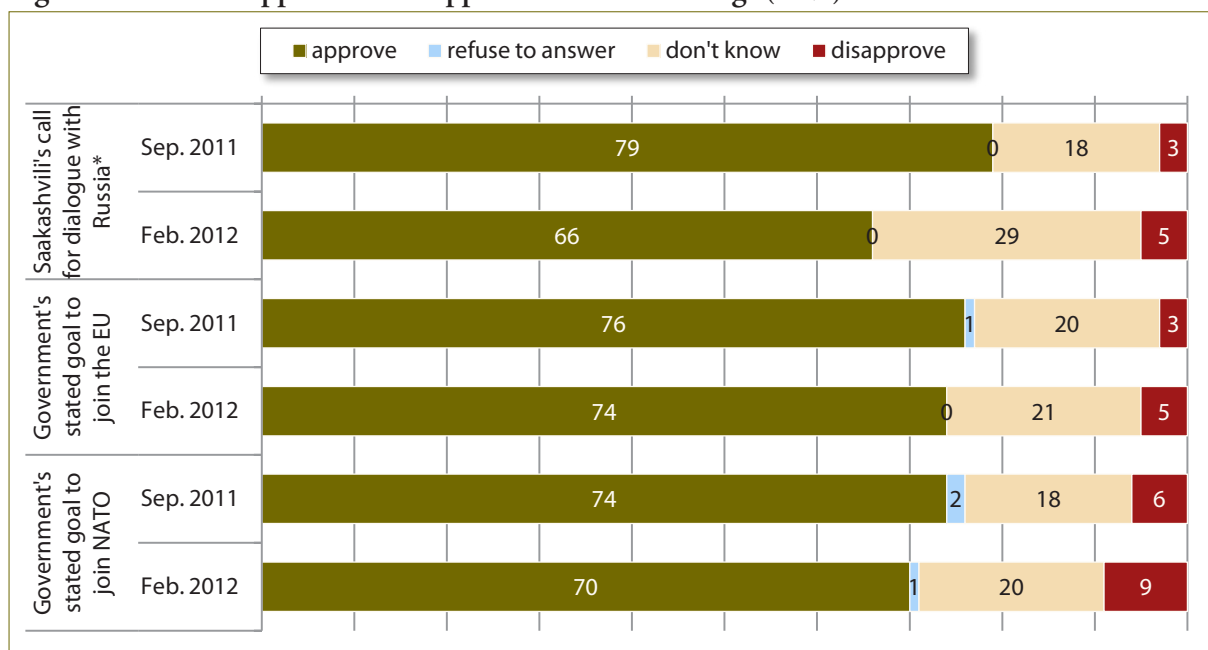
Further Reading:

- *National Security Concept of Georgia* (December 2011), accessed at: <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>
- Khelashvili, G., 'Georgia's Foreign Policy Impasse: Is Consensus Crumbling?' *Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 187 (September 2011).
- MacFarlane, S. N., 'Post-Revolutionary Georgia on the Edge?' *Chatham House Briefing Paper* (March 2011).
- Welt, C., 'Don't Shy Away From Progress on the Russia–Georgia Conflict: New Agreement Between Countries on Russia's WTO Membership Indicates Progress,' *Center for American Progress* (6 February, 2012).

OPINION POLL

Georgian Public Opinion on the Country's Foreign Policy

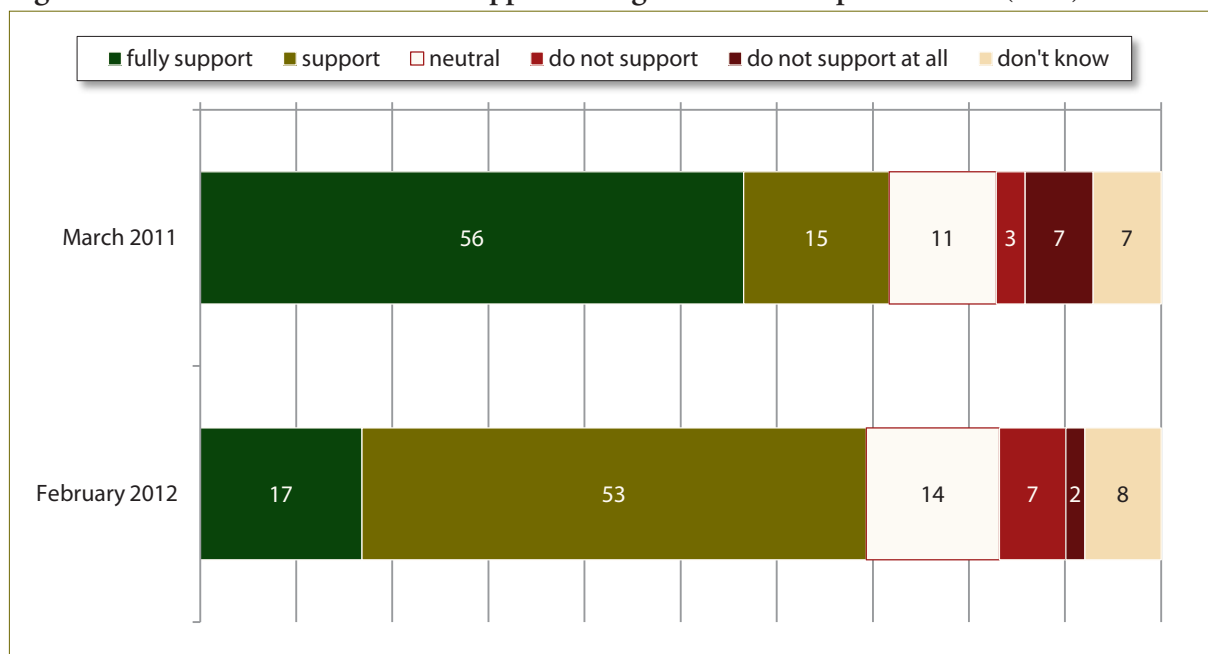
Figure 1: Do You Approve or Disapprove of the Following? (in %)



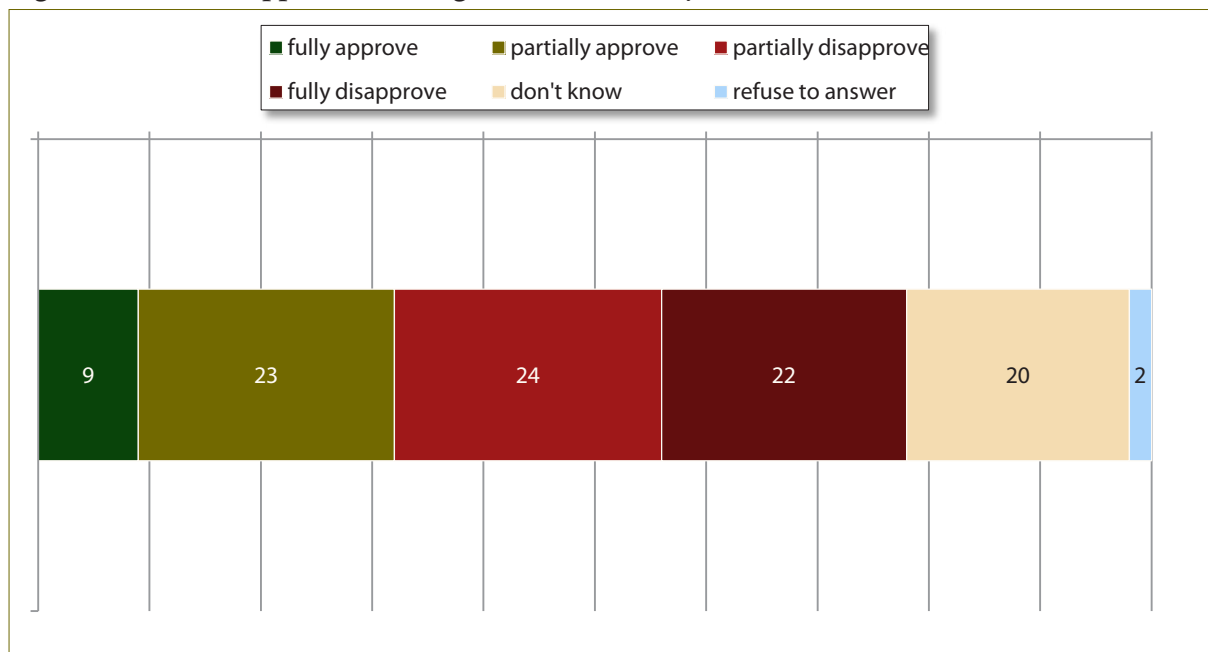
* In February 2012, this statement was worded "The President's call for meaningful dialogue with Russia on the condition that it removes Russian embassies from Abkhazia and so called South Ossetia"

Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) on September 10th–11th 2011, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf> and on February 22nd–March 5th 2012, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-0212.pdf>

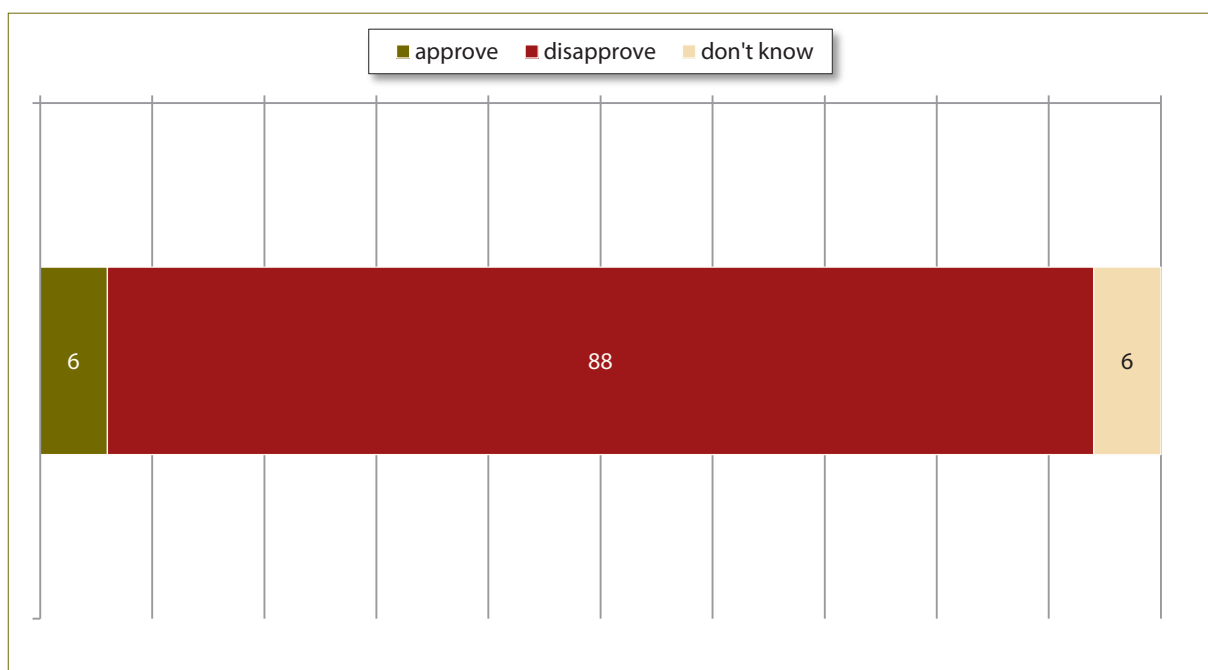
Figure 2: To What Extent Do You Support Georgia's Membership in NATO? (in %)



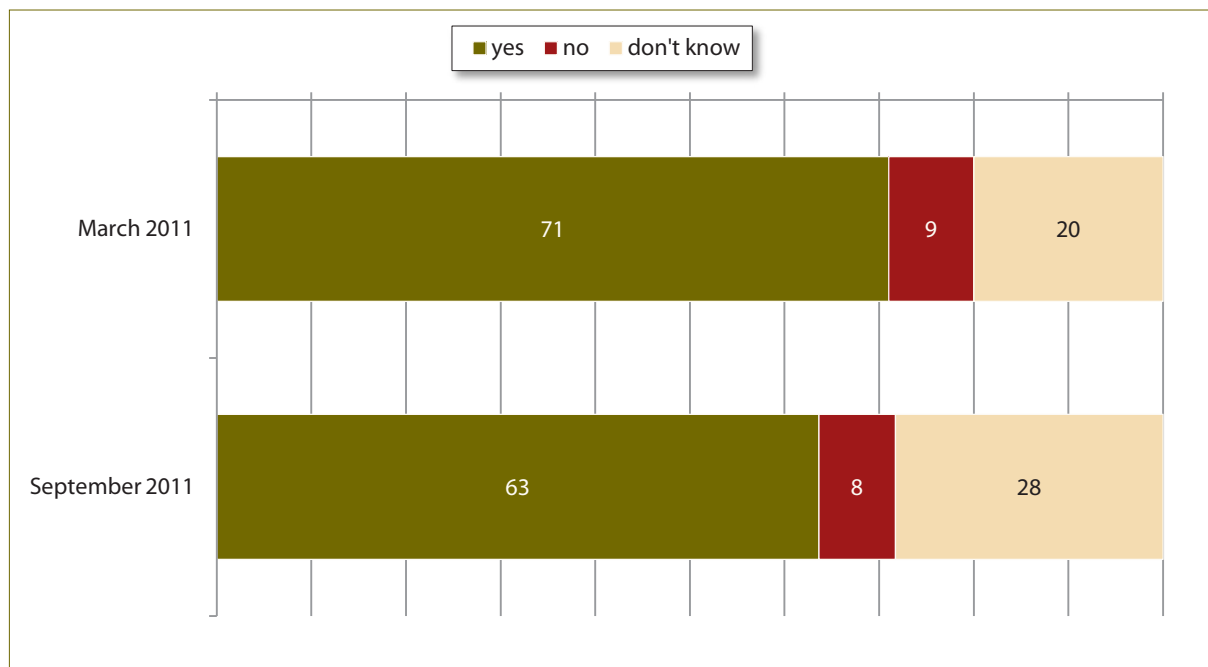
Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) on March 3rd–16th 2011, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf> and on February 22nd–March 5th 2012, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-0212.pdf>

Figure 3: Do You Approve of Georgia's Current Policy Towards Russia? (in %)

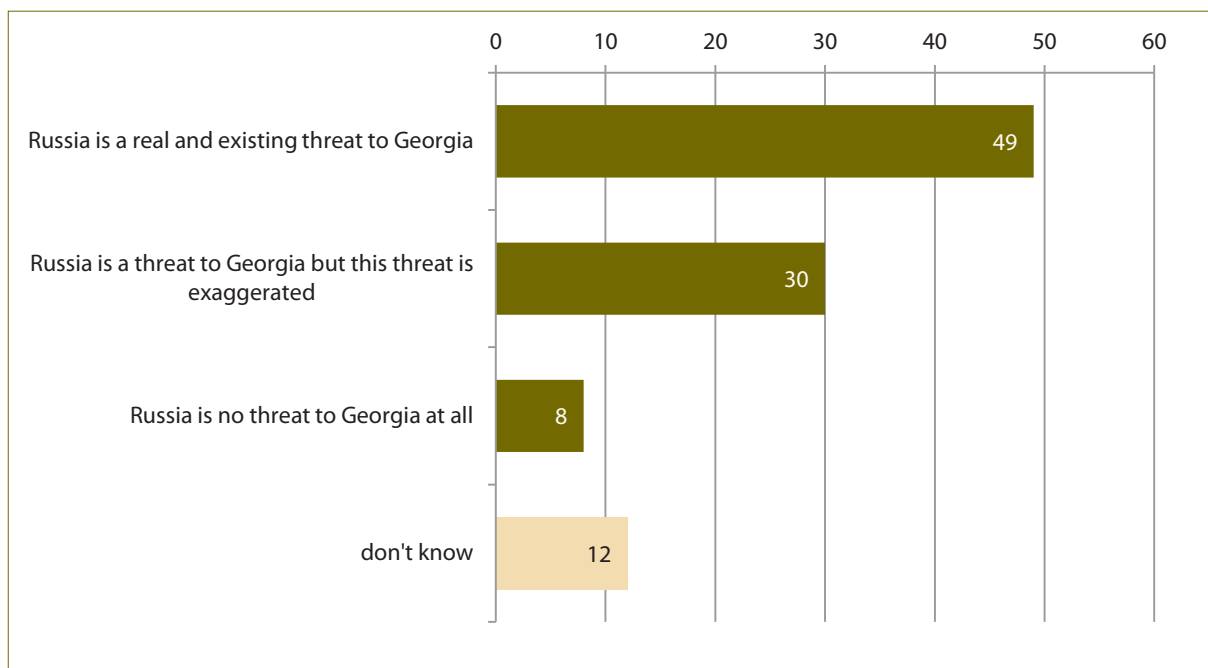
Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for NDI on September 10th–11th 2011, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf>

Figure 4: Do You Approve or Disapprove of Georgia's Current Relationship with Russia? (in %)

Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for NDI on February 22nd–March 5th 2012, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-0212.pdf>

Figure 5: Do You Think Russia's Current Policy Threatens Georgia's Sovereignty? (in %)

Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for NDI on March 3rd–16th and September 10th–11th 2011, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-report-101011.pdf>

Figure 6: Which of the Following Statements Do You Agree with the Most? (in %)

Source: representative opinion poll by CRRC for NDI on February 22nd–March 5th 2012, <http://www.ndi.org/files/Georgia-Survey-Results-0212.pdf>

CHRONICLE

From 16 February to 26 March 2012

16 February 2012	Baku submits a bid with five other cities to the International Olympic Committee to host the Summer Olympics 2020
17 February 2012	Iran's Fars news agency says Azerbaijani security forces have arrested their correspondent in Baku
17 February 2012	US President Barack Obama nominates former US Ambassador in Uzbekistan Richard Norland as his next ambassador to Georgia
20 February 2012	Former Georgian MP Valery Gelbakhiani is arrested in Tbilisi on charges of plotting a coup following the presidential elections of 2008 in Georgia
21 February 2012	Armenian deputies from the Heritage opposition faction file a court complaint against the decision to construct trade kiosks in a Yerevan park and join the protests by environmentalists and civic groups
22 February 2012	The leader of the breakaway region of Abkhazia Aleksander Ankvab survives an assassination attempt in the Abkhaz town of Gudauta
20 February 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili makes an unannounced visit to Georgian troops in Afghanistan
25 February 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili challenges opposition leaders to take a clear stand about their views on relations with Russia during a speech at a military base near the administrative border with South Ossetia
26 February 2012	About 50,000 people march through Baku to commemorate the 20 th anniversary of Azerbaijan's war with Armenian troops over the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh
26 February 2012	Israeli officials confirm a deal to sell drones, anti-aircraft and missile defence systems to Azerbaijan saying that the deal is not a response to Iran's nuclear development program
28 February 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili offers visa-free travel to Russians during his annual address to the Parliament in order to improve relations between the two countries
28 February 2012	France's Constitutional Council declares as unconstitutional a law that criminalizes the denial that the killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I constitutes a genocide
28 February 2012	The opposition Labour Party calls on opposition parties in Georgia to sign a declaration asking for the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Afghanistan
1 March 2012	Thousands of protestors demanding the removal of Governor Rauf Habibov were dispersed by police using tear gas and rubber bullets in the city of Quba, Azerbaijan
1 March 2012	The Georgian Public Defender's Office calls on the authorities to carry out a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the death of Solomon Kimeridze in a police station in the town of Khashuri
2 March 2012	Russia offers to re-establish diplomatic relations with Georgia and indicates that it is ready to reciprocate Georgia's offer of visa-free travel between the two countries
2 March 2012	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev announces the dismissal of Governor Rauf Habibov in the northeastern district of Quba
3 March 2012	Georgia presents its first domestically manufactured multiple rocket launcher system at the Vaziani military base outside Tbilisi
6 March 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku to discuss energy and transport projects
6 March 2012	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian accuses Azerbaijan of blocking progress in resolving the dispute over the Nagorno Karabakh region during a visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels

7 March 2012	The foreign ministers of Turkey and Iran meet with their Azerbaijani counterpart in the Naxcivan province in Azerbaijan to discuss the dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region as well as possible railway projects and the simplification of visa procedures between the three countries
7 March 2012	The Prime Minister of the South Pacific island Tuvalu, Willy Telavi, visits Abkhazia following his country's recognition of the breakaway region in September 2011
7 March 2012	The NATO-Georgia commission meets in Brussels to discuss "how to enhance Georgia's partnership and connectivity with the Alliance"
7 March 2012	Armenia announces its decision to withdraw from the Eurovision song contest in Baku
7 March 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili announces the joint bid of Azerbaijan and Georgia to host the UEFA European Football Championship 2020 while addressing the Azerbaijani Parliament Milli Majlis
7 March 2012	Forbes magazine estimates the wealth of Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the opposition Georgian Dream coalition, at 6.4 billion dollars and ranks him in the 153 th position in its annual list of the world's billionaires
10 March 2012	Parliamentary elections are held in the breakaway region of Abkhazia
12 March 2012	Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev says that Baku would not allow its territory to be used for an attack on Iran and that it seeks closer cooperation with Iran during a two-day visit to Tehran
12 March 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs, Andrew C. Weber, in Tbilisi
14 March 2012	The Azerbaijani Ministry of National Security announces the arrests of 22 people on suspicion of plotting attacks against the US and Israeli embassies in Baku
20 March 2012	The state audit agency Chamber of Control fines opposition politician Bidzina Ivanishvili 1.65 million US dollars for illegal donations to his party Georgian Dream movement
21 March 2012	The Parliament of the breakaway region of South Ossetia dismisses chief prosecutor Taimuraz Khugaev as part of a deal between the opposition and the authorities signed in December 2011
22 March 2012	Georgian Prime Minister Nika Gilauri visits Lebanon
22 March 2012	The World Bank approves two loans worth a total of 130 million US dollars to finance road rehabilitation projects and infrastructure development in the eastern region of Kakheti
23 March 2012	US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta meets with Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan at the Pentagon
24 March 2012	The breakaway region of Abkhazia holds runoff parliamentary elections
25 March 2012	The breakaway region of South Ossetia holds new elections to elect a new leader in a third attempt since November 2011. No one won the first round, so a runoff is set for April 8 between Leonid Tibilov and David Sanakoyev
26 March 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili attends the nuclear security summit in Seoul

Compiled by Lili Di Puppò

For the full chronicle since 2009 see www.laender-analysen.de/cad

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Lili Di Puppo, Hans Gutbrod, Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines

The Caucasus Analytical Digest (CAD) is a monthly internet publication jointly produced by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (<http://www.crrccenters.org/>), the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de), the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies of the George Washington University (www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu), the Resource Security Institute in Washington, DC (resourcesecurityinstitute.org/) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch) with support from the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Caucasus Analytical Digest analyzes the political, economic, and social situation in the three South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the context of international and security dimensions of this region's development. CAD is supported by a grant from Robert Bosch Stiftung (<http://www.bosch-stiftung.de>).

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