

NATO Expansion to the East: Georgia's Way to NATO Membership, Perspectives and Challenges

Amiran Kavadze *, Tina Kavadze **

Abstract

The article explores possible NATO enlargement to the East. The study is based on case study analyses and has two objectives: to provide analyses of the dynamics of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic process, and to show how this process corresponds to existing experience and practice. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, integration path, and domestic and external factors have all been taken into consideration, as have the degree to which Russia can negatively influence the eastward enlargement process, and what candidate/aspirant countries can offer NATO to secure future membership. The authors present scenarios that are likely to affect domestic and international changes with regard to future NATO membership.

Keywords: Enlargement, Georgia, Integration, NATO, Russia

Introduction

There are still many loose ends in the discussion of the enlargement of the EU and NATO; in particular, why certain countries wish to join these institutions, with no success. A huge literature on this topic has overemphasised international factors in the analysis of the desire of these countries to join international institutions and especially the EU and NATO. In highlighting the attractiveness of EU and NATO either through the economic benefits that might follow from integration, or by simply assuming that such an outcome is both logical and appropriate, the role of domestic factors and the interests of third parties have sometimes been downplayed. Some studies, moreover, in analysing enlargement and the process of domestic reforms to bring institutions into compliance with EU and NATO requirements, have made controversial claims with respect to the success of the reforms. In case of Georgia, some observe that Georgia has made tremendous progress, while others claim that Georgia's reforms are incomplete. Against this background, this study aims to bring about a better understanding of the reasons behind Georgia's aspirations to join NATO, as well as the reform process and the domestic and external factors behind it. The reason we have chosen to engage in this discussion at all is the manifest desire on the part of Georgia to join NATO and EU on the one hand, and the failure to achieve these objectives on the other. Georgia furthermore is the only country in its region to have Euro-Atlantic integration as its stated policy, and even more relevant is the fact that Georgia's political elites are unanimous in their desire to achieve this goal. What makes this case even more interesting is that as a NATO aspirant country Georgia has unique circumstances and peculiarities; in particular: Georgia's territorial integrity has been breached—20% or more of Georgian soil is currently occupied by Russian troops; over the past two decades Georgia has faced a civil war, two ethno-political conflicts, and a war with Russia; Georgia is now one

of the largest contributors among non-NATO member states in NATO-led military operations; and Georgia's reformist policies in many fields has made her a champion among post-Soviet countries.

All this creates a complexity of factors which are unusual for an aspiring NATO country. This article is based on case-study analyses and has two aims: (1) to provide an analysis of the dynamics of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic process and how this process correlates with existing, experience and practice; (2) to adapt existing external and internal factors affecting the integration process. There are, in addition, some crucial questions to which we have attempted to find responses; in particular: to what extent can the Russian factor play a negative role, and what were the principal shortcomings of the Saakashvili government in Georgia's NATO integration process?

We examine key issues within enlargement policies, such as European identity, conditionality, the motives for enlargement, and the use of enlargement in fostering political and economic reform, peace, and democracy in an applicant/aspirant country. In the case of Georgia we have analyzed different aspects of enlargement motives and related factors, both from the NATO point of view and that of the applicant state.

1. Georgia's road to NATO

1.1. Georgia's path towards membership: the institutional framework:

In 2002 at the NATO Summit in Prague Georgia officially declared its Euro-Atlantic aspiration, thereby starting the NATO

* Ambassador, is a Visiting Professor at the International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

** A Senior Associate, Albany Associates, London, UK.

integration process. President Shevardnadze confirmed that Georgia would be knocking on NATO's door by 2005. (Shevardnadze, 2002). Following the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, NATO-Georgia relations became more dynamic. On October 29, 2004 the Alliance launched an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with Georgia to assist the country to achieve NATO standards and to implement democratic reforms. (Forster & Wallace, 2001; MFA Georgia). According to the IPAP, NATO membership and integration with EU became the strategic objectives of Georgia's foreign and security policy. In 2004, Georgia adopted a National Security Concept, which reflected new objectives and goals. (Shevardnadze, 2002). Georgia has had very strong internal support for NATO membership; a non-binding referendum held in Georgia on January 5, 2008 resulted in 77 percent in favour of joining the military alliance. (Nichol, 2008).

Bucharest Summit: The NATO Bucharest summit (April 2-4, 2008) became a litmus test for NATO member countries on how to act further on NATO enlargement, and saw dramatic debates over whether or not to grant Georgia and Ukraine Membership Action Plans (MAP). The alliance was divided: Washington, supported by the UK, Canada and the newly admitted Central and Eastern European countries, was the main driving force for granting MAP to Georgia and Ukraine. Sceptical countries – France, Italy Spain, and the Benelux countries, led by Germany, were opposed to the next stage of enlargement. (Asmus, 2010). The Kremlin was certainly opposed to the previous rounds of NATO enlargement, but was forced to accept them under the firm stance of the united Alliance. Certain countries were not convinced that enlargement should be extended beyond the Black Sea, or that admitting Georgia and Ukraine into NATO would serve the Alliance's interests. Germany's view of MAP granting was governed not simply by the need to help Georgia and Ukraine, but also the desire to avoid any confrontation with Russia. According to Berlin, the issue of an expanded Europe was over after the 'Big Bang' enlargement; it was now high time to begin a rapprochement with Moscow. (Asmus, 2010). In addition, Berlin took a very critical view of Georgian political and democratic reforms and military capabilities, of the uncertainty of the situation in the country and of the ability of President Saakashvili to take weighty and balanced decisions on conflict settlement issues. As a result MAP was not granted to these post-Soviet republics; instead they received a joint declaration, a promise, that they would one day become NATO members. NATO always defended the principle of indivisibility of security across Europe. But in reality, as it became clear, geography matters; the West and the Balkans were treated differently by NATO and the EU than the wider Black Sea region. (Asmus, 2010). There is the shining example of Albania, which was granted MAP status during the Kosovo crisis, but which was at best two decades away from eventual membership. We can conclude that the designation of candidate states as prospective members is above all a political process and that conditionality and a performance based approach are secondary to the will of the alliance's members.

1.2. 'Bandwagoning' and the Russian factor:

NATO is a multi-purpose security alliance based on political and military assistance between member-states. (NATO,

1949). Since the collapse of communism, many countries of Central and Eastern Europe sought NATO membership. They considered themselves to be part of Europe, not only as geographical entities but as a part of the West, they expressed their readiness to promote democratic principles and European values, and they wanted to distance themselves from any Russian influence.

On the other hand, in the early Nineties there was a wide range of attitudes towards a readiness to accept central and eastern European countries as members of the 'Club'. If Central and Eastern Europe including the Baltic countries were considered candidates for possible enlargement, south-eastern Europe and the South Caucasus were remote places, '...both in terms of geographic and psychological factors'. Romania and Bulgaria lacked western diasporas, and lacked also both the shared historical reference points and the skills needed to woo west European governments and publics'. (Wallace, 2000). The situation with post-Soviet states beyond the Baltic region – Ukraine and Georgia – was even worse. The post-Soviet governments were 'less evidently the product of a clear break of the authoritarian past, their administration was less capable, their economies less advanced.' (Wallace, 2000). Besides, conflicts in former Yugoslavia and in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan shaped the response of the Western governments to that region. In the meantime partnership with south-eastern NATO neighbouring countries has been intensified, the principles and practices of multilateral security cooperation around the European periphery have been spread, which has created a fertile ground for further enlargement. (Forster & Wallace, 2001).

The main goal of enlargement was to provide "enhanced stability as part of a broad European security architecture that underpins the goal of an undivided Europe". (Woodliffe, 1998). NATO offered assistance to the candidate countries to complete domestic reforms, to raise economic standards, to improve military capabilities and relations with their neighbours, and to integrate into Western society. The first round of enlargement started in 1997 with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The second wave of NATO expansion occurred in 2004, when Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the alliance. The NATO double enlargement was actually quite successful, especially with regard to the Balkans, where vertical expansion was positively tested for the first time. Horizontal enlargement moreover assisted Romania and Bulgaria in particular to join the alliance. (Borinski, 2010). The third enlargement occurred in 2009 with the accession of Croatia and Albania.

Opposition to any eastward enlargement of NATO has been a major plank in Russian foreign policy over the past two decades. It is the view of the Kremlin that NATO enlargement to the East is counterproductive, posing a permanent threat to Russian interests. On several occasions Vladimir Putin has told NATO and US leaders that bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO and the deployment of an anti-missile defence system in Eastern Europe are 'red lines' for Russia. The Kremlin had several options how to respond to the NATO expansion: to use economic and financial means, trade sanctions, halting the delivery of oil and gas to applicant countries and member-states—heavily depend-

ent on Russian natural resources, and as a last resort direct military intervention. In the cases of Ukraine and Georgia Russia has efficiently used all its possible resources to prevent these countries from joining the alliance.

1.3. Identity based explanation:

Georgia as part of the West: The history of Georgia has been a centuries-long battle for the preservation of national identity and the Christian faith, of sovereignty, and of territorial integrity. The top priority of all Georgian rulers was to seek guarantees for the security and stability of the country. Western principles and values became inseparable parts of Georgian life: deep Christian roots and traditions, a firmly based pluralistic and multi-confessional society, irrepressible democratic aspirations – all these provide the basic prerequisites for Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The country attaches great importance to NATO's role in strengthening the stability and security of the country and of the Caucasus region. It desires to become not only the consumer of security but the provider as well, playing an important role in strengthening Euro-Atlantic security. (MFA Georgia).

Georgians have very strong 'sense of belonging', and desire to be members of the European family and the Western 'Club'. (Borinski, 2010). For other East European countries (Bulgaria, Romania) enlargement occurred at the political and psychological level, 'where relatively fast and cheap progress towards enlargement was possible.' (Borinski, 2010). Georgia's European integration by contrast represents a process that is more complex and dependant on numerous internal and external factors.

Historical overview: Georgia's geographic location always possessed a strategic importance. As a Black Sea state the country historically played a political and cultural role in greater Europe. In ancient times Georgia was influenced by Greek culture, and later it was part of the Roman and Byzantine worlds. The fall of Byzantium in 1453, however, meant that the Ottoman Empire and Persia cut Georgia off from Europe and the Christian world. During the past three centuries, Georgia has made several unsuccessful attempts to build bridges with leading European powers to safeguard the country from neighbouring invaders and conquerors.

Fractured Georgian kingdoms struggled for self-preservation and tried to pave the way towards Europe. The only practical way open to Georgian rulers was cooperation with Russia: 'The Russian Empire's annexation of Georgia [in 1801], 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'. (Kakachia, 2012).

In the 19th century, Russia served to some extent not only as provider of European values, and of western style education and institutions, it also played the quite significant negative role of inhibiting Georgian European aspirations. Soviet occupation cut Georgia off from the rest of Europe, and the country had no direct links with the major Western powers. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and re-

gaining independence in 1991, Georgia started to build a new relationship with Europe and USA. Despite the heavy legacy of the Russian and Soviet past, the lack of democratic traditions, inexperience in building the institutions of state or of a market economy, and a scarcity of financial resources, even at this early stage Georgia felt driven dynamically to seek a European future.

New perspectives after regaining independence: European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations represent a part of the collective historical memory of the Georgian people who look forward to sharing bright future and values with their European neighbours. The establishment of a Western style democratic society in Georgia has become a significant part of the Georgian psyche and the country's modernization and progressive movement has become synonymous with Westernization.

Georgia's European self-identification: The Georgian people have a highly positive perception of Europe. Public opinion surveys show that almost four-fifths of the population would vote in favour of EU membership in a hypothetical referendum and an absolute majority has positive attitudes towards NATO membership (57.5%: 'very important', 22.7%: rather important) (Muller, 2011).

The analyses were able to confirm that a European self-identification is associated with the presence of relatives and friends living in the West. English has become the principal foreign language in Georgia, replacing Russian. Thousands of young Georgians were sent to the leading educational institutions of the West, and over two decades Georgia has received a well-educated and Westernized class of young professionals. Although strengthening relations with the EU is considered a top priority of Georgia's foreign policy, in terms of importance for Georgia the EU ranks behind NATO membership and the restoration of a normal relationship with Russia. (Muller, 2011).

This means that national security and territorial integrity are the main concerns of Georgians at the moment, and NATO and Russia rather than the EU are seen to be the immediate tasks for the Government with regard to Georgia's territorial interests. In the meantime, the conclusion of an association agreement with the EU is seen to be a step in the right direction.

1.4. The Europeanization of Georgia: 'top-down' incentives:

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the EU and NATO have played a significant role in shaping institutions, political processes and economic performance in the Eastern European neighbourhood. European structures accumulated competencies for the introduction of market oriented reforms, trade liberalization, health, environmental protection measures, foreign and social policies as well as the protection of human rights and the fight against organized crime. As a consequence, both the EU and NATO significantly affected the domestic structures of its neighbouring states. Conditionality and capacity-building represent the main stimulus for Eastern partner countries to adapt to EU and NATO requirements. The example of 'external Europeaniza-

tion' and the EU's enlargement policy are very often referred to as the Copenhagen criteria, which are a main precondition for introduction of a liberal democracy and a market economy to candidate countries (Borzel & Panke, 2013). It should be admitted that the Europeanization of Georgia became the principal ideological tool of the Saakashvili regime: the government was trying to introduce new rules, norms, practices and structures. How Saakashvili succeeded in efficiently implementing EU and NATO policies is explained below; the degree of domestic change varies significantly in certain areas.

1.5. The Priorities of the Saakashvili Government:

After the Rose Revolution (November 2003), the Georgian Government began to develop a Reform and Development Program, where detailed objectives were to be achieved by appropriate legislative and structural changes. Georgia continued to harmonize its legislation with EU and Council of Europe standards. On September 21, 2006 at an Informal Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in New York, the decision was taken to begin the Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues with Georgia (MFA Georgia). The NATO-Georgia Commission held its first official meeting just after the Russian-Georgian war. On December 2-3, 2008, NATO Foreign Ministers gave the NATO-Georgia Commission a central role in supervising the process set in hand at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008. In addition, the alliance decided to develop the Annual National Program with Georgia (MFA Georgia).

The NATO member countries at the Strasbourg/Kehl (2009) and Lisbon (2010) Summits reiterated their strong commitment to the Bucharest resolution. On 15 April, 2011 the NATO-Georgia Commission emphasized the success achieved by Georgia in implementing comprehensive reforms and its contribution to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan. On December 7, 2011 the NATO Foreign Ministers adopted the final statement on NATO's relations with partner countries, where Georgia was referred to as an aspirant partner country. At the NATO Chicago Summit held on May 20-21, 2012 Georgia participated in ISAF, core partners' and aspirant countries' meetings (MFA Georgia).

After the peaceful transfer of power in 2012 from the National Movement to the Georgian Dream Coalition, which was very positively assessed by the Alliance, NATO member-countries continued to support Georgia's NATO membership aims. The Wales Summit (4-5 September 2014) once again supported Georgia's aspirations and approved a special package, which envisages speeding up the process of Georgia's accession to NATO and a significant enhancement of Georgia's defence capabilities, including capacity building, setting up a training centre in Georgia, and enhanced inter-operability opportunities (Wales Summit Declaration, 2014).

1.6. Why Georgia is important for NATO:

Georgia has become a significant contributor to Euro-Atlantic security and is actively involved in NATO and EU-led

operations. In 1999-2008, Georgian military forces were deployed in Kosovo and Iraq. Georgia also participates in the anti-terrorist operation Active Endeavour, it became the largest contributor (with 1600 troops) among the non-NATO states in the ISAF operation, and in 2014 Georgia agreed to send a military mission to the Central African Republic in connection with EU crisis management operations (EUFOR RCA).

1.7. The impact of Russian aggression on the integration process:

NATO officials have frequently declared that no third country has the right of veto concerning NATO decisions, but recent events have proved that Russia is indeed able to influence the decision-making process. Initiatives taken by NATO and the EU both during and after the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 emphasized the irreplaceable and significant role of both NATO and the EU in building stability in Georgia and the region. On August 19, 2008, NATO Foreign Ministers unanimously condemned Russia's actions and the EU Monitoring Mission was set up to promote security and stability in Georgia. The Russian-Georgian war did however raise concerns among certain European NATO member-states over the Georgian government's predictability and diplomatic capabilities in conflict prevention and peaceful settlement of existing disputes, in particular in relations with Russia. In addition, Georgia made a lot of mistakes that contributed to the war. 'The list of Georgian mistakes goes on and on. Tbilisi's handling of its relations with Russia, destined to be difficult, could have been better. Luke-warm European support for Georgia was not just a function of appeasement, as Georgian officials suggested from time to time. It reflected real doubts about Tbilisi's democratic reforms at home and the weaknesses of Georgian diplomacy (Asmus, 2010).

President Saakashvili took a decision on the night of August 7 that resulted in a full-scale war between the two countries. It had catastrophic consequences for Georgia and without any doubt negatively influenced Georgia's prospective NATO membership. Russia launched a war against Georgia for quite clear strategic and geopolitical objectives: expelling Georgian troops and terminating Georgian sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia; preventing Georgia from joining NATO, and sending a strong signal to Ukraine that further striving for NATO membership on its part might lead to conflict with Russia and its dismemberment; increasing Russia's control of the Caucasus region; retaliation for the expulsion of Russian military bases from Georgian soil, and for Western recognition of Kosovo's independence; weakening and possibly toppling the pro-western Saakashvili government (Asmus, 2010).

Russia succeeded in attacking a country that had been regarded as a potential candidate for NATO membership. Russian aggression against Georgia showed the weaknesses of the NATO security umbrella in South-Eastern Europe; it became evident that Russia could use force against its neighbours with relative impunity. Some NATO member countries – 'friends of Russia' in Europe (Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain and Italy) – saw in the war a vindication of their opposition to Georgia's NATO membership, which should be regarded as selective indications of

'Realpolitik' in Eastern Europe. Russia succeeded in Ukraine as well: Yanukovich's Party of the Regions effectively sided with Russia during the war showing how destructive were the results of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration policy, and came to power in 2010. It set Ukraine's neutrality in law, including non-membership of NATO, and granted new privileged terms to the Russian fleet in Sevastopol, to stay in Ukraine until 2042 (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011).

1.8. Russia's new strategic security requirements and 'the area of privileged interests':

The sovereignty of ex-Soviet states became rigidly conditioned after the latest revolution in Ukraine (January-February 2014), the annexation of Crimea by Russia, Russia's further defragmentation attempts of Ukraine, and her military intervention in Eastern Ukraine, aimed at incorporating new Russian speaking regions. Russia has introduced new international rules according to which all EU Eastern Partner countries should behave in the interests of Russia, and this area should be considered to be an area of Russia's privileged interests. The three Baltic republics of the former Soviet Union have somehow been accepted as EU and NATO members by Russia (yet there is no guarantee). However, it became clear that in case of 'crossing a red line' (e.g. NATO and EU membership, attempts to deploy NATO military bases or antimissile systems in neighbouring states) by other post-Soviet countries, Russia will act. In August 2008, the desire to act was first demonstrated in Georgia, then in 2014 in Ukraine. Now it is Georgia's turn again: on 24 November 2014 Russia and Abkhazia signed the Treaty on Allied Relations and Strategic Partnership, which means the creation of a common defence and security area in Abkhazia and further de facto annexation of the Georgian province.

It has recently been emphatically demonstrated that anyone who decides to 'cross the red line' in the post-Soviet space as fixed by the Kremlin, should be ready for a real confrontation with Russia, including armed conflict. As President Putin explained during his annual special Direct Line: 'When the infrastructure of a military bloc (NATO) approaches Russia's borders, we must take certain steps ... If Ukraine is drawn into NATO at some time in the future and NATO ships dock in Sevastopol, this would be geopolitically sensitive for Russia because, in this way, Russia might well be ousted from the region. In these circumstances therefore Russia had to react accordingly' (Putin, 2014). Vladimir Putin's message has actually albeit reluctantly been accepted by the NATO key players. As President Obama recently clarified: 'I think that neither Ukraine nor Georgia are currently on a path to NATO membership and there has not been any immediate plans for expansion of NATO's membership' (Obama, 2014). It became clear that many NATO member countries will not be ready to accept Georgia's membership in the foreseeable future because of Russia's position, and this position will apply to other post-Soviet countries as well.

1.9. The shortcomings of the process and membership impediments:

On many occasions leaders of NATO member-states, as well as NATO representatives, expressed their concerns over

the shortcomings of Georgia's integration process. In particular, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stressed at the North Atlantic Council meeting held in Batumi that '...we have clearly laid out further work which is still required; in areas such as electoral reform, strengthening the rule of law, deepening reforms regarding judiciary and the media, and greater involvement of civil society' (Rasmussen, 2011). Certainly, the Saakashvili government did not pay sufficient attention to the concerns raised by Western leaders, non-governmental organisations, and opposition political forces which led to heavy losses on the part of the ruling United National Movement during the parliamentary elections of 2012. Saakashvili's government paid lip-service to the urgent need to join NATO, and even aggressively requested MAP and speedy accession to the organization. In reality, however, many requested reforms in such areas as nurturing of democratic institutions, the protection of human rights, the independence of media and judiciary, fighting corruption on an elite level, treating opposition forces and political rivals with respect, were not implemented. The situation in the field of defence was no better. A politicised defence system, poor civil control of military forces, scandals over the procurement of military hardware, mismanagement of budgetary resources, numerous abuses of the rights of military personnel, etc. were revealed in the Ministry of Defence and among the Georgian military forces as soon as the new government came into power (Aladashvili, 2012; Alasania, 2013). Many supporters of NATO enlargement argue that it will help to spread democracy in Eastern Europe. The Georgian experience demonstrates however that despite investing a lot of resources into building up a modern democratic society, in reality 'the beacon of democracy' was flipping between democracy and autocracy with all the consequences one might expect (Reiter, 2001).

After the Georgian 2012 elections, many political circles in Western capitals were concerned about the direction of Georgia's new domestic politics. The former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and then the new prime minister Irakli Garibashvili have been trying to convince EU/NATO member-countries that the new government is not going to change its foreign policy priorities. Many EU/NATO leaders have however expressed their concern regarding the numerous arrests of former key official and political figures. (Rasmussen, NATO, 2012) In 2014 Saakashvili was summoned for interrogation to the Prosecutor General's office and criminal charges have been filed against him in absentia; the sword of Ivanishvili/Garibashvili justice was hanging over Saakashvili's head, which further exacerbated Western reactions.

The situation was further complicated when, on November 4, 2014, the prime minister Irakli Garibashvili sacked the defence minister Irakli Alasania, who was dismissed after high-ranking officials of the ministry had been charged with corruption. The dismissal of this pro-Western Minister led to a crisis within the ruling coalition: close associates of Alasania: the foreign minister Maia Panjikidze and state minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Aleks Petriashvili have resigned, and the Free Democrats party has left the coalition. Irakli Alasania denied all charges and stressed that the arrests of several defence ministry officials are politically motivated and represent an 'attack on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice' (Reuters, 2014).

The ruling Georgian Dream coalition has sought to improve ties with Moscow and at the same time keeping the same pace of integration with Brussels: a priori quite an unachievable mission. Unlike Saakashvili, the new government has significantly softened its diplomatic language with the Kremlin, did not join sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, opened new channels of political communication (the Abashidze-Karasin talks) between Moscow and Tbilisi, and boosted bilateral trade (actually welcomed by NATO and EU). While economic relations have improved, political ties have remained frozen because of, on the one hand, Moscow's refusal to compromise on Georgia's goal of NATO membership and her having signed the Association agreement with the EU and, on the other, Tbilisi's demand that recognition of two Georgian provinces as independent states be withdrawn. The new deal, which was concluded between Moscow and Sokhumi aiming at the de facto annexation of Abkhazia, means that Georgia's foreign policy aimed at pleasing the Kremlin to a certain degree, and improving relations with Moscow, did not yield any significant results and has reached deadlock. The government's principle of 'not to tease the goose' did not work this time.

Conclusion:

NATO with its eastward expansion is gradually extending the Western system of security across the European continent. This process goes in parallel with the establishment of Western democratic values and social and economic standards in the wider European region. NATO and EU enlargement set the foundation for stability, prosperity and development of South-East European region. In the meantime, there can be no doubt that the war with Russia in August 2008, the annexation of Crimea, the war in Eastern Ukraine, and the Russian factor in general have played quite a negative role in Georgia's accession to NATO, and have significantly slowed down the membership process. Despite the fact that many NATO officials declared that no third party, including Russia, can veto the membership of applicant countries, certain NATO member-countries have no desire to complicate their relationship with Russia on account of Georgia. Another obstacle in the way of Georgia's NATO membership is the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the deployment of Russian military in these Georgian provinces, which would conflict with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in the case of Georgia's membership. It is evident that the abuse of power by Saakashvili regime played quite a negative role where acceleration of NATO integration was concerned. After the October 2012 elections the peaceful transfer of power to the Georgian Dream coalition was well accepted by the NATO member countries, and generally played a positive role in NATO-Georgian relations. The post-election arrests of many high ranking officials, however, gave rise to criticism at NATO headquarters and in the international media. The Ivanishvili/Garibashvili government's expectation of immediate improvement in the Russian-Georgian relationship was certainly premature. The Kremlin's request to start building a new relationship with Georgia as soon as the new government came to power have not yet contributed to a rapprochement, and the expectations of the new regime were definitely exaggerated. Now it has become clear that Russia is determined to play a zero-sum game in post-Soviet space, and does not want to compromise its nationalist and impe-

rialist principles. However, with fine and filigree diplomatic work, a new bilateral relationship with Moscow can be built up, possibly in the distant future, with a new Russian leadership who will replace Putin and his regime, and which will be based on confidence-building, and mutual trust that allows the Georgian government to slowly but steadily press for European and Euro-Atlantic integration: a path that needs patience and time. For its part, the West should support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and ongoing reforms, and at the same time to dissuade Russia from acting on its worst imperial instincts. Georgia now has multiple tasks in its relations with NATO, the EU and Russia, and it will take hard work for many years to come to succeed in achieving the goal. Finally, we can conclude that NATO membership is above all a political process, and that conditionality and a performance-based approach is secondary to the will of the alliance's members regarding accession decision making, and that the external/Russian factor plays a decisive role in the EU/NATO integration process for post-Soviet countries.

References

- Aladashvili, I. (2012, December 27). *Short Analysis of 2012 Military Events*. Retrieved September 30, 2014, from <http://www.georgianjournal.ge/military/21634-short-analysis-of-2012-military-events.html>.
- Alasania, I. (2013). We should not be forcing anyone to be enrolled in the Army. *Kviris Palitra*, 2(962), pp. 6-7.
- Asmus, R. (2010). *A little War That shook the World: Georgia, Russia and Future of the West*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Borinski, P. (2010). NATO Towards NATO Enlargement: The Case of the Balkans. *Journal of European Integration*, 24(2), 113-136.
- Borzel, T., & Panke, D. (2013). *Europeanization*. (M. C.-S. Borrigan, Ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, A., & Hamilton, R. E. (2011, June). *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*. Retrieved October 31, 2014, from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/summary.cfm?q=1069>.
- Forster, A., & Wallace, W. (2001). What is NATO for? *Survival. Global Politics and Strategy*, 43(4), 107-122.
- Kakachia, K. (2012). Georgia's Identity-Driven Foreign Policy and the Struggle for its European Destiny. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No: 37, 4-7.
- MFA Georgia. (n.d.). Retrieved October 31, 2014, from http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=455.
- MFA Georgia. (n.d.). Retrieved October 31, 2014, from http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=453.
- Muller, M. (2011). Public Opinion Toward the European

Union in Georgia. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27(1), 64-92

- NATO, T. (1949). nato.int. Retrieved October 28, from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.
- Nichol, J. (2008, January 25). Georgia's January 2008 Presidential Election: Outcome and Implications. Retrieved October 30, 2014, from <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22794.pdf>.
- Obama, B. (2014, March 26). *President Obama, US-EU press-conference*. Retrieved September 30, 2014, from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2014/03/26/president-obama-holds-press-conference>.
- Putin, V. (2014, April 17). *The annual special Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*. Retrieved October 31, 2014, from <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034>.
- Rasmussen, A. F. (2011, 11 2011). *Statement by NATO Secretary General at the North Atlantic Council meeting. Batumi, 10.11.2011*. Retrieved September 30, 2014, from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_80748.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- Rasmussen, A. F. (2012, November 14). *NATO*. Retrieved September 30, 2014, from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_91286.htm.
- Reiter, D. (2001). Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy. *International Security*, 25(4), 41-67.
- Reuters. (2014). *Georgian coalition in crisis as party, foreign minister quits*. Retrieved October 30, from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/05/us-georgia-government-idUSKBN0IP0VV20141105>.
- Shevardnadze, E. (2002, November 22). *nato.int*. Retrieved September 30, 2014, from <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm>.
- Wales Summit Declaration. (2014, September 5). *nato.int*. Retrieved October 31, 2014, from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.
- Wallace, W. (2000). From the Atlantic to the Bug, from the Atlantic to the Tigris? The Transformation of the EU and NATO. *International Affairs*, 3, 475-493.
- Woodliffe, J. (1998). The Evolution of a New NATO for a New Europe. *International and Comparative Law*, 47(1), 174-192.