Integration of Post-Soviet Republics into NATO:

Comparative Analysis of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Estonia and Georgia

* Tato Bezhitashvili

Abstract

Estonia and Georgia, the two former Soviet republics, at the time of the collapse of the USSR, had quite a similar experience of statecraft: they both lived under communist rule, did not have any experience of democratic development and market relations, were approximately at the same level of development among the 15 Soviet republics and also experienced the same pressure on awakening national identity and orientation towards European values. However, with the collapse of the USSR, very distinct tendencies emerged in these two states. If Estonia, together with other post-Soviet Baltic countries, took a course towards deep reformation of the country and integration with Europe and ensuring security through joining the North Atlantic alliance, then Georgia, under the newly elected nationalist government of Gamsakhurdia, chose the path of confrontation with national minorities and its closest neighbors, and the building of a Common Caucasian Home (primarily with the North Caucasian republics being part of the Russian Federation), which led the country to a civil war, self-isolation and alienation from the West. This led to two completely different trajectories in the conduct of these countries in the international arena in the next three decades. The paper compares the two Euro-centric post-Soviet states, Estonia and Georgia, in the context of NATO integration. By drawing a variety of parallels, the research refers to both historical experiences, transformational abilities, the readiness of political elites to carry out radical reforms and explores several reasons explaining differences in the Euro-Atlantic international path of Estonia and Georgia. At the same time, the article examines several external factors and particularly the Russian one, that influenced the integration path of these countries: in one case, giving the green light to joining the alliance (a case of Estonia) and, in the other, all kinds of opposition to NATO membership (a case of Georgia).

Keywords: NATO, Estonia, Georgia, Integration, Russia, Soviet Union.

* Postgraduate Student, International Relations Master Program, E-mail: tato.bezhitashvili@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, fifteen newly independent states appeared on the political map of the world. The post-Soviet republics restored their independence as an eventual gift from this development. All reemerged countries set their individual goals and priorities in both their internal and external affairs. Depending on their speeds of transition and restructuring, only a few states could quickly overcome the post-Soviet syndrome, whereas the majority of former Soviet Republics faced quite a few challenges, which reduced their transitional pace and chances to become full-fledged advanced independent states. From the very beginning of independence, the Baltic States took the lead in the process of post-communist transformation who set the ambitious task of early integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Thus, the last decade of the XX century appeared as a dividing line between the Baltic States and the rest of the post-Soviet republics. This paper, with particular attention to Estonia and Georgia, intends to explain the variety of reasons why the former could achieve NATO integration soon after the break-up of the USSR, while the latter has not completed a decades-long process yet.

For some scholars, the fact that Estonia has become a NATO member back in 2004 makes its membership peculiarities already outdated for contemporary analysis. However, the following research revisits the process of Estonia's path from post-communist transformation to its NATO membership and compares it with Georgia's case, which, in our opinion, is still incomplete. This approach is intended to build a bridge between Estonia and Georgia's current geopolitical positions by reassessing their distinct approaches in the past and offering reasonable options for the future. This makes Estonia's NATO integration considerable once again by portraying it as a role model for Georgia with its rapid transition, democratization, and NATO accession. Moreover, insofar as NATO integration remains one of Georgia's top foreign policy priorities, all the missteps and achievements should be carefully examined, and the existing opportunities should be analyzed. Therefore, the topic has not lost relevance even at the thirtieth anniversary since regaining independence and deserves further attention from scholars and policy-makers.

The research is organized around the following questions:

1. What did predetermine Estonia's prompt Euro-Atlantic integration?

2. What are the main reasons for the prolongation of Georgia's post-communist transition and impediments to its NATO membership?

Here should be particularly emphasized that neither the shared direct neighborhood with Russia nor a common historical experience of being part of the USSR played a primary role in the Euro-Atlantic integration of mentioned republics. While Estonia championed NATO membership in 2004, Georgia's integration was delayed because of quite a few external and internal factors, which hindered the entire process.

Explaining the Divergent Outcomes

The experience shows that Estonia and Georgia throughout the second half of the twentieth century of being part of the Soviet Union (having communist ideology as their guiding principle and facing Russian threat in the immediate aftermath of the break-up of the USSR), largely had a common Soviet background. However, the common past did not guarantee the same development in the process of transition – Estonia could properly use all of the given opportunities to join NATO back in 2004, while Georgia is still knocking on the door of NATO. Hence, it is necessary to revise the main reasons, drivers, and motivators of Estonia's NATO membership (alongside the rest of Baltic States) into NATO, and explain the major impediments, which disallowed Georgia from getting the full-fledged membership of the alliance.

The following section consists of five major parts. Each of them identifies the roots of the divergent positions of Estonia and Georgia in the context of NATO integration. Details connected to communism and post-communist transition are considered as the influencers of states' efficiency. More to the point, the geopolitical situation with a focus on the West and Russia is seen as yet another feature. One sub-chapter is devoted to the analysis of the two different approaches towards nation-building. Finally, geographic location in determining states' performance is argued to be of vital importance.

Integration of Post-Soviet Republics into NATO: Comparative Analysis of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Estonia and Georgia

Journal of Social Sciences; ISSN: 2233-3878; e-ISSN: 2346-8262; Volume 7, Issue 2, 2018

1.1.   The Legacy of Communist Rule

There is a considerable correlation between today's political performance of post-communist states and their period of being under Soviet rule. Those countries, which were forced to join the communist bloc back in the early 1920s (e.g., Georgia), usually perform worse today than those who became members of the USSR after WWII (e.g., the Baltic countries, including Estonia) (Bunce, 2018, p. 48). The remarkable point here is that as several generations had been living under communist domination, states and people lost a significant portion of their identity, political culture, and necessity or method of nation-building. On the contrary, the elderly people in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania could still remember the experience of their nations before WWII. Interestingly, those states joining the bloc roughly after the Second World War faced only temporary pressure from Stalinization and communism.

While most of the present practices take roots from the memories of earlier times, it is also true that the shorter the dividing gap between certain memories of a nation and the present time the easier the reestablishment of previously accepted norms and order. "Memory of memory" is what makes the experience an inspirational force for modernity (Olick, 2007, p. 12). Notably, the nationwide remembrance of statehood and generational longevity of common memory played an essential role for Estonia in smoothly reenacting the disregarded institutions, resuming paused traditions, and other components of the nation. The consistency of the national memory of Estonia was largely dependent on elderly people, who had been living in the interwar period for about two decades and later under communist rule for approximately a half-century. Hence, the gap between the two periods of Estonia's independence was narrow enough to recollect national practices, promptly divorce from the USSR guidance, and quickly regain the place among sovereign nations. The national movements in Estonia throughout the 1970s and 1980s were largely triggered by the fact that "the memory of independent statehood in the interwar period was still very much alive" (Wolchik & Curry, 2018, p. 21). Markedly, Estonia could quite effortlessly renew rather than introduce its major political institutions, judicial system, electoral model, and constitution not from scratch but the interwar period of state-building (Eglitis, 2018, pp. 319-320). Particularly, the Estonian post-Soviet constitution was fundamentally based on the constitution of 1938, which was both a symbolic and political step for underlining the continuity between the two periods of Estonia's independence and the legal personality of the country (Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, 1992).

Comparing Estonia's communist experience with Georgian one, it is noteworthy that the latter's memory of first independence and statehood practice was blurred by the 70-year Soviet rule from back in the early 1920s. Remarkably, in distinction with Estonia's two-decade-long independence between WWI and WWII, the Democratic Republic of Georgia could exist for less than three years from 1918 to 1921. Consequently, the aforementioned gap between the historical memory of statehood and the post-Soviet independence was way wider than in the case of Estonia. Additionally, "the function of Noe Jordania [the head of the government of the first republic] was the continuation and complete realization of Ilia Chavchavadze's great national project", which he well accomplished (Guruli, 1999, p. 72) (Toria, 2014, p. 318). Nevertheless, post-Soviet Georgia lacked the true historical successor of Noe Jordania as the father of Georgia and the symbol of national unity.

It is a commonly-recognized understanding that the four-day-old constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was one of the most forward-looking legislative documents of its time (Papuashvili, 2012, pp. 323-325). It could perfectly refer to the issues of multiparty and representative democracy, Georgia's peaceful relations with neighboring countries, an independent judicial branch, protecting the rights of ethnic and religious minority groups, guaranteeing gender equality on both social and political levels, abolishment of the death penalty, etc. Despite having such a short-lived but highly progressive state, the 70-year disconnection between the memory and the present reality made Georgia considerably vulnerable in its attempt for nation-building, and thus, its democratic development was delayed for an unforeseeable period.

1.2.   Two Stories of Transition

The specifications of post-communist transition appear as the landmark features for states' political and economic performance throughout the 1990s and subsequent decades. The pace of transition largely preconditioned the structural development of both Estonia and Georgia and defined their destiny in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Estonia could rapidly overcome the post-Soviet crisis and therefore, quickly meet existing NATO requirements. The instant divorce from the rest of the communism-affected nations has been perceived as one of the most crucial accomplishments achieved by Estonia. This development has positively contributed to the formation and solidification of the Baltic States as the prominent and indispensable trio within the Euro-Atlantic space. Certainly, Estonia has been a leading politico-economic actor since that time.

At the same time, Estonia was a part of those ground-breaking CEE countries, which could properly use the historic chance and quickly promote themselves during the first wave of regional democratization. The country's irreversible aspiration towards Euro-Atlantic accession was accompanied by two significant developments. In the first case, it was a massive transformation of Estonian society, replacement of a state-controlled economy by the western-type market economy, protection of human rights and fundamental liberties, etc. Secondly, it was the issue of "Western" or "European" identity that was a widely perceived source of democracy, economic prosperity, and social welfare (Urbelis, 2003, p. 4). Ultimately, Estonians believed in the prompt necessity of returning to the West, while completely abandoning ties with the Soviet Union and its successor state. Hence, the Baltic countries represented the distinctive case out of the entire post-Soviet space, which could formulate the quick and robust de-Sovietization and westernization policies in the initial years after the breakup of the USSR. Specifically, the marginalization of communists from politics was reached either through lustration acts or modification of electoral and citizenship regulations (Di Gregorio, 2012, p. 347). It is safe to say that the Soviet Union was perceived as a life-threatening creation for almost all of its member states, which had to be destroyed. Although the goal has been achieved, most of the post-Soviet republics had no plan for further disconnection from Soviet-led affairs. Unlike the twelve post-Soviet countries, the Baltics instantly rejected the participation in the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was an explicit step for manifesting their Eurocentric enthusiasm (Oliker, Chivvis, Crane, Tkacheva, & Boston, 2015, p. 11). Consequently, Estonia emerged as one of the earliest champions among the ex-Soviet republics adopting western-type neo-liberal ideology, individual-oriented economy, as well as modern information technology (Vihalemm & Masso, 2007, p. 72).

On the contrary, Georgia has failed in its attempt for civilized divorce, timely disintegration from Russian influence, and establishment of itself as a qualified western-type state. In addition, despite the high necessity, even the proper attempts for disintegration were scarce during the first decade of Soviet collapse (Jones, 2015, p. 53). The post-Soviet governments of Georgia kept the Soviet-type bureaucracy and bodies as the means for guiding society and maintaining an office, and hence, remained tightly influenced by the Soviet-type methods of statecraft. The South Caucasian country, dreadfully affected by civil war, terrible economic conditions, and extensive rate of corruption, failed to carry out necessary institutional and economic transformations (Gylfason & Hochreiter, 2008). Thus, the process of disengagement from the Soviet sentiment and lifestyle went painfully and slowly.

The failure in using the momentous opportunity during the whole 1990s for utterly escaping the Russia-centered orbit, made Georgia's democratic transition pause for several years and Euro-Atlantic accession froze up until now. Despite Russia's default in 1998, Georgia appeared unprepared for taking active steps towards Western integration largely because of its inability to fully recover from the internal turmoil back in the early 1990s (Badridze, 2020).

Notably, each president of Georgia portrayed himself as the savor of a nation, who would reverse the undemocratic trajectory of his forerunner. This happened in the case of anti-communist and promoter of the concept of the Common Caucasian Home Gamsakhurdia, pluralism-supporter Shevardnadze, and a "Great Westernizer" Saakashvili. Ironically, although both an experienced Shevardnadze and Western-educated Saakashvili could win the hearts and minds of the West, they could not fully realize promises (Jones, 2013, p. 5).

Discussing Georgia's transitional experience, it is noteworthy to recall the two major shifting occasions in post-Soviet Georgia: the famous Rose Revolution of 2003 and the parliamentary elections of 2012. Beginning with Saakashvili-organized "Revolution", it appeared as a light at the end of the tunnel signaling that Georgia eventually stepped into the new millennium of wide-ranging opportunities. The new government managed to raise the country's economic growth rate, ensure greater transparency, and boost Georgia's pace of Euro-Atlantic integration (Jones, 2013, pp. 5-6). With the first substantial change of government, Georgia started an internationally respected transition from being bounded by the Soviet-type nomenklatura towards building a pro-democratic state. Consequently,

> "The places of members of the former party and business nomenklatura were taken over by figures and groups with no previous managerial experience from Soviet times, who came from new political parties and movements, NGOs, and top management positions at private companies" (Nisnevich & Ryabov, 2019, p. 16).

The second turning point in Georgia's late democratic transition was the parliamentary elections of 2012, which created the precedent for a peaceful transfer of power (Jones, 2013, p. 3). Hence, the shift occurred not through civil war or revolution, but fair and transparent elections. Nonetheless, the country has not yet passed what is known as Huntington's "two turnover test".

These were delayed transitional processes in comparison with the improvements reached in Estonia. Consequently, Georgia could not attain what it should in a given period, and thus, remained stuck in-between the West and Russia. Even nowadays, Georgia,

Integration of Post-Soviet Republics into NATO: Comparative Analysis of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Estonia and Georgia

Journal of Social Sciences; ISSN: 2233-3878; e-ISSN: 2346-8262; Volume 7, Issue 2, 2018

together with Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Belarus, is perceived as an "in-between" country that is neither an official member of Western family of states nor divorced from Russia-led politics (Charap, Demus, & Shapiro, 2018, pp. 1-3). Rather, Georgia appears to be one of the pieces of precarious tension between the West and the Russian Federation. Therefore, as long as the South Caucasian country remains stuck between at least two global powers, it loses almost all potential benefits from the membership of NATO, and, at the same time, experiences turmoil, a considerable degree of instability, and insecurity.

Thus, it is logical to assume that Estonia could manage to quickly and confidently divorce from the Russian sphere of influence and join the transatlantic alliance. Whereas Georgia, because of its slow tempo in the process of civilized disintegration from Russia-influenced politics, could not achieve a long-desired goal of becoming a plenipotentiary member of Euro-Atlantic structures. Hence, remarkably, it was all about the timing of breakup from the Soviet impact, reformation, and restructuring of the two post-Soviet states that have contributed disparately in the making of NATO accession stories. Georgia's delayed transition, largely because of the civil war, economic destabilization, widespread corruption, and a low level of reformation made the country "late for the train of Western integration which took our fellow Baltic countries to safety and forever ensured their security, democracy and prosperity" (Badridze, 2020).

1.3. Geopolitical Situation: Russia and the West in the 90s and now

The newly-established world order during the immediate post-Cold War decade appeared as a significant ground for those actors willing to shift their vectors to the Western norms and principles of democratic lifestyle. Remarkably, Baltic countries represent the only actors out of fifteen post-Soviet republics, which could join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Hence, it is quite important to analyze the geopolitical factor, which pushed Estonia and NATO member states to cooperate in such an unprecedented format. Why did not Russia act in 2004 in response to that development as it did towards Georgia in 2008? Answering this question, one should note the fact that Russia was way weaker throughout the first decade and a half since the Soviet breakup, while it is explicitly stronger and ambitious after the turn of the millennium. On the other hand, the immediate post-Cold war period was unilaterally dominated by the US, whereas nowadays, its geopolitical role is gradually diminishing. Such a dramatic change in Russo-American interlinked roles affects the prospects of NATO's eastward enlargement policy.

In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Russia emerged as the reasonable successor of the USSR. The devastated economy and declining geopolitical position forced the first Russian president Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) to maintain a conciliatory stance towards the West (Sarotte, 2014, pp. 90-97). Indeed, even in that condition, Russia was highly concerned with growing cooperation between Estonia and Euro-Atlantic actors but had no actual leverage for impeding the process. Notably, Estonia was not only a communist bloc country but an official member of the Soviet Union, which made its NATO integration more sensitive for Russia than in the case of the alliance's previous eastern enlargement in Visegrad Four except Slovakia.

As long as Russia had a fragile domestic situation and troubles over its recovery, the Western institutions were widely requested for offering membership to the Baltic countries, which represented the widely-recognized champions among all post-Soviet republics in their westernization and democratization process. Otherwise, giving this chance to the Baltics after the revival of Russia "would be an insufferable provocation to a superpower" (Safire, 1994). Thus, benefitting from the window of opportunity was a smart decision taken by NATO. Russia did not have either sufficient power or ambition for containing NATO membership of Estonia. At the same time, the Western states, considering both their strength and strategy, appeared ready to unanimously provide a security umbrella to the exceptional graduate of transition, Estonia.

Throughout the fifteen years since the end of the Cold War, Russia had an impression that its alarming statements were converted by NATO in a cooperative manner (Dobbins & Zagorski, 2018, p. 8). Due to its unfavorable position, Russia had no other choice but to accept the NATO membership of the Baltics and stay optimistic towards its reemergence for preventing similar attempts from the Euro-Atlantic organization to incorporate Russia's direct neighbors.

Georgia, largely because of its uneasy relations with Russia, which is more ambitious now than throughout the 1990s, is incapable of achieving an eventual integration into the NATO alliance. Moreover, the Western attitude over Georgia's Euro-Atlantic membership is full of uncertainty and disunity. Comparing Georgia's case with the Estonian one, if the latter could promptly use its beneficial geopolitical position back in 2004, Georgia's NATO membership has become a daily concern for a tiny Caucasian state as after a less cooperative and more assertive Putin's government took power in the Kremlin. Since that time, the prospects for Georgia's NATO accession have been bounded by security concerns, which considerably stimulated the trend of regular postponement in offering the MAP to Georgia.

As Russia accumulated sufficient strength and introduced a more assertive foreign policy strategy, its growing pressure over the neighboring post-Soviet states became increasingly manifested. Georgia's Western-associated aspirations have been choked by its northern neighbor at their very first stages, including the imposition of sanctions on Georgia after the completion of NATO's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2006. Alliance membership became more ghostly after the August War and recognizing the independence of two breakaway regions of Georgia by the Kremlin (Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze, & Iashvili, 2013, p. 119).

President Putin's Munich speech in 2007 and the statement by the following President Medvedev in 2008 explicitly demonstrated the real ambitions of Russia globally as well as regionally. In particular, during his speech, President Putin harshly criticized the West and set a goal for his country to regain the status of superpower (Cohen, 2018). In addition, President Medvedev described Russia's neighboring countries as "privileged" among all of Russia's interests (Oliker, Chivvis, Crane, Tkacheva, & Boston, 2015, p. 5). It is noteworthy that his address was delivered shortly before the occupation of the Georgian two provinces in 2008, which once again highlighted the real motive behind this term, which is the legitimization of Russia's use of force abroad.

Moreover, in distinction with what was NATO during 1990-2004, the level of its unity has gradually been diminishing in parallel with the rising strength and ambition of reviving Russia. The alliance appeared incapable of incorporating any post-Soviet country since 2004, and could only extend its membership in the Balkans, including Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia (NATO, 2020). NATO's full-fledged members remain highly concerned with Russia's alarming rhetoric, which on its own, makes the alliance's position towards its eastern enlargement indeterminate, and Georgia's membership debatable (Kereselidze, 2015, p. 99).

The Western policy-makers argue that Russia has no official veto power for blocking Georgia's NATO accession, while it is also true that Russia has this right. It is noteworthy that the higher the ambitions of Russia in its neighborhood, the lower the chances for any post-Soviet state to join the Euro-Atlantic family. The existential threat of restarting Russian aggression is like having Sword of Damocles (Cambridge Dictionary)[1] over the head of Georgia so that it is barely predictable when it will fall. Thus, any steps are taken westward by Georgia or the attempts of eastern expansion by NATO, which are in direct contradiction with Russian interests, usually results in a "proportional" response from Moscow by putting additional pressures over Tbilisi. Hence, Russia's advantageous position alongside the West's weakening power and attitude hinder Georgia's foreign policy aspirations to be attained and veto its accession into the North Atlantic alliance.

1.4.   Internal Developments: Different Understandings of Nation-Building

Internal developments and the way the country responded to the post-communist challenges differ on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, what is crucial in NATO requirements is that an aspirant country should be democratic, with an efficient market economy, and a pluralist society with well-protected minorities. Interestingly, the last aspect appeared to be one of the most decisive tasks for both post-Soviet Estonia and Georgia as long as it occupied a significant portion in the nation-building process.

One can assume that the degree of diversity has a direct impact on the path state chooses and the degree of success it achieves during the transition from one to another regime. There is quite a logical ground for claiming that the more ethnically or religiously diverse the country, the more difficult it is to secure its democratic transition, especially in the immediate post-communist years (Bunce, 2018, p. 40). Interestingly, this assumption appeared true in the case of Georgia. Nevertheless, it was not the case of Estonia, which had a similarly heterogeneous population with a large proportion of ethnic Russian, despite the contradictory outcome in its attempt at nation-building and democratization.

Remarkably, the means the countries chose were mirrored at the end of the transition process. In particular, as Estonian government vigorously targeted the establishment of its statehood on the western norms by quickly adopting a bulk of Western-type legal acts (Urbelis, 2003, p. 8), while the Georgian government under Gamsakhurdia rule practiced ethnic nationalism, disregard of rights of ethnic minorities and was seeking formation of "Common Caucasian Home", primarily with the Northern Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation. As a result, Estonia's approach resulted in its prompt diplomatic recognition as an integral part of the Western family, regularly-growing financial assistance from US and Western European institutions, and the eventual membership of the NATO and EU by 2004. On the contrary, as the first Georgian officials and elite could not realize the genuine nature of democratic values, they missed the chance for getting an instant recognition and vital support from the West, and thus, remained internally vulnerable and externally disregarded; actually, the country was left alone in front of rising Russia.

---

[1]   "If you have a sword of Damocles hanging over you/your head, something bad seems very likely to happen to you".

Integration of Post-Soviet Republics into NATO: Comparative Analysis of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Estonia and Georgia

Journal of Social Sciences; ISSN: 2233-3878; e-ISSN: 2346-8262; Volume 7, Issue 2, 2018

Discussing the case of Estonia, one should identify the high degree of ethnic diversity within the society. However, it did not prove the assumption that ethnic diversity makes democratization barely achievable. The other way around, despite having a considerable multiethnic population, Estonia confidently managed to establish itself as a staunch democracy. At the time of regaining independence from the USSR, Estonia had a large Russian-speaking ethnic minority with 38.5% of the entire population, whereas as of 2011, this number decreased to 24.8% along with the increasing percentage of ethnic Estonian (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021).

With the primary goal of distancing from the Russia-led politics and restricting the eligibility for Russians in receiving Estonian citizenship, the duration of citizenship of at least two years since the 30th of March 1990, the fulfillment of language requirements, and taking an oath towards the constitution and state became the three major criteria for getting Estonian passport (Carpinelli, 2019, pp. 198-200). This, indeed, frustrated the then Russian elite on the one hand, but encouraged Estonia's nation-building process on the other. Hence, Estonia, with such a smart and minimally aggressive approach, could build a European state (Herd, 1999, p. 199).

Since the nation-building process was unimaginable without the psychological readiness and solid enthusiasm of the population, a so-called "transition culture" appeared as the critical point for post-Soviet states. The post-communist people should be widely taught about the improvements they get by accepting the principles of democracy and capitalism (Kennedy, 2002, pp. 8-12). Notably, this recommendation was differently considered by various post-Soviet countries among which the Baltics took the indisputable lead back in the early 1990s. Later, their high transition culture was automatically interpreted into the accession in Euro-Atlantic structures. Remarkably, almost the entire Baltic citizenry supported their NATO aspirations. What is more, the issue of NATO membership unified quite a fragmented political spectrum of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and guaranteed their domestic unanimity (Urbelis, 2003, p. 3).

While Estonia succeeded to transcend the boundaries of nationalism (that encouraged the liberation movement in Estonia) and achieved rapid democratization, westernization, and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, Georgia failed in its bid to become a full-fledged member of the mentioned institutions. Unlike Estonia, the Georgian elites at the early stage used ethnopolitical nationalism as a tool for building a Georgian-dominated country, and hence "securing" the proper implementation of the statecraft process.

As long as the post-communist transformation had strong roots in nationalism, it was difficult to shift people's attention towards Euro-Atlantic integration rather than domestic problems (Kennedy, 2002, pp. 4-6). Georgia's transition culture, in contrast to the Estonian one, remained on a low level throughout the 1990s and was improved only since 2003, when the reformer government took office and changed the mindset of the Georgian population into a more pro-Western one.

Contemporary Russian policy-makers effectively put into practice Nikolay Trubetskoy's vision on the necessity of promoting Eurasian-type ethnonationalism in Russia's adjacent areas, including Georgia (Trubetskoy, 1925). Hence, by blocking a European-type civic nationalism and encouraging confrontation on the ethnic grounds, Russia inspired Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnic groups to pursue independence. This, of course, protracted Georgia's nation-building process, which has been unimaginable without the Abkhazian and South Ossetian regions. As long as early Georgian leaders used extreme nationalism, they remained the ideological captives of Nikolay Trubetskoy's vision, threatened national minorities, and received a reciprocal response from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the regular warnings on secession (Toft, 2001, pp. 123-125).

Finally, there are four significant impediments to Georgia's nation-building and democratic consolidation. First of all, Georgia as a small state has largely depended on the centralization of power in the hands of charismatic leaders. This practice might have been a relatively effective tool for integrating a dissolved country, but it could not respond to the demands of ethnic minorities and requirements for democratic governance. Secondly, there was no sufficient degree of communication between the governors and citizens. Particularly, since the 1990s, all major decisions were made by a small group of policy-makers and such an approach led the country into crisis, corruption, and especially the popular disappointment on their civic rights and commitments. Yet another feature of a weak nation-building practice is the long-lasting absence of an independent judiciary. Thus, the politicized judicial branch could not serve its function properly and was an instrument for political control. Last but not least, political power is tightly merged with economic power. Consequently, "political power in Georgia is a source of self-enrichment; economic power is a source of political patronage" (Jones, 2013, pp. 5-7).

Thus, the specific approaches towards nation-building stand as the prominent factors in the creation of the success story of Estonia and the postponement of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Once again, if the former achieved a rapid westernization and firm domestic consensus over NATO membership, the latter was bound by inter-ethnic clashes, as well as the idea of regional brotherhood.

1.5.   Why Regions Matter?

Both Estonia and Georgia represent two out of fourteen direct neighbors of the Russian Federation. This detail appears one of the central common characteristics for both post-Soviet republics and makes both states located in the strategically important areas (the Baltics and South Caucasus, respectively), which have been inspiring global powers and organizations either to establish their authority or strengthen links with them.

Divergence in their geographic proximity with the West is a crucial characteristic for Estonia and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. It was logical that if NATO had incorporated any post-Soviet state, it would have been the Baltics vividly led by Estonia, which was both geographically and ideologically closer to the West. Ultimately, NATO's first eastward expansion in the direct neighborhood with the Russian Federation was focused primarily on the Baltics. Notably, most of the Western nations did not recognize the forced incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the USSR in 1939. The most monumental was a non-recognition policy of the United States of America, which has never accepted the occupation and inclusion of the Baltics into the Soviet Union (Juda, 1975, pp. 272-274). Thus, even though the Western non-recognition could not prevent the USSR to integrate the Baltics, it played a principal role while restoring independence and pursuing trans-Atlantic integration.

Georgia's geographic belonging to the West is one of the primary bases for joining Euro-Atlantic structures. After the integration of Turkey into NATO in 1952, Georgia received a significant geographic narrative for the endorsement of its membership prospects after the demise of the Soviet system. In addition to the territorial neighborhood since back in the 1950s, the argument appeared even stronger after the enlargement round of 2004, which included Romania and Bulgaria into NATO, and hence, automatically made Georgia a bordering state of the alliance via the Black Sea (Lazarević, 2009, p. 43). If nothing else, Georgia has historically belonged to the Black Sea region, which is widely perceived as an integral part of the wider Mediterranean area, and thus, of Trans-Atlantic space. Georgia's geographic location is frequently argued as strategically important for NATO. Located at the crossroads of the West and the East, Black and Caspian Seas, Russia and the Middle East, European and Asian continents, Christianity and Islam, Georgia represents one of the unique countries in the world. In addition, South Caucasian countries are militarily and economically beneficial for the Euro-Atlantic alliance. To be more precise, Georgia's reconstructed ports and airports have been offering both infrastructural and transitional capabilities to NATO's cargo and militaries in the direction of Afghanistan (Coffey, 2018, pp. 1-2). Still, Georgia, unlike Estonia, is geographically far from the core Western powers, which may deliver the political and economic backing, but remain physically distant from the South Caucasian state.

The degree of complexity in regional affairs represents one of the key features for contrasting Estonia and Georgia's performances. Particularly, if Estonia is from the considerably stable and peaceful Baltic region, bordering the well-developed Nordic countries from the south and the "champion in transition" – Visegrad Four states from east, Georgia is located in the South Caucasus – the volatile region full of both frozen and melting conflicts, neighboring expansionist Russia, turbulent Turkey, and belligerent Azerbaijan and Armenia.

While discussing the issue of regional determinants and their role in the country's Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgia's regional projects need a particular emphasis. Since the early post-communist years, as was mentioned above, Georgian leaders were dynamically advocating the idea of a Common Caucasian Home (Haindrava, 2012). Particularly, the then-President Gamsakhurdia was highly interested in founding the association that would bring together Georgians and North Caucasian 'highlander' people. Moreover, this idea was re-energized by the former Prime Minister Zhvania, who extended the area of possible grouping and included Armenians and Azerbaijanis into it (German, 2012, p. 22). Yet, none of those ideas have been realized. Of course, there is nothing wrong with creating a more interconnected and mutually beneficial regional community. The point is the selection of proper time and situation to achieve regional unity. As long as Caucasian nations were domestically fragmented and externally vulnerable, they appeared incapable of creating a Caucasian family. On the other hand, the Baltic countries preferred to stabilize the situation and seek Euro-Atlantic integration rather than building a common regional union. Thus, instead of paying attention to the vitally important partnership with the West and thus, easily handling the nation-building process as well as attracting the FDIs, Georgian leaders used to focus on regional integration, which was both irrational, groundless, and a hopeless exercise.

Integration of Post-Soviet Republics into NATO: Comparative Analysis of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Estonia and Georgia

Journal of Social Sciences; ISSN: 2233-3878; e-ISSN: 2346-8262; Volume 7, Issue 2, 2018

CONCLUSION

The article is yet another attempt to conduct a comparative analysis of the Euro-Atlantic integration of two post-Soviet countries - Estonia and Georgia: in one case showing a positive example of securing the NATO membership and in the second case as an incomplete and prolonged process, in which the light at the end of the tunnel is not yet visible.

If we apply to the historical background, the two states had quite a similar starting point before the dissolution of the USSR, however, after acquiring independence they have been using the given opportunities differently. The research outlined five principal circumstances, which significantly helped Estonia to achieve its objectives, whereas prevented Georgia to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In particular, it should be mentioned here: public perception of the communist heritage (1), reforms absorption capacity during the post-communist transition (2), the geopolitical location (3), the attitude towards the West and willingness as well as adherence to liberal democratic principles (4), and the external factors and particularly role of Russia in the integrational process (5).

The longevity and brutality of communist rule had a critical impact on Georgia's nation-building practice. With a 70-year split between the previous and the newly-gained independence, the South Caucasian country lost its political culture and institutional memory. This ultimately impeded the return of Georgia on the pro-Western track. In distinction with Georgia, Estonia was absorbed by the USSR in the 1940s. In this way, the state faced only a soft form of communist pressure. Despite a new reality, the Estonian political establishment and society could maintain their national features and stay resistant to the communist regime. As a result of the short-lived communism, the Baltic country could quickly restore its independent political life based on the precedence of the inter-war period.

The early effective steps of Estonia and the initial latent move of Georgia in the immediate post-communist decade produced disparate consequences for the two countries. The post-communist transition was a formality for Estonia's political elites and population since they were ready for rebuilding a Western-style state. The Baltic country was able to rapidly overcome all post-Soviet challenges and demonstrate its unshakable readiness for NATO accession. On the other hand, Georgia's transformation was very much impeded by internal disorder, economic crisis, corruption, and apathy towards reformation. Despite the slow but steady reformation process since the early 2000s, Georgia could not transform itself into a Western-type democracy and missed the opportunity of joining NATO during the first two decades of independence.

With the emergence of the unipolar world, the United States led the newly established world order. The turbulent decade exposed many of Russia's weaknesses, which ultimately sent a "green light" to NATO for starting the eastern expansion. Due to Estonia's prompt and effective accomplishments and favorable geopolitical situation the country managed to join NATO in 2004. In contrast, the declining role of the West in parallel with rising Russia in the second half of the 2000s played a critical role in Georgia's fruitless attempts for joining the alliance. Hence, as the South Caucasian country was far from the level of Estonia, it lost the momentum and chance to integrate into the Western structures and leave Russian orbit for good.

There were other factors affecting the integrational process in both cases. Despite having a similarly heterogeneous society, Estonia could get through the transformation without facing intra- and inter-state conflicts. On the contrary, Georgia was unable to respond in a timely manner to the growing separatist tendencies in certain regions; the country itself was gripped by nationalism well-fanned by the political elites. At the same time, Estonia's political spectrum and society could not imagine their future without the closer cooperation with the West, whereas their Georgian counterparts were focused only on the regional integrational incentives, which was proved to be a utopian exercise.

Notwithstanding that, both states are located in different geopolitical spaces: on the one hand, they are bordering with Russia, and on the other NATO member states. However, if Estonia, which is indisputably a European country, is closely connected with the Nordic and Baltic countries, then Georgia is located in the south at the fracture of two civilizations - Muslim and Christian, and according to the Western view, with very dubious roots going back to Europe. Moreover, the Nordic countries and the Visegrad Four have been representing role models for the Baltics, whereas expansionist Russia, turbulent Turkey, and belligerent Armenia and Azerbaijan could not play a positive role in Georgia's case. Besides, Estonia had a determined goal to return to the West, while Georgia could not transcend its regional boundaries by advocating the regional arrangement with no shared cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds with Northern Caucasian peoples.

Georgia's desire and attempt to join NATO were hampered by its communist past, squandered opportunities, and tumultuous regional circumstances. Estonia, on the other hand, could quickly turn into a Western-style state and eventually join the alliance. Nonetheless, despite their divergent developmental paths, Georgia, rather than Estonia, played a significant role in international security matters for the past 20 years. The former, in particular, has made substantial contributions to NATO-led peacekeeping operations, thus

reaffirming its commitment to the strategic partnership with the United States and especially in the fight against international terrorism. However, given the growing hegemonic and ambitious aspirations of Russia and its "red lines" on the path of NATO's eastward expansion, and the reluctance of key Western players to further exacerbate the situation with Russia, the process of Georgia's NATO membership began to lose its perspective.

Consequently, Georgia not only remained outside the alliance but also was unable to get the MAP in 2008 during the NATO Bucharest summit. After George Bush Jr., all American presidents noted that in the near future, the issue of Ukraine and Georgia's membership in NATO will not be considered. And this attitude will persist for a long time in the foreseeable future.

Bibliography

Badridze, G. (2020, May 26). Independence of Georgia and the Historic Responsibility of Our Generation. Retrieved November 8, 2021, from https://www.gfsis.org/blog/view/1074

Bunce, V. (2018). The Political Transition. In S. L. WOLCHIK, & J. L. CURRY, *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy* (4th ed., pp. 33-56). Rowman & Littlefield. Retrieved November 7, 2021, from https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/faculty_books/385/

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). sword of Damocles. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sword-of-damocles

Carpinelli, C. (2019). The Citizenship Policies of the Baltic States within the EU Framework on Minority Rights. *Polish Political Science Yearbook, 48*(2), 193–221. doi:https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2019201

Central Intelligence Agency. (2021). Ethnic groups. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/ethnic-groups/

Charap, S., Demus, A., & Shapiro, J. (2018). *Getting Out from "In-Between": Perspectives on the Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia.* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. Retrieved November 2, 2021, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF382.html

Coffey, L. (2018, January 29). *NATO Membership for Georgia: In U.S. and European Interest.* The Heritage Foundation. Retrieved November 2, 2021, from https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/SR-199_0.pdf

Cohen, A. (2018, August 10). The Russo-Georgian War's lesson: Russia will strike again. Retrieved October 28, 2021, from https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-russo-georgian-war-s-lesson-russia-will-strike-again/

Constitution of the Republic of Estonia. (1992, July 3). Retrieved November 8, 2021, from https://www.president.ee/en/republic-of-estonia/the-constitution/

Di Gregorio, A. (2012). *Epurazioni e protezione della democrazia: Esperienze e modelli di "giustizia post-autoritaria".* Milano: FrancoAngeli. Retrieved October 27, 2021

Dobbins, J., & Zagorski, A. (2018). Lessons Learned from Russia-West Interactions on European Security. In S. Charap, A. Demus, & J. Shapiro, *Getting Out from "In-Between": Perspectives on the Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia* (pp. 5-15). Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF382.html

Eglitis, D. S. (2018). The Baltic States: Facing New Challenges in Politics, Society, and Security. In S. L. WOLCHIK, & J. L. CURRY, *Central and East European Politics: from Communism to Democracy* (4th ed., pp. 313-335). Rowman and Littlefield. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/faculty_books/385/

German, T. (2012). *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Good Neighbours Or Distant Relatives?* London and New York: Routledge. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://books.google.ge/books?id=7vTsCwAAQBAJ&lpg=PA22&ots=m-mMstdRWQB&dq=common%20caucasian%20home&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q=common%20caucasian%20home&f=false

Guruli, V. (1999). Noe Jordania. Politikuri portreti 1869–1953 (Noe Jordania. Political Portrait 1869–1953). 72. Retrieved October 26, 2021

Gvalia, G., Siroky, D., Lebanidze, B., & Iashvili, Z. (2013). Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States. *Security Studies, 22*(1), 98-131. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2013.757463

Gylfason, T., & Hochreiter, E. (2008, August 2). Governance and growth: Why does Georgia lag behind Estonia? Retrieved October 27, 2021, from https://voxeu.org/article/governance-and-growth-why-does-georgia-lag-behind-estonia

Haindrava, I. (2012, June 24). A CAUCASIAN HOME AS DESIGNED BY TBILISI. *Russia in Global Affairs*. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-caucasian-home-as-designed-by-tbilisi/

Herd, G. P. (1999, June). Russia's Baltic Policy After the Meltdown. *Security Dialogue, 30*(2), 197-212. Retrieved October 25, 2021, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/44472432

Jones, S. F. (2013, April). Democracy in Georgia: Da Capo? *The Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper, 13*(2), 1-16. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from http://css.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Stephen_Jones_Georgia.pdf

Jones, S. F. (2015). Populism in Georgia: The Gamsakhurdia Phenomenon. In S. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* (pp. 51-73). London - New York: I.B. Tauris. Retrieved November 4, 2021

Juda, L. (1975). UNITED STATES' NONRECOGNITION OF THE SOVIET UNION'S ANNEXATION OF THE BALTIC STATES: POLITICS AND LAW. *Journal of Baltic Studies, 6*(4), 272-290. Retrieved November 7, 2021, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/43210709?seq=1

Kennedy, M. D. (2002). *Cultural Formations of Postcommunism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War* (1st ed.). University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/cultural-formations-of-postcommunism

Kereselidze, N. (2015). *Foreign Policy of the European Union towards the South Caucasus in 1992-2014.* PhD Thesis, University of St Andrews, School of International Relations. Retrieved November 5, 2021, from https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/6824

Lazarević, D. (2009). NATO Enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia: Old Wine in New Bottles? *Connections, 9*(1), 29-66. Retrieved November 7, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326193

NATO. (2020, May 5). Enlargement. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm#:~:text=Since%201949%2C%20NATO's%20membership%20has,and%20Herzegovina%2C%20Georgia%20and%20Ukraine.

Nisnevich, Y., & Ryabov, A. (2019). Post-Soviet Authoritarianism. *Sociological Research, 58*(1-2), 1-19. Retrieved October 16, 2021, from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10610154.2019.1688994

Olick, J. K. (2007). *The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility.* New York: Routledge. Retrieved October 15, 2021, from https://books.google.ge/books?id=mXrhAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Oliker, O., Chivvis, C. S., Crane, K., Tkacheva, O., & Boston, S. (2015). *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context.* RAND Corporation. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE144.html

Papuashvili, G. (2012). The 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia: Looking Back after Ninety Years. *European Public Law, 18*(2), 323–349. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from https://kluwerlawonline.com/journalarticle/European+Public+Law/18.2/EURO2012018

Safire, W. (1994, December 1). Strategic Dilemma. Retrieved November 3, 2021, from https://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/01/opinion/essay-strategic-dilemma.html?searchResultPosition=1

Sarotte, M. E. (2014). A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion. *Foreign Affairs, 93*(5), 90-97. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483307

Toft, M. D. (2001). Multinationality, Regions and State-Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia. *Regional & Federal Studies, 11*(3), 123-142. Retrieved November 7, 2021, from https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Multinationality%20Regions%20and%20State%20Building%20The%20Failed%20Transition%20in%20Georgia.pdf

Toria, M. (2014). The Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian war of August 2008: Historical analogy as a memory project. In S. F. Jones, *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012: The first Georgian Republic and its Successors* (1st ed., pp. 316-335). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. doi:10.4324/9781315818207-15

Trubetskoy, N. (1925). On the peoples of the Caucasus. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from https://topwar.ru/28710-nstrubeckoy-o-narodah-kavkaza.html

Urbelis, V. (2003). *Defence Policies of the Baltic States: from the Concept of Neutrality towards NATO membership.* NATO-EAPC Individual Fellowship Report, Vilnius. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/01-03/vaidotas.pdf

Vihalemm, T., & Masso, A. (2007, March). (Re)Construction of Collective Identities after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union: The Case of Estonia. *Nationalities Papers, 35*(1), 71-91. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990601124496

Wolchik, S. L., & Curry, J. L. (2018). Democracy, the Market, and the Return to Europe: FROM COMMUNISM TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND NATO. In S. L. Wolchik, & J. L. Curry, *Central and East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy* (4th ed., pp. 3-29). Rowman & Littlefield. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/faculty_books/385/