

# **Structural Realism and Georgian Foreign Policy**

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## **Abstract**

According to shared opinion, Georgia forged the western foreign policy after the rose revolution. The new elite who came to power after a bloodless uprising aspired to integrate the country into NATO and the E.U. Some scholars believe that Georgian western course is the outcome of the rose revolution. Therefore, they explore the process through the Liberal lens of international relations theory. On the other hand, Georgian foreign policy is regarded as a continuation of the course developed during the previous – Shevardnadze's – rulership, and the strategy can be explained via neoclassical realism theory. Another author goes further and uses offensive Realism for the Russian-Georgian War interpretation. The article aims to demonstrate that Georgian foreign policy from 1993 to 2012 can be examined through a Structural realism lens, and external factors play a significant role in designing foreign course.

**Keywords:** Georgia; Structural Realism; Small State; Foreign Policy.

## **Introduction**

Several years ago, different articles were published regarding Georgian foreign policy. In 2013, an article about the foreign course of Georgia was introduced. The authors explained the formation of policy through the liberalism theory lens, arguing that the strategy of integrating western institutions was formed by new elites who came to power after the Rose Revolution. The scholars went beyond and, for a particular reason, labelled the extension of the same foreign policy of Georgia after the Russian-Georgian war "puzzling" (Gvalia et al., 2013). Emphasizing only new elites and their ideas, the explanation created a specific way of investigating foreign

course. This approach explicitly emphasizes the predominance of internal factors in designing external policy. Another attempt to investigate Georgian foreign policy not wholly rejected the importance of exogenous aspects but mainly focused on elite perceptions (Oskanian, 2016). The only article where foreign circumstances are considered investigates a pretty narrow part of the Georgian external course and primarily analyzes the 2008 war through the Offensive Realism perspective (Karagiannis, 2013). Recent scholars mostly ignore the systemic approach during an investigation of Georgian foreign policy. The primary reason for ignorance can be the lack of a broader prospect of Structural Realism to exhibit relevance in forming an external course. However, to a certain degree, the option is not as narrow as it may seem. The discounted point is that becoming part of NATO will help Georgia effectively balance the threat from Russia. Therefore, the state aspires to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to seek survival and security. Thus, there is space and option to review Georgian foreign policy through the lens of structural Realism too.

The article's primary purpose is not to reject previously introduced estimations via different theories but to demonstrate that the case of Georgian foreign policy can be contemplated through the Structural Realism prism. During the analysis, every author should consider the limits of theories. However, specific theories can explain a case more comprehensively than others. It has to be acknowledged that the initial investigation of Georgian foreign courses through a Liberal and neoclassical realism lens contributed much to the academic field. Nevertheless, there is room for the case to interpret via the Structural realism paradigm, and it may be regarded as not insignificant to other theoretical explanations.

### **Structural Realism**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on Realism theory. Authors commenced the new wave of critique, emphasizing the irrelevance and obsolescence of the theory (Schroeder, 1994) (Lebow, 1994) (Legro & Moravcsik, 1999). However, Realism theory can be marked as one of the most prominent among Liberalism and Constructivism. The latter theories are based on and consider the internal type of governance, institutionalism, democratic peace, ideas, identities, norms and culture. Meanwhile, the primary concern of Realism is the anarchy of the international system and states' interaction through the system.

The collapse of the USSR caused worldwide changes, but it is essential to mention that the system was reshaped at the unit level. Meanwhile, the feature of the structure remained the same. Changes in the system's structure are distinct from changes at the unit level (Waltz, 2000). The reduction of pole number to one caused the transformation of world politics to a certain degree. Yet, supranational governance has been absent in the world - one of the five assumptions on which Realist theory rests. The first assumption suggests that big states possess the military capability that can be directed against each other; further, states are never confident about other counterparts' motives and intentions. Additionally, survival becomes the primary goal, and states act rationally (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 30-31). An indispensable part of Structural Realist theory is the recognition of states – the units - as only actors in the international system. Units have similar functions but different capabilities (Waltz, 1979, pp. 96-97). Therefore, the internal features of states are not essential but the relative distribution of capability among international actors. Leaders, government types, ideology and culture, have no effect from the theoretical perspective. Unlike neoclassical Realism, the importance of elites and perceptions are entirely ignored, and the system dictates units' actions.

One of the main points of Structural Realism is that it evaluates international politics from a global perspective. The dependent variable for Classical Realism and neoclassical Realism is a state's foreign policy. In neorealism, international political outcome is the dependent variable (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 20). Thus, the primary purpose of structural Realism is to investigate worldwide political event(s). As Kenneth Waltz stated at the end of his book:

The problem seen in the light of the theory is not to say how to manage the world, including its great powers, but to say how the possibility that great powers will constructively manage international affairs varies as systems change (Waltz, 1979, p. 210).

From this perspective, Structural Realism is an odd theory for the investigation of the foreign policy of a small state. However, it may be helpful if the external course of a small-scale actor is analyzed through the international system and interaction with more prominent players. The methodology part will demonstrate how this type of theory can help scrutinize Georgia's foreign policy.

### **Research Question, Hypotheses, and Methodology**

The primary research question of this paper is can Structural Realism explain the foreign policy of Georgia? The most straightforward answer is Yes. Although structural components might influence the course of external policies, there is a need for improvement on a theoretical and methodological level. Nevertheless, it is essential to conceptualize a small state for two reasons: Georgia is a small country, and it is significant to describe a small state. The second reason is the difference in foreign policies between big and small actors. According to specific cases, small states act differently than structural realist logic. One of the arguments is that if great powers can balance each other via mobilizing internal capabilities, small states hardly follow such a strategy because of a lack of resources. Conversely, this logic there is a case when a small state continues the same foreign policy even though there are structural changes in the international arena and the threat toward the small state increases. The best example is Switzerland.

To cut a long story short, small states and their choices differ from the policies of big ones. Structural realism theory stands on the interaction of great powers and doesn't explain foreign policy. The mission of this part is to conceptualize the meaning of small states, adjust structural realism theory to small actors, and find out if structural realism explains Georgian foreign strategy.

The ideal small state is a country with a small population, small territory, a small GDP, and a small military. In reality, everything is too complicated. No shared standard defines exactly how much is small. Previous works of different authors focused on the population as defining variable of state size and suggested various sets for labelling a state adjective "small". Simon Kuznets regarded a small state a country with less than 10 million population (Kuznets, 1960). Roderick Pace had the same assumption that a small state's population must be a maximum of 10 million (Pace, 2000). Fazal had quite a low threshold and regarded a state as small, with more than 500 000 people (Fazal, 2007). Some previous scholars added economic variables and suggested 10-15 million as the maximum population for developed countries and 20-30 million as backward ones (Vital, 1967).

Conversely, the abovementioned suggestions cause confusion. Some states have a relatively high population and less territory or vice versa. Bangladesh is 148,460 square kilometers, with over 165 million inhabitants (CIA World Factbook, 2022). However, the area of Norway is more than twice larger - 323,802 square kilometers with just over 5 million people (CIA World Factbook,

2022). Meanwhile, the GDP of Norway in 2021 was over 482 billion (World Bank, 2022) USD, while Bangladesh had more than 416 billion USD (World Bank, 2022). The verdict derived from the complex reality is that the absolute measurement of states seems worthless. Therefore, to determine whether a state is small, we can use relative size and common sense. Generally, actors in the international system can be split into four categories: 1) System Determining; 2) System Influencing; 3) System Affecting; 4) System Ineffectual (Keohane, 1969). As Waltz argues, finding great powers can be as easy or hard as discovering big firms in an oligopolistic market. The question is empirical and common sense can answer it (Waltz, 1979, p. 131). The same method can be used to categorize small state that does not affect the international system; moreover, their foreign policies are forced by variations of balance of power (Browning, 2006).

After conceptualizing the notion of a small state, the first obstacle research faces is how to adjust the Structural Realism theory to explain the foreign policy of a small state. On the one hand, the prospect of theory consists of global scale outcome; on the other hand, as Waltz states:

True, the theory does not tell us why state X made a certain move last Tuesday. To expect it to do so would be like expecting the theory of universal gravitation to explain the wayward path of a falling leaf (Waltz, 1979, p. 121).

According to this logic, utilizing general theory only is not enough to evaluate a state's specific foreign policy. However, it has to be assumed that if there are other influential aspects that the theory may be combined with, the investigation of the external course might be successful. The article's purpose is to explain the particular action of the state via general theory accompanied by conditional variables. In this case, it can be argued that using the theory of universal gravitation and additional factors can explain the wayward path of a falling leaf.

During the analyses of the Georgian foreign policy, Structural circumstances will be under focus. However, it should to be assumed that external factors may not be the only conditional variables. Therefore, it is presumed that before the evaluation, all prominent theories – Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism – are equally important. It may be demonstrated that Realism is less successful in explaining Georgian foreign policy than the others. The additional element of the research will be that the state under the investigation lens is a small country. Scholars have already explored the pattern of a small state's behavior under different circumstances via different theoretical lenses. Since the scope of the paper focuses on the foreign policy of a small state, we can borrow from the authors' part of the methodological frame that suggests what the

expectation of small state action on the international level is through the Realism/Liberal/Constructivist prism. According to the specific framework, each theory suggests certain options for foreign policy. For example, based on the realism paradigm:

**R1:** Small states should react to structural constraints, most likely by bandwagoning or balancing. **R2:** As threat levels increase, small states should act more and more realist along the lines of **R1**. **R3:** Foreign policy choice is constrained for small states and smaller they are, the greater the constraint. the more constrained the choice, the more the state should follow the lines of **R1**

Domestic Actor Theory suggests that:

**D1:** Small states will support and appeal to international laws and organizations more than large states. **D2:** Small state foreign policy choice will be dictated by the interests of domestic actors and thus will change as the domestic actors in control of the state change. **D3:** Small state foreign policy choice will be constrained by domestic coalitions, and respond slowly to changes in the international structure.

According to Social Constructivist Theory:

**S1:** Small states will create and develop norms that support their identity. **S2:** Small state foreign policy choice will be consistent with these norms. **S3:** Small states foreign policy will be constrained by these norms and will only slowly respond to changes in the international structure.

(Jesse & Dreyer, 2016, p. 52)

The hypothesis of the paper suggests that the way of conducting Georgian foreign policy corresponds with realist logic because Georgia, in both – common sense and relative – terms, is a small state compared with Russia. Furthermore, Kremlin regards the former Soviet Union space as an exclusive interest zone, so Tbilisi has limited foreign policy options. Therefore, the hypothesis suggests that the Georgian foreign course corresponds with **R1**, **R2** and **R3** logic. Thus, the realist view indicates that a small state in the international system has two options: balance and bandwagon. Balance can be explained as the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition (Schweller, 2006). On the other hand, bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger (Walt, 1987) or it is caused by the opportunity for gain (Schweller, 1994).

A specific approach will be necessary to investigate the roots of the formation of the external course of a small actor during a particular timeframe. Regarding weak states<sup>1</sup>, two methodological approaches are distinguished: "Horizontal" and "Vertical". The first approach is oriented toward generating general theories about operating and positioning weak units in the international system. The second approach seeks to profoundly investigate the foreign policy of a small state or a few weak states in a specific period of history. The "Horizontal" approach provides a common explanation. The "vertical" one uncovers precise details which can hardly be generalized (Handel, 2016, p. 4). The approach used in this paper will be the "vertical" one. The period for investigation has been chosen from 1993 to 2012.

Georgia gained independence in 1991; nonetheless, the early years of independence were characterized by nationalistic sentiments, civil war and separatist wars. There will be a discussion of these events in the research. Still, the main focus will be on conducting the country's foreign policy, from freezing the separatist conflicts to democratic change of government in Georgia. The reason why the observation ends in 2012 is the assumption that the Georgian government formed by the political party Georgian Dream had initiated the policy of appeasement of the Russian Federation, which was undoubtedly revealed during the 2022 Russian-Ukrainian war when prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili stated that Georgia would not join sanctions against Russia (Narimanishvili, 2022). The Russian Federation did not name Georgia in the "unfriendly" countries' list (Russian News Agency, 2022) (The Moscow Times, 2022). Even though Georgia has been maintaining a close relationship with the U.S. since 2012, and both countries have conducted joint military drills (The US Embassy in Georgia, 2020). However, during a specific moment in the international arena, Georgia revealed a policy that resembles bandwagoning with Russia. The subject is quite complex and confusing. According to the concrete methodological structure, when foreign policy choice is dictated by domestic actors and thus will change as the domestic actors in the state change (Jesse & Dreyer, 2016, p. 52) it has to be interpreted via the Liberalism theory of international relations. However, the complicated part in the case of Georgian foreign policy is that the domestic actor that changed in 2012 reversed the course of foreign policy from balancing to bandwagoning, which still is part of the structural realism frame. This type of knotty case needs independent research; therefore, it

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<sup>1</sup> Author Michael Handel used term "weak states". In this article weak and small is considered as synonyms.

will not be included in this paper's investigation scope. Hence, the period for the analysis will be from 1993 to 2012.

The research is a specific case study that will test whether the theory helps explain Georgia's foreign policy from a structural perspective. The preeminent part of the methodology will be the process tracing that will guide to a chain of events by which initial case conditions are translated into the case outcome (Evera, 1997, p. 64). The procedure attempts to uncover the motivation the actors attend to; the decision process; the catalyst of the decisions, and development actions (George & McKeown, 1985). From a practical perspective, the fundamental research will be based on profound observation of the chain of events to determine the role of structural factors in Georgia's foreign policy conduction. However, the focus should not be oriented on the small state only. Under surveillance will be the interaction of Georgia with two other international actors: the Russian Federation and the United States. The latter is the leader of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and one of the prominent supporters of Georgian integration into NATO. Representing a whole military-political organization with 30 states as a sole actor would be inaccurate. The interests of each member country sometimes broadly differ. The most appropriate example is the reluctant policy of France and Germany in 2008 Bucharest summit, not expressing endorsement toward Georgian and Ukrainian integration into NATO. Thus, it is a mistake if the military-political organization is regarded as a monolithic structure of states with identical interests.

The most outstanding actor in the alliance which backs Georgia is the US. Therefore, the central balancer of the Russian menace is the United States. On the other hand, Russia is the leading regional player with the ambition of being a regional hegemon (Suny, 2007). From an offensive realism perspective, it is natural that Russian Federation has a contentious relationship with NATO enlargement. Conversely, this type of attitude was manufactured by the top Russian elite more than a decade later after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his famous Munich speech, President Vladimir Putin criticized the United States' action and emphasized that the unipolar world was over, as well as the time for making unilateral decisions (Putin, 2007). The 2007 Putin's speech may be regarded as when U.S. and Russian relations deteriorated. Nevertheless, Georgian-Russian interaction was exacerbated earlier.



Finally, Georgian foreign policy will be under surveillance from 1993 to 2012 following interaction with the Russian Federation and the United States. The chain of developed events will demonstrate the effect of exogenous factors on Georgian foreign policy. In case external variables are not abundant and/or the course of a small state does not validate hypotheses, the conclusion will be that Structural Realism is an inappropriate theory for explaining the foreign strategy of Georgia. Otherwise, the theory will help explain the Georgian external course if the hypotheses are approved.

### **The Beginning – The Rough Startup**

In his book, the leader of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, states that there are handbooks about house building, mechanical maintenance, and how to write a book, but there are no written guidelines on how to set up a nation with different ethnic groups and without a prominent economic role in a region (Yew, 2000, p. 4). Although Singapore also had severe issues after gaining independence, the country became one of the most prominent players in the region and the world's financial center. In the case of Georgia, everything was the opposite. The demise of the Soviet Union caused the birth of Georgia, one of the ways new states appear on the world political map - by an ethnically-based dissociation from weakened empires or great powers (Knudsen, 2002). In Georgia, building a solid democratic state failed and was overshadowed by nationalistic rhetoric and actions, leading to civil war. The turbulence in the Georgian domestic political arena occurred before the disintegration of the USSR.

When Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian presidents and prime ministers met at the hunting lodge near Minsk, where they agreed to dissolve the Soviet Union, Georgia was experiencing disarray and turmoil. The final dissolution of the USSR coincided with the civil war in Georgia. A couple of weeks later, on January 6 1992, Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his supporters left the country (Smeets, 1999).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia was elected as president on May 26, 1991, with 86 percent of the votes (Fuller, 1993). The first president of Georgia, despite his political miscalculations and mistakes, is admired by a particular segment of the Georgian population as a national hero. His nationalistic rhetoric, less democratic, and more authoritarian actions can be regarded as the root of the turbulences that emerged in 1991 and continued for a few years. Despite serious issues, Zviad Gamsakhurdia had major endorsement and popularity in the country. His understanding of

democracy was way vaguer and authoritarian. Political opponents were arrested, critics usually were labelled as "Russian agents", on the media was imposed censorship. Plans for economic reforms and land privatization were postponed indefinitely. His reputation soon deteriorated in the external and internal political arena. Gamsakhurdia's equivocal reaction to the August coup attempt in Russia alienated relations with northern neighbor. On a domestic level, his motto, "Georgia for Georgians" became a signal of menace for the country with many ethnoreligious minorities. The impractical and idealistic policy of the first president exacerbated relations among elites and specific regions.

The decisive moment was the crackdown of the demonstration in Tbilisi on September 2. The situation became quite tense when protesters were endorsed by the former leader of the national guard – Tengiz Kitovani. The civil war became the product of weird messianic and crusader policy degenerating into chauvinism. Furthermore, republics of minorities were so alienated from the perspective of Georgian ultra-nationalistic independence that they preferred to side with USSR and later Russia rather than with Georgia (Nodia, 1996).

The ouster of the first president had no positive effect on relationships with alienated regions. On August 14, 1992, eight months after Gamsakhurdia had left the country, the conflict in Abkhazia commenced.

It may seem irrelevant to analyze the foreign policy of Georgia from 1991 to 1992. This part of Georgian history is nothing but chaos. Instead of forging an independent state, the country probably experienced the worst state-building scenario. The course exacerbated the state's overall condition. The nationalistic policy antagonized ethnical minorities, the Soviet Union and Russia. Instead of maintaining proper relations with the former metropole, the latter was constantly demonized. Georgia did not participate in the Soviet referendum of March 1991 nor join the Commonwealth of Independent States – CIS. It should not be surprising that Kremlin endorsed breakaway regions in Georgia after this policy.

What could be the best option for Georgia? The situation from a regional perspective was grave. Neutrality was unacceptable for the Russian Federation. A balance strategy was impossible because of no endorsing power on the horizon to support Georgia. Bandwagon would seem the best choice in the foreign arena, as well as moderate/pragmatic policy in domestic affairs.

However, the chosen course during the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia turned out to be the opposite.

One of the differences between "offensive" and "defensive" realism theories is that the former regards international actors as rational ones (Mearsheimer, 2001). Meanwhile, the latter units have plenty of options, and nothing prevents them from making wrong decisions (Waltz, 1997, p. 915). Any realism branch can hardly explain the Georgian historical phase of 1991-1992, but by the assumption that states are free in action and sometimes consequences might be dreadful. However, later, at the beginning of Shevardnadze's leadership, it may have been presumed that the cease-fire agreement signed with Russian mediation was bandwagoning and abandoning the previous irrational policy. Apparently, structural Realism may be helpful.

### **Bandwagon – worse option rather than the worst one**

Between 1991 and 1992, Georgia could be called anything but a rational actor. There were two reasons: 1) The whole conducted policy, domestic as well as foreign, was irrational and emotional; 2) The internal institutional disarray and civil war in the country turned the actor into a failed state.

Georgia had no better option than to agree to a Russian-mediated cease-fire agreement. Shevardnadze – the successor of Gamsakhurdia – commenced the policy of stabilization. On June 22 1992, in Dagomys, Russia, Shevardnadze and Yeltsin met each other and acknowledged a cease-fire to defuse the situation in the Tskhinvali region. A couple of weeks later, Russian peacekeepers entered the region. However, after less than a couple of months, a new conflict erupted in Abkhazia, which was more aggressive and atrocious than the previous one. Despite the cease-fire agreement in Sochi in July 1993, Abkhazians on September 16 resumed military actions. After eleven days, the capital of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, fell.

Along with the conflict, Russia revealed its fundamental interests. On the one hand, Moscow endorsed separatists. On the other hand, Kremlin demanded the legalization of Russian military bases in Georgia and required Georgia's enrollment into the CIS (Cheterian, 2008, pp. 199-200). In his memoirs, Eduard Shevardnadze mentioned that Georgia was coerced to join CIS (Shevardnadze, 2006). This action meant that the state de jure was returning to its previous orbit, and the attempt of independent policy failed and provoked dreadful consequences.

From 1992 Georgia seeks external power to solve the problems. Because of its lack of capabilities, including political competence, Tbilisi could not handle exacerbated situation alone. The only prominent and interested side was Russia. Despite downgrading from global power, Russian Federation was the most significant regional actor, capable of mediation and assistance. Thus, the agreement to cease fire and introduce Georgia to the CIS resulted from recognizing continued Russian regional predominance (Fawn, 2002). It may be assumed that from the moment Georgia officially became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States – on December 3 1993 - the policy of bandwagon began.

In Georgian case, it was the North from where the threat originated (and still is). It may hardly be assumed that the Georgian move to bandwagon with Russian Federation was motivated by seeking profit. The only gain Tbilisi obtained by Moscow mediated cease-fire agreement and enrolling into the CIS was peace at the expense of "freezing" conflicts that deteriorated Georgian territorial integrity.

It may be argued that the leader change caused the bandwagon and was Shevardnadze's policy. However, to look at the systemic constraints, hard to believe that these factors played no role.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kremlin gave up east Europe, but the "near abroad" remained the area of the Russian exclusive interest zone. The juxtaposing fact is that the first foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Andrei Kozyrev, mentioned that Russia still was great power with national interests and that defending these interests would be appropriately rough interaction with actors and not via confrontation (Kozyrev, 1992). Probably the statement was aimed at other great players in international politics. Meanwhile, Russia's aim appeared to try to restore its influence throughout the region, on all sides, in every conflict, to prevent developments from slipping out of control and opening the floodgates to outside interference (Trenin D. , 1996). The interaction with Georgia was quite unusual, with some elements of confrontation and coercive actions. On the one hand, Moscow endorsed Georgian territorial integrity. On the other hand, Russian weapons were found in Abkhazian separatists' hands. Furthermore, Russian planes bombed civilian targets in Georgian-controlled territory, and Russian-trained and Russian-paid fighters defended Abkhaz territory in Tkvarcheli (Human Rights Watch, 1995). In this case, Georgia had the worst and worse alternatives. The former would be a continuation of war, and the latter agreeing on Russian-mediated negotiations and

granting Kremlin military-political concessions. It was evident that Tbilisi had limited options and chose the worse one. However, what was Russia's aim? Apparently, the goal of the Kremlin was to dominate the area of former soviet republics. It was demonstrated in action and later declared as a doctrine by the first foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Andrey Kozyrev. According to the doctrine, the CIS and Baltic republics were the area of Russia's vital interest zone. The Foreign Minister emphasized the importance for Kremlin to maintain a military presence "near abroad"; otherwise, the Russian army withdrawal would cause a power and security vacuum in the area and would be filled by the forces that would not always have a friendly attitude toward Russia. Despite different era and geography, the doctrine is an analogy of the Monroe Doctrine (Litera, 1994/1995). The idea of Monroe Doctrine, implemented in 1823, declared that the government of the U.S. refused to condone further colonization in the western hemisphere by any European power, and any European intervention would be regarded as a manifestation of unfriendly action toward the United States (Rich, 1992, p. 42). Another similarity is that the Great powers not only attempt to deter other counterparts from interfering in their vital interest zones but also act in a particular manner to prevent the "leave" of geopolitical orbit by a state located in a crucial interest area. In the U.S. case, it was the western hemisphere. In Russian – "near abroad".

The structural constraint was obvious. The separatist wars in Georgia, endorsed by Kremlin, coerced Tbilisi to change the political agenda. There was hardly any better option than agreeing on Moscow-mediated peace negotiations, stationing Russian peacekeepers, joining the Commonwealth of Independent States and entering a Russian-dominated military alliance via signing Collective Security Treaty. That was a pure representation of bandwagoning. Thus, Georgia adopted the policy predicted by systemic-structural theories (Jervis, 1978), (Wolfers, 1962).

### **Seeking Better Policy – Initiating Balancing**

After signing cease-fire agreements, Georgia gained relief to sort out a domestic mess. The conditions in the internal political arena were exceptionally grave. The country's general characteristics were a fragmented society, weak state institutions, paramilitary gangs, high crime, and unemployment. The situation started to improve but in slow motion. The first significant positive change was the adoption of the constitution in 1995 that set institutional frames and

limits. Although the state had severe corruption and economic issues, the circumstances changed positively. The economy started to grow gradually. In 1994 GDP of Georgia was 2.51 billion USD; in 1995 – 2.69 billion \$ and in 1996 - 3.1 billion \$ (World Bank, 2022). The progress was evident in terms of GDP per capita as well. Even though the amount was too low still, slight development was evident. In 1994 GDP per capita was 519.9 USD, and in 1995 -1996 it became 578.3 \$ and 689.1 \$ (World Bank, 2022). Although there was an improvement, it was not conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. Five days after adopting the new constitution, there was an assassination attempt. The target was Eduard Shevardnadze. The main suspect, the state security minister of Georgia – Igor Giorgadze, who had long sought to install someone less independent than Shevardnadze in Georgia (Jones, 1996) fled the country after the assassination attempt. The failed coup became the excuse to fight against organized crime and paramilitary gangs.

Progress became apparent on the level of foreign affairs too. However, the way was full of obstacles. The primary mission of the newly independent country was to establish itself in the international arena. Georgia actively started a partnership with neighbor states – Azerbaijan and Turkey and later became a member of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project. The plan was political and geostrategic and aimed to transport Azeri oil through Georgian territory to the Turkish Mediterranean harbor (Alam, 2002). From the beginning, it became known that Russia was opposing the pipeline route through Georgia. Eduard Shevardnadze mentions in his memoirs that the next day after his assassination attempt President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin contacted him via phone, congratulated survival, but emphasized that the pipeline would cover Russian, not Georgian territory.

Conversely, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline had already been agreed upon among partner sides; therefore, Moscow had no lever of influence (Shevardnadze, 2006). On the other hand, the project's proponent was the United States, which preferred Caspian oil and gas transportation through the territories fully affiliated with the Euro-Atlantic alliance - Turkey and Georgia (Shaffer, 2005). Although there was another assassination attempt on Shevardnadze directed against the country, it still seems evident that structural factors dictated the decision. It was the beginning of the moment when the US-Georgian interests coincided. The United States became interested in the region, meaning the global power started involvement in the "near abroad". Moreover, Russia was increasingly viewed in Washington as a spoiler in international

affairs and as something other than an honest broker in regional conflicts (Hill, 2004). For small Georgia, this was a chance to find a new ally and balance the Russian menace. From this moment, the Gregorian foreign policy vector starts leaning toward the West.

The Kremlin's foreign policy toward Tbilisi had a severe issue that exacerbated Russian-Georgian relations. The prominent player was not allowing the small one to conduct particular policy to aggrandize its status and evolve the devastated economy. According to one of the assumptions in I.R. theories, states care most about wealth after their survival, which also boosts the chance of long-term survival (Monteiro, 2014, pp. 33-34). The fact that Moscow opposed Tbilisi to advance its role was a direct hint that bandwagon with Russia was not a good policy.

The gradual changes started during the middle and late 1990s when Georgia signed the treaty of cooperation with the E.U. and later became a member of the Council of Europe. Meanwhile, Tbilisi refused to continue membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in 1999 and became a member of GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) to strengthen ties with the West as well as the member states of the union. Although the GU(U)AM (Uzbekistan left the organization in 2005) was not entirely successful, the initiative had a definite prominent message to Moscow that there were former Soviet Union states willing to conduct the policy and deepen cooperation with the West.

In the Georgian case, there was a breakthrough on a bilateral level with the United States as well. Tbilisi was one of the most prominent receivers of U.S. aid, ranking among the top states in terms of U.S. aid per capita (Nichol, 2013). After the 9/11 terrorist attack, the US-Georgian relationship strengthened. In May 2002, the United States proposed the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), to aid Georgia's security services in combating internal terrorism threats and in border security, anti-terrorism, crisis response, and military reform. The program aimed to train four Georgian Army light infantry battalions and a mechanized company team (The US Department of State, 2003). Such a close relationship caused Russian resentment. On May 7, after the consultation in the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, Georgia's Defense Minister, Lt. General David Tevzadze, was asked about the Russian reaction to the GTEP, to which the Minister responded by saying that "unfortunately our Russian friends have overreacted." (Areshidze, 2002).

The Russian attitude toward the US-Georgian close relationship was not surprising. Because of internal political turbulences, like the wounds of the 1997 economic crisis and the Chechen war, Kremlin had severe constraints that played a particular role in strengthening Washington-Tbilisi political ties. However, Moscow sought a reason to interfere in Tbilisi's policy and blamed Georgia for endorsing Chechen separatists. Sometimes allegations went too far; for example, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation stated that the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, was hiding in Georgia, precisely in Pankisi gorge (Old.Civil.ge, 2002). The response of Shevardnadze to the absurd allegation was that he promised the Russian Minister of foreign affairs to search for Bin Laden in his house in the Akhmeta region, which includes Pankisi gorge (Риа Новости, 2002). Moscow sought a purpose that would give an excuse to intervene in Georgian political affairs. The deployment of US military staff for training Georgian forces was direct involvement in "near abroad" by another big player, which was unacceptable and a cause of resentment in the Russian Federation. However, this was an opportunity for Georgia to conduct a policy of balance and change the foreign vector from coercive to great benevolent power. On November 22, 2002, Eduard Shevardnadze, on the second and final day of the Prague NATO summit, officially requested that his country be invited to join the 53-year-old alliance (Peuch, 2002). Since then, it can be argued that Georgia's initiated policy of balance entered a new level; however, the catalyst of the process was the Rose Revolution.

### **Acceleration, War, Continuation**

Despite the changes and gradual but irreversible development in particular foreign policy aspects, Georgia remained a small weak state with serious issues. In the early 2000s, Mikhail Saakashvili, Nino Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania detached from Shevardnadze's political party - the Citizens Union of Georgia and criticized Eduard Shevardnadze for increased corruption and authoritarianism. After the 2003 fraudulent parliamentary election, a massive protest led by the triad (Saakashvili-Burjanadze-Zhvania) succeeded, and Shevardnadze resigned. The process became known as Rose Revolution, as protesters marched into the parliament building with roses, guided by Saakashvili. The new leader(s) of Georgia became younger politicians who got an education in the West. Soon new authorities launched advanced packages of reforms that positively changed the internal features of the state. The economy grew faster until the 2008 world economic crisis and the Russian-Georgian war (World Bank, 2022). Fighting against



corruption became one of the central policies; hence, it started to shrink (Trading Economics, 2022). Foreign direct investments started to flow turbulent; nonetheless, in 2006/2007, it was 15.1/18.6 % of GDP (World Bank, 2022). It can hardly be arguable that after the Rose Revolution, Georgia experienced massive positive changes on a domestic level. However, the foreign policy question after the revolution is hard, to sum up in a nutshell.

There are two distinct perceptions regarding the conduction of Georgian foreign policy after the Rose Revolution. On the one hand, it was a continuation of Shevardnadze's shift from bandwagoning to balance (Oskanian, 2016), on the other hand, the third president Mikhail Saakashvili and his government have established a distinctly Western ideological reorientation that permeates both domestic reforms and foreign policy (Gvalia et al., 2013). It is hardly questionable that internal reforms had ideological roots. However, the statement that cooperation with the West was caused by the ideology of Saakashvili's new government and that Shevardnadze never detached Georgia far from the Kremlin geopolitical orbit may be false. To begin with, the roost of Georgian Western foreign policy lies in the middle of the 1990s, and Shevardnadze was the first to initiate NATO integration.

Furthermore, it is well known in the theory of international relations that the general outcome in the world political arena is made by big players (Waltz, 1979, pp. 72-73). Thus, shifting Georgia out of the Russian geopolitical orbit depended neither on Shevardnadze nor Saakashvili but on Russian weakness. Nonetheless, Saakashvili's government tried to escape Russia's interest/influence zone.

Looking at the timeline of US-Georgian and NATO-Georgian cooperation, it becomes evident that after the revolution partnership between Washington-Tbilisi and NATO-Georgia, is progressively deepened. In 2005, GTEP evolved into the Georgian Sustainment and Stability Programs (SSOP and SSOP II), designed to train and equip the Georgian forces and command staff for peace support operations in Iraq. Since then, Georgia has actively participated in US/NATO-led missions (Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 2022). The timeline list emphasizes that the US-Georgian partnership started and evolved through Georgian Train and Equip Program, initiated and conducted during Shevardnadze's government. Thus, the solid foundation of the western foreign policy lies before the Rose Revolution, not after it. The difference is in the speed and quality of enforcing it. If Shevardnadze's government abstained from officially

declaring concrete Georgian foreign course, authorities during Saakashvili's presidency unequivocally demonstrated and advocated pro-Western policy (German, 2015). After developing the capabilities of the state, Tbilisi was able to deepen relations with the West. However, external factors were not favoring Georgia.

In 2007, during the Munich security conference, President Vladimir Putin made a speech that became a message revealing the Kremlin's different policy and attitude toward the West and the course of the US. The speech's plot emphasized that the unipolar world was over, and the unilateral decisions of the greatest actor became unacceptable. Furthermore, Russia regarded the fact offensive that Kremlin military bases were closing in Georgia; according to The Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the country sought integration into NATO (Putin, 2007). Thus, North Atlantic Treaty organization's frontline near the Russian border and in the political backyard was repugnant to Moscow. If Kremlin was weak enough and unable to resist NATO enlargement in 2004, the situation changed dramatically three years later. During the early years of the 21st century, the Russian economy started to heal wounds. "It was growing so fast that by 2007, its GDP, in dollar terms, had surpassed its 1999 level no less than seven times" (Trenin D. , 2011).

Additionally, Moscow had diplomatic success as well. Significant actors on the European continent, like Germany and France, were actively cooperating with Russia. It was demonstrated when the Berlin-Paris refused Ukrainian and Georgian integration into NATO, simply explaining that the candidate countries could not fit the standards for the alliance. Nonetheless, the ample reason was maintaining a good relationship with Moscow (Lazarević, 2009). The summit demonstrated the revival of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century balance-of-power ideas in Berlin and Paris, involving Moscow's participation in a "European concert" of equivalent powers (Socor, 2008).

Not gaining Membership Action Plan on Bucharest NATO summit and Russo-Georgian war revealed that Tbilisi was Moscow's backyard and Kremlin had the liberty of coercive action. After the Rose Revolution, it may seem that Kremlin was losing influence ties in Tbilisi; however, the freedom of Russian action and reluctance of the West demonstrated that Georgia still was part of Moscow's interest and influence zone.

Why did Georgia continue to balance after the 2008 war? The mission of the Kremlin was to change Tbilisi's balance policy into bandwagon. If Georgia redirected the foreign course in favor

of Russia, it would mean complete capitulation of Tbilisi, and Moscow would accomplish its task. Although both options – bandwagon and balance – are part of structural realist theory, it became evident from the middle of the 1990s that the balance was way more profitable than the bandwagon policy for Tbilisi. Russian hypocrisy toward Georgia was revealed during the bandwagoning years when Kremlin as a mediator, played no positive role in resolving Tbilisi's separatist "frozen" conflicts. Russia was opposing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project, which was crucial for Georgia. Recognizing separatist regions as independent states became a legal justification for maintaining military bases in the area by Russia. The reality for Georgia became quite dramatic; in the central and Northern-west parts of the country were stationed Russian militaries, as well as in South in Armenia, in Gyumri. Georgia was (and still is) surrounded by Kremlin forces, and in case of another full-scale Russian attack, Tbilisi could hardly be survived. Thus, nothing is puzzling and surprising that the western foreign vector of Georgia was maintained even after Russian aggression. Cooperation between US and Georgia continued. In 2009 Georgian Development Program was established to support Georgia's participation in NATO-led missions. In 2015, three years later, after the change of government in Georgia, the Development Program was replaced by Resolute Support Mission. Georgia was one of the mission's most significant non-NATO soldier contributors. (Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 2022). Thus, the balance was continued, despite the pressure from Moscow.

## **Evaluation**

Georgian and Russian success/failure can be compared with a half-empty/half-full glass of water. On the one hand, Georgia could not integrate into NATO and complete its survival task. Nevertheless, cooperation with the West continued; a western endorsement to Tbilisi halted Kremlin military action. Therefore, the course of balance was maintained after the war. On the other hand, Russia using diplomatic and hard power, postponed Georgian integration indefinitely. Although, Moscow was unable to change the Georgian foreign policy course. Hardly can be made an unambiguous verdict, yet the Georgian integration process was frozen, and the policy of balance continued in a limited way.

Via the analysis of contemporary Georgian history, it becomes evident that in terms of foreign policy options, Tbilisi had limited prospects ranging from bandwagon to balancing. The aftermath of Russian-mediated cease-fire agreements and enrolling Kremlin-dominated

organizations was a pure representation of bandwagon. Although, changes in international structure – the revealed interests of the US in Caspian oil resources and the Caucasus regions – gave Georgia a chance to participate in intergovernmental projects despite the pressure from the Russian side. It may be argued that Georgian foreign policy transformation from bandwagoning to balancing was the product of domestic actors. However, it must be admitted that Shevardnadze's government created the western course at the end of the 1990s when there were hardly prominent interest groups or internal actors that would influence the country's foreign policy. The practice continued and accelerated after the Rose Revolution. The fact that the policy of balance was forged before the revolution hints that Domestic Actor Theory is odd, and there is no evidence that **D1**, **D2** or **D3** suggestions are relevant.

Furthermore, the continuation of the same policy after the authority change may refer to the setting of a norm to support the identity of a state. Saakashvili and his government were too active proponents of Georgia's European identity. The Euro-Atlantic political narrative continued after the 2008 war. It may be assumed that the state created a norm, and the foreign course followed it even during external systemic developments. However, his idea has a couple of specific flaws.

To begin with, the establishment of norms need time. In the Georgian case, it is pretty hard to declare without hesitation that chosen course after the Rose revolution was nothing but setting up a norm. To look at Switzerland's example, it becomes easy to analyze and make the verdict that Swiss neutrality is and was set of the norm that survived significant structural change during World War First, later turned into a tradition and did not shift from 1939 to 1991, became the culture, thus was maintained after the demise of the USSR and continues even nowadays. Constructivist theory can explain that very well (Jesse & Dreyer, 2016, p. 69) However, in the Georgian case, the history is too short of making a long "vertical" investigation. On the other hand, structural factors are evident, and the foreign policy of Tbilisi coincides with Realism theory options. Bandwagoning with Moscow guaranteed neither institutional development nor economic prosperity, and to a certain degree, it even undermined survival. Therefore, the small state made a maneuver to balance the big actor.

Further, we investigate the Georgian foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2012, and more convincing it becomes that policy of Tbilisi goes along with suggestions of Realism theory **R1**,

**R2** and **R3**. In relative and absolute terms, Georgia is quite small compared to Russia. The theoretical frame suggests that a bigger constraint, the narrower option ranges from bandwagon to balance. As mentioned at the beginning of the evaluation, the whole Georgian foreign policy option, implemented in practice initially, was bandwagon later turned into balance.

## **Conclusion**

Analyzing foreign policy by emphasizing elite perceptions is a quite prominent method; however, advocating the point via interviews with politicians and experts, not even mentioning structural factors, makes the methodology less objective. Furthermore, analysis of a small part of history from 2003-2012, without any prerequisite, may lead to the wrong verdict. On the other hand, betting on elite perception and structural factors together seems to step forward to an objective investigation. However, assuming the same importance of both factors may be odd. Let us assume that Shevardnadze was assassinated in 1995 or 1998; how would the external course be changed? If, in 2008, Saakashvili's government was toppled by Russian forces, what policy would be taken by occupational authorities? In any counterfactual analysis hardly, we can speculate any scenario where the external vector would be different from the bandwagon.

Despite the previous works emphasizing elites and elite perceptions, the vertical structural analysis demonstrated that external factors were important in forming Georgian foreign policy. Furthermore, the Georgian external course from 1993 to 2012 fits Realist theory suggestions and varies from bandwagoning to balance. Additionally, it is essential to mention that the Georgian foreign course from 1991 to 1993 was based on ideas and certain nationalistic/chauvinist interest groups advocating complete detachment from Russian orbit culminated with a mess, civil war and separatist wars endorsed by Kremlin. The situation was relatively defused after Moscow mediation, bringing its peacekeepers into the conflict zone and made Georgia join CIS.

To summarize the fundamental structural factors in a single sentence, the Russian Federation creates structural constraints for Georgia. Whether some scholars and authors want to admit it or not, it has to be acknowledged that the foreign policy of Georgia yields those constraints.

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