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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

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Abstract

The ongoing political processes in the South Caucasus are always characterized by different dynamism and diversity. The countries of this region are constantly fighting to protect their national interests. Regional actors always try to gain their political influence in the South Caucasus region. Their goal was to suppress all attempts to defend independence in the South Caucasus region. It turned out to be not so easy, because the Caucasian people were very resistant to all empires. The situation changed significantly in the 19th century. Controversies took a different form for the South Caucasus region. In order to spread its political influence not only in the South, but also in the entire Caucasus region, Russia was able to remove all rivals and strengthen its positions here. Due to the two revolutions of 1917, Russia briefly gave up its positions in the South Caucasus. This was followed by the gaining of independence by all three states of this region (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) in 1918, although this did not last long (1918-1921). Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became part of the Soviet Union. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), all three South Caucasian states were able to gain independence again. The political situation in the South Caucasus in the 90s of the last century can be characterized as particularly dynamic. The processes taking place in the countries of the region were of great interest to both internal (Russia, Iran, Turkey) and external regional (USA, EU, then China) actors. The cause of their interests was the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all three independent states of

the South Caucasus: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan chose different foreign policy courses. Along with the different foreign policy course of these countries, it is worth noting the intervention of external actors in the development process of the region. Also, in internal political processes in the region, such as: conflicts, territorial disputes between states. As the South Caucasus region is interesting and attractive for both internal regional and external actors, its role in the international security system occupies an important place.

Keywords: *Caucasus, actor, region, politics, security, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan.*

Hypothesis. Due to its geopolitical location, the South Caucasus region occupies an important place in the international security system. Therefore, this region is a crossroads for major political players. Each of them is trying to spread their political and economic influence over this region.

Research results. All three countries in the South Caucasus have chosen more or less different foreign policy courses. There is also a territorial conflict between two countries in the region. Despite these and other obstacles, peace and security are important to all three countries of the South Caucasus. The region also plays a major role in international security, which is increasingly increasing its importance. Along with the political, this region has a significant economic impact on the international arena.

Theoretical framework. I used it while working on the paper. Max Weber's modernization. Modernization is a continuous process that does not involve the transformation of just one specific country in accordance with modern requirements, it encompasses many countries and involves broad segments of the population. G. Almond's concept of political culture and political socialization. This theory distinguishes three main types of political culture: patriarchal, or traditional, submissive, and participatory cultures. It should be noted that political culture is inextricably linked and interacts with political institutions - the political system, the state, political parties, and socio-political associations, which, in turn, affects its further development and improvement.

Discussion. The term "Caucasus" in a geopolitical context refers to the location of the main range of the Caucasus. The conquest of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire led to the division of this region into Transcaucasia and Transcaucasia, i.e. South and North Caucasus. The term "Caucasus" in a geopolitical context refers to the location of the main range of the Caucasus. The conquest of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire led to the division of this region into Transcaucasia and Transcaucasia, i.e. South and North Caucasus. The South Caucasus is the oldest and most important region connecting Central Asia and Europe with the countries of the Middle East and Russia. Due to its geographical location, this region has always been the center of attention of big countries. The neighboring states of the region tried to pursue their geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic interests in the South Caucasus region. The situation often changed, but due to the geopolitical situation, interests in this region were always great. Based on these interests, the countries of the South Caucasus region were limited in terms of political, military and economic development, which was a hindering factor for the region in various directions. It should be noted that the South Caucasus is an area of conflicts between such large regional and extra-regional political players as: Russia, the USA, China, Iran and Turkey, who are trying to pursue their political, economic and other interests in the South Caucasus and thus strengthen their influence. Accordingly, these interests of theirs have a great influence on the political climate here. Before

proceeding to the discussion of the main issue, it is necessary to make a short historical excursion. In the 16th-19th centuries, first the Ottoman and Persian empires, and then the Russian empire, avoided the territories of the South Caucasus. From the 18th century, the Russian Empire became stronger and, accordingly, achieved great success in the South Caucasus region. In 1724, an agreement was signed between Russia and the Ottomans, by which these two empires divided the Caucasus region, including the territories under the influence of Persia [1]. From time to time, the Ottoman and Persian empires slowly lost their political influence in the Caucasus, as a result of which Russia achieved complete dominance in the Caucasus region.

The South Caucasus region had a special importance for the Russian Empire. Therefore, he did everything to not only gain control over this region, but also to maintain it. Georgia was especially important for Russia, with which the union was perceived as a mutual cooperation between like-minded nations. For Russia, the conquest of Georgia was a guarantee of domination over the Caucasus. The Russian Empire completed its complete conquest of the South Caucasus region in the 70s of the 19th century (as a result of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878). This region, included in the Russian Empire (only three years - 1918-1921, the countries of the South Caucasus were able to gain independence) was a part of the Soviet Union from its creation until its dissolution (1921-1991). After the end of the "Cold War" and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a completely new era begins. After Western liberal democracy won over socialism and the political ideology of communism was destroyed, Western society hoped that Russia, which was the legal heir of the Soviet Union, would weaken and the West would have a less competitive state in its form as a rival in the South Caucasus region, but it did not happen. We can say that Europe and the USA remained deceived.

We are interested in the opinion of Hamlet Chipashvili, a Georgian political expert, who points out that despite the positive or negative changes that took place in Russia in the 90s of the XX century, we should not classify the Russian Federation as an ordinary country, because each of its actions affects the life of the entire planet [2]. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the goals of the Russian Federation became clear to the international community. During Boris Yeltsin's rule, Russia considered the post-Soviet countries as its sphere of influence. In this regard, the South Caucasus was not an exception. Added to this fact was the fact that gradually the political climate in the South Caucasus also changed. New big political players have appeared in the region, who have their own political, economic and other interests in the South Caucasus. Therefore, in order to achieve their goal, they spare neither military, political efforts nor "financial assistance" to the countries of the region. Therefore, the role and importance of this region in the international security system has increased. At the end of the 20th century, the South Caucasus region became a place of intersection of the interests of the United States of America and

Russia. Russia tried in every possible way to artificially create ethno-political conflicts in the region and thereby hinder Washington. Apart from these, Iran and Turkey also have their own political interests in the South Caucasus.

The second Karabakh war (2020) resulted in a change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus [4]. Russia and Turkey have greatly increased their influence in the region. Russia aims to remain the main military and security guarantor in the South Caucasus region. To achieve this, it tries to exclude other actors, especially the US, NATO and the European Union. It is interesting that with the deployment of Russian "peacekeeping forces" in Karabakh, Moscow now has troops in the territory of all three countries of the South Caucasus. According to Geoffrey Makoff, in fact, in 2020, Russia quite successfully used the political crises around its peripheries [5].

According to the UN Charter, the Security Council is entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. In carrying out this responsibility, the Council may establish a UN peacekeeping operation [6]. This document defines the legal framework of the peacekeeping operation [7]. The issue of the representation of the Russian "peace mission" should be reviewed after five years. This provision is in the interests of official Baku, because it will be able to cancel the agreement with this clause. Russia managed to exclude the OSCE Minsk Group, thereby further reducing the already low influence of the US and the EU. Turkey expresses displeasure that Moscow is trying to balance its influence in its favor in the Black Sea, especially after Russia's annexation of Crimea (2014). That is why, with its indirect intervention in the Karabakh conflict, Turkey tried to show its ambitions in the South Caucasus region. In the background, when Western interests are decreasing and their involvement is becoming minimal.

In the background of the rivalry between the above-mentioned countries to gain influence in this region, it is somewhat difficult for the countries of the South Caucasus to effectively implement their domestic and foreign policies. On the other hand, the United States of America spares no efforts. He tried his best to actively implement important economic projects in the region with his support, the goal of which, of course, was to leave Russia and Iran out of the game.

It should be noted that since 1980, the Republic of Turkey has started establishing relations with Turkish and non-Turkic speaking peoples in the South Caucasus region. When the Soviet Union collapsed, both Turkey and Iran supported the countries of the South Caucasus. Their embassies were opened in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Embassies were opened in Ankara and Tehran, which heralded new political-cultural and economic relations between the countries of the South Caucasus and among them.

As for NATO and the European Union, they appear relatively late in the political life of the region. If they were initially characterized by a cautious policy, today NATO and the European Union are one of the big players in the South Caucasus region. Moreover, they even determine the political calendar of the South Caucasus countries.

NATO has great interest in the South Caucasus region. The reason for this, of course, is the geographical location and strategic importance of the region. This military-political alliance believes that the current political situation in the countries of the South

Caucasus has a significant impact on the security and peaceful development of not only Europe, but also the Balkans, the Middle East and Eurasia [8].

One of the big players in the region is China. It has appeared in the South Caucasus region in recent years, which also has its own interests in the region. China's rapid economic development has raised concerns in the United States. China's goal is to have a dominant position in the South China Sea. At the same time, China wants to restore the ancient "Silk Road", whose plan is "One Belt - One Road" [9].

"One Belt - One Road" is a project with the greatest ambitions. This initiative has united more than 70 countries, and today their number is gradually increasing. The project has covered the Eurasian continent. The idea belongs to the President of China, Xi Jinping, who presented it in 2013. The goal is to expand the ancient Silk Road, both economically and infrastructurally.

This initiative of the Chinese President put a task before the states, according to which they had to correctly define China's aspirations. Against the backdrop of China's rapid rise in influence, there has been a retaliatory response from various countries. In the interests of our research, attention must be focused on the trend of increasing confrontation between the United States of America and China. The Russian Federation is not going to lag behind the development of events and is trying to take strategic steps in this direction. As a counterbalance to the above-mentioned initiative of the President of China, Russia decided to lay the foundation for the Eurasian union, which was called the Great Eurasian Cooperation Initiative. The goal of the organization was the unification of major states, including, of course, China. And the main target is the United States of America.

In parallel with the mentioned events, the United States of America is trying to maintain the balance of power and stop China's growing ambitions. Joe Biden's administration announced before the G7 summit that an infrastructure plan should be created that would prevent China from increasing its influence [10].

The main idea of the balance of power theory is to balance the existing situation. The attempt of states to unite in various international alliances aims to balance the dominant position created by another powerful state [11].

The project to restore the ancient Silk Road has both supporters and detractors. These attitudes were mainly formed by directly observing the current processes. The most important issue is the extent to which the "One Belt One Road Initiative" proposed by China poses a threat to the West and the United States of America [12].

Now we will briefly discuss separately the role of all three countries of the South Caucasus and the importance of each of them in the system of international relations. Let's start with Georgia.

In 1992, Georgia took its first steps towards the West and became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In 1994, Georgia joined the NATO program "Partnership for Peace". Despite all this, it took a long time for Georgia to express its desire for full NATO membership - it happened in 2002. In 2004, Georgia created an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO. This program was created for those countries that were ready to deepen cooperation with NATO [13]. The Georgian government decided to send troops to Iraq and at the same time

join NATO operations in Afghanistan. Georgia had the third largest number of troops in Iraq, after the United States and the United Kingdom. The NATO-Georgia intensive dialogue, which meant consultations on a different issue, was laid at the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in 2006, including political and security issues, defense, conflict resolution, economy and other important issues. In 2008, due to the successful fulfillment of the obligations assumed, the Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia should have been handed over to NATO at the Bucharest Summit.

But Georgia did not get the deserved MAP. It should be clarified here that the granting of MAP did not necessarily mean joining the organization [14]. Georgia failed to get the deserved MAP. He only received a promise to definitely join NATO. It was a promise without any indication of time. In 2011, Georgia officially received the title of NATO aspirant country. In 2014, Georgia was named as an interoperable partner of NATO. Georgia was also awarded the status of a country of increased opportunity along with Jordan, Australia, Finland and Sweden.

The worst for Georgia was the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. This war is still a matter of dispute. Even now there are discussions about which side, when, why and how the war started. It is true that the majority of countries condemned Russia's war with Georgia, but we also find opinions where part of the responsibility rests with Georgia. Of course, there is a political motive behind these opinions. Followers of this opinion do not want to spoil relations with Russia and, on the contrary, try to warm Russia's attitude towards them. As a result of 2008, we got the occupation of the territories of Georgia, which is increasing over time. Today, 20% of the territory of Georgia is occupied by the Russian Federation.

In August 2008, the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) was formed by the NATO foreign ministers, the goal of which was practical cooperation between Georgia and NATO. We can say that Georgia deserves to join NATO. Georgia has confirmed this many times, which was manifested by the reforms carried out in the country and participation in NATO missions over the years, where many Georgian soldiers were killed and maimed. The document developed by the Government of Georgia clearly states that NATO integration will help our country to ensure security. Only promises of full membership are heard from NATO.

It should also be noted that many effective and efficient steps have been taken on the path of Georgia's integration into the European Union. On June 27, 2014, an association agreement was signed between Georgia and the European Union. 9 years later, in December 2023, Georgia became a candidate country for the European Union. As for full membership, there is no talk about it yet.

It is in the interests of Georgia to maintain peace and stability in the South Caucasus. Therefore, it promotes the development of close political and economic relations with the countries of the region. Which in itself includes active participation in energy and economic projects in our region. In addition, Georgia has always played the role of a mediator in the Karabakh conflict between neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan.

As for Armenia, its neighboring countries are: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and Turkey. Armenia is landlocked [15]. Also, the conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh was added to it. The National Movement of Armenia, which came to the head of the country in 1990, set as one of its goals the settlement of relations with Turkey, because Armenia was well aware that Turkey is one

of the big players in the region. Also in Armenia, they realized the existence of Turkey as one of the connecting roads with Europe, and therefore they tried to establish trade and economic relations with it. The factor hindering the union between Armenia and Turkey is the request from Armenia to recognize the genocide by Turkey (Genocide of Armenians - mass slaughter in the Ottoman Empire in 1915) [16].

In 2018, Nikol Pashinyan took the post of Prime Minister in Armenia [17]. As for the position of the USA in this regard, it positively evaluated this step taken by Armenia and expressed its support for the investigation [3].

It should be noted that the state of Armenia does not have its own energy resources. It receives gas mainly from Russia [18]. This emphasizes Armenia's dependence on Russia to a certain extent.

The status quo of both internal and external regional actors has undergone significant changes in the South Caucasus, which was triggered by the 2020 Karabakh war. As a result of this war, both Russian and Turkish influence in the region increased [19]. Most importantly, the Karabakh conflict has been resolved to some extent, which is one of the important guarantees of stability in the South Caucasus region.

Since the day of gaining independence, Iran has been considered as a friendly state for Armenia. In the ongoing Karabakh war of 1992-1994, Iran mainly chose a balanced policy. Friendly relations between these two countries continued, which is confirmed by more than one circumstance. Here we will bring only one fact. In 2007, the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline was put into operation [20]. After Pashinyan came to the head of the government of Armenia in 2018, it was thought that Armenia would be used by the US for anti-Iranian activities, which was followed by Armenia's response that Pashinyan visited Tehran in the same year 2018 and expressed his readiness to establish a new friendly relationship [21]. This visit yielded positive results and Armenian-Iranian relations returned to their old state.

With the start of the second Karabakh war in 2020, Iran, as before, called on the parties to negotiate, because the unstable political environment in the South Caucasus was unacceptable to Iran. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are its immediate neighbors. At the same time, Iran welcomed Azerbaijan's proposal regarding the 3+3 format, which meant the joint working format of all three countries of the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and important regional actors, Iran, Russia and Turkey.

As for Azerbaijan. Since the 1990s, its main task has been the restoration of territorial integrity (which it has achieved), the strengthening of the country's sovereignty and the development of a strong regional economic partnership. This country owns oil and natural resources, and with these natural resources, Azerbaijan is able to strengthen its economy. Important priorities for him are the implementation of infrastructure and defense projects. Azerbaijan's first priority is to refrain from joining military alliances and maintain de-facto neutrality in the region. It focuses on practical cooperation with NATO and its member states. Which is mainly done within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program. It is the maintenance of military de-facto neutrality that contributes to the security of Azerbaijan. It is also less subject to pressure from regional powers.

Azerbaijan is also trying to make effective use of informal trilateral cooperation. As an example, we can cite Azerbaijan-Georgia-

Turkey, Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey, Azerbaijan-Turkey-Pakistan mutual cooperation. The goal of multilateral cooperation is not only political and military interests, but also includes economic issues. Examples of this include the North-South transit corridor involving Iran and Russia, the BTK regional railway project involving Georgia and Turkey, and the TAP gas pipeline involving the Balkan countries and Italy. Since 2009, Azerbaijan has cooperated with the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EAP) program in both bilateral and multilateral formats. Although bilateral cooperation with the EU remains a priority, the multilateral platform of the EAP allows Azerbaijan to pursue its interests in the context of regional politics.

Regular actors of the South Caucasus: Turkey, Iran and Russia are important partners for Azerbaijan. He manages to balance relations with these countries. Since independence, Turkey has been Azerbaijan's main regional ally and strategic partner. Regional energy projects, such as oil and gas pipelines, new regional railways, military and humanitarian cooperation, as well as mutual investments are establishing close linguistic and cultural ties. Azerbaijan views Turkey as a strategic balance against potential threats from other neighbors [22].

There are important connections between Iran and Azerbaijan in the economic, trade, transit, energy direction [23]. Both countries regularly host economic forums and participate in joint infrastructure and investment projects. Among the countries of the South Caucasus, only Azerbaijan stands out for having energy resources [24].

Conclusion

All three countries of the South Caucasus have chosen different foreign policy courses. Their common goal is to maintain peace and stability in the region. The issue of regional security is equally important for Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, for which they actively cooperate with each other.

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