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GEORGIA IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

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The majority of the sovereign states in the world are small. The principle of self-determination and nationalism has turned out to be one of the most powerful and influential factors in world politics and will remain so in the near future. Hence the process of formation of newly independent small states' promises to last for a long period of time. The questions about what is a small state, which states we shall call small or what are the determining factors of smallness, still remain open.

There is no universal definition of a small state, even though several attempts to classify states according to the size of population and the size of territory have been made. Apart from these two main features of state typology (land area and size of population), particular important is state's economic and military power, which together comprises a state's political 'weight' in the international system. Small states have a minimal role and importance in world politics, but due to their growing number and significance they have generated an increased interest and received a special place in the international system. The main interest is concerned with small states' viability, with processes of newly independent state formation and their role and functions in the world politico-economic systems.

What are the main characteristic features of a small state? L.G.Jaquet argues that 'a small state is a state that is neither on a world scale nor on a regional scale able to impose its political will or to protect its national interests by exerting power politics'.⁽¹⁾

Robert Rothstein defines a small state as 'a state which recognises that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognised by the other states involved in international politics'.⁽²⁾

Both authors stress the fact that a small state is also a weak power unable to defend its national interests by its own political and military means. We also have to admit that a small state is a weak power. In the post-Soviet space the majority of states are weak powers with the exception of Russia and Ukraine. Very often the term 'small state' is used to describe a state with rather large territory but weak politico-military power. Some theorists prefer to call these states Weak Powers, which has more political rather than geographical dimensions.

In this paper the term small state will be used with regard to those countries that have small territory and at the same time are weak powers. A country can be small and weak but have a very strong and stable statehood and thus be a strong state (like Sweden, Norway, Austria etc.). At the same time a large and powerful country may have a weak state, and in terms of national security may be confronted with the same difficulties and weaknesses as small states. Internal weakness, lack of social and ethnic cohesion, weak economy and absence of stable institutions create serious national security problems for all states and for small ones in particular.

Until recently, in a world of very few liberal-democratic states and no international institutions like UN, small states used to become victims of imperialist neighbours and in many cases ceased to exist. The current international order is favourably disposed towards weak powers even if they have failed to create a unified civil society and their governments are not able to perform the most rudimentary tasks. Such states are the majority of African countries, Afghanistan, former Soviet republics and others. The international community guarantees juridical sovereignty to these states despite the fact that they lack political and economic viability. Robert Jackson labelled such states as quasi-states and their sovereignty as negative sovereignty. (3)

The three most influential theories of international relations (Political Realism, Neorealism and Complex Interdependence) give small countries the role of geopolitical 'change', of a certain supplement to the medium-sized and large powers that are the main actors in world politics. In spite of everything, small states, at least in this century, have proved to have a surprising viability and ability to survive in an extremely harsh international environment. One possible explanation of this is the peculiar character of modern international society governed by the principles of international law.

Another explanation lies with the interests of more powerful states, that find it in their interest to keep their smaller 'colleagues' alive in order to use them to preserve the balance of power on both a regional and global level. The national interests and foreign policy priorities of a small state have regional, rather than global dimension. In some exceptional cases the regional importance of a weak power extends to the global scale, which is connected with the location of a state on the intersection of superpowers' interests, on civilisation borders or in the 'magnetic field' of global political and economic problems.

The politico-economic capabilities and scope of action of these small countries take special parameters, which can be proved by the example of

Russia and her neighbouring newly independent small states that emerged on the political map after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Newly independent Georgia represents a typical example of a small, quasi-state that carries all the problems of a former colony located near the superpower. New sovereign states are born as a result of different events and under different conditions.

Usually the process of a new state's formation takes place after the extreme politicisation of a society strongly influenced by a wave of radical populism. This argument has been once again supported by the events that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The mystification of real political and economic conditions, ardent nationalism, excessive optimism, along with other objective factors, significantly shaped the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of newly independent quasi-states, including Georgia. The absence of a mature political elite, the access to power of unqualified people whose vision was shaped by the clichés of provincial literary criticism and pseudo-patriotic historical literature, largely contributed to the formation of the domestic and foreign policies of the newly independent states.

The new political elite failed to grasp the essence of geopolitical reality together with complicated political and socio-economic mechanisms and problems. As a result a small country with no vitally important natural resources, ethnic integrity and strong statehood became an arena of civil war and ethnic conflicts, not to mention social and economic catastrophe. Revolutionary governments mushrooming on the grounds of nationalism and populism proved to be incapable of assessing crucial problems as well as political and economic realities not only of their own countries but also of the outside world. As a result there followed strategic mistakes and failures. Unfortunately the current international system is not willing to protect small, weak states, particularly those that are neighbouring big powers, their former metropolises.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by the series of interconnected political, economic, social, military, ethnic and psychological traumas. The mostly traumatised happened to be Russia, which is struggling to preserve its Great Power status, find a new identity, define the sphere of influence and defend her real and perceived strategic interests. Russia's small neighbours, including Georgia, have realised that the norms and principles of international community are not working in the so called 'near abroad' and they are left unprotected *vis-a-vis* the most powerful state in the post-communist space. In the situation described, a small country has to take into consideration the national security interests of its powerful neighbour and conduct diplomatic relations with Russia and other former Soviet Republics according to the existing geopolitical and economic conditions in order to ensure future survival and development.

It is important to note that the main parameters of Georgian foreign and internal policy are substantially influenced by the values and principle interests of the Russian political and military authorities. Thus, Georgia has to accept the rules of the game that dominate international relations in the post-soviet space. The economic problems of the newly independent states also turned out to be extremely complicated. Small countries of the

post-Soviet space found themselves in a catastrophic situation, due to their limited resource base and highly specialised, undiversified economy.

The economies of the former Soviet republics were part of an integral, all-union economic system and have not been adjusted to independent existence. They will need fundamental restructuring and large investments in order to integrate into world markets. Georgia, for example, managed not only to lose its traditional economic sources and markets in the former Soviet Union, but also managed to destroy the most developed sectors of its economy. Georgia, like other Transcaucasian republics, has not yet fully defined its position towards Russia. There are both integrational and disintegrational forces that operate now in Georgia. Towards reintegration with Russia Georgia is pushed by: the structure of its economy and need of vital resources and technology; also the acute energy problem, necessary access to the Russian market; the need to guarantee territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as a long tradition of friendship and close cultural ties with Russia.

Disintegrational forces are supported by the new political and economic conditions in the former Soviet Union, by Russian military and political pressure that creates a negative reaction among Georgia's population and the lack of desire or the incapability of Russian business to deal with Georgia. We think that integrational processes are gaining momentum now, but neither sides have yet found nontrivial and civilised forms of cooperation, which could create favorable conditions for reintegration on a new basis. Small countries of the post-Soviet space are going through severe economic and social difficulties.

At the same time they are trying to build a real statehood, but objective and subjective negative factors hinder their attempts. Georgia too is confronted not only by economic problems but also by the difficulties of state building. What kind of economy should Georgia have, what kind of state should it build and on whose economic and military support should it rely in order to survive the hard times of transition? These are the questions that still remain open and the answers are not yet clear. One has to ask also what are the national interests of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and other states? The collapse of the Soviet Union occurred five years ago, but we ourselves and our neighbours could not manage to define the main priorities of national interest, foreign policy and national security. There are several objective and subjective reasons for it. One of the reasons is Russia itself, which so far has proven to its neighbours that 'if you are not with me, you are against me'.

Small states neighbouring Russia found themselves not in the international or regional community, but in a net of harsh and merciless politico-economic relations, where the leader or the hegemon is holding its weak neighbours and is busy 'amputating' their vitally important organs. In the long run, a consistent Russian policy of using sticks instead of carrots is not likely to give satisfactory results. Russia could have played a more positive role in the region, but it chose to adhere to the most vulgar norms of political realism. We think that the most realistic and logical way of building a genuinely sovereign small state, with a well developed economy and viable statehood is through integration with other former Soviet republics.

The choice for small states neighbouring Big Powers in foreign relations is very restricted, mainly due to such phenomenon as the 'sphere of influence'. Powerful states build their spheres of influence either by peaceful means or by the use of active military power, threats and blackmailing. At the same time big states impose their 'rules of the game' and measure the 'dosage' of their actions according to the reaction of the opposing side. A good example of such policy is Russian actions in Transcaucasia during 1991-1994. Another important characteristic of international relations in the post-Soviet space is the internal disintegration and disunification of the member states.

This particular factor has played a negative role in the region and triggered violence, separatism and policies of 'teaching lessons' to the weak neighbours. The actions of small states are not usually judged by the same standards as those of a big state. The latter operates independently and does not rely on others support, while small states count only on the support of the big powers and guarantee their security by 'borrowing' power from others. Thus small quasi-states, neighbours of Russia, located in the Russian sphere of influence are not always able to choose neutrality or non-alignment as their strategy. This means that Georgia, due to its weakness, has to count on union with Russia, which has to guarantee Georgia sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and economic development.

The current situation in the post-Soviet space is characterised by the painful process of newly independent state-building. Unfortunately, in this process we are witnessing the irresponsible actions of national elites that lead to the violation of human rights, rights of ethnic minorities and often to the eruption of ethnic conflicts. In order to develop civilised relations and make the process of newly independent state formation more peaceful, it is important to strengthen democratic reforms and institutions, form a new political and economic elite and develop the capacity of rational decision making. During the first years of independence in Georgia, and in some other former Soviet republics, there came to power political idealists, while at the moment the main positions in the government are held by people with a more realistic outlook on the world and on existing political and economic relations. Transcaucasian states live and develop in a part of the world where the 'end of history' has not yet come, but where unfortunately there exist almost all the components of political realism and are present features of a possible 'clash of civilisations'.

Notes:

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1. L.G.M. 'Jaquet, The Role of a Small State Within Alliance System', in: *Small States in International Relations*, August Schou and Arne O. Brundtland, Stockholm, 1971, p. 58.
2. Robert Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 29.
3. Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 21-30.

