

Caucasian Regional Studies



The International Association For Caucasian Regional Studies
Law Politics Sociology Economics Modern History International Relations

Caucasian Regional Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 1998

THE MAKING OF THE NEW GEORGIA: DEVELOPMENT FACTORS - PLUSES AND MINUSES

Revaz Gachechiladze*

Introduction

More than six years have passed since Georgia and the other former Union Republics of the USSR were recognised as independent members of the World community. From the point of view of political history six or seven years is not a long period ^ much more time is usually needed for the formation of a new statehood. Therefore there is no place either for surprise, or (even less so) for blaming any of the Newly Independent States (NIS) for the serious shortcomings in the first stage of their development.

There is no doubt that most of these shortcomings were predetermined by objective factors; but for time being, many people in the NIS, who have no experience of real political participation, who live in the conditions of an embryonic democracy (it is hard to say whether in each NIS these embryos will find fertile soil to develop), who reside in countries at an early stage of statehood, which are encountering a dramatic change of economic paradigms, tend to blame their plight (quite real, it should be said), simply upon the subjective actions of the former and recent leaders of the USSR and its successor states. Nevertheless, it can be argued that what is now perceived as a subjective factor, years after may be re-evaluated by scholars who will find an objective scientific explanation for it from the point of view of the logic of economic and political development.

There is no doubt that absolute majority of the population of the ex-Soviet Union now lives in harsher conditions than under "real socialism". The difficulties are mostly caused by:

- a dramatic fall of economic output, after the previous single

economic complex (producing goods more or less affordable within the closed economic space, though non-competitive on the world market) happened to be torn apart into at least 15 new separate parts (none of them a complex): this left many people unemployed;

- a dramatic decline in the real welfare of population: social welfare in the USSR had been subsidised from the budget, which was mostly secured by the state ownership of natural resources and their injurious exploitation ^ this factor no longer exists;
- a sharp polarisation of wealth distribution: the number of those who require social support is increasing rapidly;
- ethno-territorial tensions and even wars, which have happened, are proceeding or can be envisaged (they are mostly due to the ambiguity of the political and administrative boundaries
- the heritage of the USSR): this has turned many people into refugees and internally displaced persons.

It is clear that these aspects do not cover all the reasons for the decline in the material welfare of the population of the NIS, but they seem to be more important than any others.

On the other hand, it is arguable that the positive sides of the denunciation of the Union treaty of 1922 and the refusal to follow dogmatically accepted Marxism ("Marxism-Leninism" ^ a more familiar term in the USSR) will in the end outweigh the difficulties the population of the post-Soviet Union (PSU) suffer now.

To the positive aspects of recent development of many of the NIS may be attributed the following:

- all the NIS had the opportunity to become real owners of their natural wealth. The best examples are Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, rich in natural resources (especially hydrocarbons) and Russia, rich in all kinds of natural resources. Previously this wealth was wasted elsewhere and many potentially rich countries were doomed to live in poverty (the best example was Soviet Turkmenistan);
- the NIS with better developed industrial forces and higher culture of production have the chance to overcome more rapidly the inefficiency of the planned economy (the best examples here are the Baltic states);
- in some countries (Georgia not the least among them) ideological blinkers no longer limit the economic success of a person: the market economy, although the transition to it is painful and quite often accompanied by a sharp economic polarisation, is still capable of giving the majority of the population (and, certainly, to its most energetic, well-educated and industrious part, which under the levelling tendency of "real socialism" was doomed never to

exceed an average level) material welfare of a much higher standard than the centralised economy of the Soviet period could offer them;

- in some countries (Georgia being a clear example) the process of democratisation is proceeding. Although the results so far are relatively modest, they are encouraging. It is important that people of many NIS are step by step getting used to the possibility of choice during elections, in contrast with the "elections" under Soviet power (with the only candidate on the ballot list) which just endorsed the rule of the single party;
- for the world community it is important that the threat of a devastating war from "the one sixth of the Earth" has been substantially reduced.

An objective argument against Soviet-Communist nostalgia is the impossibility of restoring all the free benefits, the source of which was the injurious exploitation of natural resources, the levelling of wages and incomes and the suppression of individual initiative in favour of false collectivism.

Nowadays the people with such a nostalgia prefer to forget the rising prices, queues and eternal deficit of all kind of goods and services under "real socialism".

The general political and economic background of the development of the whole post-Soviet region is almost identical, but the objective factors ^the concrete natural, socio-cultural, political and economic realities - differ very much and they cause visible differences in the way in which state-building proceeds in each NIS, as well as in the pace and peculiarities of solving of their socio-economic problems.

It must be noted that it is very difficult to single out separate factors of development in an absolutely pure manner. Quite often the factors are so interconnected that it is hard to discuss them separately, for example, to consider natural resources without mentioning the local economic basis, or to argue about economic factors ignoring the international political situation. Nevertheless, it seems more appropriate to analyse the factors before attempting to synthesise them.

Georgia, resembling the other NIS in its general problems, nevertheless has substantial differences in its developmental patterns. The task of a geographer is to determine the reasons for these differences. The aim of this article, in particular, is to find the answer to the question ^ what are the internal and external factors of development of the New Georgia? With the aim of obtaining a correct geographical explanation it is preferable to consider the answer against the background of the overall post-Soviet realities and especially those of the other NIS of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia (the "Southern NIS").

Internal Factors of Development of the New Georgia

These factors could be grouped into four large components:

1. Natural resource potential;
2. Socio-cultural potential;
3. Economic potential;
4. Internal political potential.

1) Natural resource potential

From the point of view of climatic, water, forestry and, to a certain extent, soil resources Georgia has some advantages in comparison with the other Southern NIS.

The water resources of Georgia (its rivers and glaciers) are substantially larger than in most of the other Southern NIS. Climatic conditions are relatively good in spite of frequent droughts in East Georgia. This country includes virtually the only important region with a humid subtropical climate in the PSU – the Kolkheti lowlands of West Georgia (there are only smaller analogies, the tiny south-western part of the Krasnodar Krai in Russia and the Lenkoran lowlands along the littoral of the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan). Even against the background of the rest of Europe the climatic niche of humid subtropical Kolkheti lowland may give a definite advantage to Georgia (especially in the development of a specific agriculture, namely subtropical crops and dairy farming).

Against the background of the rest of the PSU the recreational resources of Georgia (Black Sea littoral, mountain resort and spa potential) are quite substantial. The development of mountainous, skiing and spa tourism destined for specific customers seems especially promising.

Georgia possesses many deposits of mineral resources, especially important being the deposits of construction materials (marble, granite, and tufa).

The most important asset of the resource potential of this country is Georgia's access to the open sea: nine out of the fifteen NIS, among them all the seven other Southern NIS, do not possess such an access and are landlocked countries.

Along with these definite pluses Georgia nevertheless has certain minuses in its natural potential. Of these the following may be considered less serious:

Water resources are located unevenly. The western, humid part of the country possesses twice as many hydroresources as the more arid eastern part, which needs capital-consuming irrigation systems. It will be rather expensive to develop the hydroenergy potential of the mountainous country: this sort of development needs large capital investments.

Although almost half of the territory of Georgia is covered by forest, these mountainous forests have an environmental and recreational purpose and the state cannot permit wide-scale lumbering. The serious deforestation since the early 1990s can be explained by the uncontrolled

action of the rural population due to the grave energy crisis in the country.

The recreational potential is not easy to develop, first of all because of relative remoteness of Georgia in comparison with its potential competitors in the Mediterranean and the Alps. Georgia's Black Sea littoral is considered (maybe arbitrarily) less attractive than the beaches of the Adriatic and Aegean Seas because it is rainier. The tourism infrastructure needs to be almost completely changed.

Earlier, the most frequent tourists from Russia already paved a way more to the south and to the west. Nevertheless, the recreational potential of Georgia can be used in a competitive way if large enough capital investments are available. On the other hand, the latter may follow only after full political stabilisation is achieved (the latter is examined as a separate factor).

A much more serious drawback of the natural resource potential of Georgia is the lack of more or less substantial metal ore deposits and fuel (hydrocarbon) resources. Once the rich manganese ore deposits of Chiatura (West Georgia, exploited since 1879) are exhausted, neither of the other metal ore deposits has an international significance: although the deposits are quite numerous and diversified, they are relatively small. Local oil and gas resources are scarce (larger deposits are still to be discovered): their virtual absence is the cause of an ecological problem (the cutting down of the forest for fuel) and of the dependence of Georgia on foreign suppliers ^ in the first place Russia. If large enough deposits of fuel are found inside the country (and there are some signs of this) the economic situation in this country may improve substantially.

2) Socio^cultural potential

This is probably the most important internal factor of development of the state.

From this point of view Georgia has substantial pluses. Among them is the high level of education: 10 per cent of the working age population (350 thousand in 1989, the year of the last census) has complete higher education (university or college diploma) and over half an incomplete higher or a secondary education. Even if the real professional knowledge of these people doesn't match western standards, their behaviour (e.g. demographic, economic, electoral) differs substantially from that of the masses in the classic developing countries. And they influence the behaviour of the rest of the population: although independent Georgia has the formal status of a "developing country", the reproductive behaviour of its majority population is similar to that of Europe. In Georgia there are high consumer standards. The qualifications of most of the working population are also quite high.

There exists a numerous and quite well prepared intellectual elite (according to the still persistent Soviet tradition referred to as the "scientific and artistic intelligentsia"). Although it does not form any independent political group, and possesses little economic force, its

influence on public opinion is great (sometimes this becomes a political factor: see below).

One more advantage is the easy adaptability of the majority of the population of Georgia to the "western" way of life compared to most of the other Southern NIS. This is predetermined by the well-grounded claims of the Georgian nation to belong to the western (Judaean-Christian) civilisation: the religious majority (75-78%) are nominally Orthodox Christians (most of the ethnic Georgians, Slavs, Ossetians, Greeks, and many Abkhaz). In spite of the youth of democracy the electorate, at least the urban electorate, tends to make its own choice and is not easily manipulated. The political culture is developing, though slowly.

The social mobility of population is quite high. This is the result of the social policy carried out by the CPSU during the seven decades of the 20th century to "eliminate differences between intellectual and physical labour, between urban and rural settlements". Although this social policy could not be given a purely positive or purely negative evaluation, in one case it resulted positively ^ this is the practical absence by the mid-1990s of any specific social tension in Georgia which could be labelled as a "class struggle".

The consolidation of the (ethnic) Georgian nation (on the basis of the literary kartuli language) is complete. In spite of persistent efforts of external forces and local separatists (e.g. in Abkhazia, north-western Georgia), even in the gravest years of the Civil Wars (1992-93) it became impossible to play off the regions settled by the different Georgian subethnic groups against each other. A very positive role in this case was played by the capital city of Tbilisi, which concentrates more than a third of the total ethnic Georgian population and which serves as the virtual "melting pot" of the nation.

The importance of family and kinship relations is still rather high. Although this factor can be given a negative evaluation as well, as it affects parochialism and traditionalism, on the other hand, precisely because of such relations the burden of the material shortages of recent years has been relatively evenly distributed over the whole society and has restricted the emergence of serious social tensions. Therefore this factor may be attributed to the list of "pluses".

At the same time this group of developmental factors has negative aspects as well.

The social structure of the population is undergoing a dramatic change. The "Middle classes" are practically unidentifiable. It is clear that the existence of a large enough proportion of the population which is economically independent from the state ("middle classes") is a certain guarantee of political and economic stability. Such classes are not interested in destabilisation as they have something to lose (in contrast with "the proletariat which has nothing to lose except its chains" as a popular Marxist motto stated). But the middle classes represent a minority within the social structure of all the NIS, Georgia among them. In the present conditions of the transition to a market economy a process of economic polarisation is in progress. Most of the population of Georgia, which

earlier achieved a relatively high standard of material welfare, is nowadays on the edge of marginalisation. This applies first of all to the state employees (e.g. schoolteachers, postmen, etc.) who have to depend on meagre salaries, and to the large number of pensioners with tiny pensions. As these people constitute a large part of the electorate, who can vote for radical counter-reforms (e.g. for the leftist parties, advocating the refusal of development towards the free market) the government has to pursue some kind of populist policy to the detriment of economically sound but harsh reforms. Many members of the existing economic elite are not ready to bear the burden of economic reforms. Although there are in Georgia real businessmen as well, especially among the younger generation, their number at the moment is not large enough. Due to the system, widely practised in the USSR, of assignment of the Communist Party functionaries to posts as industrial enterprise directors, the last Soviet directors in the PSU space, including Georgia, as fate has willed, became the virtual owners or major stock-holders of these enterprises during the privatisation process of the 1990s. However, many of such "new businessmen" (especially if they are in their middle age or older) are still unable to understand the system of market relations, prefer to hamper reforms and to act circumspectly, with one eye always on the government functionaries.

The political elite is not strong enough. The small and inexperienced political parties do not have clear programmes oriented towards specific layers of the society. The price of charismatic leadership is too high, while very few politicians could rely upon their charisma. Many of the governmental functionaries are either non-professional (belonging to the same circles as the above-mentioned "new businessmen"), or underpaid and corrupt. Some new developments in Georgia, such as the building-up of several national political parties (the ruling "Citizens Union of Georgia" is the best example) give more confidence that this particular shortcoming might be overcome.

A serious drawback of the social structure of the population is the scarcity and low training level of the existing army officers, corps. This was revealed in the most dramatic way during the military conflicts of the early 1990s when these officers had to confront the much better trained military of the former Soviet Army. The establishing of the new officers, corps will take some time and international support is urgently needed.

The morals of the nation were affected negatively by the presence of criminal elements in governmental structures during the period 1992-1994. The effect of this presence may be revealed to some extent in the future, especially since it influenced the young generation of the first half of the 1990s. Not all the ethnic minorities of Georgia (up to 25% of the total population) have patriotic feelings towards the state. The problem of their acculturation is partly caused by their belonging to different cultural groups. Up to 8 per cent of the population - the Azeris, Kistins, Avars, some of the Abkhaz and Kurds - are Muslims, up to 7 per cent - the Armenians - predominantly Gregorian (monophysite) Christians, and there are also smaller communities of Yezidi Kurds and Jews (Judaic). But such a differentiation was not (and hopefully never will be) a cause of any ethnic tensions in Georgia. The real reasons are the legacy of the nationality policy of the Soviet state in which the citizenship of any

Union Republic, formally, under the Soviet Constitution, a "sovereign state", meant nothing and people were distinguished by their ethnicity marked in internal passports. Even more important causes of tensions are the internal boundaries (which are mentioned below as a political factor). An attempt to introduce "ethnic nationalism" in 1990-1991 proved unsuccessful. There is a necessity to elaborate some form of "all-national ideology" which will promote the self-identification of all the peoples inhabiting the state as the citizens of Georgia. This can be achieved only in the conditions of a strong statehood, economic stability, and non-interference from the outside (meaning the "nearest abroad"). Unfortunately such conditions are limited in Georgia at the moment (it appears unavoidable here to mention again the political factors ^ internal and external).

3) Economic potential

The economic structure of Georgia within the USSR was very specific. Agriculture was specialised, with such products as tea and citrus fruit in the western part, grapes (for winery) and continental fruit in the east. Almost all the production was intended for the vast, less fastidious Soviet market, well protected from external competition. A good income was enjoyed in the tobacco-growing and sheep-grazing areas. Many rural districts of Georgia achieved a material welfare far exceeding the average Soviet level. This affected the welfare of the urban population as well.

The output of the industrial enterprises was also diversified and oriented towards the internal Soviet market (to a lesser extent towards the COMECON countries), but its competitiveness on the world market was low. Up to 60 per cent of industrial production was in the light and food-processing branches. The more sophisticated products of electronic and machinery factories were intended almost entirely for the Soviet military-industrial complex, a customer which no longer exists. Hence many factories have become obsolete.

To the positive sides of the economic potential may be attributed the existence of quite a substantial technical infrastructure. Although the existing factory buildings, roads, electricity transmission lines, water supply, sewage systems, etc. need large capital investments for their renovation, they represent a good basis for the restarting of industrial activities.

The presence of technically well educated personnel, quite well trained (especially in more sophisticated fields) and a substantial workforce, which at the moment is very cheap compared with that even in Southeast Asia, may also be an attractive factor for foreign investors.

In the long term perspective a positive factor will be the privatisation of the industrial enterprises (which is in progress) and of the land (which has been partially accomplished and will be completed after full political stabilisation is achieved).

The most important positive factor of Georgia's economic potential is its geographical location: the possibility to serve as the shortest transit way

for raw materials, including oil, gas, cotton, to reach the West from the East (the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia). The TRACECA project (Transportation Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia) is already being implemented. There are projects aimed at restoring the "Great Silk Road" passing through Georgia. The latter can also serve as a transportation corridor from the North (Russia) to the south (Turkey) and vice versa. There is a ready to implement plan for the construction of a railway connecting Turkey with Georgia, which will enable the latter to have a railway link with the European states without passing through Russia and Ukraine.

In spite of the definite pluses of the economic potential of Georgia negative factors are also noticeable. They are mostly connected with the grave, but inevitable, changes occurring during the transition period to the market economy and adjusting to the conditions of the world market.

It is necessary to restructure industry, first of all "the industrial giants" ("giants", according to the Georgia scale, naturally) of machinery and metallurgy: their sources of raw material supply have been left in the near abroad and markets in the same area appeared to have narrowed greatly. Structural change will leave many enterprises and even branches obsolete.

The necessity to feed their families forced many rural people(and some extent, even urban inhabitants) to change the structure of agriculture and to turn to subsistence farming. Only a part of what is produced in the rural area reaches foreign markets. Nevertheless, local production of food has proved to be quite enough for the population of Georgia, which is now supplied almost entirely by local farm products (incidentally, ecologically now much more cleaner than before, as chemicals became too expensive).

Even partial privatisation of land has given birth to too many farms, most of them economically nonviable. The inevitable future rationalisation of agriculture will reduce the number of such farms as well as employment in this branch of the economy. It is important if these changes begin in conditions of economic growth to alleviate the social tensions that may arise during the redistribution of the land.

The external economic links of Georgia need to be changed drastically: instead of an orientation towards the North they are gradually turning towards the West and the East. This change is not an easy task, taking into account the low competitiveness of local products. To a certain extent the change is connected with the closing (hopefully, provisionally) of the old transportation lines, which in their turn were predetermined by the temporary success (with the most active help from the same North) of separatism in Abkhazia, northwestern Georgia. The only railway and important highway directly connecting Georgia with Russia passed through there: since 1992 there has been no connection via this area. Besides, Russian border guards substantially impede economic links via the mountain passes of the Great Caucasus Range. All this influences negatively the earlier intensive trade between these states. It is clear that if the conflict in Abkhazia is not resolved and transport links are not restored, it will later become more difficult for Russia to return to its

previous economic position in Georgia.

The entire technical infrastructure was created according to the Soviet standards, a fact impedes the co-operation of Georgia with the EU. Meanwhile, the strategic aim appears to be the restructuring of the economy according to western standards of production and consumption.

There is one more indirect drawback paradoxically caused by the good location of Georgia. If not all the neighbouring countries derive economic benefit in the transportation possibilities of the Southern Caucasus this may give a cause to the "deprived nations" (certain neighbours who at the moment do not see a direct benefit from the TRACECA and the other projects) to destabilise Georgia (and, quite possibly, Azerbaijan as well). Thus, even the most important economic factor, the good location, which gives a chance to Georgia to integrate within the world economy escaping the old metropolis ^ carries a certain vulnerability.

4) Internal political potential

To the pluses of the internal political potential must be attributed the quite advanced process of democratisation (in contrast with many other Southern NIS) and the formation of several all-national parties, which can bear the burden of power.

Although not all civil rights may be observed according to Western standards, the freedom of speech and press is not limited. This is at least true of the capital city (where almost a third of the total population reside) and the majority of the other regions (apart from those controlled by the separatists).

The strengthening of statehood was predetermined by the adoption of the new democratic Constitution (August, 1995) and parliamentary and presidential elections (November, 1995): the latter were considered by all the foreign observers to be free and fair in most of the regions. The consolidation of the central government followed these events.

There is no doubt that the development of a state is impossible without internal stability ^ the most important component of the internal political potential. At present there appears to be a trend towards such stability, despite the efforts from outside to destroy it.

Nevertheless, the contemporary political situation has certain shortcomings as well.

Complete internal peace has not been achieved in independent Georgia due to several objective political factors, most of them the legacy of the Soviet period:

- a. The multi-ethnic composition of the population, not united by a single "national idea" (as mentioned above);
- b. The virtually federal administrative-political system which was imposed upon Georgia at the earliest stage of the forced

Sovietisation (1921-1922), revealed in the setting up of internal borders of the dubious autonomous units whose governments tend to rely on the support of a foreign power;

- c. The absence on the eve of independence of a well-prepared political and economic counter-elite (there were no large parties other than the Communist one; no social groups economically independent from the state), which could have taken and held power after the Communist regime crashed. The easy overthrow of the first nationalistic government in January 1992 was the result of the absence of such a counter-elite;
- d. Inadequate political culture.

The first two factors have a clear geographical appearance in Georgia: the peripheral location of the minorities and the autonomous units complicate the problem of preservation of the territorial integrity of the state.

As soon as the possible disintegration of the USSR became apparent (the late 1980s) strong separatist tendencies were revealed in some peripheral parts of Georgia (the same was observed in some other multiethnic Union Republics).

These were strongly supported by Kremlin, who considered such tendencies the best lever to keep the disobedient Union Republics under control. In the areas where ethnic minorities had a territorial autonomy (e.g. in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where the "federal system" existed) separatism appeared to be better institutionalised. None of the successive central governments of Georgia, neither the final Communist one (till October, 1990), nor the nationalist one (till January, 1992) which succeeded the former in a legal way, and even less - the formally illegitimate Military Council and State Council (till the elections of October, 1992) could not find strong enough arguments (not even military force) and, most tellingly, no positive stimuli to overcome these separatist trends.

The internal conflicts which followed (wars in South Ossetia in 1990-1992, and in Abkhazia, 1992-1993) led to tragic consequences. First of all to the violation of the territorial integrity of the state: Georgia had been recognised by the international community within the boundaries of the former Georgian SSR. In addition, up to 300 thousand refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), most of them ethnic Georgians, had to flee the battle areas. Even if these conflicts had been inspired from outside (and there is hardly any doubt of this) the local political elite has been easily provoked to commit grave mistakes. This was predetermined by their inadequate political experience.

The democratisation of political life, as the guarantee of stability, cannot yet be considered an irreversible process (the same is true of the other NIS).

The military overthrow at the very beginning of 1992 ("the Winter Revolution") of the elected government, even if the latter was ineffective and acted against the real interests of the country, caused a civil war and

divisions in the society. No doubt one of the real factors was a subjective one: the inability of the nationalist leadership to govern the country in an appropriate way, and the lack of the will to compromise. The leadership underestimated the influence of the existing intellectual elite when attempting to humiliate the latter, and became the victim of its own mistakes. Nevertheless, the precedent of a military coup does not contribute to the process of political stabilisation.

The full scale use of the internal political potential in the making of the New Georgia could be achieved after the restoration of territorial integrity of the state, but even before that this group of factors will work in favour of state-building.

External Factors of Development of the New Georgia

These factors could be grouped into two large components:

1. the geopolitical context of the country;
2. the political situation in the states for which Georgia represents a sphere of vital interests.

1) Geopolitical context of the country;

Since Georgia is a small country it depends upon the external factors of development no less, and maybe even more, than on internal ones. It is obvious that a small country cannot make decisions absolutely independently, without support from outside. The geographical location of a country, the attitudes towards it and interests in it of the larger powers create the geopolitical context within which the foreign political activity of a small country is carried out.

A positive aspect of the international relations of Georgia is that it has no territorial claims to any neighbour. From this point of view Georgia is a peaceful factor in the region. It is in its national interests to keep the peace in the region and to increase co-operation with all its neighbours. Georgia is ready to give all the neighbouring countries the possibility to use its territory for economic contacts, for instance to Turkey to communicate with Azerbaijan and Russia, to Russia - with Turkey and Armenia, and to the landlocked Armenia, which has strained relations with its Turkic neighbours, to obtain access to the outside world.

To a certain extent another geopolitical factor (some may consider it just an emotional one, but it sometimes works in practice) is the good relations with the North Caucasus on the people's diplomacy level: for decades Georgia's capital served as the major cultural-educational centre of the North Caucasian autonomous units, and national cadres were trained in Tbilisi. Many representatives of the local intellectual elites of the North Caucasus have not forgotten this fact and consider Georgia the major actor in the whole Caucasus. Besides, Georgia is much larger than any of the North Caucasian Republics (all of them landlocked) and possesses access to the sea. Chechnya, for example, intensively seeks

such access via Georgia.

But its geo-political location does not give Georgia full confidence in its security. It constantly has to take into account the interests of all the four neighbouring countries ^ Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the interests especially of the first of these. Russia tenaciously keeps its military bases in Georgia and Armenia (the latter is considered as the most reliable strategic ally of Russia).

In spite of the diplomatic activity of Georgia to balance its international links, the major player in the geo-political games of the Southern Caucasus remains Russia. It seems that the latter's policy towards Georgia is ambiguous: it needs a formally independent (and integrated?) Georgia, but actually a weak nation dependent upon Russia.

Georgia itself needs a democratic and integrated Russia with distinct national interests. Georgia needs to enjoy an equal partnership with Russia - it does not require philanthropy. There is no doubt that the true interests of Russia also mean the existence to the south of a democratic and integrated Georgian state with traditional friendly attitudes towards the former. The litmus paper of the real attitudes is Abkhazia. There is an impression that Russia pursues a policy of "neither war, nor peace" in this part of Georgia and makes some contradictory "chess sacrifices" which may not lead to eventual gains. Thus it permitted the appearance of a de-facto ethnic "Abkhaz State" (at the expense of Georgia). Still cherishing it, Russia takes steps virtually against its own national interests by: a) permitting the precedent of the splitting of a NIS, which is not beneficial to Russia itself; b) promoting Abkhazia as an effective supporter of future North Caucasian separatism; c) stimulating the increase of the influence of Turkey in the Southern Caucasus.

Probably relying upon its military strength, which the forces left to the other NIS cannot match, Russia considers that it will be always able to suppress separatism on its territory. But the example of Chechnya proves the opposite.

In the case of Georgia, Russia can abuse the factor of the common cultural character: Georgia will always consider the Realm of Orthodox Christianity closer than the Realm of Islam.

It appears that Georgia has got into a vicious geo-political circle: it cannot go away from Russia. It is not only the "Abkhaz hook" which holds Georgia. If Georgia, desperate in its efforts to recover Abkhazia in a peaceful way, will insist upon the removal of the Russian military bases and will start to carry out a completely independent policy, there are the other "hooks" ^ actual separatism in South Ossetia and potential separatism in Southern Georgia, or the threat of the splitting-up of the nation (e.g. the periodical "crises" in Adjara, another autonomous unit, very much resemble ones staged from abroad). It is naive to think that Russia will permit Georgia to resolve the problems of separatism in the same manner as Croatia solved them in Srpska Krajina.

2. Political situation in the other states

The political situation in the states for which Georgia represents a sphere of vital interests is an important external factor. The USA and Germany have already announced that the Southern Caucasus, including Georgia, is an area of their national interests. Such a giant as China must not be ruled out either. The global balance of interests of these and other powers and Russia may influence in many ways the political situation in the region.

A concrete analysis of the configuration of the political forces and interests of the neighbouring and the world powers exceeds the aims of this article. It must only be noted that Georgia would prefer such an international development, which would stabilise the overall situation in the PSU and would not impede its market reforms. Such conditions might be a positive factor in the making of the New Georgia.

A relatively negative factor would be the victory of the forces in Russia which openly attempt to restore the USSR, or the victory of Muslim fundamentalism in Turkey. But, on the other hand, such developments may activate different, equally influential, forces, which are less seen nowadays.

Conclusion

Internal factors in the making of the New Georgia may be evaluated as more favourable than unfavourable. The minuses of these internal factors may be overcome to a large extent, although this will need a lot of time and effort.

The minuses of external (geopolitical) factors seem to be more serious: in general external factors ought to be evaluated as more unfavourable than favourable. Yet even in this case it is up to Georgia to use the smallest opportunities, and to play on the contradictions between the competing forces in the multipolar world. Even the gravest geopolitical problems do not seem to be fatal. Economic development and democratisation of political life, which are in the end, together with westernisation, the national goals of Georgia, and the most of all the achievement of the situation in which Georgia would become a strategically important economic partner for the developed countries, would help the former to solve the far-reaching problems of its state-building.

NOTES:

* **Revaz Gachechiladze** is Professor of Human Geography at Tbilisi State University, and from 1998 he has been Ambassador of Georgia to Israel, e-mail:geoemba@

Back to [index](#)