

Georgia: How Domestic Policy Shapes the Path Towards Western Integration



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— Feel free to reach us! — Advised by Professor Sandra Fernandes

Note from the authors

This document is the final encompassing of our dissection and elaborates a critical vision that aims to respond with the utmost transparency and thoughtfulness to a challenge launched by the Georgian Centre for Strategy and Development, to try to produce an analytical perspective that reflects the possible movements surrounding Georgia, and its respective insertion in the present day, but which also allows it, in a way, to project into the future. Above all, it is a reflection that articulates a number of possible paths for scrutinize the concrete structures surrounding the issue.

After the evaluator's proposal, the authors worked closely together for four months to identify the potential and the main strategic interests with the greatest impact for this research paper, where the key decision was taken unanimously to recognize the seriousness of starting with a study model based on two lines of thought, in a top-down process, starting with a macro exposition of the sociological, economic, historical and behavioral conditions, towards a natural evolution that encompasses, above all, a pedagogical power architecture and its measures. All the content involved in this resource represents our personal perception of what is and may be happening, and accordingly, like all collective understandings, they have limitations, certainly many uncertainties and also unresolved issues, however, we have endeavored as far as possible to convey our best contribution.

“Declaramos que somos coautores e responsáveis pelo trabalho que o nosso grupo submete neste relatório, que conhecemos e compreendemos o material que aqui se apresenta; que os extratos de texto de outros autores são devidamente assinalados e as suas fontes identificadas, que os dados dos respondentes, no caso de existirem, são verdadeiros; e que conhecemos e compreendemos as consequências da violação desta declaração.”

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Executive summary

Let's not delude ourselves: Georgia, as a small state, faces challenges in navigating the international system. Georgia sees its domestic policy interfered with by Russia, which supports separatist movements within the country and maintains its dependence on the russian state for its energy supplies and trades. Furthermore, Georgia's institutions need improvement. This has made it difficult for Georgia to implement policies and to assert its steadiness on russian pressure leading to a lack of trust in the government and tensions within the social and political landscape that limits its ability in pursuing objectives.

The success of Georgia's foreign policy, particularly its aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration, relies heavily on securing public buy-in. Addressing historical anxieties, countering disinformation campaigns, and promoting a clear understanding of the potential benefits of closer ties with the West are steps in this process. **Therefore, we understand that the key factor lies in resolving internal vortices that are limiting the pursuit of Georgia's character in the external dimension.**

To enable its full potential, our study evaluates Georgia's foreign policy via heuristic spectrums of security through the lens of the **Small State Theory** while providing insights into the stabilization of the South Caucasus region. Our evidence-based research was designed on a wide range of sources and scholarly literature to provide a detailed understanding of Georgia's current situation and future prospects.

Our advice was architected respecting the dimension of Georgia, by utilizing an approach that incorporates relational, quantitative, and qualitative criteria allowing us to consider Georgia's relative influence, weight, and position within the international political chessboard. These proposals drawn-connected into the **Small State Theory**, provide a framework for comprehending how smaller states can exploit their power asymmetry while emphasizing the vitality of leveraging power imbalances with larger states through a cross-fertilization between strategies such as band wagoning, hedging and balancing with bottom-up processes like pro-European Union initiatives in high population clusters, preferably aimed at young people; measures to strengthen the separation of powers; the emphasis in key-investments for infrastructures; as well as hybrid approaches for the Georgian Centre for Strategy and Development to monitor the use of his soft power to influence public opinion. **The document further explores these ideas and is intended to be a thought-provoking resource for Georgia.**

Variables that contributed to the occurrence of our decisions

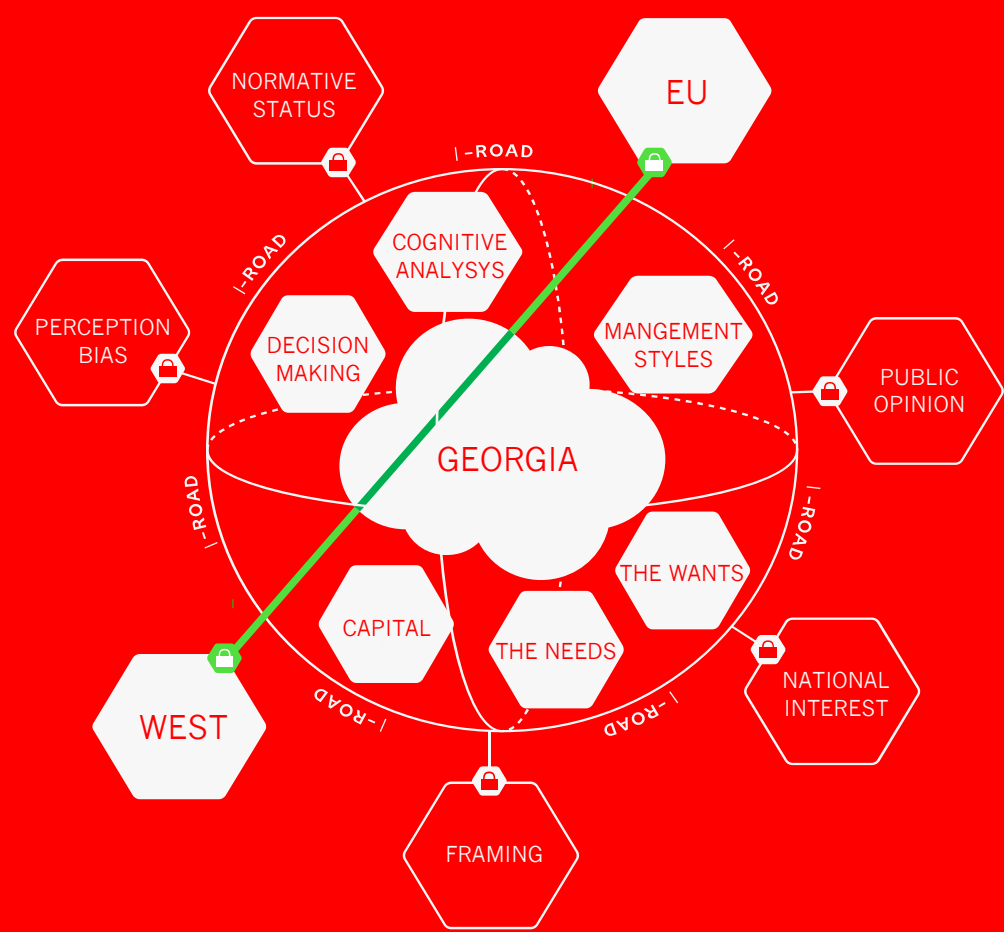
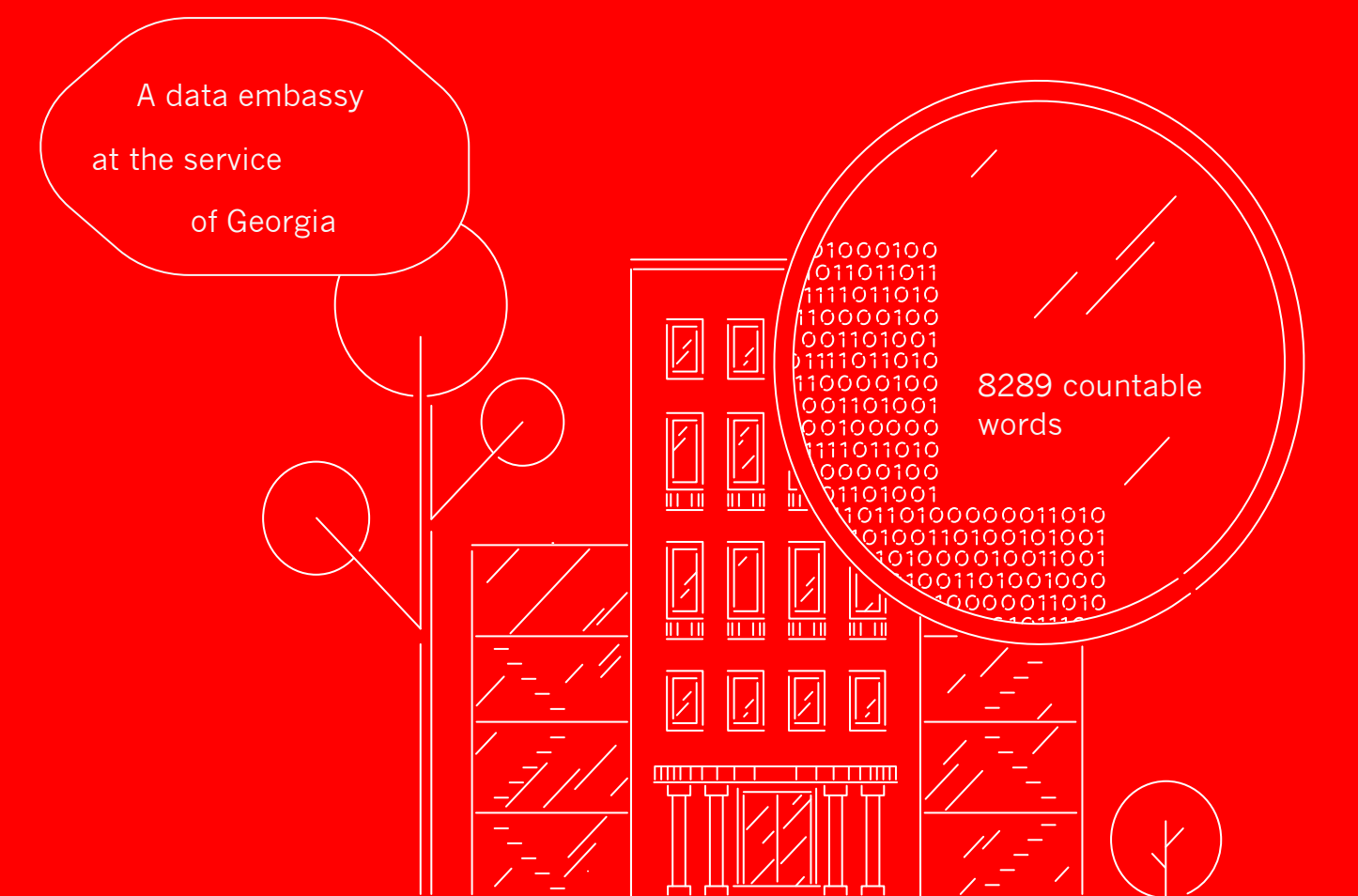


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Introduction

SALOME ZOURABICHVILI, PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA

Georgia's foreign policy reflects its tumultuous history. Frequent invasions (Byzantines, Mongols, Soviets) shaped its outlook [Hey, 2003]. After Soviet collapse, Georgia sought agency and Western ties, but its 20th century communist past under Soviet rule limited its foreign policy autonomy (Hey, 2003). This Soviet influence continues to impact Georgia's relations with Russia, particularly regarding separatist conflicts.

After the Soviet collapse, Georgia's foreign policy navigated rising nationalism and separatism (Suny, 1994). Internal conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, backed by Russia, weakened Georgia (Cornell, 2001; Jones, 2013). Shevardnadze's leadership offered some stability but faced these challenges.

Under Shevardnadze, Georgia pursued Western integration through NATO's Partnership for Peace (1994), Council of Europe membership (1996), and attracting Western investment in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (Peuch, 2000; Council of Europe, 1996). This strategic shift strained relations with Russia (NATO, 1994).

The early 2000s marked a significant shift in Georgia's policy with the Rose Revolution in 2003. Mass protests and election fraud led to Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation and Mikheil Saakashvili's election as president in 2004. Saakashvili's presidency focused on modernizing the economy and strengthening ties with the West. Georgia actively pursued NATO membership, facing opposition from Russia (Asmus, 2010); (Jones, 2013).

Tensions with Russia escalated into the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008. The conflict began over South Ossetia and expanded, with Russian forces entering Georgian territory. The war ended with an EU-mediated ceasefire, but Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence, worsening relations with Georgia (Allison, 2008). After the 2008 war, Georgia continued its integration with Western institutions. The EU and the US increased support for Georgia's sovereignty.

In 2014, the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia occurred, an event that caused both regional and global repercussions. Crimea, which was an autonomous republic within Ukraine, was occupied by Russian forces and, after a referendum internationally contested, was annexed by Russia. (Hofman; Migacheva; Nichiporuk; Radin; Tkacheva; Obrrholtzer, 2017)

Georgia experienced several repercussions both internally and externally. Internally, this invasion and annexation impacted national security, as the annexation of Crimea increased the perception of threat regarding Georgia's territorial integrity. Georgia, which had already faced the 2008 war with Russia, saw the need to reinforce its defense capabilities and increase surveillance in its separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Externally, the primary impact was on its relations with the West. Georgia intensified efforts to strengthen ties with the European Union and NATO, viewing these organizations as security guarantees against Russia. (Cornell, 2013).

Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), reinforcing its European aspirations. NATO membership remains a key goal, but unresolved conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia complicate this path (Allison, 2008); (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015).

Recently, Georgia has balanced its foreign policy between seeking closer ties with the EU and NATO and managing its relationship with Russia. Domestic politics play a role, with ongoing debates over reforms and external influences. Georgia's strategic location as an energy transit corridor adds complexity to its foreign policy. The government has also focused on improving relations with neighboring South Caucasus and Black Sea countries to enhance regional stability (Cornell, 2013).

Eight years after the invasion and annexation of Crimea, Russia advanced its aim of dominating Ukraine by launching a large-scale invasion in February 2024, employing both ground and air bombardments from various directions. (Hofman; Migacheva; Nichiporuk; Radin; Tkacheva; Obrholtzer, 2017)

This new offensive once again impacted Georgia both internally and externally. Internally, national security was significantly affected. The invasion heightened fears in Georgia of a potential similar aggression by Russia on its territory. Georgia, which has its own separatist regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) supported by Russia, felt particularly vulnerable, leading to increased military surveillance and security measures in the border and separatist regions. Politically, the invasion once again strengthened pro-Western and pro-NATO sentiments within Georgia. Efforts to more deeply integrate the country with Western institutions such as the European Union and NATO were intensified, seen as a means to secure protection against Russia. Externally, the invasion significantly influenced Georgia's foreign relations, as the country sought to strengthen its international alliances, particularly with the United States and European countries, seeking political and military support.

Now, speaking in a general overview about the political situation of Georgia and its positioning at internal and external levels. Georgia's political environment has undergone notable changes, especially in the context of presidential election methods and the wider political landscape. In recent times, the country has faced significant political instability. A key development was the transition to a fully proportional representation system for parliamentary elections, first used in the 2024 elections. This change was intended to create a more equitable and representative political process compared to the previously used mixed electoral system. Domestically, the political climate in Georgia has been characterized by fierce competition between the ruling Georgian Dream party and various opposition factions. The resignation of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia in February 2021, due to conflicts over the arrest of an opposition leader, exemplified the persistent tensions. This incident highlighted the deep polarization and instability within Georgia's political framework.

On the international front, Georgia's relations with Russia remain a central issue, particularly due to Russia's support for separatist regions within Georgia, namely Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has further complicated these relations, heightening Georgia's security concerns and strengthening its commitment to closer ties with Western entities such as the European Union and NATO. In December 2023, Georgia was granted EU candidate status, signifying its ongoing efforts to integrate more closely with European political and economic systems.

In addressing the purpose of this work, our research is primarily dedicated to an examination of Georgia’s foreign and domestic policy landscape. This analysis is pivotal for our group to delineate the theoretical underpinnings to be applied in the Georgian context, alongside the subsequent recommendations (Hey, 2003). We will focus on the timeframe from 1991 to 2024. Throughout the inquiry, we will formulate multiple policy recommendations for adoption by the Georgian government, the Georgian Center of Strategy and Development and other actors like the President, where these recommendations will retain relevance until 2030.



Following an analysis of Georgia’s domestic and foreign policy dynamics, our group has discerned the utilization of the Small State Theory as a foundational framework and analytical lens to decipher Georgian conduct and furnish prospective recommendations (Hey, 2003). In broad terms, the Theory posits that smaller states, situated within an anarchic international system, can leverage strategies that exploit their power asymmetry vis-à-vis larger states (Hey, 2003).

This theoretical construct elucidates the significance of small states within the global arena and underscores that embracing such an identity can engender growth over the medium to long term (Hey, 2003).

Resistance

We mustn't distance ourselves from some of the nuances imposed by this new global dynamic. It has introduced the pandemic as the ultimate variable and clearly posed questions that should not be overlooked. The scope of health challenges has changed, with new logistics networks being constantly inserted and new vaccination plans being created and implemented on a global scale.

With them, the security paradigm has also changed. Today, security is above all about the defense and protection of the human species itself and everything that concerns its future. The worsening scarcity of resources is also increasingly significant, as is the case primarily with oil, with its rising cost and its brutal impact on society.

It changes consumption models, recalling the extraordinary expression of the German philosopher Hannah Arendt: 'In the face of crises, it is necessary to think without handrails'. It is therefore unnecessary to think while clinging to many of the paradigms and preconceived ideas we had in the past.

The nature of work is now expressed in a hybrid regime with the rise of homeworking. There is the growing exponentiation of inequalities that introduces a new virus that acts in a kind of social Darwinism in which the most vulnerable, the least able, are sacrificed and this cannot happen. It is a hallmark of civilization to protect the weakest and prevent them from being trapped by phenomena of this kind. It negatively affects the demographic downturn, the growing fear that families feel or will feel about having children, and this same fear is now very deep-rooted on a global scale and often works in the markets of anguish.

It has given rise to new models for identifying and managing risk. Risk management inaugurated modernity. It appeared at the end of the Renaissance with the extraordinary school of Luca Pacioli, which is at the origin of the theory of probabilities and the systemic identification of the first risks, and until now we have been following a path in which risk management was at the center of public policies and the defense of countries' resilience.

Ultimately, we are failing to identify risks and see trends. We are a civilization that accumulates information at a rate unprecedented in history. In the last five years, the volume of information we have accumulated in the world has increased 20-fold. Yet we are not able to extract thought, derive strategy, identify patterns and analyze behavior. The poet T.S. Elliott's prescient verse mentions: 'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we lose in information?'. So, we think that if the decision-makers around the Georgian structures pool their wills, clarify their path and chart a course that allows them to overcome all of these barriers, then we can say that it was worth it!

Our recommendations take into account unfavorable global dynamics

The rise in the prices is one of the consequences most felt after the start of the war in Europe.



Methodology

The principal criteria employed in scrutinizing small states encompass quantitative, qualitative, and relational dimensions, with a pronounced emphasis on the latter (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017). Specifically, the relational criteria afford insights into Georgia's stature by gauging its relative influence, "weight", and power vis-à-vis other states, thereby transcending mere quantifiable attributes (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

Within Small State Theory, the quantitative dimension refers to the analysis of quantifiable and measurable factors that affect these states. Examples of these factors include population, territory, economic resources, military capacity, and infrastructure. The theoretical foundation of Small State Theory focuses on how these quantitative characteristics influence a state's ability to maintain sovereignty, security, and development in an international system predominantly dominated by larger and more powerful states. The quantitative analysis within Small State Theory aids in understanding the limitations and opportunities faced by these states. Despite their numerical disadvantages, many small states manage to play significant roles in the international arena through strategies such as active diplomacy, economic specialization, and the formation of strategic alliances. (Kolnberger & Koff, 2021).

The qualitative dimension within Small State Theory refers to non-measurable and intangible aspects that influence the effectiveness of these states on the international stage. These aspects include factors such as governance quality, social cohesion, innovation, and national identity. The qualitative dimension is crucial for understanding how small states can overcome quantitative limitations and maximize their influence and security. The qualitative dimension reveals that, despite limitations in terms of population, territory, and economic resources, small states can achieve significant levels of security, stability, and influence through successful strategies based on the quality of their institutions, policies, and culture. These intangible qualities often play a performance in compensating for quantitative disadvantages, allowing small states to stand out in the international system (Kolnberger & Koff, 2021).

The third dimension is the relational dimension, which pertains to the interactions and networks these states maintain with other actors in the international system. This dimension emphasizes how diplomatic, economic, political, and cultural relations influence the position and effectiveness of small states on the global stage. The relationships small states establish can compensate for their internal limitations, expand their capacities, and ensure their security. The relational dimension highlights the importance of the networks and interactions that small states maintain with other international actors. By cultivating positive and strategic relationships, small states can overcome their quantitative and qualitative limitations, ensuring their security, promoting their development, and increasing their influence on a global scale. (Long, 2022).

Under the aegis of, we are compelled to scrutinize Georgia's positioning and conduct within the international system, while factoring in its interactions and interdependencies with other global actors by deploying relational criteria (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

This approach underscores the significance of Georgia’s regional context in determining its classification as a small state, subject to variations contingent upon contextual and regional specifics (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

Recognizing the multifarious determinants of small state status, our group advocates for a holistic approach that integrates quantitative, qualitative, and relational criteria, thus fostering a nuanced understanding of Georgia’s categorization (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

Such an approach facilitates an examination of small state behavior within the broader international system, cognizant of fluctuating power dynamics and contextual nuances. We underscore the imperative of avoiding the exclusivity of any single criterion in defining small states, as such an approach tends to generate numerous exceptions. Emphasizing quantitative criteria, for instance, could yield misleading conclusions by neglecting other pivotal factors such as military prowess, geographic positioning, or economic interdependencies (Kurecic, Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

After this theoretical exposition, our analysis delves into Georgia’s strategic maneuvers within the international milieu. Despite its status as a small state, Georgia has exhibited astuteness in navigating power asymmetries, as evidenced by its strategic deployment of bandwagoning, hedging, and balancing strategies (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). In aligning with Western powers such as the United States and the European Union, Georgia has pursued a bandwagoning strategy aimed at enhancing its security and countering Russian influence in the region (MacFarlane & Jones, 2023). Concurrently, the adoption of hedging strategies, exemplified by diversifying energy and trade relationships, underscores Georgia’s stance in reducing dependence on Russia (Ciorciari, 2019).

Georgia has embarked on balancing strategies, bolstering its military capabilities, and engaging in alliances such as NATO military exercises, to counteract Russian assertiveness (MacFarlane & Jones, 2023). These strategic imperatives reflect Georgia’s efforts to transcend its "low state" status and assert itself as a "small power" (Kozina & Kokotović, 2017).

Three pillars for the safest combination to information security

Quantitative	Qualitative	Relational
Use of large data sets to identify patterns and trends in foreign policies, such as statistics on trade, alliances and conflicts.	Use of speech analysis and declarations of leaders and diplomats, which can reveal intentions, priorities and perceptions on international issues.	Linkage of the interactions and mutual dependencies between countries, such treaties and international cooperation.
Use of statistical and econometric models to test hypotheses and determine causal relationships between different variables.	Involves understanding the historical, cultural and political environment in which foreign policies are formulated, for interpreting decisions and actions.	Study of networks of relationships between various international actors, mapping how they connect and influence each other.
Use of comparative methods to analyse the foreign policies of different countries or periods, seeking to identify common and differentiating factors.	Focus on how national identities and conceptions of self and the ‘other’ influence the formulation of foreign policy.	Focus on changes and evolutions in international relations over time, observing how ties between countries strengthen, weaken or transform.

Domestic and Individual Levels

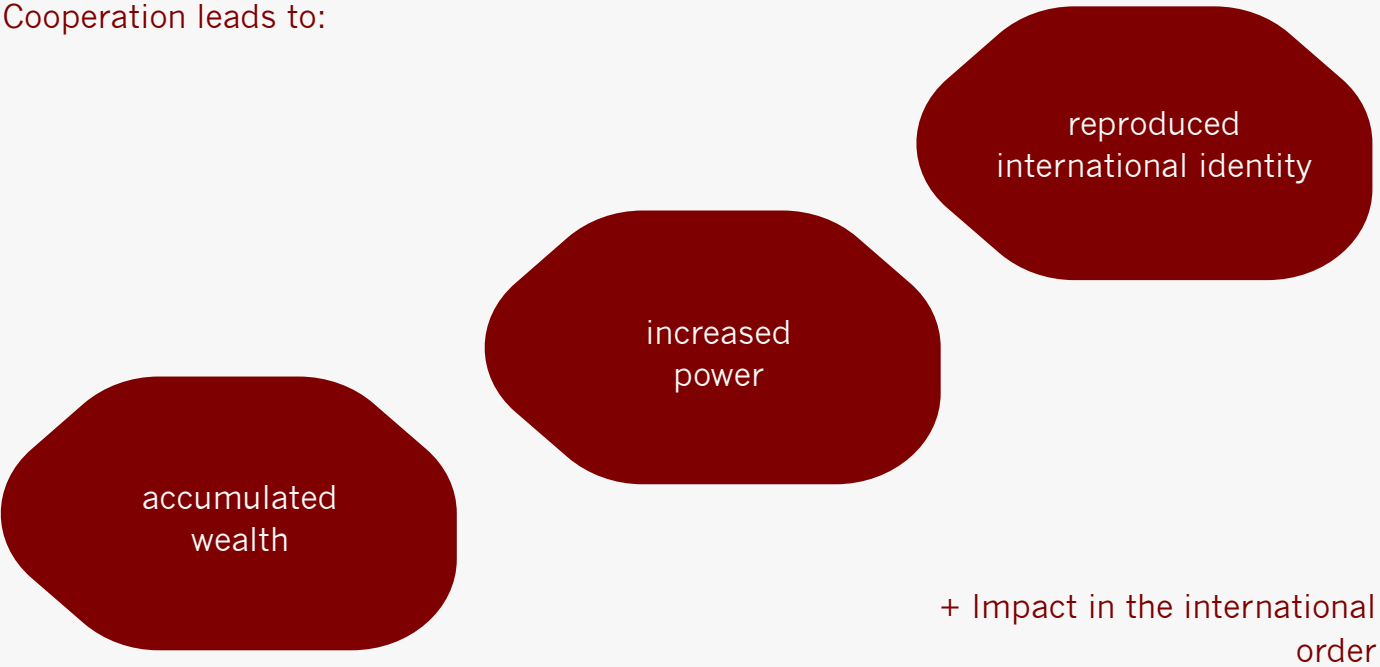
Independence took Georgia on a new path in its history, which promised great things such as democracy and prosperity. However, the nation had to overcome numerous obstacles and setbacks on its way to achieve these goals. One of those challenges that followed independence was political instability. When the Soviet Union collapsed, it left a power vacuum which led to power tussles between various political factions. This struggle often resulted in public protests and demonstrations that only worsened the situation among the young state (Radnitz, 2010). With no single goal for the country’s future direction, there were frequent changes in leadership that hampered establishment of steady and effective governance structures (Stefes, 2008).

Georgia's post-independence landscape was further complicated by ethnic and territorial conflicts. Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the secessionist regions, were posing major threats to territorial integrity of the country as these autonomous movements advocating for separations were ethnically based. These conflicts resulted in many deaths and strained relations between Georgia on one hand, its neighbors on the other hand as well as with the international community thereby hindering all peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts (Siroky et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Georgia had to deal with several internal problems such as changing from a centrally planned economy to market-oriented one. The disintegration of the Soviet economic system meant that Georgia was left with obsolete infrastructure facilities, ineffective production methods and lacked experience in market mechanisms (Wellisz, 1999).

This transition called for far-reaching structural reforms aimed at liberalizing markets, disposing off state-owned entities through privatization and encouraging foreign investment into Georgia’s economy. The creation of a business-friendly atmosphere emerged as another goal to revive Georgia’s economy. The recognition that the country had to attract foreign investment to stimulate growth and innovation led the government to undertake measures aimed at simplifying regulations, reducing bureaucracy, and increasing transparency. These steps were intended to create faith among investors and entrepreneurs – transforming Georgia into an attractive place for business and investments within the region.

How capital impacts a state's foreign policy

Cooperation leads to:



Faced with these daunting challenges, Georgia's leaders and people understood that they needed to bolster democratic institutions, enhance economic development, and at the same time resolve the deeply ingrained rifts in Georgian society. This led to an ambitious agenda of political, economic, and social reforms, and to efforts to encourage reconciliation and social integration. When the former Soviet-era diplomat Eduard Shevardnadze assumed the presidency in 1992 with some promise of democratic reforms and better alignment with the West, this ushered in a period of political and economic instability, sustained strikes by medical students and other groups, growing corruption and buyer's remorse on the part of the populace about the path the country's democratic institutions were taking (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Shevardnadze may have initially taken steps to strengthen and modernize Georgia and bring it closer to the West, but early criticisms of his administration stated he was unable to tackle corruption, promote economic growth and stability (Stefes, 2008).

With all these issues, Georgia's new leadership and its population realized that democracy had to be consolidated and institutions strengthened, so that they would hold up against both internal and external pressures. Shevardnadze's presidency illustrated the difficulties of achieving this goal, as widespread corruption and political instability threatened to undermine Georgia's democratic reform and its economic prospects. However, it showed that Georgia was willing to overcome these obstacles to reach its full potential. Shevardnadze's tumultuous era was like a furnace, purging the air for lasting reforms. Yes, the shortcomings that marked Georgia's early independence led to his downfall. No, they did not have lasting effects. With the benefit of hindsight, Shevardnadze's presidency has a very meaningful and profound part in Georgia's quest towards democratic consolidation and economic recuperation (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). This highlights the difficulties and innate problems regarding building a nation after gaining independence from colonial rule. Georgia nonetheless emerged from this period with a lot to learn from and got a new lease of life ready to take enlightened path that would lead to prosperity.

A critical moment in Georgian history unfolded in 2003 with the initiation of the Rose Revolution by Mikheil Saakashvili. It was a non-violent protest whose sole aim was to stop corruption and end fraudulent voting which had led to the lack of faith in the ruling government. Change and rebirth were attributed to this man, who quickly became a symbol for both as it promised to fight crime and bribery, revamp institutions and take Georgia to westernization (Zurabashvili, 2023). Saakashvili's leadership saw Georgia take a new direction when sweeping reforms were implemented across all sectors. The government made significant efforts aimed at enhancing the rule of law, fighting corruption while promoting conducive business environments. Also, he actively sought closer ties with EU & NATO, placing Georgia on an integration path towards the West (Tukvadze et al., 2021).

However, Saakashvili's term was not without its problems, concerning mostly matters of human rights and freedoms. In addition, his active engagement in regional conflicts especially with Russia in 2008 has raised a lot of controversy within and outside the country leading to questioning and debating on the effectiveness of his approach (Siroky et al., 2017). Despite difficulties encountered as well as criticism expressed, Shevardnadze's and Saakashvili's legacies remain etched in Georgia's political terrain thus affecting its directionality plus global position. Their differing leadership styles and governance methods reflect complex dilemmas Georgia faces as it seeks stability and progress. Saakashvili assumed office after a dynamic election campaign which had seen him promoting pro-westernism; he vowed that his regime would be marked by far-reaching reforms directed at eliminating corruption, consolidating democracy-building structures, as well as enhancing economic development. His presidency saw notable strides in governance structures, rule of law adherence, infrastructural growth as well as public service provision indicating major milestones for this nation during that period (Zurabashvili, 2023).

Still, Saakashvili's autocratic, centralized style of leadership, among other things, drew a lot of criticism for the perceived limit to press freedom and infringement on the civil and political rights as well as erosion in the separation of powers in the country (SIROKY et al., 2017). These criticisms notwithstanding, it is impossible to deny that what Saakashvili did to Georgia's political map, which made its direction irreversible and changed its status globally, his unyielding commitment to revolutionary reforms and a pro-Western stance was instrumental in modernizing Georgia and establishing closer ties with Western states.

Withal, his aggressive and confrontational policies resulted in tensions that have continued shaping Georgian society which demonstrates an intricate relationship between democratization process and political stability.

After his re-election defeat in 2012, Saakashvili handed over power to the Georgian Dream coalition, headed by the Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili (Amiranashvili, 2022). Despite expectations for political stabilization and the establishment of a governance system that would allow for greater plurality, neither hope was completely fulfilled. The situation was compounded by allegations of corruption, weak institutions, and deep political polarization (Stefes, 2008). Ivanishvili's ascent was hailed as a historic opportunity for a new beginning in Georgia, with promises of sweeping reforms in the governance system, and the prospect of dealing in a more inclusive manner with underlying systemic issues. However, the change he brought was not commensurate with the existing degree of corruption in institutions and public mistrust, which had nearly become the norm. Many of the attempts to tackle this had turned into dead ends, notably the measures for the control of corruption, or efforts to re-establish to address institutional pathology (Radnitz, 2010).

The international community continued to express concerns about the lack of independence of the judiciary, restrictions on the freedom of the media and human rights. Similarly, the political confrontation between the ruling faction and the opposition, which reflects the persistent division within the society, still hinders the authorities from elaborating and implementing the correct policy measures that would address these complex challenges (Stefes, 2008).

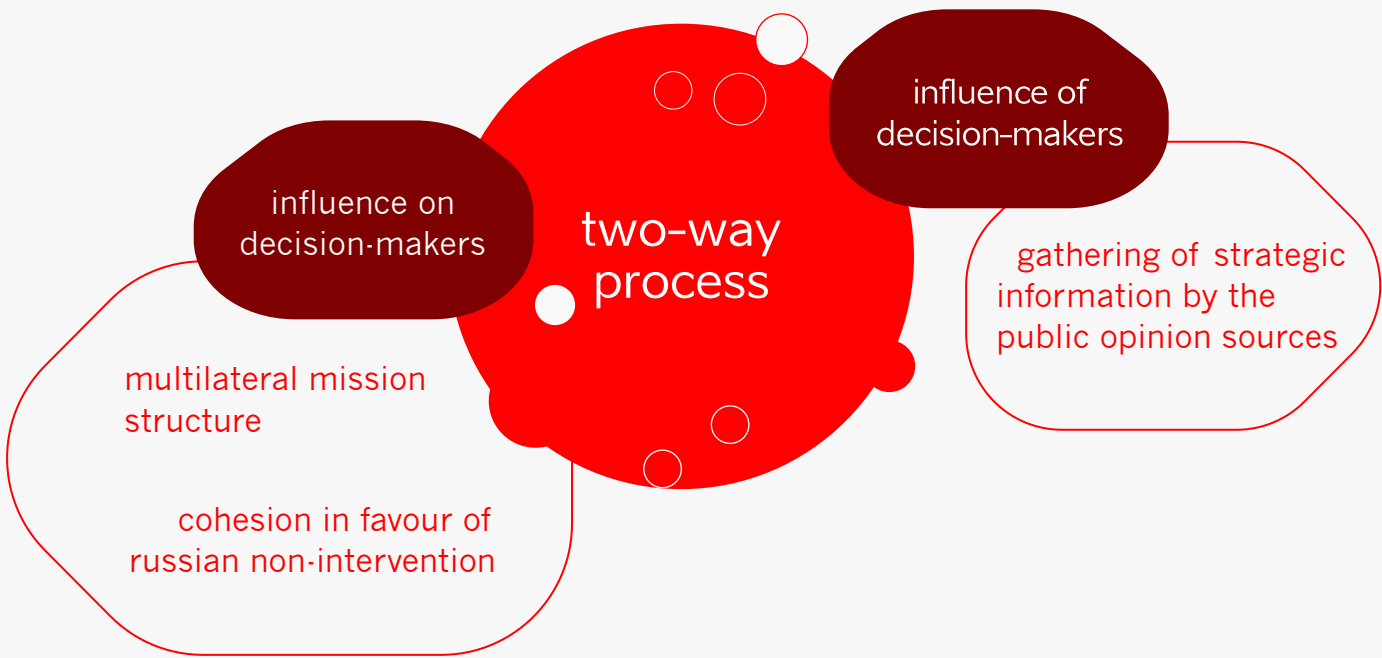
The ongoing struggles between the ruling factions and the opposition demonstrates the difficulty of attaining the unity requisite for the country's successful democratic consolidation. In this tense political environment, development is particularly difficult under the most auspicious of circumstances. In democracies, the consolidation of power is a condition for the proper functioning of the political system. This principle plays an role in preventing the concentration of power in one hand or in one institution, and allows the legislature, executive and judiciary to control each other. However, in Georgia, a government with almost unlimited authority and the effective monopolization of power poses several challenges to the very foundation of the state. The division of powers is enshrined in Georgia's Constitution: the executive, legislative, and judicial branches are supposedly separate from one another. In practice, however, this division is under threat. Powerful political and economic interests often trump mutual controls and checks (Amiranashvili, 2022).

Salome Zurbashvili, the current president of Georgia, has a piece to play in Georgia's future. She came to power in 2018 as an independent candidate, but with a strategic alliance with the Georgian Dream party. Her pro-Western stance has always been clear, and her policies include an attempt to move closer to the European institutions (Herbert, 2023). The recent change in the constitution has taken away practical powers and the portrayal of the President has become more representative and symbolic. However, as is being seen in the context of the “Foreign Agents Act”, she plays a key role in opposing the Georgian Dream party and its pro-Russian intentions (Herbert, 2023).

An additional problem is that Georgia is, like Ukraine, a country suffering from severe endemic corruption. Corruption in the judiciary undermines the rule of law and creates a situation where some can bend the separation of powers to their will and profit. Furthermore, a lack of popular trust in the independence of public institutions means that people might reject the results of their work or use political violence. This lack of accountability weakens and endangers democratic institutions further (Radnitz, 2010).

When political leaders cannot be held to account for their actions and public trust in the independence of institutions is low, the rule of law is weakened, which in turn limits people's civil rights and rights to security. Tackling these challenges requires a holistic approach: a combination of legislative reforms, institution building, and an informed and engaged population in a transparency and accountability culture (Radnitz, 2010). By enhancing the functioning of the division of powers and tackling corruption, Georgia can build a stronger and more inclusive democratic country, where the rule of law, equality, and democratic participation are guaranteed.

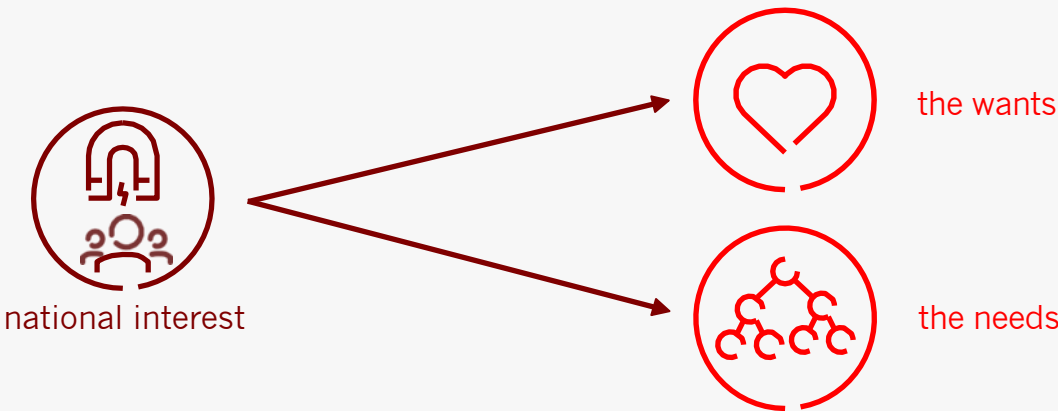
Societal and governmental factors in defining national preferences



System Level

When analyzing Georgia's foreign policy, it is necessary to consider the systemic level of analysis to understand its impact on Georgia's agency. Georgia's foreign policy has direct consequences on its national security, economy and trade, regional and global integration, as well as its conflict resolution capacity (Suny, R. G. 1994). Foreign policy plays a part determining the way a country can develop itself and to protect its interest in the international system. The capacity of Georgia to play its agency in foreign policy is fundamental to its autonomy and sovereignty, allowing it to seek strategic alliance and promote the national interest (Hey, J. 2003).

How national interest is operationalized into a double edge in the foreign policy dimension



Agency in foreign policy refers to the capacity of a state to act more independently and proactive in the international system, seeking its national interest. However, this capacity is influenced by several factors, such as the systemic level context that the very state is inserted in. The systemic level can significantly affect the capacity of agency a state can have in foreign policy (Keohane, 2011).

The international system these days is characterized by a complex interaction, especially with the great influence that non-state actors have, shaped by various dynamics such as multipolarity, multilateralism, globalization, and regionalism. Multipolarity is the distribution of power among multiple major actors on the global stage, leading to a more decentralized and versatile system, where different states exert influence and pursue their interests. Multipolarity is the best way to have a great agency to influence others, especially if you are in a small state, since it allows you to have different partners and different strategies to play your agency (Keohane, 2011). Globalization, on the contrary, involves the increasing interdependence of economies, societies, and cultures worldwide, which became easier by advancements in technology and communication. This phenomenon has blurred traditional boundaries and intensified transnational interactions, creating both opportunities and challenges for states (Keohane, 2011). Multilateralism is also important since it's in between multipolarity and globalization. For Georgia, multilateralism provides the path to engage, cooperate and conflict resolution, that is why the country is closer to the European Union and the United Nations than any other individualist agreement or partnerships. It will also help Georgia to voice its concerns in the forums of the world, that is why they are so reliant on multilateralism to seek security. Finally, regionalism highlights the growing importance of regional organizations and cooperation mechanisms that address common challenges and pursue a common shared objective. These regional dynamics often intersect with broader global trends, shaping the behavior of states and influencing the trajectory of international relations (Keohane, 2011).

In the context of current trends and challenges in the international system, several factors directly impact Georgia's foreign policy. One such trend is the reappearance of geopolitical competition among and between major powers, particularly between the United States, China, and Russia. This competition can be seen in various ways, including as a beneficial situation for Georgia, allowing them to have its agency in focus. Furthermore, the unresolved conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the Caucasus region, including the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, continue to destabilize the region and impede efforts towards peace and reconciliation. These conflicts not only undermine Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty but also exacerbate regional tensions and hinder prospects for economic development and integration (Popescu, 2010). Given its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia holds significant geopolitical importance in the Caucasus region. Its position as a transit hub for energy resources and trade routes further enhances its strategic value and puts the country in the spotlight for that matter. As such, Georgia's foreign policy choices and strategic alignments are closely scrutinized by external actors seeking to advance their own interests in the region (Hey, 2003).

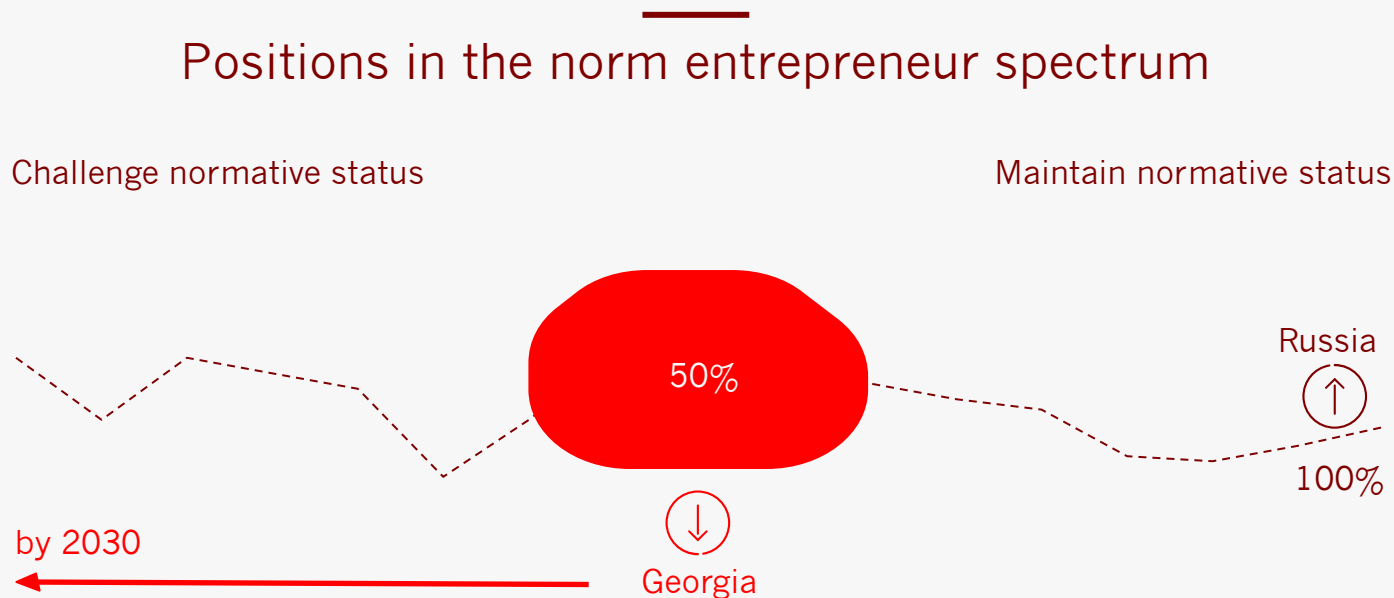
The dynamics of the international system have a significant influence on Georgia's capacity to exercise agency in its foreign policy. As a small state situated in a complex geopolitical environment, Georgia must navigate several systemic factors that shape its strategic choices and interactions with other actors on the global stage (Popescu, 2010). One key factor is the power of regional powers, particularly Russia, which has historically exerted considerable influence in the Caucasus region. Their presence shrinks the capacity of Georgia to play in agency and undermine Georgian foreign policy in place of Russian foreign policy. Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and its following support for separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have increased security concerns and limited Georgia's ability to pursue its own agenda in the region. Ethnic conflicts are also a significant challenge to Georgia's agency in foreign affairs. The unsettled conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only undermine Georgia's territorial integrity but also prolong regional instability and impede efforts towards reconciliation. Georgia's response to these conflicts is constrained by the interests of external actors, namely Russia, and the complexities of ethnic politics, limiting its ability to assert control over its own territory and shape the regional security landscape.

Moreover, it is imperative to highlight the necessity of understanding how the individual/domestic level plays a key role for consolidating Georgia's foreign policy, once it is intrinsically correlated to the systemic level. As mentioned before, the EU is a goal for Georgia, but to become a member, any applying state has to meet the Copenhagen criteria, also known as the accession criteria. Two conditions need to be fulfilled in order for a state to join the EU, the political and economic criteria.

Consequently, Georgia needs to truly consolidate its democracy, through the Rule of Law so it can meet the political conditions of Copenhagen criteria's. Meaning, there will be no entrance in the European Union if the country does not have its three instances of power fully separated and independent. Also, in economic terms, Georgia has to prove that it can handle the competition inside the EU market, that the country has a functional economy and macroeconomic stability. According to the EU, Georgia has already made some progress in economic terms, but they recommended that they further deepen the sectoral cooperation with the union, on the basis of the EU-Georgia agreement. Consequently, Georgia won't meet its foreign policy goal, that is join the EU, if they do not resolve their domestic level question, such as the consolidation of democracy and the consolidation of its economy in the terms of the Copenhagen criteria, which are the only way the country will be able to join the union, and further expand its capacity of agency, improving its independence in terms of foreign policy.

Regional integration initiatives such as the European Union's Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union present both opportunities and challenges for Georgia. Having closer ties and integration with European institutions offers the possibility of economic development and security cooperation, requiring Georgia to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and balance its relations with other regional powers. International institutions also play a significant role in shaping Georgia's agency in foreign policy. Membership in organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gives Georgia a platform to express its concerns and engage in multilateral diplomacy. However, the effectiveness of these institutions in resolving conflicts and promoting peace and security in the region is often limited by the interests of powerful actors and the constraints of geopolitical rivalries.

Georgia has demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness in countering systemic pressures and maximizing its agency in foreign affairs. The clearest example is Georgia's strategic partnership with the United States, which has increased its security capabilities and provided diplomatic support in international forums. Additionally, Georgia's pursuit of closer ties with European institutions reflects its commitment to European values and aspirations for integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. It is also important to highlight that the proximity with the European Union, NATO and the United States brought some wide flexibility to Georgia in terms of its foreign policy and capacity to exert its own agency without the interference of others, such as Russia. And, in terms of strategy, it shortens Moscow's power to intervene externally in the country, and even to support the separatist regions, because the more active presence of the US, NATO and EU takes away part of the leverage that Russia had before to interfere in the country without retaliation or any sort of consequence from its major rivals.



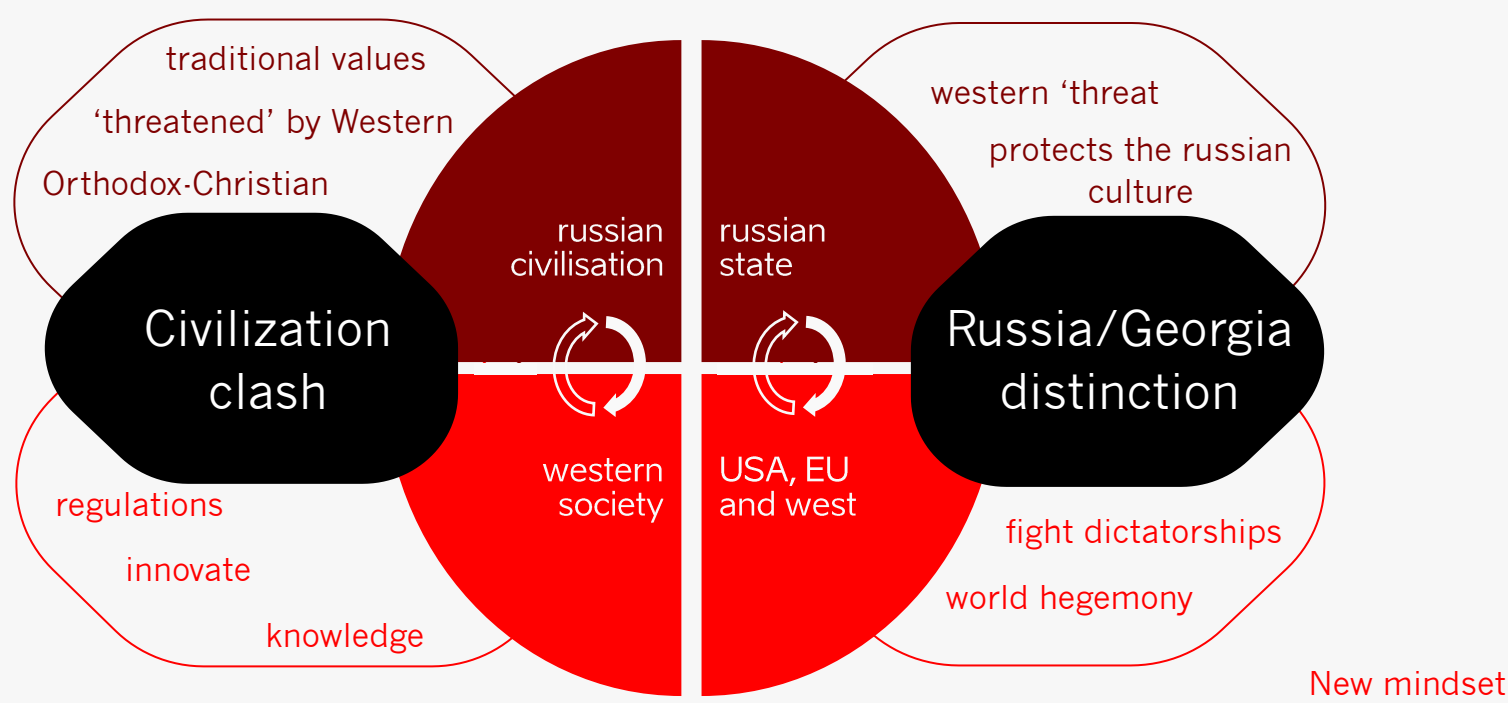
The systemic level of analysis is important for understanding Georgia's capacity to exercise agency in its foreign policy. By evaluating the impact of regional powers, ethnic conflicts, regional integration, and international institutions, we can gain insights into Georgia's strategic choices and responses to systemic pressures. Especially, and probably the most important, what truly matters to Georgia is to improve its aspect as a regional power while having close relations with the Western institution, which it has been developing over the years. For Georgia to improve their agency, their capacity of exerting foreign policy without the influence of other actors, and becoming more independently and more sovereign, it should focus on multilateralism, the widest diplomatic power it could have and improve its security and defense capabilities. In the sense of multilateralism, Georgia should deepen and get closer ties with all multilateralism it could have, especially with the European Union, United Nations, NATO and OSCE. This would create a close tie among them, allowing Georgia to boost its prestige in the international community, making it more difficult for external actors and pressures to undermine their own interest and agenda.

Georgia should also seek to improve its diplomatic capacities and abilities to have a good relationship with the most countries it can, or at least, the countries that would have an impact on their agency and foreign policy construction. They shall use the forums of multilateralism to improve that, creating some sort of interdependence in their multilateralism and diplomatic approach, since they are linked to each other. Finally, Georgia should improve their defense capacities in the way they can as a small state, investing in different technologies, specific training that would allow them to counterfeit greater armies.

We saw how complex it is for Georgia to have their full independence and sovereignty in their foreign policy and agency, given the historical conjuncture that shaped Georgian’s identity, namely the fact the country for centuries has been the target of invasions and foreign influence. Also, we have seen the importance of the systemic level approach to understand why Georgia suffers from the lack of capacity in formulating their foreign policy, the constraints that emerge from this systemic level. We acknowledge that multilateralism, multipolarity and regionalism has its importance for Georgia in creating and seeking agency and foreign policy in the international community, since it allows that small state to have more and deeper ties with greater powers, counterbalancing against the great threats Georgia face from Russia and its influence in the region of the Caucasus. We highlighted those institutions such as the UE, NATO, UN and OSCE can play a positive impact in Georgia's formulating process of foreign policy, since having closer ties with them means minor odds of external influences.

Top-down framing on Georgia’s foreign policy: Civilization Clash and geopolitical distinctions

Path dependency & Historical Institutionalism



Recommendations

First and foremost, efforts to fortify the separation of powers must be complemented with initiatives to improve civic education and participation, thusly creating an informed and empowered electorate capable of effectively holding government officials accountable. Similarly, efforts to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and depoliticize law enforcement agencies are indispensable to protect the rule of law and safeguard the rights of citizens. Moreover, building an ethos of transparency and accountability within governance structures is vital to rebuild public trust in the political system. Public disclosure of government expenditures, enhanced whistleblower protection, and the establishment of strong legislative and administrative oversight mechanisms are all critically important in this regard. These measures also help to reduce corruption and enhance the integrity of government institutions.

Artificial intervention in Georgia's political processes It will be informative to recall another dimension of meddling in international affairs, which is the impact of external actors on Georgia's political landscape. The influence of future actors on Georgia's foreign policy is closely linked to changes in the geopolitical landscape of the region. Shifts in relations with regional and global powers, such as Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union have the potential to shape future Georgian alignment, as well as attitudes towards Euro-Atlantic integration, and the prospects for the resolution of regional conflicts. The response of Georgia to these changes will depend on the decisions of the country's leadership and the ability of the country to defend its own interests. The influence of specific actors on international orientation could be significant, especially when these political actors have personal and close ties to foreign governments or international interest groups. An equally important influence is the influence of non-governmental, private, and transnational actors. Powerful multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations can affect the global agenda. They can influence the Georgian government's decision on foreign policy by lobbying and other means, which can also affect Georgia's line in the international arena.

In this complex context, the only right and effective way to confront the challenges of the separation of the branches of power and the influence of non-governmental actors is to take a quick and comprehensive approach. This means that Georgia should carry out constitutional and legislative reforms aimed at protecting the separation of powers and the integrity of each branch of power. The reforms should strengthen mechanisms for checks and balances among the three branches. These reforms are the basis for a strong and effective democracy. Additionally, creating a culture where the judiciary is not interfered with politically and ensuring the rule of law is kept should be considered. Georgia keeping the judiciary independent, through protecting it against political interference, while promoting impartiality plus integrity would ensure public confidence in its legal system. It would also see to the protection of rights and freedoms of its citizens. Corruption as an endemic issue, underlines the rule of law, eroding public trust in democratic institutions while also misallocating resources which further perpetuates corruption itself. Hence, we have no choice but to make combined efforts both in fighting corruption and empowering law enforcement agencies, since without them society cannot be just or fair to its people. It is necessary for Georgia to strengthen the citizens' willingness to participate in democratic procedures actively while promoting civic education and awareness of democratic principles. By nurturing a culture of accountability and civic participation, Georgia will immunize itself from political instability ensuring that the democratically established organs are responsive to the collective needs and aspirations of society.

Yet, the path to victory also strongly depends on the regular engagement of civil society, private sector, and the international community. Civil society plays a role as the flagships of democracy and good governance. As the vigilant guardians of democracy, civil society organizations are able to investigate the actions of the government, promote human rights in their broader and more abstract understanding, and ignite the citizenry's activism. The strengthening of civil society in Georgia constitutes the cornerstone and a key driver for the anti-corruption fight, increase in government's accountability and transparency, and literacy promotion concerning the citizens' rights and obligations. The effort to bring civil society under one roof can have the reformative potential of titanic proportions, as it may align the voters' aspirations and demands with politicians' manifestos and ensure that the former get implemented. The private sector also needs to seek for economic advancement. Promoting a conducive business climate founded on transparent laws and behind-the-scenes machinations as well as property rights preservation proves essential in attracting private sector investments and creating employment, among others. Besides, the private sector also significantly contributes to the diverse nation's expansion drive by adopting environmentally practices and financing green technologies.

We recommend the implementation of two projects by the Georgian Center for Strategy and Development tackling main hybrid threats strategies used by pro-Russian parties and groups fostering skepticism about Western rapprochement, while also nurturing concerns about erosion of identity, religion, and security. The first project aims to tackle disinformation propaganda labeling western ideals as a threat to traditional Georgian values, by supporting multi-religious and multi-ethnic integration education in Georgian schools. Pro-Russian disinformation present Western values as an attack on traditional Georgian ones, especially religious and family oriented, this project aims to increase the knowledge about how different minorities and religious are integrated in the EU and how this integration fosters equality and human rights for all, empowering students building their capacity to promote critical thinking and improve skills like basic fact-checking, media literacy and digital literacy.

The second project aims to tackle "Georgia has been abandoned by the West propaganda", by introducing to the youth and different civil society groups, EU-related subjects and what EU candidate status means for Georgia. This will enhance the general knowledge about the European Union and involve civil society to address the people of Georgia's European aspiration, while answering questions on what improvements will EU candidate status bring for democracy, economic development, youth, culture, environment, and any other subject tackled by Eu integration.

By the same token, the international community needs to support Georgia's journey towards democracy and evolution. This involves offering both technical and financial assistance to help implement institutional reforms and promote economic growth. It also includes encouraging cultural and educational exchanges to strengthen civil society and democratic values. Advocating for Georgia's integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions is another important aspect. This means supporting Georgia's efforts to join organizations like the European Union and NATO, which can provide additional opportunities for economic and political reinforcement.

It is compelling for the community to ensure that the Georgian government upholds rights and basic freedoms. This responsibility helps to encourage governance and the protection of citizens' rights. In essence, collaboration among society, businesses, and international partners plays a role in steering Georgia towards a future marked by democracy, prosperity, and societal advancement. Through efforts and leveraging their influence and resources, these stakeholders can foster positive transformation, reinforce democratic structures in Georgia, and propel objectives forward. Georgia possesses all the elements to evolve into a thriving democracy in the Caucasus region. Its diverse cultural heritage, abundant natural resources, and industrious population equip it well to address challenges effectively and reach its aspirations. With leadership and backing from the community, Georgia can surmount barriers to progress while advancing democratic consolidation, fostering sustainable economic growth, and aligning with Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Georgia, despite multiple difficulties, is a land of opportunities and prospects. It is conveniently located, between Europe and Asia, connected by several important trade routes that cross the country. The location creates unique prospects for economic development, high levels of trade, and numerous tourists. Georgia can become a gate to regional prosperity as it will benefit from the transportation of different goods and people and will increase everything that happens around due to the country's beneficial economic interest. Additionally, the country has all the natural conditions to remain beneficial and prosperous. For example, Georgia is the country of minerals, and they can be used in the future for multiple new industries. Georgians have numerous forests that can be used by local citizens and exported to other countries. In addition, the fertile soil may be beneficial to produce new biomass for various technologies.

For the Georgian government to take advantage of the described opportunities, it will be necessary to invest in infrastructures. Among them are the transportation networks, railways, and ports as investing in them will enhance the needed connections to facilitate the trading of goods and services. Additionally, Georgia should promote the growth of the IT sector to become a regional center of excellence for innovation and digital growth. In addition to striving for independence, Georgia has additionally been on a continuous journey toward democracy and advancement. This way, the country is not only focused on political freedom but also on creating a society that can thrive ultimately. It aims to build a future in which everyone can enjoy the benefits of progress and inclusivity.

To achieve this vision, Georgia must address several issues. By ensuring that power is distributed fairly and independently, Georgia can prevent any one entity from becoming too dominant and abusing their authority. Another challenge that Georgia faces is external influence. It is important for the country to maintain its sovereignty and make decisions that are in the best interest of its citizens, without being swayed by external pressures. This will allow Georgia to shape its own destiny and pursue policies that align with its values and goals. Georgia's history is a testament to its resilience and determination.

By addressing challenges related to the separation of powers, external influence, and corruption, while seizing opportunities for economic growth and regional integration, Georgia can pave the way for a rich and inclusive future for all its citizens.

Outcome

Georgia's pursual of democracy and unceasing development unfolds within a geopolitical outlook marked by historical legacies, internal claimings, and external pressures. As a small state decisively positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia faces the task of navigating power asymmetries and forestalling its sovereignty.

The nation's pilgrimage since self-reliance has been characterized by periods of instability, political transitions, and the persistent threat posed by unresolved strifes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These challenges are further compounded by Russia's enduring influence in the region, which confines Georgia's foreign policy choices and entails strategic procedures.

Despite these stumbling blocks, Georgia has endorsed resilience by ardently seeking closer ties with Western institutions such as the European Union and NATO, pursuing partnerships to bolster its security, and embarking on ambitious domestic reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting economic growth, and consolidating the rule of law.

Notwithstanding, the forward avenue requires a multi-faceted assessment that addresses both intramural vulnerabilities and external threats. Fostering transparency and accountability within government, strengthening the segregation of powers, and empowering civil society are flows towards consolidating democracy and mitigating the risks posed by corruption and outside agency.

Simultaneously, Georgia must continue to bargaining chip its meaningful location and economic potential to allure foreign investment, promote progress, and solidify its position as a regional hub for transportation, trade and innovation.

By adopting these recommendations for enhancing its security and maturity, and effectively addressing these multidimensional challenges capitalizing on emerging opportunities, Georgia can achieve a «small power» vortice capable of protecting its sovereignty as well as advancing towards a future characterized by stability and prosperity, securing a place within the international community navigating the complexities of sovereignty in a turbulent regional landscape achieving its general goals while offering guidance for current and future policymakers in Georgia.

We have to ensure that Georgia must not become a vanished Ukraine

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