

NATO’s Enlargement and Georgia’s Chances of Integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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Abstract

One of the main foreign policy priorities of the Georgian government is to integrate the country into Euro – Atlantic structures. Although Georgia has made important progress in creating democratic institutions and in the transition towards democracy, many obstacles remain that prevent the country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. From these obstacles special attention should be paid to the Russian factor, as well as to internal problems such as ethnic conflicts with breakaway regions, fragile democratic institutions and political instability. Although Georgia has made some progress towards building democracy, it is still regarded as a hybrid regime and a lot has to be done to transform the country into liberal democracy.

Key words: Nato; Georgia; integration

NATO’s enlargement and Eastward expansion

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established after Second World War in 1949. During the Cold War there was a danger of the spread of communism and the expansion of the Soviet Union. NATO played very important role in ensuring freedom and security of its member states. Since its foundation, since 1949, the number of member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has increased from 12 to 28 countries. There can be identified six stages in the NATO expansion process. The first three phases of the expansion took place during the Cold War. Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and later in 1982 Spain became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical reality has changed radically in the world and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization established close relations with the Eastern European states, which were previously regarded as satellite countries of the Soviet Union. In 1990s favorable conditions were created for the enlargement of NATO and among the political circles of the West intensive debates began about NATO's expansion. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (North Atlantic Cooperation Council) was established to strengthen relations with Eastern European countries. This organization played very important role in improving relations between NATO member states and Eastern Europe. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council was replaced by the Euro - Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997.

In 1993 United States decided to create a special program "Partnership for Peace" in order to establish closer relations with the countries of the Eastern Europe. The purpose of this program was to strengthen trust and ties between member states of NATO and non-member states. Particular attention was paid to the deepening of relations with the former Soviet republics and the Eastern European states. The program "Partnership for Peace" could play a significant role in the NATO enlargement process and assist the candidate countries of NATO in carrying out military reforms. Another important step towards NATO expansion was the creation of a Membership Action Plan. During the 1999 Washington Summit the Membership Action Plan was elaborated, which includes the list of Recommendations for the states Wishing to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The purpose of the Membership Action Plan is to help countries that wish to integrate in to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to satisfy the NATO standards.

Serious debates on expansion took place at the Madrid Summit in 1997. Three states of Eastern Europe - Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were invited to participate in this summit. These countries joined NATO in 1999. The West intended to transform NATO into a global military- political organization and therefore, great attention was paid to the integration of new members into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The famous Polish-American diplomat and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski supported the integration of Eastern European countries into NATO and believed that the main geopolitical goal of USA should be the expansion of its base in Europe and eastward expansion. (Gvenetadze & Rukhadze, 2009)

In 2004, NATO expanded again and its member states became the following Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. After

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the integration of these states, NATO's boundaries stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. As a result of this enlargement process NATO has a common border with the Russian Federation. NATO's enlargement, especially the integration of the former Soviet republics into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has caused irritation of Russia. Russia has always been suspicious of the NATO's expansion in the east and perceived it as a threat. The NATO-Russia Council was set up in 2002 to regulate relations with Russia. The aim of the NATO-Russia Council is to discuss the problematic issues and reduce misunderstandings, to protect the common interests of the Alliance and Russia. It serves as a forum for dialogue and information exchange. The NATO-Russia Council tries to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and deepen cooperation in areas such as the struggle against terrorism and the maintenance of peace in the world. Although the creation of the NATO-Russia Council was a progressive step, the reduction of tensions between the West and Russia could not be achieved. Russia is particularly opposed to the integration of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO.

Main obstacles for Georgia's integration into North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The Integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures is the main foreign policy priority of Georgia, as well as of Ukraine. Georgia's National Security Concept states that one of the main objectives of the country is integration into the North Atlantic Treaty organization and the European Union. According to the National Security Concept " One of Georgia's major foreign and security policy priorities is membership in NATO and the European Union. As a Black Sea and Southeast European country, Georgia is part of Europe geographically, politically, and culturally; yet it was cut off from its natural course of development by historical cataclysms. Integration into NATO and the EU is Georgia's sovereign choice, one which will strengthen Georgia's security and ensure its stable development. Accession to NATO is an important foreign policy objective of Georgia. Georgia views NATO as the basis of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture as well as the major mechanism for ensuring security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic space. Georgia's membership in NATO will create solid guarantees for the nation's security and stability and will play an important role in strengthening stability in the entire region." (National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011) Membership in NATO will contribute not only to the strengthening of stability and security in Georgia, but will also create solid guarantees for peace and stability in the whole Caucasus region. The reforms that Georgian government is

implementing in order to join NATO, contributes to the consolidation of democratic institutions in Georgia. Obviously, if Georgia becomes a Western-style liberal democracy, then the southern borders of Russia in Caucasus will be more protected. The Russian authorities do not share this opinion and think that the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance represents one of the major threats to the country. This argument is also included in the Russian National Security Concept. In the above-mentioned concept particular attention is paid to the analysis of external threats. Issues such as strengthening of military-political alliances, NATO enlargement and moving military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders are seen as foreign policy threats. Putin believes that the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance has nothing to do with stability and security of Europe. In his opinion, this process is a serious factor that tends to worsen relations between the West and Russia. The Russian government constantly threatens the West and states that Russia will do everything it can to halt the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. As Vladimir Putin 's press secretary, Dimitri Peskov stated: "Moscow has always noted at various levels that the continuing expansion of NATO and NATO's military infrastructure to the East, of course, cannot but lead to response actions from the East, namely, the Russian side in ensuring security interests and supporting the parity of interests." (TASS Russian News Agency, 2015)

Although Georgia has made significant progress and has come closer to NATO by implementing ambitious reforms, there are still several factors that hinder its integration into the North Atlantic Alliance. The main problem, as it has been mentioned above, is the Russian factor. The more intensive the NATO-Georgia relationship becomes, the likelihood increases that Russia will launch new provocations against Georgia. Russia is making pressure on Georgia through the "creeping occupation" of its territories. Georgia's security environment considerably worsened after the 2008 August War and the deployment of Russian occupational forces in Georgian territories. This war has demonstrated that Georgia's pro-European and pro-western political course is unacceptable for Kremlin and that Moscow will always oppose Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. As the former president of Russia Medvedev stated the 2008 august War thwarted NATO's plans to expand further on the post-Soviet space. "We have simply calmed some of our neighbors down by showing them that they should behave correctly in respect of Russia and in respect of neighboring small states. And for some of our partners, including for the North Atlantic Alliance, it was a signal that before taking a decision about expansion of the Alliance, one

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should at first think about the geopolitical stability. I deem these [issues] to be the major lessons of those developments in 2008," Medvedev said. (Civil Georgia, 2011)

The second factor that hinders Georgia's integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is the lack of unanimity among the member states of NATO with regards to the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. The member states of NATO show different attitudes towards the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. Western European countries, in contrast to the Eastern European countries, are not very favorably disposed towards NATO expansion. Western European countries, especially Germany, France and Italy, believe that NATO's eastward expansion is not a priority issue for them. (Chitadze, 2008) Leaders of the above mentioned European countries believe that in case of the incorporation of Eastern European states into NATO, they will face with new problems such as unresolved frozen conflicts and wars. Ukraine and Georgia are in a state of war with Putin's Russia. Crimea and Ukraine's eastern regions - Donetsk and Lugansk, have been added to the Russian occupied territories since 2014. Of course Western Europe does not want to enter into confrontation with Russia, therefore it is more skeptical about the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. At the meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, former French President François Hollande said that the North Atlantic Alliance should not be expanded at this stage. As the former French president stated the issue of integration of new members into the NATO should not be the priority for Europe because of the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and former Soviet republics.

Eastern European states, in contrast to Western Europe, support Georgia's integration into NATO. They are geographically closer to Russia and are more familiar with the expansionist policies of Russia. They were often victims of Russian aggression. That's why they express more solidarity with Georgia than Western European countries, that do not have a common border with Russia and do not perceive Moscow as a threat. Due to the tense geopolitical situation, the Eastern European states think that NATO should accelerate the process of enlargement. In case of NATO's enlargement, it might be possible to stop Putin's expansionist policy and his attempt to restore the Soviet Empire. Therefore, it is not surprising that Eastern European countries support the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. (Modebadze, 2016)

The third factor that prevents Georgia's integration into NATO is incorrectly implemented reforms and fragile democratic institutions. Several decades have passed since the process of

democratization started in Georgia, but our country still belongs to hybrid regimes. Building democratic institutions is still an ongoing process and Georgia has not fully implemented such important reforms as judicial reform (the Court has not yet been established as an independent branch of government), public service reform, the establishment of rule of law and elimination of selective justice. Integration into Euro-Atlantic structures will be possible only if Georgia will become a liberal democracy and will fully accept those values that Western European countries have. (Modebadze, 2016)

Conclusion

Thus, there are a number of hindering factors that prevent NATO's eastward expansion and Georgia's integration into the North Atlantic Alliance. From these factors, as it has been mentioned above, the Russian factor is particularly noteworthy. Russia has always perceived the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance as a threat. Because of the fear isolation, Russia does not want to have a common border with NATO. The second factor that hinders NATO's expansion in the east is a lack of unanimity over the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. Members of the Alliance have different opinions on this issue and it is difficult to achieve a consensus among them. Although NATO declares that its door remains open to any European country, Western European states are opposed to the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance. The third factor that prevents Georgia's integration into NATO, is poorly implemented reforms and fragile democratic institutions. The state that wants to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures must meet the Western standards and the requirements of NATO. Therefore, it is necessary to implement a number of reforms to transform Georgia into a liberal democracy and accelerate its integration into NATO.

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