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EXPLAINING REGIONAL ALIGNMENT CHOICES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The Cases of Armenia and Georgia

By

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To Khatchig, Irma, Patil & Hera
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ABSTRACT

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and the gradual growth in significance of the South Caucasus region economically and geopolitically, Armenia and Georgia have found themselves struggling to safeguard their national sovereignty and develop their weak economies. They have been forced to adhere to waves of expansion by both Russia and the European Union and NATO. They have also been obliged to choose one sphere of influence over the other, with serious consequences for national sovereignty and foreign policy considerations. This thesis examines the reasons behind Armenia’s and Georgia’s regional alignment choices. Georgia’s national Western identity, and history of Russian occupation and aggression on its territorial sovereignty, has led it to align with the Western bloc, especially after the 2003 Rose Revolution and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war that led to the de-facto secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia. On the other hand, Armenia’s economic and military dependence on Moscow, and the struggle over Nagorno-Karabagh and its ensuing security climate, has pushed it to align with Russia at the expense of its own economic relations and geopolitical position. The thesis tests the alignment choices of the two Transcaucasian states against neorealist predictions. Whereas neorealism offers a robust explanation with regards to Armenia’s alignment choice, it fails to offer a compelling explanation for Georgia’s integration into Western structures. The latter’s foreign policy orientation towards the West can be better understood through constructivist approaches that consider Georgia’s post-revolution policy-makers’ immaterial identity preferences and perceptions of state purpose, both of which have been staunchly pro-European.

Keywords: Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Balancing, Bandwagoning, Neorealism, Constructivism
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BTC- Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
CBA- Central Bank of Armenia
CFSP- Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS- Commonwealth of Independent States
CJSCs- Closed Joint Stock Companies
CSDP- Common Security and Defense Policy
CSTO- Collective Security Treaty Organization
CU- Customs Union
DCFTA- Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP- Eastern Partnership
EEU- Eurasian Economic Union
ENI- European Neighborhood Instrument
EU- European Union
EUMM- European Union Monitoring Mission
FDI- Foreign Direct Investment
FSS- Federal Security Service
GDP- Gross Domestic Product
GTEP- Georgia Train and Equip Programme
GUAM coalition – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova
IR- International Relations
JTEC- Joint Training and Evaluation Center
MAP- Membership Action Plan
NAR- Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic
NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA- Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PfP- Partnership for Peace
SME- Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SNGP- Substantial NATO-Georgia Package
SSOP- Sustainment and Stability Operations Program
TANAP- Trans Anatolian Pipeline
TAP- Trans Adriatic Pipeline
UNSC- United Nations Security Council
US- United States
USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Remarkably, the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus nowadays bears a resemblance to the turbulence of the pre-Soviet period and the inter-war phase of the early twentieth century. As was the case then, Armenia and Georgia are once more encountering the overwhelming task of preserving their territorial sovereignty and defending their national security. The area’s exclusive geostrategic location is of vital importance for the development of the twenty-first century world order. Whereas the race for energy security is an extremely geopolitical subject, the competition over jurisdiction and authority in the South Caucasus region has become an ideological issue attaining vaster strategic significance for Russia, the European Union, and NATO.

After the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, and the annexation of Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine conflict in 2014, it has become universally apparent that Russia is keen on maintaining and regaining its spheres of influence in the post-Soviet states and will use all measures necessary to retain these territories it calls its near-abroad. Armenia’s and Georgia’s predicament are a good case in point. These two South Caucasian countries have felt the full-blown presence and aggression of Russia on their territories, a presence that has been beneficial in some cases and has proven destructive in others. While Georgia has led a rapprochement with the European Union and NATO even before the 2008 war,
Armenia, over the years, has been moving closer to Russia while desperately attempting to maintain a balanced foreign policy described as one of complementarity.

The zero-sum game being played by the West and the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus has created clear lines of division from which the two small states have been forced to choose. This thesis applies realist international relations theory to understand the different causes behind Georgia and Armenia’s regional alignment choices in an attempt to test whether realism can explain their different alignment choices.

The aim of this thesis, then, is to show that while a realist theory helps explain why Armenia chose to integrate with the Russian sphere of influence, it falls short of explaining Georgia’s alignment away from Russia and towards the West. While Georgia has been pushed to a point of no apparent return, reorienting itself towards the Western periphery, driven by a self-identification with European civilization, Armenia, having ceded too much in the past to be able to lead a diverse foreign policy agenda, has remained reliant on Russia for security and economic survival. This thesis also examines the passive western engagement in the region, namely its inability to counter Russian expansion and offer the security guarantees Eastern Partnership member countries direly need. This, in turn, has created a vacuum filled by Moscow. The relevant factors contributing to the foreign policy decisions made by Yerevan and Tbilisi are also examined throughout the thesis in an effort to understand the reasoning behind the policy choices of the two states.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

Two small post-Soviet states with fairly similar geopolitical circumstances, weak economies and security concerns, one bandwagoning with the regional hegemon and the
other balancing against it. What explains Armenia’s and Georgia’s different alignment choices with regards to the Russian Federation? What explains this variation at the dependent variable? Namely, that Armenia chose to integrate with Russia and its regional model, while Georgia chose to align with the West (mainly the EU and NATO). Can a realist approach explain the behavior of the two South Caucasian countries? Or should we consider alternative theoretical approaches to explain Georgia’s integration choice? This is the main puzzle the thesis tries to explain.

1.3 METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION

The working hypothesis of this thesis is that regional alignment choices made by Armenia revolve around considerations involving predominantly security considerations, as well as economic and geopolitical factors, all of which fall in line with a country’s struggle for survival in an anarchic world. On the other hand, the alignment choice made by Georgia does result from the abovementioned factors but falls short of entirely explaining that choice. In an effort to explain this, the research incorporates the national identity formation in post-Soviet Georgia to uncover the reasoning behind the latter’s choice to align with the West. The thesis considers as independent variables the political and economic factors that explain the decision to align with either regional pole, or regional integration with either Russia or Europe, the dependent variable. The independent variables include but are not limited to economic factors (foreign investments, energy trade, remittances, extractive industries…), political factors (national sovereignty, national security, diplomatic ties, regional associations and agreements…) as well as military
factors (weapons trade, military bases…). If these factors fail to explain the alignment choices of the cases, a constructivist framework is then applied.

Given its wide-ranging military and economic ties with Russia, Armenia has sometimes been obliged to align with Moscow. This has had some negative ramifications for its national sovereignty and its ability to diversify its foreign policy. Georgia, on the other hand, has made its choice to integrate itself with the EU and NATO based on the identification of its society and political elite as belonging to the Euro/Atlantic family, as well as its quest to find a security guarantor that could offset Russian expansion on its territory. However, this alignment choice has created undesirable consequences for its national territorial integrity and has fueled nationalist, separatist sentiments.

This thesis analyzes all the contributing factors amounting to alignment choices in both Armenia and Georgia steering them to either end of the Russia-West spectrum. It is thus a comparative study of two states – Armenia and Georgia. The application of the aforementioned contributing factors on the two states reveals the reasons behind their alignment with the different regional powers. The relevance of the different variables with regards to integration choices is also analyzed. The research strategy follows the qualitative research method as the thesis is going to be predominantly based on an inductive approach and emphasis is placed on generating theories that explain the dependent variable: variations in alignment choices. The goal is to link the arguments and the data gathered to explain alignment choices, whether realist or otherwise. The research method also involves a naturalistic stance as it relies on data and content that has already been published and will not involve collecting artificial data. The relied use on published content will allow to expand the generalizability of the thesis, establishing external validity.
The study also bases itself on the procedural practices of data gathering and analysis through the examination of primary sources – content analysis of government documents relating to security and foreign policies, in addition to national security concepts, and national alignment strategy documents, as well as discourse analysis of speeches and press releases of high ranking Armenian and Georgian government officials. The research is also based on the examination of secondary sources – scholarly research, which exists about the subject.

The time period chosen for this research is the onset of the Rose Revolution in 2003, when Georgia’s anti-Russian sentiments were on the increase, to the present time. The research also offers a historical background starting from the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of independent states in the South Caucasus to get a clearer understanding of the states’ formation and development, especially in the case of Armenia. This time period allows for a proper understanding of the geopolitical shifts and the growth of importance of the South Caucasus region within the new world order.

1.4 MAP OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter includes a survey of alternative theories to explain alignment choices in the South Caucasus in a bid to test the explanatory power of realist theories. The third and fourth chapters focus on the individual cases, Armenia and Georgia, analyzing their national economies, geostrategic and security considerations as well as national identity when other material factors fall short of explaining the alignment choice. The final chapter summarizes the main argument of the
thesis and spells out its main theoretical implications pertaining to the explanatory power of realist theories and the foreign policy choices of small states.
CHAPTER TWO

MATERIAL & IDEATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE FORMULATION OF SMALL STATE FOREIGN POLICIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union some thirty years ago, two small nations in the Southern Caucasus resting on the margins of Central Asia and the European continent, Armenia and Georgia, and despite significant similarities, led distinct political paths with regard to foreign policy alignments. This has been manifested in the particularities of their interactions with their shared regional geopolitical setting. Ever since the two small states reestablished their independence following the dissolution of the USSR, Yerevan and Tbilisi were compelled to pursue alliances with regional powers to ensure their states’ survival in the South Caucasus. Whereas Georgia has pursued integration into European and Atlantic systems, especially after the Rose Revolution in 2003, Armenia has intimately associated itself with the Russian Federation and became a member of the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Yerevan’s determination to extend the timeframe of Russia’s military presence in the country, and to enlist in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), have consolidated the state’s integration into the Russian sphere of influence. Conversely, Tbilisi has endeavored to
dissociate itself from Moscow and lead an integration into Western economic and security systems. Even though Georgia did become party to the Collective Security Treaty during president Eduard Shevardnadze’s term, the latter declined the renewal of the treaty, and made efforts to lead a more diversified foreign agenda engaging in a rapprochement with the West. Subsequently, president Mikhail Saakashvili steered Georgia further away from the Russian orbit, making steady efforts in joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The chapter highlights the contribution of IR literature on alliance theory. Firstly, it explores the significance of the Transcaucasian region, and the zero-sum game between Russia and the West in the area. Then, it presents the main principles of neorealist theory before moving to the study of small state foreign policy formation and the prominence of the structural level of analysis in this regard. The chapter then examines the material considerations behind Armenia’s bandwagoning policy towards Russia. Finally, it presents the limits of structural realism in explaining Georgia’s balancing behavior against Russia and introduces constructivist theories to explain Georgian foreign policy.

2.2 THE GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE ZERO-SUM GAME BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST

The geostrategic significance of Transcaucasia is directly correlated with its location. Its importance lies in connecting Central Asian countries to the European continent and the Russian Federation to the Middle Eastern region, in addition to its growing role in the provision of Caspian hydrocarbons to European markets as an alternative to the volatile
Middle Eastern and Russian energy channels. All this has resulted in an increase of great power interest in the area. Conflicting foreign interests have transformed the region into one of the most “coveted pieces of territory in the World” (Aydin, 1999, p.118). While the area has been a hotspot of rivalry and competition between several external actors, involving Russia, Turkey, Iran and Western powers, the small states of the South Caucasus have been scrambling to work out their best options for survival, utilizing external alignments to safeguard vital interests. These and other overlapping economic and political considerations have resulted in an aggressive race for influence. Consequently, the future of the Southern Caucasus has become dependent upon the conflicting interests of international powers in the region instead of upon the desire of the region’s individual states. Responding to the power struggles in the region, Tbilisi has been attempting to distance itself from Russian influence and join the EU and NATO, while Yerevan has allied itself with Russia and became a member of CSTO (Abbasov & Siroky, 2018, p. 254). Ever since the corrosion of the notion of a shared neighborhood amongst Russia and the West (European Union, NATO and the United States) in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus after the 2008 Russian war on Georgia and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, post-Soviet countries in the region have been wrestling between two strategic choices: consent to Russian protection or opt for European and Atlantic incorporation.

Researchers on the region such as Craig Nation (2015), George Niculescu (2015), Elkhan Nuriyev (2015), John Besemeres (2016), and Mikhail Sarjveladze (2017) all share the belief that the great game being played by Russia and the West has been portrayed as a struggle along ideological lines. The West is competing for the proliferation of Western style democracy in contrast to Russian authoritarianism, while Moscow perceives the
Western infiltration in the region as an attack on a traditional domain of authority and the “Russian idea” of a cohesive Eurasia that instigated it (Nation, 2015, p.3). George Niculescu sees it as the continuation of the Cold War with the Russian side now backing a combination of “state-based nationalism and autocratic traditionalism” to counter Western endorsement for democratic ideals and individual freedoms across the Eurasiatic region (Niculescu, 2015). This dispute has become a competition of conflicting value systems embodying varying models endorsed by Brussels and Moscow (Nuriyev, 2015). With sizeable sociopolitical, economic, and geostrategic considerations, including energy supply routes, trade and transit channels, both Russia and the EU have been pressing for greater authority in the region. Moscow has been steering a restorationist objective with the Russian-headed Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) intended to preempt integrationist attempts by Europe which, in turn, is pushing for its Association Agreements and free trade arrangements in South Caucasian countries (Besemeres, 2016). For Russia, the Caucasus has always been considered as a “zone of existential interests” of substantial importance to its national security (Nation, 2015, p.3). This is demonstrated through its incursion in Georgia in 2008, and in Ukraine in 2014, and its threats that attempts to interfere in its near abroad would be disastrous in all aspects.

The European Union and NATO, on the other hand, have been noticeably trying to incorporate former communist Eastern European countries into Atlantic and European structures. These incorporation strategies are intended to promote good governance, ensure energy security in addition to safeguard key European interests (Nuriyev, 2015), and bring Eastern Partnership member states politically and economically closer to the Union (Sarjveladze, 2017). Moscow recognized these strategies as programs for the EU’s
expansion in its strategic zone of influence (Egorova, Babin, 2015), generating tension with the Federation and within the states concerned, mainly Armenia and Georgia.

With Moscow setting clear red lines regarding Western expansion in the region, and the EEU incompatible with the European Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) (Niculescu, 2015), a winner-take-all attitude has placed massive weight on the two states which were put in a position to pick between the two poles. With realpolitik, rather than cooperative engagement, reigning in the South Caucasus, Armenia’s and Georgia’s predicaments are worth analyzing.

2.3 THE TENETS OF NEOREALISM & ALLIANCE THEORY

Neo- or structural realism bases itself on an assumed interplay of material powers in international relations, a notion which concentrates on the relative allocation of physical capabilities among independent states. Structural realism proposes that the global structure is comprised of sovereign political units which operate in the absence of a higher authority, thus rendering the structure anarchic (Sørensen, 2008, p.6). Nation-states strive for survival and to take measures to preserve their national interests. They operate in an environment of uncertainty regarding the intentions of other nation-states, “since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on” (Herz, 1950, p.157). The notion described here is known as the security dilemma: states confront it by instrumentalizing rational behavior. They use strategic reasoning to decide how to survive in the anarchic structure of international politics. John Mearsheimer explains the materialist lens of neorealism stating that: “Realists believe that state behavior is largely shaped by the
material structure of the international system. The distribution of material capabilities among states is the key factor for understanding world politics [...] the system forces states to behave according to the dictates of realism, or risk destruction” (Mearsheimer, 1995, p.91).

A good deal of the literature on security studies and foreign policy has been centered around the epistemology of an international system in which constrained, rational territorialized self-governing nation-states exist in an anarchic environment aiming to safeguard their security and ensure their survival. They present a single identity, that of self-regarding pursuers of security. For structural realists the anarchic nature of the system is the only setting in global politics, and states are trapped in a vacuum of insecurity – as they pursue arrangements to enhance their security, they become liable for decreasing that of others (Suny, 2000, p.142). To offset perceived threat from others, states form alliances with other actors in the international system.

The theoretical reflection of alliance behavior starts with George Liska. His examination of the causes of alliance formation in contemporary Europe was among the first to consider this topic. Grounding his analysis on balance of power theory, he posits that countries align with each other to reinforce and enhance the capabilities of the states that are members of the alliance. It is also “a means of reducing the impact of antagonistic power which threatens one’s independence” (Liska, 1962, as cited in Bose, 1963, p.91).

Kenneth Waltz, in *Theory of International Politics*, contributed two major advancements to the study of alliances. He first posited that great powers strive to balance against capabilities – amassed military and economic power– instead of against broad notions of power as frequently employed by balance of power theorists. Secondly, he
introduced the idea of bandwagoning, forging alliances with a great power, as opposed to balancing against it. Waltz’s pupil, Stephen Walt, refines this theory in two important ways. He proposes that “states balance against threat to the state rather than capabilities. Walt argues that four causes – aggregate power, geographic proximity, the offense-defense balance and aggressive intentions – produce variations in threat that in turn determine alliance patterns” (Bailes, Thayer, & Thorhallsson, 2016, p.11). Additionally, he expands Waltz’s idea of bandwagoning, stating that it can happen for offensive and defensive purposes. The purpose of the former is to reap the benefits of alignment. Conversely, the rationale behind bandwagoning defensively is to appease a great power and to cozy up with the powerful so as to prevent it from acting aggressively. Consequently, neorealism posits that the security environment in which states operate has a determining effect on their foreign policy choices. This is especially true for small states, and since Armenia and Georgia are classified as small states, it is important to analyze the systemic level of analysis and its application on small states.

2.4 STRUCTURAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS AND SMALL STATE FOREIGN POLICY

Because weak states are more concerned with survival than great powers, the structural level of analysis will be the most relevant in understanding small state foreign policy choices. Since they are normally confronted with outside threats to survival, external policies will display more attention to the constraints of their geopolitical setting and foreign strategy objectives will be less restrained by domestic political processes. Conversely, the latter will play a larger role in explaining great power foreign policies.
Normally, great powers face lower levels of environmental threat as compared to smaller states and therefore have more room to act. This increase in a state’s scope of action will likely make the formation of foreign strategies more receptive to domestic pressures. Accordingly, domestic developments cannot be overlooked in the explanation of great power foreign policies (Waltz, 1979, as cited in Elman, 1995, p.175).

Theories that assume the prominence of different levels of analysis in the scholarship of great as compared to weak state foreign policy have been studied extensively. For Arnold Wolfers, the analysis of domestic political processes is most important in the examination of great power politics, in which systemic constraining factors are less critical, therefore, divergences in behavioral patterns are less noticeable (Wolfers, 1962, as cited in Elman, 1995, p.176). Correspondingly, in evaluating the relative saliency of international and domestic pressures in the formulation of foreign strategies, James Rosenau proposes that the structural level will be the most relevant in analyzing small rather than great power external policies (Rosenau, 1966, as cited in Elman, 1995, p.176). More recently, this academic consensus has been strengthened. The general assumption is that given the different environmental settings in which weak and great powers engage in, their external strategies will manifest differing arrays of constraints.

Robert Jervis (1978) maintains that the security dilemma is especially critical for weak states that cannot bear to be deceived and are less probable to be cushioned from the penalties of policy errors. Contrary to powerful countries, weak states are deprived of margins of error in their response to environmental pressures. Because the price of being manipulated is much greater for a small state than it is for powerful ones, a small state will be more exposed to the anarchic nature of the system. Therefore, the political leadership in
smaller states must be more carefully adapted to environmental constraints than that of great powers (Jervis, 1978, p. 172). By contrast, Jack Snyder presumes that the analysis of small and great power behavioral patterns necessitates different analytical emphases.

In examining small state foreign policy, Snyder does not anticipate domestic level factors to be as significant. While “great powers adapt their foreign strategies to their domestic circumstances”, weak states are more “exposed to the vagaries of international security and economic competition” (Snyder, 1991, as cited in Elman, 1995, p.177). Since the foreign policies of small states will exhibit a responsiveness to external threats and constraints, structural levels of analysis should be sufficient. Randall Schweller also agrees that domestic politics would be less valuable when studying small state behavior. Instead of being prone to domestic constraints, he infers that “extreme systemic constraints can account for weak state foreign policy and military behavior” (Schweller, 1992, p.267). Finally, in their examination of post-cold war foreign policy behavior, James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul maintain that while the second level of analysis will continue to have an important impact on the study of great power politics, the foreign policies of weak states on the sidelines of the international structure will tend to display systemic constraints: “structural realism is inadequate to explain the behavior of states in the core but is relevant for understanding regional security systems in the periphery” (Goldgeier & McFaul, 1992, p.470).

Overall, then, the academic literature on small states focuses more on the systemic level of analysis. The literature analyzed, in varying degrees, assumes that structural constraints on small states are substantial, if not the most defining, condition that determines small state foreign policy. Scholars naturally presume that since small states
are not self-sufficient enough to protect themselves against more powerful states, they will be constantly engrossed in the quest to survive. Because weak states have more to lose, systemic constraints and opportunities will exert a commanding impact on foreign policy strategy formulation. But, how does the literature define a small state? And how well do Armenia and Georgia fit into this categorization?

In examining the alignment behavior of states, categorizations such as a small, middle or great power can have vast consequences in understanding the rationale by which it operates within the international system. Small state alliance behaviors vary greatly from great power alignment choices. Therefore, it would be useful to understand what constitutes a small state and whether Armenia and Georgia fit into this categorization.

The lion’s share of research conducted on small states devotes a lot of attention to the issue of definition. Efforts to define small states have incorporated geographic size, population count, as well as a state’s level of influence in global affairs. However, a small population or territory does not automatically correspond with an insignificant political model. Luxembourg, a small state by any classification, is a case in point. Correspondingly, smallness does not necessarily denote helplessness in the international system. Even though Israel is considered a small state with regards to its geographical size, it still is one of the most dynamic and aggressive states not just in the Middle East but also on the international level. How to fix a limit between small, middle and great powers, then? It appears as though focusing solely on a description that bands states by population, geographical size, or other quantifiable measures serves a limited purpose. Instead, this thesis adopts David Vital’s standpoint that a notion – a laxly defined idea of a small state
that avoids strict measurements - is more desirable than a definition when debating small states (Vital, 1971, as cited in Hey, 2003, p.3).

Alongside material considerations of the constituents of a small state, this thesis also takes into account the notion of perceptions. In other words, if the state perceives itself to be small, or if others consider that state as small, it shall be deemed as such. The approach used here is mirrored with the concepts formulated by Robert Keohane and Robert Rothstein, who have highlighted the importance of non-material dimensions in complementing objective measures in defining small states. Rothstein maintained that “a small power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of others” (Rothstein, 1968, as cited in Hey, 2003, p.3). Moreover, Keohane proposed a different formulation: “a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system” (Keohane, 1969, as cited in Hey, 2003, p.3). Consequently, the theoretical approach adopted in this thesis reflects the aforementioned concepts of the constituting elements of small states, thus, defining states as they define themselves and as others identify them. This epistemology makes this research equivalent to the system in which these units operate and interact with other actors.

The scholarly works analyzed contain no specific incontestable description of the constituents of a small state. The literature uses various factors or a mixture of factors in its definitions. However, some common elements can be identified. With a population of around 3 million and a geographic size of 30000 km², Armenia qualifies perfectly for the categorization of smallness. Georgia, with a population of roughly 3.5 million and a landmass of around 70000 km² is also a prime candidate. Moreover, Armenia’s and
Georgia’s constant pursuit to find a security guarantor in the volatile region proves Rothstein’s hypothesis. The South Caucasian states are also small compared with their most strategically important neighbors – Iran, Turkey, and Russia. Armenia’s political leadership and specifically the president’s perception of the country as a “small boat”, adds weight to this argument.

External security conditions, as well as economic dependence, elite ideas and domestic factors - in varying degrees in different contexts - all play a part in shaping the foreign policies of small states. The interplay of these different factors is analyzed in the cases of Armenia and Georgia.

2.5 ARMENIA BANDWAGONING WITH RUSSIA TO SAFEGUARD NATIONAL INTERESTS

The hypothesis that a small state is more prone to bandwagoning with an aggressive great power than balancing against it is prevalent. The argument made concerning balancing strategies, asserts Jack Levy, “refers to the great powers more than to other states. Great powers balance against potential hegemons, whereas weaker states in the proximity of stronger states do what is necessary to survive… bandwagoning with the strong instead of balancing against them” (Levy, 1989, as cited in Gvalia et al. 2013, p.2013). Walt adopts a similar position, claiming that a state’s weakness is correlated with its propensity to demonstrate bandwagoning behavior. He goes further arguing that balancing can be imprudent because a state’s alliance partners might not provide support rapidly enough. A weak state in close proximity to another one with sizeable military capabilities and is far from its alliance partners might be compelled to engage in bandwagoning strategies since
potential balancing allies are not available. Bandwagoning is more common when an aggressive great power is in proximity and possesses offensive military capacities (Walt, 1990, as cited in Gvalia et al. 2013, p.2013).

Similarly, Eric Labs (2008) claims that whether small states are more disposed to lead balancing or bandwagoning policies against threatening great powers is directly related to structural considerations, such as geographical contiguity and the existence of alliance partners. Labs deduces that structural realism is “powerful in predicting weak state behavior” (Labs, 2008, p.386). Gunasekara (2015), reviewing prevalent foreign policy alignments of weak states, asserts that a vital condition that compels a state’s decision to balance or bandwagon is grounded on the element of threat. A small state’s propensity to bandwagon is linked to that state’s recognition that it cannot influence its structural environment. Additionally, the availability of material assistance from a great power, specifically defensive and military capabilities, assures that the majority of weaker states will prefer to bandwagon with them. A crucial condition in influencing a small state’s choice to bandwagon, then, is the extent of a great power’s military and defensive capacities to ensure the protection of the small state. Alternatively, if a great power is able to muster resources in support of the small state, the latter, in that case, would gladly pursue courting policies with regards to the powerful state. A small state’s fear regarding its structural setting and the security concerns in it determine its choice to balance or bandwagon. Influential determining features are the scope of threat, the accessibility of alternative alliance options, and the security environment (Gunasekara, 2015, p.218).

Armenia became the first country of the EU Eastern Partnership members that was compelled to withdraw from European integration. It appears as though hard security
concerns continue to impel the landlocked republic to seek military cooperation with Russia (Shahinyan, 2019). Fenced by hostile states, with two of its borders closed on the account of the semi-frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan, Armenia is pushed to seek protection from its Russian neighbor. Military assistance is afforded by Moscow compliant with several bilateral and multilateral agreements including the Russian-Armenian treaty regarding the presence of a Russian military base in Gyumri as well as Armenia’s membership in the CSTO (Novikova, 2015). Other than security arrangements, Armenia’s economy is deeply reliant on Moscow, with remittances from Armenian workers in Russia accounting for a substantial percentage of the country’s GDP (Danielyan, 2018). Russian foreign investments also account for the majority of direct investments in the landlocked country (Gvelesiani, 2017). Russian state and non-state enterprises also own governing interests in substantial sectors of the national economy (railways, extractive industries, telecommunications and energy infrastructure) (Nation, 2015) making Yerevan militarily and economically reliant on Moscow, prolonging the latter’s leverage on Armenia’s internal and foreign policies, and permitting it to instrumentalize a carrots and sticks approach toward Armenia: Armenia receives special treatment regarding, for example gas prices in return for political allegiance and ratification of the Eurasian integration project (Novikova, 2015).

In essence, then, Russia has mainly been depicted as an invaluable security partner against Azerbaijani and Turkish antagonistic policies towards the Armenian Republic. There has been a fervent accentuation on the security repercussions of Armenia’s choice, along with the reluctance to “incite Russia’s ire” (Terzyan, 2017, p.200). This would have destructive consequences, for example, on increasing gas prices for Yerevan, providing
arms to Azerbaijan, maltreating Armenian diaspora members in the Federation or even enacting a Ukraine-style nightmarish scheme. It is for these purposes that the choice to join the EEU was broadly perceived as a logical one in Armenia’s political circles.

In general, Yerevan’s decision not to choose what intuitively seems like an identity-driven course toward the European Union has been largely validated with regard to Armenia’s economic and, especially, security demands. These demands led Armenia to consider Moscow a crucial partner. Furthermore, even though Yerevan has sometimes adopted a condemnatory position towards Russia, for instance in the case of the latter’s provision of military armaments to Armenia’s enemy, Azerbaijan, Yerevan would be weary of casting doubt on the countries’ security relationship.

Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann (2004), in keeping with Stephen Walt’s approach, contend that a small state will at times bandwagon with a great power, specifically if the latter can offer security guarantees and economic benefits. The rationale of bandwagoning asserts that states are not naturally prone to balance. In reality it is aligning with the strong that is the dominant model of small state behavior. Walt contends, however, that states can also balance potential hegemons in their regional environment because “an alignment that preserves most of a state’s freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination under a potential hegemon. Because intentions can change and perceptions are unreliable, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to hope that strong states will remain benevolent” (Walt, 1987, as cited in Paul et al. 2004, p.25). That being said, Georgia’s balancing behavior against Russia would make sense. However, as Walt continues to explain, the theory does not match reality, as we examine below.
2.6 THE LIMITS OF STRUCTURAL REALISM IN EXPLAINING GEORGIA’S BALANCING BEHAVIOR AGAINST RUSSIA

Proponents of balance of power theory acknowledge that small states regularly face difficulty in adequately responding to balancing constraints. The concept essentially proposes three provisional factors that influence the tendency of a state to balance in its regional environment in which the possibility of hegemony is relatively high.

First, the existence of alliance partners will influence a state’s foreign policy choices. On the account of geographical circumstances or possession of precious resources, some states are better disposed to acquire alliance partners than others. If great power alliances are obtainable, the theory anticipates states to make use of them. Second, the more significant a state’s relative strength - defined here as the capacity to balance against the potential hegemon - the more probable it is for that state to lead a balancing policy. Only the most helpless states, whose involvement in checking the regional great power is insignificant, should opt to bandwagon. Lastly, geographical settings influence the choices between balancing and passing the buck. Proximity leads to balancing behaviors since neighbors will be considered as the first victims of subjugation by imperial great powers. The theory falls short of predicting success or if balancing behavior in fact does take place; it only can forecast the intensity of different states’ tendency to lead balancing behaviors, however. Taking this unavoidable limitation into account, the theory predicts that the states most prone to balance are the most adept regional states that share borders with the likely hegemonic power and are fortunate enough to locate mighty great-power alliance partners.

States that present two of the aforementioned characteristics still may balance. Others that present one or none of these characteristics have no reasonable balancing
choices and must choose to pass the buck. Only the most defenseless states will choose to bandwagon (Paul et al. 2004, p.228).

Studying the effectiveness of balance of power theory in the Eurasian geopolitical setting, we find that many post-Soviet Eurasian states have actively tried to find alliance partners, yet only the small Baltic countries have been successful by becoming members of a significant coalition. Many attempted fervently to join alliances against the Russian threat but have not prevailed. The Georgian case stands out, however. The states that have preferred to bandwagon with the Russian Federation by joining Russian-led integration programs like CSTO are not too many. Most of them are quite vulnerable and do not have external alliance partners. The Armenian Republic is a good example that corresponds with the theory’s expectations.

Notwithstanding Georgia’s geographic proximity to Russia, its inability to find a great-power ally that is prepared to offer the country a security umbrella, and since it cannot stage a resistance alone, the theory would place Georgia in the bandwagoning category. Nevertheless, Georgia’s foreign policy since it regained its independence has become increasingly pro-western and distinctly anti-Russian.

As aforementioned in this chapter, neorealist balance of threat theory, mainly linked with Walt, appeared as a substitute to Waltz’s classical balance of power theories. Contrary to the latter, which contends that states balance against excessive consolidations of power in the global order, balance of threat claimed that usually states will balance against the most threatening states and not essentially the ones with the most material power. Moreover, the theory posits that shifts in a state’s foreign policies follow changes in the degree of outside threat. Therefore, if Georgia were to alter its foreign policy course, it
would be in response to increasing external threat. But when we look at the increasing pro-western orientation in Georgian foreign policy over successive governments, the theory cannot easily account for the difference in the responses of the successive administrations of Shevardnadze and Saakashvili to the threat posed by Russia. If we consider whether the acceleration of Tbilisi’s western orientation since the events of 2003 was a consequence of an intensification of the Russian threat, we observe the contrary: the rise in Georgia’s western aspirations resulted in the growth of the Russian threat. This is counterintuitive, however. The increased perception of threat was more of an outcome of Georgia’s policies towards the West than it was the cause of it (Gvalia, Lebanidze & Siroky, 2019, p.39).

With regard to the foreign policies of post-Soviet small states, neorealist theories struggle to explain some of the irregularities of alignment theory. Correspondingly, this line of thinking falls short of explaining why Tbilisi sustained its western orientation after the 2008 war with its northern neighbor when it became obvious that its western partners were not ready to militarily support Georgia. The rational structural realist reaction to these circumstances would have been to bandwagon with Moscow. However, this did not take place. Nor can the theory offer a convincing justification concerning the formation of aggressive intentions regarding another state (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p.172). Furthermore, in the face of overwhelming economic and military pressure placed on Georgia, particularly after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the ensuing positioning of Russian armed forces and heavy ordnance in striking distance of Tbilisi, Georgia’s strategy in reality became progressively, and some would say assertively, anti-Russian. The answer to this mystery cannot be explained by neorealist International Relations theory, since this predicts that that Georgia would lead a bandwagoning policy with Russia.
Economic dependence theories also fail to explain Georgia’s choices, as Tbilisi further dissociated itself from the Russian Federation after the enforcement of a trade embargo in 2006, in spite of its substantive dependence on Russian trade. Instead, the answer can only be found in the 2003 Georgian revolution, which steered Georgia’s foreign policy in a new direction. When Mikhail Saakashvili came to power, together with his post-revolution administration, he advanced a distinct western ideology, one that permeated both local reform programs as well as the state’s foreign agenda. This behavior is hard to comprehend through the filter of traditional realist standpoints, however. The structural pressures on Georgia should have pushed it to bandwagon with its northern neighbor, but the facts tell a different story (Gvalia et al. 2013, p.102).

### 2.7 THE CONSTRUCTIVIST TURN IN IR THEORY AND GEORGIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Since gaining independence from the USSR, European integration has increasingly emerged in Georgia’s foreign policy strategy as a “politically and psychologically motivated decision” (Huseynov, 2016). Primarily, it was founded on the self-identification of the Georgian people as Europeans and fitting into Western civilization. Moreover, the country’s elite identifies the historical timeframe of 1800-1991 as an occupation of Georgia by the Russian empire and later by the Soviet Union (Novikova, 2015). Furthermore, the Georgian public as a whole perceives Russia as an occupational power, in view of its part in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian secessionist struggles regarded as the most serious intrusion on Georgia’s national sovereignty (Nuriyev, 2015). All recent Georgian governments collectively gave strong preference to an EU integration course (Gurer, 2015).
Until now, it is the only state in the South Caucasus region that has ratified an Association Agreement with the EU with its DCFTA section.

In spite of shared attributes of size and vulnerability vis-a-vis great powers, small states do not necessarily follow homogenous foreign policy agendas. Substantial variations are observable in their interests and foreign policies. The majority of the literature is focused more on the variations in great power behavior and foreign policy, while the early research on small state behavior has maintained that they form a standardized group. This was a result of structural realist interpretations of weak state behaviors revolving around the observations that small states have insufficient material resources and are subordinate to the anarchic constitution of the international structure. These circumstances have generated the expectation that small states pursue the same models of behavior and implement similar external policies (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006, p.11).

The constructivist turn in the study of International Relations left an important mark on the understanding of small state behavior. It permitted the expansion of the description of small states by loosening the weight accorded to the material capabilities of the state, reflecting instead on the actors’ understanding of smallness, the obstacles and prospects that it engenders.

The case presented here proposes that small states develop numerous identities, ones that are also formed by the perceptions, anticipations and exigencies of others. A good deal of empirical research continues to demonstrate the exceedingly influential character of national identity in influencing small state behavior in the international environment. Unit level actors have a range of choices within the limits of material and normative systems (Gigleux, 2016, p.39).
While neorealism discards the prospect that a state’s interests could shift as a result of state or individual level factors, social constructivist thinkers, such as Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (2002), contend that the political setting in which actors/states operate is material as well as socially constructed and that this environment presents actors with a sense of what their interests are. Consequently, foreign policy choices are influenced not only by the geopolitical security setting and material conditions, but also by ideational factors such as the identities of the pertinent foreign policy makers who construe their security setting and their material circumstances (Telhami et al. 2002, as cited in Gvalia et al. 2011, p.30).

Giorgi Gvalia and Bidzina Lebanidze (2011) also maintain that ideas shape policies by means of two causal processes. First, ideas guide agents’ perceptions of the security environment, and therefore frame the situation through that filter, and the understanding of the results. Second, ideas act as blueprints for political actors that confine the scope of possible policy choices and ensure uniformity in policy-making regardless of shifts in material circumstances. Ideas, from this perspective, behave like checks in policy-making, as some of the strategy choices will be excluded because they undermine deeply entrenched beliefs (Gvalia et al. 2011, p.34). It is on those grounds, according to Goldstein and Keohane, that “culture promotes continuity in behavior… [because it] promises to be particularly useful for explaining cases of puzzling or unexpected constancy in foreign and security policy” (Goldstein et al. 1993, as cited in Gvalia et al. 2011, p.35). This is so, as Keohane and Goldstein argue, because some of the pragmatic irregularities in IR research and foreign strategy can be solved once elite ideas and identity are considered (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p.1). This thesis builds on that premise and attempts to provide an
empirical basis to prove that Georgia’s case is explainable when the function of ideas is accounted for. The research considers Keohane’s and Goldstein’s definition of ideas as “beliefs held by individuals that affect foreign policy outcomes” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p.1) and combines social constructivist frameworks that do not consider national interest as established by external circumstances. The post-revolution foreign policy makers in Georgia’s political elite advanced European belonging sentiments and the country’s civilizational ties with Euro/Atlantic systems to legitimize the European integration course.

The established consensus in International Relations is that small states pursue bandwagoning policies vis-a-vis aggressive great powers instead of balancing against them. Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze, And Iashvili (2013), analyzing the foreign policies of small states, indicate that this assessment on small states is unsatisfactory since it places excessive emphasis on external and material components without regard for elite ideas and national identity, which represent the lens through which external and material pressures and prospects are understood. They propose that while geographical circumstances, regional balance of power considerations, and economic factors are influential, for a more rounded understanding of Georgia’s foreign agenda, one needs to study the widespread and prominent elite ideas regarding the identity of the Georgian state.

For Andrew Moravcsik, it is the composition of state interests that is most relevant in international relations instead of the composition of material resources as argued by realist theories: “societal ideas, interests and institutions influence state behavior by shaping state preferences” (Moravcsik, 1997, p.513). John Owen confers a significant responsibility to ideologies in shaping the purpose of the state. Discarding theories that
simply focus on material elements, Owen maintains that state political leaderships endorse regimes constructed on particular ideological doctrines, hence associating regime endorsement to “ideological polarization” (Owen, 2011, as cited in Kakachia et al. 2015, p.172). This approach does not suggest that interpretations grounded on ideational and material factors cannot be reconciled, on the contrary, they are consistent in the way that “material interests matter but ideas determine how they matter” (Gvalia et al. 2013, p.109).

On this view, then, identity formation is regarded as being a top-down strategy, which is the circumstance in the lion’s share of cases where a state transitions towards a different alignment course. The major emphasis is placed on political leaderships and their identities and understandings of the purpose of the state.

Georgia’s foreign strategy agenda after the events of 2003 has been less a result of material changes in its regional security setting and more a consequence of a series of ideas about the state’s identity and objectives that are particularly post-revolution. When Tbilisi did not observe a shift in its regional security circumstances in 2003, it undertook an extensive policy alignment shift. And when it did encounter such a transformation – during the events of 2006 and 2008 – its foreign strategy was generally unaltered. “Where purely materialist theories predict change, we observe continuity; where they predicted continuity, we observed change” (Gvalia et al. 2013, p.123). As Georgian researcher Alexander Rondeli affirms “[Georgian] attempts to integrate their country into European structures is often seen as strategic idealism, which goes against all geopolitical arguments and even common sense” (Rondeli, 2001, as cited in Kakachia et al. 2015, p.175). In the same sense, Ghia Nodia maintains that Tbilisi could have simply opted for a different integration path,
consequently its western alignment choice is not “based on some material necessity or strict
logic” (Nodia, 1998, as cited in Kakachia et al. 2015, p.176).

   The foreign policies of small states are thus shaped by a variety of circumstances, some material, like geographical environment, and some ideational, like identity. Kornely Kakachia (2012) posits that although Georgia’s orientation is regarded as pro-western, it has not always been grounded on notions of pragmatism. Some have claimed that Tbilisi’s external policy is based on identity and in contrast to its neighbors not directed by material circumstances like national interests or practicality. To comprehend the logic behind Georgian foreign policy strategies towards its environment, it is essential to recognize the elements that define them, such as identity. The development of the country’s national interests and foreign strategies was an immediate consequence of the embodiment of identity inclinations that were molded by cultural configurations of societal life (Kakachia, 2012, p.5).

2.8 CONCLUSION

   The literature analyzed throughout the chapter posits that the foreign policy choices of small states are usually dictated by the security environment in which they operate. In this case, neorealism assumes that weak states will bandwagon with threatening powers in their environment so as to ensure their survival. Whereas Armenia’s bandwagoning policy toward Russia fits into this approach, Georgia’s case does not, as the theory expects Tbilisi to also bandwagon with Russia. The introduction of elite ideas and state identity in the study of Georgia’s foreign policy formulation offers a more reasonable understanding as to why Georgia’s political leadership chose to balance the threat to the north. The next
chapter delves deeper into Armenia’s choice to integration with the Russian sphere of influence as security and economic factors are taken into consideration.
CHAPTER THREE

ARMENIA’S EXTERNAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT PUSHING IT TO BANDWAGON WITH RUSSIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Even before regaining its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia was engaged in a conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karabakh region. Over the years, the Karabakh issue pushed Armenia to seek closer relations with Russia. This relationship gradually developed into a strategic partnership offering Armenia security guarantees that would protect it from Azerbaijan and its strategic partner Turkey. Along with growing military cooperation, Armenia and Russia have an extensive economic relationship, which over the years, has made Armenia economically dependent on Moscow. Together with significant remittances being transferred from Russia as well as a substantial Armenian diaspora residing in the Russian Federation, Armenia has become reliant on Russia both militarily and economically. This is not to say that Armenia has not made efforts to diversify its foreign policy agenda. In fact, European integration was pursued throughout Armenia’s post-independence period. This is evidenced in its dealings with the European Union, from which it received the opportunity to ratify an Association Agreement, as well as with northern Atlantic cooperation efforts. However, considering its
harsh security environment, its military ties and economic dependence on Moscow, the choices for Armenia has been rather slim.

This chapter examines the major conditions and factors that have pushed Armenia to align with the Russian Federation. It includes an analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, its ensuing security climate, and Turkish-Azerbaijani relations threatening Armenia. The chapter also examines Armenia’s economic dependence on Russia and its extensive military partnership with Moscow. It then turns to analyze in depth the event that settled Armenia’s path towards Russia’s orbit – the U-turn from the European Association Agreement in favor of integration into the Russia-led Customs Union. The West’s limited engagement with Armenia, as well as the substantial Armenian diaspora in Russia are also examined as contributing factors leading to Armenia’s integration into the Russia-led path.

3.2 THE IMPACT OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT ON ARMENIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

Nagorno-Karabakh can be accurately recognized as Armenia’s Achilles heel, the most important subject on its external and security agenda. In effect, Yerevan’s endeavor to safeguard its national interests against its threatening enemy – oil rich Azerbaijan, in addition to Baku’s strategic alliance partner Turkey, are considered as the justification behind Armenia’s and Russia’s gradually deepening military and political relationship. The resulting security environment from the conflict has shaped Armenia’s foreign policy throughout its post-independence period and has played a major role in consolidating Russia’s grip on Armenia.
The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s signified the expiration of the “Soviet identity” that had been “instrumental in attenuating and mitigating conflicts between the people of the Soviet Union” (Cornell, 2001, as cited in Sigurðsson & Bailes, 2015, p.2). Prior to the collapse of the Union, political circles in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, had demanded in 1988 that the territory be reassigned from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Aside from fast-tracking the collapse the Soviet Union, this marginal incident resulted in a regional conflict. Gorbachev’s reform programs facilitated the (re)appearance of ethnicity-based rivalry between the Armenian and Azerbaijani people, and self-determination for Karabakh appeared as the central component of a dynamic Armenian nationalism (Giragosian, 2006, as cited in Sigurðsson & Bailes, 2015, p.2). With the Soviet Union’s containment structure disappearing, heavy fighting ensued in the early 1990s and resulted in the victory of the Armenian side.

The Soviet administration had attempted to reconcile the opposing parties in the late 1980s and Russia originally pursued the same approach, however, the regional hegemon was unable to resolve the dispute. Cooperating with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia advocated instead reaching a ceasefire that was agreed upon in 1994. In spite of the sustained, and still continuing, engagement of the OSCE Minsk group, a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has not been reached and the conflict is considered as semi-frozen. It has been branded as the most precarious situation in the Caucasus area, and the main contributing aspect of the region’s unstable security climate (Boonstra & Melvin, 2011, p.2).

Armenia’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, regarded the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute as self-defeating, warning that the conflict would drive the country into Russia’s
arms. In his earlier years, Ter-Petrosyan had adopted an unfavorable stance towards Russia’s presence in Armenia. He considered the dependence on Moscow as delusive and dangerous; at the same time Russia’s expansionist policies were perceived as the most serious obstacle to Armenia’s national development (Ter-Petrosyan, 2006, as cited in Terzyan, 2018, p.239). Whereas his critical discourse towards Russia gradually receded as a result of the intensification of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia’s first president was not inclined to consider Russia as its crucial security partner. Ter-Petrosyan’s determination to reformulate the perceptions of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Armenian society failed to resonate with the country’s political leadership and post-war society. His insistence on the unavoidability of concessions in the Karabakh issue angered a good portion of Armenian society. The leaderships of Karabakh and the Armenian military, along with the diaspora, media and opposition groups heavily criticized his policies on the basis of his favorable views regarding Turkey and Azerbaijan (BBC News, 1998). Ter-Petrosyan was ultimately compelled to step down in the late 1990s and was replaced by Robert Kocharyan, a renowned leader of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its first president, which showcased Ter-Petrosyan’s shaky influence and the defeat of his foreign policy aspirations (Aberg and Terzyan, 2018, p. 157).

In the early stages of his presidency, Kocharyan espoused a pro-European agenda, strongly emphasizing Armenia’s incorporation into European structures. Furthermore, Kocharyan preferred a wider ranging external agenda that incorporated political as well as military convergence with western powers. In mid-1999, he attended NATO’s 50th anniversary in the US. Moreover, Kocharyan acknowledged the European course as his country’s “civilizational choice” (Kocharyan, 2006, as cited in Terzyan, 2018, p.240)
which would present the best prospect for Armenia’s development, and applauded the country’s membership in the Council of Europe. In fact, during the initial years of his presidential term, Robert Kocharyan was generally recognized as a pro-western official who embarked on a European course to build up its maneuverability regarding Russia. This was apparent in the concept of complementarity in his foreign agenda (Terzyan, 2016, p. 149). In essence, this policy referred to the preference to reach a breakthrough on the course to western integration, without forgetting the established relationship with the Russian Federation. However, after some time and mainly as a result of Putin’s new engagement efforts with its neighborhood, Yerevan slipped into the trajectory of Russian influence. That being said, to what extent did the Karabakh issue influence the Kocharyan administration’s choice to join Russian integration?

From the start of his term, however, Kocharyan securitized the Karabakh issue and distinctly dissociated himself from Ter-Petrosyan on this subject. Contrary to the latter who was consistently underscoring the need for rapid conflict resolution, Kocharyan assumed a much tougher stance. He blamed his predecessor for impermissible compromises that would be disastrous for Karabakh’s safety (Astourian, 2000 p. 32). Having played a substantial role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Kocharyan was attentive to not take steps that could damage his reputation as a prominent figure of the war effort. Moreover, as a candidate who expanded his public support as a result of his rejection of Ter-Petrosyan’s rhetoric on compromise, Kocharyan was confronted with path dependence (Terzyan, 2018, p.240). Basically, his influential supporters – the Armenian armed forces, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, in addition to the voters who were especially sympathetic to the Karabakh issue, prevented him from repeating his predecessor’s
mistakes. Kocharyan’s discourse places the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its ensuing security climate at the top of Armenia’s foreign policy agenda, at the same time limiting the possibility for compromise with Azerbaijan, thus ruling out the prospect of any concession concerning the de-facto independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The securitization of the Karabakh issue can justify Kocharyan’s shift from a pro-European agenda to Armenia’s integration into Russia’s orbit. The latter’s penetration into Armenia’s economy is correlated with the gradual intensification and expansion of Russia’s political and military relationship with Azerbaijan. Therefore, the significance ascribed to Armenia’s cooperation with the EU in the president’s discourse, would be overshadowed by the increasing importance on Armenia’s strategic partnership and military relations with Russia, which became exceedingly recognized as the country’s essential security provider (Terzyan, 2018, p.241).

Perhaps by forming a strategic alliance with the Russian Federation, Kocharyan trusted that it would push Russia to embrace a more accommodating attitude toward Armenia with regards to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Russia’s foreign strategy rhetoric during this time suggested its determination to significantly amplify its partnership with Baku (Mirzoyan, 2010, as cited in Terzyan, 2018, p.241). Moscow’s expansion of its military and political relationship with Armenia’s foe provoked fear within Armenia’s political leadership because the dreadful scenario of a Russian-Azerbaijani security partnership would run counter to the Armenian position on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In fact, Kocharyan was compelled to make decisions in a setting of absolute systemic and strategic ambiguity, because of scarce information regarding Moscow’s potential policy choices and their consequences for Armenia’s security. The concerns triggered by
Moscow’s potential decision to choose Baku as its strategic ally in the region could have prompted Kocharyan to persuade the Russian side to choose Armenia. This would explain why he abandoned the European integration agenda and forged a closer relationship with its Russian neighbor. Serzh Sargsyan followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, recognizing Russia as Armenia’s security guarantor. However, he also emphasized the European integration agenda, framing the European Union as the country’s civilizational preference (Sargsyan, 2011, para.4). Nonetheless, in 2013, Yerevan backed away from the Association Agreement with Brussels in favor of joining the Moscow-led EEU.

There is an inclination in the current literature which regards Armenia’s backtrack from the EU as a no choice option in view of Yerevan’s considerable reliance on Moscow, which gained importance as Russia became increasingly assertive with regards to the EU and its Eastern Partnership Program (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015, p.504). However, this begs the question regarding the significance of the Karabakh issue in determining Armenia’s integration into the Russian-led Customs Union.

Sargsyan, together with several senior officials, has rationalized the country’s accession to the Economic Union primarily with reference to its security environment and distinct emphasis on the Karabakh issue. The choice was made against the background of growing Russian-Azerbaijani relations that could have tilted the dispute in Azerbaijan’s favor. Statements made by Armenian officials create the assumption that the country had no choice in preventing the U-turn. They stressed that since Armenia’s security is of upmost importance, the government couldn't have downplayed the significance of its security alliance with Moscow given that Armenia was facing increasingly aggressive rhetoric coming from its neighbors (Margaryan, 2015, as cited in Terzyan, 2018, p.242).
Furthermore, just before Armenia turned away from signing the EU’s Association Agreement, Moscow intensified its military partnership with Baku by providing Russian weapons systems valued at $4 billion (Kucera, 2013, para.5). Consequently, Armenia’s fears of a Russian-Azerbaijani security partnership considerably influenced its decision to join the EEU.

There is wide consensus among Armenia’s political circles that increased threat levels caused by Baku and Ankara have made the country dependent on Moscow. Therefore, in spite of some bitterness that Russia’s Azerbaijan policy might cause, Yerevan cannot anger Moscow. Otherwise, the latter can retaliate closer to home. (A1plus), particularly by selling arms to Baku. Therefore, Armenia has no options except to accept the rules established by Russia.

In fact, with the renewal of heavy fighting between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in 2016, Sargsyan conveyed his discontent towards Russia on the account of the weapons sales to its enemy and indirectly cast doubt on the dependability of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership. Sargsyan even stated that: “Russia never played for Armenia the role that Turkey plays for Azerbaijan” (Sargsyan, 2016a, para.1). Moreover, in a press conference with German chancellor Angela Merkel a few days after the cessation of fighting, Armenia’s president spoke about the pain Russia had caused, as well as the country’s exposure to Russia’s coercive tactics: “Russia is our strategic partner indeed and we are in the same security structure – CSTO, and it is naturally painful for us when Russia sells arms to Azerbaijan. But as you understand, our abilities to influence the process are limited” (Sargsyan, 2016b). Yet, Sargsyan’s stance on Russia’s duplicity
proved temporary as he later voiced his support for even the most debatable Russian engagements, from its incursion into Ukraine to its involvement in Syria.

In general, then, the semi-frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, together with the subsequent hostility with Baku and Ankara, have had considerable effects in making of the Russian Federation as an indispensable alliance partner.

3.3 THE TURKISH-AZERBAIJANI STRATEGIC ALLIANCE: A MAJOR THREAT TO ARMENIA

In an effort to balance against the Russian-Armenian military partnership, Azerbaijan has closely aligned itself with Turkey. Baku’s hydrocarbon capital which helps it finance its massive military buildup, recurring aggressive discourse, and routine ceasefire violations resulting in casualties and the abduction of servicemen and civilians, Yerevan’s priorities have centered around the conservation of Nagorno-Karabakh. This has driven Yerevan directly toward the Russian sphere of influence as a weak state enjoying the protection afforded by a powerful actor active in Transcaucasian affairs. Whereas Baku’s economic self-reliance allowed it to engage in a balanced external strategy, Yerevan’s strategy of complimentary external policy was fated to turn into one of “supplementarity” (Vasilyan, 2012, p.34). While Yerevan has been leading a bandwagoning approach vis-à-vis the Russian Federation, Baku has closely aligned itself with NATO member Turkey. This has resulted in the formation of a self-protective alignment with Russia to counter the antagonistic Turkish-Azerbaijani security partnership, which could alter the regional power balance. Consequently, a classic security dilemma portrayed in terms of military buildup between the two sides has transpired. Armenia and Azerbaijan have invested enormously
in building up their militaries: during 2016, Armenia allocated $430 million for defense and security, which accounts for 4% of its GDP, whereas Azerbaijan spent four times more than its counterpart - $1.767 billion accounting for 5.6% of its GDP (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.344). Baku’s defense budget exceeded Armenia’s spending by more than seven times (Vasiliyan, 2012, p.34). Armenia’s external security environment has become very volatile with the intensification of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, with Ankara backing Baku in all issues related to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia has become surrounded with antagonistic powers, pushing it into Russia’s orbit.

Azerbaijan occupies a significant position in Turkish external policy, not just in the Caucasus but also in the wider Turkish speaking region. This intimacy is owed to common cultural and linguistic kinships as well as the robust political and geostrategic relations that the two states hold. This relationship is often described as “two states, one nation” (Balci, 2014, p.46). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey pursued the creation of a solidarity founded on ‘Turkishness’, uniting all Turkic-speaking peoples. Baku was eager to accept this invitation. Strong bilateral relations are not restricted to high-level interactions, as the two peoples are quite intimate and culturally interconnected. With regards to economic ties, Turkey and Azerbaijan are associated through multiple bilateral agreements, which allows for interactions in all areas, however, the energy sector is without doubt the most vigorous (Balci, 2014, p.46).

Turkey regularly provided military support to Baku during the 1990s. Turkish experts trained Azerbaijani armed forces both in Baku and Turkey. Besides military support, the Turkish side also supported Azerbaijan politically. The short-lived skirmish between Baku and Tehran sheds light on Turkey’s political backing for Azerbaijan. In
2001, an altercation involving Iranian gunships and Azerbaijani exploration boats in the South of the Caspian, led to an escalation where Iranian jets violated Azerbaijan’s airspace several times. At this time, Turkey dispatched several jet fighters to Azerbaijan, which partook in a symbolic parade in Baku, leading to the de-escalation of the situation (Ismailzade, 2006, p.6). The treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support, endorsed by the Azerbaijani parliament in 2010, guarantees that the two states will assist each other “using all possibilities” in the circumstance of a military attack against one of them (Abbasov, 2011).

The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline placed the two states’ partnership on a new level. President Aliyev recognized that Azerbaijan needed a major transit channel for the transport of Caspian hydrocarbons to the European continent. The Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline that fed into the Russian port on the Black Sea was “neither politically trustworthy nor economically efficient” (Ismailzade, 2006, p.5).

Responding to the eruption of armed conflict between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, Turkey’s political leadership publicly declared its staunch support for Baku’s cause. Turkey’s PM at the time Ahmet Davutoglu asserted that “Turkey will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Azerbaijan against Armenian aggression and occupation until the end of time”. Correspondingly, president Erdogan stated that “Karabakh will surely be returned to its rightful owner, Azerbaijan, one day” (Hedenskog & Korkmaz, 2016, p2). Ankara also stepped up its support for the Nakhchivan autonomous region, an Azerbaijani exclave crammed between Armenia and Iran. In an agreement between the Turkey and the Azerbaijan’s state oil company - SOCAR, Turkey agreed to transfer “500 million cubic meters of Azerbaijani natural gas to Nakhchivan each year transit free” (Abbasov, 2010).
A few days after Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan halted the reconciliation efforts with Turkey in 2010, Turkey’s foreign minister at the time, Davutoglu underscored the exclave’s security as “one of Turkey’s foreign policy priorities” (Abbasov, 2010). Prime minister Erdogan also made a statement, remarking that “Nakhchivan is exposed to various threats from the Armenian state. Therefore, military cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan and the NAR [Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic] is one of the major components of our relations” (Abbasov, 2010).

Azerbaijan is undertaking a massive buildup in the Nakhchivan region, as the exclave’s strategic importance grows for both Baku and Yerevan. The territory is detached from the rest of Azerbaijan and does not share a border with Nagorno-Karabakh. However, it is the nearest section of Azerbaijani territory to the Armenian capital as well as other potential strategic targets. Therefore, with the probability of renewed conflict increasing, Nakhchivan could develop into a zone of potential violence.

Currently, Baku keeps around 20000 soldiers in the region (out of a projected 67000 active duty soldiers), and about 400 armored vehicles, aircraft, air-defense mechanisms, and heavy armaments (Shiriyev, 2017). Support from Ankara has played a significant part in the military buildup. Turkey’s actions can be linked to its security agreement regarding the Nakhchivan region that it upholds in accordance with the 1921 Kars treaty between Ankara and the USSR (Shiriyev, 2017).

Armenia’s efforts to resolve disputes with its neighbor to the west without preconditions have proved ineffective, mostly on the account of Ankara’s refusal to accommodate Armenia unless the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is resolved in Azerbaijan’s favor. In the early years of independence, a particular line of thought appeared which
believed that Yerevan should normalize diplomatic relations with Ankara without accounting for past issues. However, the intensifying conflict in Nagorno Karabakh as well as regional geostrategic alliances resulting from it had other plans. Yerevan’s effort to normalize relations with Ankara without any preconditions were not reciprocated. In 1992, the latter amassed forces near Armenia’s border and temporarily considered an offensive on the country in retaliation to the advance of Armenian forces in the disputed territory. This plan was impeded by political pressure from Moscow and Washington (Goldberg, 1992). In 1993, Turkey shut down its borders in solidarity with Baku. This was followed by an economic embargo geared towards compelling Yerevan into making compromises in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. All Armenian governments, including the Pashinyan administration, have held the notion of normalization of relations with Turkey without prior conditions. Armenia has not made recognition of the Armenian genocide, which Turkish administrations refuse to recognize, a precondition for the normalization of diplomatic ties. Concurrently, it has anticipated that Turkey not associate the reopening of its borders to the Karabakh issue. However, Ankara did not reciprocate, largely owing to its strategic alliance with Baku.

Security circumstances have largely shaped Armenia’s external policy during the course of its post-independence period. The border closing in 1993 and Turkey’s alliance with Armenia’s foe made Armenia’s structural environment very challenging. This was vital in prompting Yerevan to pursue a security partnership with Moscow. The main reasoning was that, while Armenia could protect itself from Azerbaijan, it required a security umbrella against a more powerful state like Turkey, in the event of a potential incursion into Armenian territory. Against this backdrop, Yerevan’s orientation towards
Russia is recognized as an attempt to hold back Turkish expansion in the South Caucasus. In addition to external security considerations, economic dependence is also regarded as a major factor pushing Armenia into Russian arms, from which it has yet to escape.

3.4 ARMENIA’S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA

A dependence on trade ties with Russia, Russian foreign direct investment, as well as assets-for-debt deals have made Armenia’s economy and energy sector completely reliant on Moscow. In 2002, Armenia’s and Russia’s presidents signed a ‘mutually advantageous’ equity-for-debt swap that would progressively increase Russia’s authority in Armenia’s economy. The formula is straightforward: In return for a write-off of Armenia’s approximately $100 million debt accumulated since it re-gained its independence, Yerevan consented to handover key state-owned assets to Moscow, which included six hydro-electric powerplants (Danielyan, 2003a, para.5). In 2002, the Hrazdan thermo-electric plant, the Mars electronics corporation and three research establishments were transferred to Moscow. Furthermore, in 2003, Yerevan authorized a contract that permitted Russia’s RAO Unified Energy Systems to administer the financial management of the Metzamor nuclear powerplant, which accounts for almost 40% of Armenia’s electricity generating capacity (Danielyan, 2003b, para.4). Then in 2004, the Russian Volgaburmash company took over Nairit, Armenia’s biggest chemical plant, and the Russian state-owned Vneshtorgbank acquired a controlling share of the Armenian Savings Bank. Later, in 2006, the Armenian government consented to hand over 90% of Armenian telecommunications company ArmenTel to the Russian VimpelCom (Vasilyan, 2017, p.36). AtomRedMetZoloto, a uranium mining corporation associated with Russia’s state
atomic agency Rosatom, was accorded uranium developing rights in Armenia. A year later, MTS, a Russian telecommunications enterprise acquired VivaCell, Armenia’s leading mobile phone company. Shortly after, Russia was granted the management rights of Armenian’s railway network for a thirty-year timeframe (Vasilyan & Petrossian, 2012, p.46).

The aforementioned transactions provided Russia with further political leverage over its main alliance partner in Transcaucasia. All in all, Moscow acquired roughly 90% of Armenian electricity producing capacity. In addition, in the context of the equity-for-debt deal, Robert Kocharyan’s administration transferred the country’s biggest cement plant to Russia’s state-owned ITERA gas exporting company in compensation for its $10 million debt for gas provisions. (Danielyan, 2003a, para.7). It is worth mentioning that both Tbilisi and Kyiv had also incurred extensive debt to Moscow, yet Yerevan was the only one to make sizeable transfers as payment.

Over the years, Moscow has considerably tightened its economic grasp on Armenia. As a separate state, the Russian Federation is Armenia’s principal trade partner. Accounting for 20% of Armenia’s exports and 70% of remittances (World Bank, 2015, para.9). In 2013 remittances from Armenian workers in Russia reached $1.4 billion, in comparison to $302 million originating from the US and $226 million from EU member states. A year later, the respective numbers were $1.38 billion from Russia, $297 million from the US and $221 million from the European Union (Vasilyan, 2017, p.39). While Armenia’s national budget for 2013 was set at $2.8 billion on expenditure and $2.7 billion on revenue, it is clear that Armenia’s economy has become gradually reliant on remittances originating largely from the Russian Federation (Terzyan, 2018, p.254). The Armenian
Central Bank (CBA) placed the total sum of incoming personal transfers in 2017 at $1.5 billion, which constituted the equivalent of around 15% of Armenia’s Gross Domestic Product (Danielyan, 2018, para. 2). Russian investments also account for the largest share of FDI in Armenia, reaching $4.5 billion in 2017 (Sargsyan, 2017, para.5). During a statement made in Russia, president Sargsyan declared that there are more than 1300 enterprises operating in Armenia that depend on Russian capital (Sargsyan, 2017, para.5), accounting for a fourth of all economic entities involved in foreign investments.

As a means to counter hypothetical opposition to its substantially increasing authority in Armenia and specifically in the energy domain, Moscow set out to impede any alternative choices for Armenia. This mainly pertains to the Iranian-Armenian pipeline intended to deliver natural gas from Iran to its Armenian neighbor in return for electricity from Armenia. Recognizing this plan as damaging to its interests, Russia openly blackmailed Yerevan by threatening to revise gas rates. To circumvent this profoundly undesirable situation Armenia surrendered to Moscow’s objectives and agreed to transfer the last chunk of the Hrazdan powerplant to Russia’s state-controlled corporation Gazprom. Furthermore, Russia’s relentless pressure forced Armenia to hand over the first portion of the Iranian-Armenian pipeline, allowing Russia to control Yerevan’s access to Iran’s natural gas (Danielyan, 2006). It should also be noted that before Armenia’s integration into the Customs Union, Moscow increased gas rates for Yerevan underscoring the economic implications of an undesirable policy choice. Moreover, to deflect Yerevan from diversifying its energy providers, Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom, in 2014, bought Armenia’s entire gas sector and, in return for reduced gas prices, Armenia consented not to acquire gas from another supplier until 2043 (Delcour, 2014, p.9).
In addition to extensive economic ties, Armenia has wide-ranging military agreements with Moscow that provide the country with the security guarantees it needs to stave off the Turkish-Azerbajiani threat.

### 3.5 ARMENIA’S MILITARY TIES WITH RUSSIA

In 1997, Yerevan and Moscow ratified a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security with “substantial military cooperative contents” (Nygren, 2007, p.114). In 2000, Yerevan agreed to let Russian armed forces stay in the country until 2025. The Russian Federation offers Armenia military and technical assistance in compliance with a number of bilateral agreements, comprising the treaty on the Russian military base in Armenia’s second largest city, Gyumri. Russia’s 102nd military base with its air force section, the 3624th airbase in Erebuni airfield, which operates under Russia’s Southern Military District alongside the border force of the Russian FSS, represent fundamental components of Armenia’s defense system. Consistent with the 2010 “Protocol on the introduction of amendments to the Treaty on the Russian Military Base in Armenia” (Novikova, 2015, p. 47), Yerevan agreed to extend the timeframe of Russia’s military presence until 2044, as well as expand the scope of its geographic responsibilities. Specifically, the amended version of the protocol’s third article asserts that, along with the task to defend Russia’s interests, the Russian military forces stationed in Armenia will ensure the security of the Republic within the entirety of its internationally recognized borders (RFE/RL, 2010). Four units of Russia’s Federal Security Service border forces are stationed in Armavir, Gyumri, Artashat and Meghri regions, and another group of FSS forces operates in Yerevan’s
Zvartnots airport. The Russian base houses around 5000 troops, 80 tanks, and over 100 artillery units (Terzyan, 2018, p.250).

In 2003, Russia and Armenia signed an agreement expanding their military collaboration permitting Moscow to train and develop Armenia’s armed forces. In 2004, Moscow presented Armenia – the sole member of the CSTO in the Southern Caucasus – arms at reduced rates. Russia furthermore relocated armaments and weapons systems from its closed military stations in Georgia’s Batumi and Akhalkalaki regions to Gyumri. After the closing of its bases in Georgia, along with the termination of the lease of the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan, Armenia remained the only foothold for the Russian Federation in the region (Nichol, 2014, p.11).

Nagorno-Karabakh’s tank battalion comprising 100 tanks was given heavy artillery systems in 2012 along with 33 additional tanks in 2013. Moreover, “110 armored vehicles and 50 rocket systems were dispatched for the Armenian military in the same period” (Vasilyan, 2017, p.34). More sophisticated weapons systems at discounted rates were made available to the Armenian military to be procured with a $200 million Russian loan proposed in 2015 in addition to the provision of advanced Iskander-M ballistic missile systems (Vasilyan, 2017, p.34). Russia and Armenia also formed a joint air-defense system in 2015 and a joint military force in 2016. Russia’s military shipments to Armenia include “high-precision short-range ballistic missile systems; multiple-launch rocket and air defense (S-300) systems; ballistic, anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles; electronic warfare vehicles; armored personnel carriers; and tank upgrades” (Sanamyan, 2016, as cited in Ter-Matevosyan et al. p. 346). Finally, multilateral treaties were signed to safeguard Armenia’s security. Armenia became an original signatory and active member in the Russian-led
CSTO together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in 1994. The treaty stipulates that any act of aggression on a member country would prompt other member states to support that country through any means, including military intervention.

3.6 ARMENIA’S U-TURN FROM THE EU INTO RUSSIA’S ARMS

In 2009, the European Union and Armenia, together with other post-Soviet states including Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Belarus, inaugurated the Eastern Partnership Program (EaP) with the principal objective of establishing “the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries” (Council of European Union, 2009, p.6). Over the next few years, in compliance with the goals of the EaP agreement, Yerevan implemented several political, legal and economic reform agendas intended to expedite its integration into the European structure. During the entire course, Armenian officials underscored Europe’s civilizational significance to the country. For example, during a 2011 speech at the Council of Europe, President Sargsyan asserted: “the people of Armenia have made their historic and irreversible choice… for us, it is a homecoming to the European civilization and cultural realm, to which we belong, and where we have been ever-present” (Sargsyan, 2011, as cited in Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.341). In 2013, and after Armenia completed wide-ranging reforms, European representatives revealed that since talks with Yerevan were carried out effectively, the country was now prepared (together with Tbilisi and Chisinau) to sign the Association Agreement during the EaP Vilnius summit at the end of 2013. Repeated guarantees by Armenian and EU officials on Yerevan’s integration into the European program asserted that the signature of the agreement with its DCFTA
(component at the Vilnius summit was certain. Yet, a few years before the signing was to take place, some political analysts in Armenia as well as in Russia raised potential hindrances and responses from Moscow. Before that, the Russian administration had not revealed any noticeable signs of irritation regarding the European integration program. However, from mid-2012 onwards, Moscow, set out to raise the price of integration with the European Union by presenting a range of (dis)incentives to the Eastern Partnership states (Ademmer et al. 2016, p.12). To offset coercion from Moscow, the Armenian government regularly stressed its readiness to cooperate with both the Russian Federation and the European Union. The Armenian administration was cautious not to incite unfavorable reactions and was eager to carry on with the European agenda.

In view of this, Tigran Sargsyan, Armenia’s prime minister at the time, stated that Moscow was notified regarding Yerevan’s integration agenda, and had not shown any discontent. In the same interview, Sargsyan notoriously declared that the Armenian Republic was not considering joining the Russian-led Customs Union (Kommersant, 2012). The prevailing justification regarding the Customs Union, repeatedly asserted by Armenia’s political leadership, was that Armenia did not share a border with any member of the Customs Union. Senior Armenian representatives, including the president and prime minister, stated, on numerous occasions, that since Armenia did not have common borders with the member states, its accession into the Customs Union would be pointless. A few days prior to the September 3 announcement, Armenia’s deputy foreign minister once more stated: “there is no precedent of a country becoming a member of a customs union without having common borders with other member states” (Kocharyan, 2013, as cited in Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.342). Kocharyan also announced that enlisting in the customs bloc
would signify the demise of Armenia’s sovereignty. Furthermore, the president’s scheduled meeting with Putin on September 3rd was interpreted as a routine visit like several others that had occurred before. After a closed meeting with president Putin, the latter shared the news regarding Armenia’s accession into the Customs Union; Putin also promised to continue supporting Armenia in all domains. After Putin’s statement, Sargsyan came on stage and confirmed the decision (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.344).

Throughout the negotiation period with the European Union, Armenia’s administration was so resolute in its effort to fulfill the conditions of the agreement that it failed to predict possible complications. However, in retrospect, there were a number of fundamental and secondary causes that prompted the Sargsyan administration’s choice to opt for the Russian-led path. While representatives of the ruling party came out in support of Sargsyan’s decision emphasizing the fragility of the country’s economy and security conditions, ‘security’ grew into an umbrella term to cover a number of local and geopolitical difficulties that the country was confronting.

Armenia’s foreign policy priorities revolve around the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The hopes of achieving a long-term resolution to the most brutal conflict in the post-Soviet area are ambiguous. Armenia’s political leadership, which emerged during the fighting in the disputed region, rationalized much of its external policy choices through the filter of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Deputy-speaker of the Armenian parliament, Eduard Sharmazanov, underlined that the country’s accession to the trade union derived from core national interests, mainly security considerations and the Karabakh issue: “the security issue of Armenia can be considered resolved after the decision was made to join the Customs Union” (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.345). Artak Davtyan, a parliamentary standing
committee member, specified that Armenia’s integration into the Eurasian Union was the most favorable choice. He continued that the agreement with the European Union was very ambiguous and hypothetical, and considering the volatility of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia was better off relying on Moscow to guarantee its security.

Some political analysts also highlighted the security considerations behind Yerevan’s alignment choice. The director of the Caucasus Institute, Alexander Iskandaryan, asserted that “whenever Armenia has to choose between security and anything else, it has to choose security” (Iskandaryan, 2013, p.4). Sergey Markedonov, a political expert on Caucasus studies, emphasized that Yerevan should not to be deluded by the EU’s visually attractive model and appreciate Russia’s importance in safeguarding the security of Armenia and prolonging the favorable conditions in the Karabakh region. He underscored the European Union’s lack of enforcement capabilities, its energy partnership with Baku, and the potential of Turkish hostile behavior against Armenia (Markedonov, 2013, p.35).

However, along with security considerations, a set of conditions regarding Armenia’s economy and energy security also qualify as significant motives for Armenia’s foreign policy decision. Dependence on Russia for economic survival and energy supply spillover into Armenia’s foreign policy. Several Russian corporations are 100% shareholders of Armenian CJSCs. Russian businesses are present in major sectors of the economy of Armenia, including power distribution, transportation, communications, finance, insurance, and extractive industries. As stated by the former minister of energy infrastructure, Armen Movsisyan, Yerevan joined the Eurasian integration program and
traded the last of ArmRusGazArd shares to Moscow so that the latter would waive the $300 million state debt (ArmeniaNow, 2013, para.5).

Another dimension to Armenia’s alignment choice involves just how much the Armenian and Russian economies are interconnected. Armenian business circles aired support for the Eurasian integration choice, largely on the account of elevated standard levels and challenging competition in the Eurozone that Armenian exports, despite moderate tariffs, would face. By contrast, the Eurasian market is considered as less advanced and more appealing to Armenian industrialists and labor migrants on account of cultural bonds, common historical memory, and the absence of language barriers which generate better chances for the demand of Armenian exports. Correspondingly, recent surveys suggest that the greater part of the Armenian community prefers the Eurasian integration option to the European one (Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2016). Yet Armenia’s membership in the Customs Union coincided with a stagnating Russian economy, the enforcement of western sanctions and devaluation of the Russian ruble. Being crippling dependent on Russia’s economic circumstances, Armenia did not enjoy the benefits of acceding to the Eurasian market system. Moreover, Russia’s economic recession persisted, affecting Armenian markets. Consequently, Armenia’s modest growth rate slowed to 0.5% in 2016 (World Bank, 2016).

Yerevan’s membership in the customs market was also motivated by another mutually dependent element that is often unexplored – the significance of the Armenian diaspora and migrant workers in Russia. As influential components, diasporas have a substantial impact on the conduct of states in the global system. Armenians residing in the Russian Federation are economically relatively successful. Projected at around 1.2 million
as per official statistics (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.353), the Armenian diaspora in the Russian Federation has become a bargaining chip in extending Russian leverage on Armenia. According to official statistical data, between 2008 and 2011, 85% of labor migration from Armenia was to the Russian Federation (Armstat, 2012, p.20). Accession to the Customs Union intended to generate free movement of products and labor, regarded as vital advantages. Consistent with that rationale, the admission of Armenian migrant workers to Russia’s labor market would allow them superior status after the scheduled induction of a fresh visa management system for CIS countries. Thus, the Armenian administration was not in a position to overlook the economic orientation of the Armenian population toward Russia. Moreover, the leading amount of investments from the diaspora originates from Armenians in Russia (29% of all investments) (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.353). They hold important commercial and political ties with both Russian and Armenian administrations. “The largest Armenian community resides in Russia…[therefore] we have never made a step aimed against Russia and have no intention which would compel us to make such a step”, said Sargsyan (2013). Finally, the projected yearly growth in remittances reliant upon Yerevan’s accession into the Russian-led Customs Union’s common labor and trade market is considered to be one of the principal advantages of Armenia’s integration into the CU.

Considering that Yerevan’s accession into the EEU removes visa requirements thus facilitating the movement of Armenian migrants, huge migration patterns from Armenia to Russia are expected to persist (Terzyan, 2019, para.2). Curiously, Moscow has not been inclined to obstruct the inflow of Armenian migrants. Rather, it has adeptly utilized the huge Armenian diaspora to expand its economic and political influence on Yerevan.
Contrasted with the early 1990s migration waves to the Russian Federation, which were a result of harsh socioeconomic circumstances following the breakdown of the USSR and the concurrent Karabakh conflict, migration from Armenia to the Russian Federation since the start of the millennium has been taken over by migrant workers. The labor force encompassed 94% of all emigrants, with this movement impacting the remittances transferred back home (Vasilyan & Petrossian, 2012, p.50).

Another important factor influencing Yerevan’s integration into the Russian-led Economic Union is the economic well-being of the sizeable Armenian diaspora in the Russian Federation. There were genuine concerns that the Armenian community would be subjected to severe maltreatment in the event Yerevan strays from the pro-Russian course (Terzyan, 2019, para.6). This hypothesis is premised on Russia’s vast clampdown on the Georgian community residing on Russian territories after Tbilisi’s rapprochement with the EU and NATO. In 2006, under the guise of the “fight against irregular migration and organized crime”, Russian police arrested thousands of ethnic Georgians and expelled around 2300 of them, including many legal residents (Terzyan, 2019, para.7). Authorities made recurring public declarations framing Georgian residents as illegal settlers, convicts and demanding strict measures against them. Russian TV stations, the most significant of which are owned or regulated by friends of the Kremlin, vigorously backed and defended prejudice against the Georgian community. Simultaneously, Moscow’s police force started to conduct extensive ID checks of the ethnic Georgian population. The crackdown extended to other regions of the Russian Federation as well and led to arrest of thousands of Georgian residents (Terzyan, 2019, para.8).
The introduction of the Russian Compatriots Program in 2006 which provided support by covering travel expenses, housing costs, employment assignment, and the opportunity to acquire a Russian passport has resulted in an upsurge in the total number of labor immigrants. Yet, with immigration turning into a delicate and politicized subject in Armenia, since 2012 the Armenian administration has filed objections against the program (Vasilyan, 2017, p.39). This has not led to a decrease in the number of migrants to the Russian Federation, in view of the opportunity to benefit from dual nationality laws, geographic contiguity, and the comparative affordability of traveling to Russia.

In general, then, and together with other considerations, the abuse of the ethnic Georgians in Russia sent waves of anxiety across Armenian circles and drew attention to the consequences of irritating Russia. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Armenian administration framed its accession into the EEU as unavoidable, continually mentioning its positive repercussions for the Armenian diaspora residing in Moscow. When Sargsyan finally declared Armenia’s choice to enlist in the Moscow-led Eurasian integration program and similarly promote the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, he irrevocably established Russia’s constraining influence on the country’s foreign affairs. Sargsyan consistently underscored the rationality behind the decision highlighting its security circumstances in addition to its economic advantages for Armenia.

Essentially, the accession into the Eurasian model is directly related to the renewed wave of Russian-European rivalry and Moscow’s aspiration to further hinder the EU’s expansion in its traditional domain of influence. Russia’s repeated demands to Europe to steer clear from Moscow’s zone of influence were supported by aggressive counter-integration schemes following the notable campaign of European Association Agreements.
Yerevan’s sudden U-turn from the European Union and its integration into the Eurasian market program was associated with further intensification of Russian-European aggressive rhetoric. Considering Armenia’s harsh security setting, the Russian Federation is unambiguously recognized as an essential alliance partner and security patron by Armenian policy-makers but the wider public. Consequently, there was little disagreement regarding the country’s accession into the Eurasian trade union from the Armenian public and most opposition groups.

The EU, with its soft power politics, is not recognized as a potential security sponsor in Yerevan’s political circles. Essentially, the Southern Caucasus region is characterized by its security climate and the ensuing dominance of hard power politics. Yerevan’s European alignment objective “plays out insofar as it is not perceived as detrimental to Russia’s strategic interests” (Terzyan, 2018, p.252), highlighting the very real material constraints of Armenia’s Russia-first policy. This was emphasized by President Sargsyan’s clarifications regarding the country’s accession into the CU, underscoring the security-related considerations of the decision. Thus, civilizational or cultural considerations are overshadowed by security concerns, exposing the limitations of identity-centered policy formulation on Armenia’s alignment choices.

This is especially evident in how Sargsyan detailed the reasons behind the September 3 decision, mentioning fears concerning the application of a Ukraine-type scenario in the Republic of Armenia. He suggested that “the Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated that lack of understanding of the root causes of the current situation can call further proceeding of the Eastern Partnership into question. Armenia joined the Eastern Partnership with a deep conviction that it is not directed against any third country… it is
necessary to find solutions by means of a dialogue that take into account the interests of all regional beneficiaries” (Armenpress, 2014, para.11).

Witnessing the politicized use of Russia’s energy provisions in Ukraine and Moldova, the Armenian administration made every possible effort to circumvent similar adversities resulting from power cuts. In this respect Sargsyan specifically noted: “our choice is not civilizational. It corresponds to the economic interests of our nation. We cannot sign the [European] Free Trade Agreement and increase the gas price and the electricity price three-fold” (Sargsyan, 2014, as cited in Terzyan, 2018, p.254). The rationality of the choice is also evident in the perceptions of the two poles.

The perceptions of the Russian Federation’s and European Union’s identities have undergone substantial ebbs and flows in Armenia’s foreign policy rhetoric. Throughout Serzh Sargsyan’s presidency, Russia was primarily considered a strategic ally and a security patron, whose engagement in the South Caucasus promotes Armenian interests. In contrast, before and specially after Armenia’s shift away from the EU’s Association Agreement, perceptions regarding the EU changed from very being optimistic to more critical frames – referring mainly to its unbalanced, and anti-Russian strategy. However, in the formal rhetoric, Armenia has been consistently considered as an inseparable part of Europe, with the Union considered as Armenia’s civilizational preference. Given that no ideational preference was mentioned regarding Russia, Yerevan’s integration in the Russian-led EEU was acknowledged as a ‘rational’ instead of an ideational choice (Terzyan, 2017, p.200). Armenia’s wide-ranging ties with Russia have pushed it to backtrack from a deal with the EU. However, a closer look at the West’s engagement in the post-Soviet sphere, shows that it cannot offer a compelling alternative for Armenia.
3.7 LIMITED WESTERN ENGAGEMENT

Another issue contributing to Armenia’s Russian integration is the West’s narrow and diminishing commitment to the landlocked state. The latter’s relationship with western powers is a dichotomous one. Though it deems itself an intrinsic member of European society, geostrategic alignments with the western hemisphere has not been easily attainable. Yerevan’s disappointment with the West resonates in a number of factors.

Basically, it derives from to the bitterness of Armenia’s relative insignificance for western powers in light of wider-ranging geostrategic considerations. Simply put, Armenia is not valuable enough in terms of Europe’s efforts in diversifying its energy sources; therefore, the typical objectivity towards Yerevan and Baku regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue could lean towards energy-rich Azerbaijan’s favor counter to Armenian interests – or so is the concern in Armenia. And, as the latter is not considered as significant as Tbilisi and Kyiv, its exposure to Russian coercion is not recognized as much.

Baku’s ‘contract of the century’ pertaining to the expansion of its energy assets gave it a considerable advantage over Yerevan regarding partnerships with western powers. Running west across Georgian and Turkish territory, its energy transit routes circumvented not only Russian and Iranian territories but also Armenia, leaving out the latter from most regional transit projects backed by the West.

Within the framework of Yerevan’s intensifying relations with Moscow, and the expanding divide between the western powers and Russia, another element became apparent. The appearance of pro-western leaderships in Georgia and Ukraine, demarcated dividing lines between supporters of the West and others in the Eastern European region.

“Against this background of a pro-western aspiring Georgia and an energy rich Azerbaijan,
as well as growing Russian-Armenian ties in parallel to growing Russian-western antagonism, Armenia’s standing was diminished” (Shirinyan, 2019, p.14).

The European response to Armenia’s back-tracking from the EU’s Association Agreement highlighted how the South Caucasian state is often perceived as unimportant. Representatives proposed that its Russian choice settled Yerevan’s integral pro-Russia attitude and the European Union should move along. In an effort to mitigate the damage, Yerevan proposed its readiness to ratify the political section of the agreement. The EU declined because this would generate an undesirable precedent for Kyiv. A short time later, however, against the background of the Ukrainian disaster, Kyiv was extended the offer to ratify the political section of its Association Agreement with the European Union while deferring the ratification of the associated DCFTA (Shirinyan, 2019, p.15). The European Union’s Association Agreements ended up extending support only in four soft security spheres. Even though the agreements mentioned “security policy” in the initial part of its cooperation close, this did not denote assistance in the security domain: The EU did not provide a security umbrella to the EaP states. However, security was and still is a core issue for all states involved. Having omitted direly needed security assurances from its integration platform, the EU lost some of its appeal.

The extent of apprehension of Yerevan’s security circumstances in western circles has been difficult to measure, however. Most states have found it problematic to consider Turkey, a NATO member state, a source of insecurity for Yerevan. At the outset of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington considered Turkey as extending the West’s influence in its regional environment and as an archetype of development. While Baku and Tbilisi perceived Turkey as a path towards increased engagement with the western
hemisphere, this was proven not to be the circumstance for Yerevan. Nor is Western incapacity in offering security umbrellas is limited only to the Armenian case, as the examples of Tbilisi and Kyiv suggest. While Brussels and Washington have embraced and encouraged the two states’ western alignment, they have been incapable or reluctant to offer them a security umbrella to refrain from provoking Moscow’s ire. Western powers undoubtedly miscalculated how Moscow would respond to Georgia’s and Ukraine’s western orientation but avoiding a confrontation with Moscow rendered them hesitant to offer Georgia and Ukraine security guarantees.

It is also important to underscore that much like its incapacity in the security domain, the EU also cannot compete against Russia in the economic sphere: Its economic support to Armenia cannot match Russian investments in major areas of Armenia’s economy. Moreover, if the Association Agreement with the European Union, with its DCFTA section, was signed, “the Armenian economy would hardly survive” (Novikova, 2015, p.48). Moreover, while the Armenian government carried on with the implementation of reforms in accordance with EU standards throughout 2012 and 2013, it became progressively disillusioned by the EU. The Safarov extradition instance highlights Armenia’s disillusionment.

Ramil Safarov, an Azerbaijani officer, who executed an Armenian soldier with a hatchet in Hungary in 2004 was incarcerated there until 2012, when Hungary extradited him to Azerbaijan. Safarov received a pardon from president Aliyev, in spite of contrary pledges made to Hungarian officials. This had a negative effect on Armenia’s opinion regarding the European Union as well as NATO. Yerevan then understood that the choices of some EU members might – albeit inadvertently – generate further insecurity without
prompting condemnations by the coalition. This resulted in a drop in positive perceptions towards the European Union, as demonstrated by the rise in distrust regarding the EU from 17% to 28% between 2011 and 2013.

Karen Bekaryan, a senior political analyst in the Sargsyan administration, referred to a number of assurances made by the European Union well ahead of Armenia’s U-turn that were never carried out, triggering suspicion within the Armenian administration. For example, Bekaryan mentions the EU’s intention to arrange a donor convention for the Armenian Republic but never fulfilled its promise; furthermore, he states that the EU representatives had pledged to pressure Turkey to reopen the border with Armenia, however, they remain shut (Bekaryan, 2014, as cited in Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.346). Moreover, the landlocked Armenian state has been omitted from regional hydrocarbon transport developments extending from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to European markets – the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Erzurum, and TAP/TANAP pipelines (Vasilyan, 2017, p.36-37). European member states constitute the lion’s share of stakeholders, and the first two developments stemming from Azerbaijan were backed by the US in the 1990s as an alternative to Russian and Iranian sources. With Baku refusing cooperation with Yerevan in the context of regional projects lest the Karabakh issue is settled to its benefit, the European Union has abstained from insisting Armenia’s participation. Consequently, Yerevan has been left reliant on Russian and Iranian energy imports.
3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined Armenia’s economic and military relations with the Russian Federation. This relationship has intensified during the years and has become a strategic partnership that offers Armenia security guarantees against Turkish-Azerbaijani belligerence regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and provides Russia with a foothold in the South Caucasus.

Turkey has refused the establishment of diplomatic ties with its neighbor to the east and to end its 28 years blockade over what is known as the only remaining sealed border in the European region. Successive Turkish and Azerbaijani administrations have been successful in marginalizing Armenia from regional energy projects. On the account of the closed borders, the landlocked country is one of the rare examples in the international system that has 80% of its borders shut. Its Georgian and Iranian borders remain the only ones accessible, which makes the Armenian state excessively reliant on them, but especially on the Georgian border, as 70% of Armenia’s external trade passes through it (Ter-Matevosyan et al. p.344). Besides these circumstances, Ankara and Baku have stepped up their political and economic presence in the Georgian Republic, which Armenian political circles identify as a rising challenge to the region’s security climate.

Moscow considers the Karabakh issue as strong leverage to tighten its control over Armenia. The recipe is simple: Moscow helps the Armenian Republic develop its military and security capacities in return for its allegiance and compliance with the Russian trajectory. While the Russian Federation is an important arms provider to Baku, even though several bilateral Russian-Armenian treaties serve as requisite platforms for security assurances, any policy by Yerevan that is considered unwelcome by Moscow may result
in Russia’s nonalignment over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue if not a complete policy reversal. Armenian administrations may be forced to abide by a setting drafted by the Kremlin. From condemnation of the pro-independence efforts of Kosovo and Chechnya to recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, Moscow’s position concerning the standards of self-determination is likely to be directed by geopolitical interests. In this situation Karabakh has become a veritable pawn (Vasilyan, 2017, p.42).

As exemplified by its position on the Crimean issue, Armenian foreign policy is best understood when observed through the lens of the Karabakh issue. While some subtle distinctions may exist within the republic regarding opinions on Russian involvement in Armenia, the primacy placed on Nagorno-Karabakh engenders little dispute. In effect, it is the Karabakh issue that makes the Armenian state pursue tighter relations with Moscow. Yerevan’s attempts at diversifying its foreign relations - on the one hand satisfying Russian whims in exchange for security guarantees, and on the other trying to get closer to the EU – have largely failed on the account of its external strategic priorities.

Indeed, Armenia’s desire to diversify its foreign policy appears to be out of reach. Armenia’s pursuit of security has made it increasingly reliant on Moscow – one from which, it cannot break out. Taking Russia’s side regarding Crimea will result in Armenia’s regional isolation as well as increase Russian leverage in the country. As highlighted by a statement made by its ambassador in Armenia, Moscow utilizes Yerevan’s foreign agenda to expand its authority in the republic (ArmeniaNow, 1999). Armenia is therefore trapped by its security environment with its sovereignty dwindling. Its fate critically depends on
Russian-led integration programs as well as on the regional geopolitical balance between Russia and the West.

With regards to Armenia’s U-turn from signing the EU’s Association Agreement, and its subsequent accession to the Russian-led EEU, it appears as though an intricate series of primary and secondary factors come into play. The Russian-Armenian partnership of convenience, geopolitical circumstances, antagonistic ties with Turkey, as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh issue have all played a role in the formulation of Armenia’s foreign policy. Furthermore, the polarization of the EU’s and Russia’s integration programs was not as evident at the outset. When Vladimir Putin returned for his second term in 2012, Moscow took tenacious steps in accelerating the development of its own integration programs. Moscow’s determination coincided with Europe’s engagement in the region pushing for the expansion of its relationship with Eastern Partnership states as well as with the financial crisis in Armenia that has limited the administration’s short-term room for choice (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017, p.355). The reality that Yerevan effectively achieved wide-ranging institutional reforms and then backpedaled, comes to demonstrate Armenia’s inability to overcome its geopolitical circumstances and its security climate. The next chapter examines Georgia’s balancing strategies against Moscow and its rapprochement with Western powers and analyzes how they stem from ideational considerations more than material circumstances.
CHAPTER FOUR

IDEOATIONAL FACTORS EXPLAINING

GEORGIA’S BALANCING ACT AGAINST RUSSIA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since regaining its independence in the early 1990s, Georgia has been engaging in a Western integration process, regardless of the successive administrations and domestic and environmental conditions. Tbilisi’s pro-Western alignment has been naturally anti-Russian and has been constructed in resistance to Russian threats – Georgian society considers the Russian Federation as Europe’s direct opposite, in spite of common cultural and religious characteristics with the northern neighbor. The prevailing Georgian social order views Russian imperialist tendencies as a major barrier to the country’s path towards European integration, a danger to its sovereign existence as well as its territorial integrity. A fundamental shift of perception regarding the Russian way appeared with regional developments: Gorbachev’s reform program, the appearance of Georgian nationalism, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the surfacing of the Western integration option, as well as the de-facto secession of the two territories (which Russia vigorously backed by assisting the secessionists). The intensification of anti-Russian attitudes was exacerbated by an incident when the Soviet army brutally crushed a pro-independence protest in the capital
of Georgia in April 1989, during which around 20 protesters were killed (Falkowski, 2016, p.6).

Against overwhelming threat emanating from the Russian Federation, structural realist theory would predict that Georgia assume bandwagoning policies vis-à-vis Moscow. However, we observe successive Georgian administrations ardently leading a balancing policy towards Moscow. Georgia’s quest to find alternative alliance partners explains its efforts at Western integration, the country enjoys extensive relations with the European Union as well as NATO. Nevertheless, Western powers are not yet willing to offer Georgia a collective security umbrella that would act as a balance against Russia. Therefore, having removed security guarantees from the equation, it would be interesting to understand the justification of Georgia’s distancing from Russia and its fervent rapprochement with the West. This is done through a constructivist theoretical framework that incorporates elements of elite ideas, identity as well perceptions of the purpose of the state.

The chapter explains firstly Georgia’s distancing from Russia throughout its post-independence period before presenting Tbilisi’s shift towards the West and highlights the former’s economic and military relationship with Western powers. The chapter also highlights the role of elite ideas and perceptions of the purpose of the state in explaining Georgia’s rapprochement with the West, as well as the “othering” of Russia.

### 4.2 DETERIORATING RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN TIES

Moscow has several interests in the South Caucasus, from socioeconomic to geopolitical and security-related. A major consideration for Russia is connected to security. This is because of the intrinsic unity of the entire Caucasus area, in which Transcaucasia
is included. The Northern Caucasus, which constitutes several autonomous non-Russian nations inside the federation, shares cultural and ethnic linkages with their brethren to the South. This indicates that ethnic conflict in the South Caucasus can extend to or incite opposition in parts of the Northern Caucasus and consequently threaten Russia. For instance, the secessionist struggle in South Ossetia had wide ranging effects in the North Ossetian autonomous region, inside the Russian Federation. Conflict in Abkhazia led to hostilities in the ethnically associated Adygea region as well (Kocaman, 2007, p.1).

Concerning the Southern Caucasus, Moscow had other geostrategic concerns as well. One essential priority was the deterrence of infiltration by external actors in the region. Furthermore, in an effort to thwart the materialization of a security vacuum in Transcaucasia, Moscow attempted to integrate the states in the region into its orbit during the 1990s – which explains why it did not withdraw its forces from the Southern Caucasus in that period. Another aspect of Moscow’s geostrategic interests in the region were, and continue to be, economic and energy considerations, which were associated with energy supplies. The development of Caspian hydrocarbons exports caused substantial harm to Russia’s economic interests.

After declaring its independence from the USSR in the early 1990s, Georgia adopted western democratic principles. However, inheriting a political environment that lacked robust democratic traditions, untested policy and decision makers, limited financial capabilities, and ill-defined opposing social powers, at the outset the country was not capable of developing a sustainable external agenda in relation to the western periphery. Georgia’s first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, had trouble developing significant political relations as central global powers were hesitant to recognize Georgia’s independence. The
president was largely unsuccessful in crafting a practical foreign agenda and carried out a somewhat idealistic pan-Caucasian program at the cost of the country’s suppressed European aspirations (Jones, 2003, p.87).

Foreign policy options were limited on the account of domestic conflict in the country. Gamsakhurdia’s successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, and despite initially rejecting the concept, was compelled to give in to Russian pressure and became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1993 (Rondeli, 2001, p.197). The second president’s decision was motivated by the need to consolidate his authority in the clash against warlords, in addition to continuing separationist skirmishes. However, when the domestic situation stabilized, Shevardnadze’s administration embarked on a western foreign agenda. In the late 1990s the objective of western alignment reappeared in Georgia’s foreign policy as an ideologically and politically motivated agenda.

While Georgia and Russia share cultural bonds and historical links, at the outset of the revolution of 2003, their relationship had reached its lowest point since the collapse of the USSR. Moscow repeatedly blamed Tbilisi of supporting Chechen secessionists in the Pankisi valley, and threatened the use of military force as a prospective option. The Georgian side was uneasy with Russia’s unwillingness to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory, in spite of a 1999 pact to do so. Moscow’s fast-tracked passport allocation to inhabitants of South Ossetia and Abkhazia damaged Tbilisi’s sovereign authority over the autonomous territories. Shevardnadze’s declared intent to integrate into NATO’s ranks (NYtimes, 2006), and the country’s participation in the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which was meant to circumvent Russian territories, aggravated Moscow.
In spite of some attempts at reconciliation after 2003, there were quite a few matters challenging Russian-Georgian relations. The whole time, the two states were in disagreement over the future of the Russian military bases in Georgia: the latter demanded their removal and pressed this position repeatedly, while Moscow, in evident procrastination, was providing inconsistent and significantly prolonged estimations for the time it would take to remove them. Tbilisi’s integration with the West persisted – as a matter of fact, Saakashvili’s participation in a summit in Moscow was followed by a visit to the United States during the same month, boasting Georgia’s unyielding path towards the West (Tsygankov, 2009, p.310). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan channel was progressing as scheduled. When Georgia decided to utilize military force in South Ossetia in 2004, Moscow decided to fight back. In the same year, the Kremlin suspended dialogue between the two states and discontinued issuing passes to Georgian citizens, a policy that has proved persistent throughout their recent relationship. The contenders of Abkhazia’s contested election convened in Moscow with the Russian Federation acting as arbitrator, underscoring Moscow’s supremacy in a region supposedly under Georgian authority.

In 2005, Moscow repeated that it was entitled to engage in preemptive incursions into Georgia against possible terror groups – a somber reversion to Russian discourse during Shevardnadze’s term (Sputnik, 2005). Moscow had also declared its intent to increase gas rates, just before the winter season. Tbilisi, in the meantime, started to take note of Russia’s involvement in regional developments. The Georgian side quickly pointed out the duplicity in Moscow’s conduct: crushing separatist movements at home but openly backing separatists on Georgian territory (RFE/RL, 2004). When a pipeline mysteriously exploded in 2006, cutting off gas supplies to the Georgian Republic, accompanied by
interruptions to its restoration, Tbilisi was predisposed to doubt Russian sabotage, which it voiced stridently (Giragosian, 2006). Moscow was accused of breaching Georgia’s airspace on several occasions, Russian representatives were suspected of collusion in a series of explosions, and its peacekeeping force in the autonomous territories were described as a threat. Georgia engaged in various actions to pressure Russia, including a legislative decree in 2006, which stated that the Russian peacekeeping force was henceforth not welcome in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Kommersant, 2006).

Soon after the legislative motion, Moscow once again suspended issuing visas. Georgian wine, the vast majority of which was exported to the Russian Federation, was barred, allegedly for health purposes, together with Georgian mineral water. Moscow begun to impose commercial constraints on Georgia’s agricultural exports at the end of 2005. By mid-2006, it had enforced a total blockade on all agricultural crops under the pretext of phyto-sanitary standards. By then Moscow had clearly imposed a political blockade on all Georgian goods, which endured over six years (Cenusa et al. 2014, p.7). Russia’s imports blockade was the first response in a sequence of responses to Tbilisi’s openly stated goal of integrating into the European Union’s political and economic spheres as well as its aspired membership into Atlantic structures. Paradoxically, Russia’s imposed embargo promoted Georgia’s economic expansion. During the period of the blockade Georgian agrarian trade figures increased by 90%, while prior to the blockade Georgia was exporting its wine to 36 states, by 2011 it had reached 15 more markets, comprising Germany, Singapore, China and Poland (Cenusa et al. 2014, p.7). The country’s farming sector also attracted foreign investments in spite of Russia’s blockade.
A few months later, without prior notice Russia provisionally shut its only inland crossing with the Georgian Republic for “construction” purposes, interrupting Georgia’s trade flows amidst calls of hostility and aggravation (Tsygankov, 2009, p.311). When Tbilisi placed Russian intelligence officers under arrest and arranged to prosecute them for espionage in the summer of 2006, a climax was clearly attained. Even though the international community was able to persuade Tbilisi to transfer the detainees to the OSCE just after a short while in custody, Moscow did not mitigate its reaction. The closing of Russia’s military bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi was provisionally postponed, all transportation and postal links between the two states were cut off, Georgian-owned industries in the Russian Federation were searched and bullied. Russian state-owned gas supplier, Gazprom, considered doubling gas rates, and threatened to cut off provisions if it does not receive payments. Tbilisi fired back with allegations of Russian extortion and accused Moscow of xenophobic behavior (RFE/RL, 2006). Tbilisi consequently sued Moscow at the European court of Human Rights in 2007 for the expulsion of its citizens. Saakashvili played off the confrontation as a chance to detach the country from its reliance on Russia and expand commercial and energy partnerships with other states. Henceforth, the Atlantic integration process carried on at a fast pace. In the last months of 2007, Tbilisi announced its intent to officially terminate Moscow’s peacekeeping mandate in Abkhazia following the beating of Georgian officers in the province. Tbilisi also carried on with its accusations regarding Russian violations of Georgian air space. This highlights the deteriorating relationship between the two countries and the simultaneous intensification of ties with the West.
After the 2008 presidential elections, Saakashvili, whose standing was considerably weakened, highlighted the need to improve ties with Moscow, stating that the countries should start fresh. Moscow, on the other hand, was the prominent voice in distrusting the validity of his victory. Vyacheslav Kovalenko, the Russian ambassador to Georgia, reiterating Vladimir Putin’s discourse in the wake of the 2003 revolution, expressed a longing to improve ties, but distinctly indicated that it was Tbilisi’s obligation to engage in them: “Russia wants friendship [but] it expects from Georgia specific steps and actions that could be viewed as aiming at improving our relationship” (Tsygankov, 2009, p.312).

However, attempts to renew relations was interrupted by the independence of Kosovo in early 2008, and Moscow’s revoking of sanctions on the Abkhazian territory a few days after the declaration. This further eclipsed prospects for appeasement. From this moment forward Moscow went further than attempting to contain Tbilisi, revealing that it was no longer convinced of the usefulness of trying to check Georgia’s integration ambitions, and was preparing for a likely military incursion.

In April 2008, Moscow strengthened its peacekeeping force in Georgia with 1,500 new soldiers without prior notice to Tbilisi. Meanwhile, the South Ossetian administration consented to have ethnic Russians take up the highest-ranking positions in government. The two breakaway regions sustained their opposition of Tbilisi’s integration into western structures and pressed for their own incorporation into the Russian Federation. Moscow was not yet ready to officially recognize the independence of the autonomous regions, but president Putin published a document in April that established direct links between the Kremlin and the two breakaway territories. A few months later, the Russian side also refurbished the Abkhazian railway terminating Tbilisi’s embargo on the region and
arranging for the transfer of more Russian troops into Sokhumi (Tsygankov, 2009, p.312). All these actions occurred against the background of increasing violations and military aggressions between Tbilisi and the autonomous regions including kidnappings of civilians, raids against the territories’ representatives, intelligence gathering and cross-border shootings.

Hostilities intensified in June and July with a sharp rise in ceasefire breaches and reciprocal allegations of war preparations. In July Georgian armed forces struck suburban residences in Tskhinvali and its neighboring provinces with battery fire (Kavkaz-uzel, 2008). Maintaining that South Ossetia had struck the first blow, Georgia carried on with its assault and did not stop until the South Ossetian side declared a mobilization of its troops and pleaded with Moscow for protection. The Russian foreign affairs minister slammed Georgia’s incursion into the South Ossetian territory calling it an “open act of aggression” (Tsygankov, 2009, p.313), and demanded that both parties sign an accord prohibiting the use of military force. Moscow went further to present a draft resolution on the settlement of the conflicts in the breakaway territories to the UNSC. The Georgian side reacted by accusing Moscow of annexing Georgia’s territories by opening direct links with the autonomous regions and breaching Georgian territory by flying military aircraft over South Ossetian skies. Tbilisi also rejected the signing of the nonviolence accord and insisted that Russian peacekeepers be removed from the territories. Western representatives released various statements articulating concern regarding the worsening situation in Transcaucasia, and Germany’s foreign secretary visited the region in an effort to mediate between the opposing sides. However, Tbilisi and the breakaway territories sustained their confrontational engagements. Accounts from the conflict zone exposed that the warring
sides were engaging in cross-border fire and that the Georgian side was concentrating heavy ordnances on its borders with South Ossetia. “By the morning of August 7 Georgia had amassed 12000 troops on its border to South Ossetia, and 75 tanks and armored personnel carriers were positioned near Gori” (Tsygankov, 2009, p.313).

Tbilisi invaded Tskhinvali on August 8, 2008, in an effort to reestablish its authority over the secessionist territory. Georgian armed forces killed ten Russian peacekeeping troops and, by bombarding the town with artillery fire, caused substantial civilian fatalities in the South Ossetian region (Tsygankov, 2009, p.313). Tbilisi led the assault in spite of a ceasefire accord it had consented to a day prior. Within a short period, Russian forces crossed Georgia’s borderline into the South Ossetian territory in an overwhelming show of force which comprised armored divisions, military jets and Russia’s naval infantry, overpowering and annihilating much of Georgia’s forces (Hahn, 2017). Moscow later recognized South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence and placed the regions’ security control under its forces. While Saakashvili tried to portray his incursion as a reaction to Russian hostilities and even though it appears likely and even probable that Moscow laid a trap for Georgia’s infamously impulsive president, various reports from intelligence groups, rights associations as well as the OSCE all established that the Georgian side initiated the attack (Tsygankov, 2009, p.313). The five-day war exhibited the collapse of Moscow’s efforts to contain Georgia as well as its readiness to utilize military means in the regions it views as its near abroad. Moscow learned that the previous approaches to preserve its influence in a zone of existential and security interests are not enough.

Whereas Moscow asserted at the outset that it was exercising its responsibilities as a peacekeeping force under the Sochi accord to intervene in the South Ossetian region, its
intervention deeper into Georgian territory reflected its apprehensions from Georgia’s determination to join NATO. In the meantime, Moscow carried on with its coercive policies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, constructing barriers alongside the administrative borders of Southern Ossetia and essentially enlarging the territory of the autonomous province and manipulating the choice of officials. For example, it overthrew the Abkhazian de facto leader Alexander Ankvab, who opposed Russia’s coercive tactics and espoused a more balanced approach towards ethnic Georgian inhabitants in the province (Gordzadze, 2014, p.59). Moscow’s proposed Alliance and Integration agreement with Abkhazia, envisioned joining military forces, police force co-management as well as and an alignment with the EEU.

In addition to military assistance, Moscow also enjoys deep commercial and governmental links with the breakaway regions. This undermines self-rule in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian influence in the autonomous regions is practiced through the assignment of pro-Russian factions as well as the mirroring of Russian laws and institutions (Gerrits & Bader, 2016, p.309). The intensifying linkages between Moscow and the territories after the hostilities of 2008 made the possibility to resolve the conflict improbable. To describe the breakaway regions as independent, would be misleading since South Ossetia and Abkhazia gained their independence from Georgia but remain reliant on Russia to a vast degree, something that is not commonly witnessed between states that have recognized each other as independent. The territories possess the characteristics of independent nations with bureaucratic structures, but independent self-rule is limited, whether openly because of Russian meddling, or subliminally as an outcome of the reliance on support from Russia. Furthermore, the defense of the territories’
boundaries is entrusted to Russian soldiers. Since the five-day war, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have become de-facto Russian provinces, and Moscow’s responsibility regarding the territories has been that of an influential patron. This is partially due to the August 2008 war. It is, simultaneously, also a consequence of the comparative absence of commitment of western powers with the territories since the secessionist clashes of the 1990s.

Georgia’s rapprochement with Western powers occurred simultaneously with its distancing from Moscow. While western powers strengthened relations with Tbilisi particularly after the events of 2003, Moscow invested immensely in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This has led to exclusive associations of both the autonomous territories and Georgia proper with external powers (Gerrits & Bader, 2016, p.309). Since relations have become mutually exclusive, actors on opposing teams have advanced exclusive and conflicting incentives. These circumstances contributed to the breakout of war in 2008. Georgia’s Western orientation, not entirely explainable through material considerations, led to the increase in Russian threat and paved the way for a brutal Russian response to Tbilisi’s Western engagement.

4.3 GEORGIA’S PRO-WESTERN TURN

Faced with increasing Russian threats, Georgia embarked on an exclusively pro-Western trajectory in an effort to find alliance partners who could support it in balancing against Russia. This Western orientation was apparent in an emerging group of reformists in the governing party – the Union of Citizens of Georgia. The westernization course took place parallel to the ‘othering’ of Georgia’s northern neighbor (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p.175). The intensification of ties with European organizations such as the country’s
accession into the Council of Europe in the late 1990s was recognized as significant strides in Georgia’s orientation “back to Europe”. This orientation was best described by Assembly speaker Zurab Zhvania’s famous statement: “I am Georgian, therefore I am European” (Georgian Journal, 2013). In 1994, Tbilisi enlisted in NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program (PFP). A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was initialed between Tbilisi and Brussels, which was ratified in 1999. European aspirations were manifested also in official documents. For example, the article entitled “Basic Principles of the Sustainability of Social Life, the Strengthening of State Sovereignty and Security and Restoration of Territorial Integrity of Georgia” overtly asserts the country’s western aspirations and the exigency to incorporate into its organizations (Jones, 2003, p.98). The article phrases the country’s external policy objective as “to achieve full integration into European political, economic, and security structures, thus fulfilling the historical aspiration of the Georgian nation to participate fully in the European community” (Georgia and the World: A Vision and Strategy for The Future, 2000). Balancing Russia, considered essential for the country’s security, has accounted for a key objective of Georgian external policy since the mid-1990s. For Tbilisi, associating with the West and integrating into organizations like NATO and the European Union signify a measure of security. The alignment choice is also driven by cultural factors, however.

The country’s regional agenda in the 1990s echoed its ideals and ambition to establish a model of governance inspired by the West. As a result, in spite of the reactive and cautious character of the administrations’ policies throughout the 1990s, Tbilisi’s external policy orientation remained unchanged, not just since it regained independence, but also throughout its first independence in 1918-1921 before the establishment of the
Soviet Union. Identity is a crucial factor because Georgia has always perceived the West as a model of development and as its main alliance partner and security guarantor. Nevertheless, in spite of this ideational preference, at least at the early stages of its independence, in view of the reactive character of its foreign agenda, it was only after the 2003 revolution that the country’s external alignment became unambiguously pro-western reflecting cultural preferences.

Following the Revolution of Roses in November 2003, alignment with the EU gathered new momentum as Tbilisi recovered its standing in European circles and compatibly placed Euro-Atlantic integration as a key external policy objective. The revolution was construed as “the masses upholding Georgia’s national dignity and democratic values,” (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, as cited in Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p.175) reflecting alignment with European structures. Undeniably, in certain political and economic spheres, the country surpassed substantially most of the post-Soviet states, especially with regards to reducing corruption in addition to developing into one of the sharpest growing economies in the Eastern European region.

Resonating with the evolving political transformations, membership in the European Union and NATO were specified as Tbilisi’s central foreign policy objective. Georgia’s National Security Concept, the main record that outlines the country’s central national interests which was ratified by the national assembly in 2005, portrayed the republic as “an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and which] aspires to achieve full integration into Europe’s political, economic and security systems… and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe” (National
Security Concept, 2005). The document underscores the aspirations of the Georgian people to enlist in NATO and become a full-fledged member of the EU, and to take part in securing the Black Sea area as a fundamental element of the region’s security structure. Although there were some discrepancies associated with the integration process into the European Union – for example some limitations in the implementation of the Union’s conditions, in general, Tbilisi’s foreign strategy remained staunchly western oriented. Ties with Moscow reached an all-time low with the latter’s implementation of a trade embargo in 2006, the expulsion of Georgian migrant workers from the Russian Federation as well as cuts in the power supply. This climaxed with the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the Kremlin’s recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian Federation was perceived as an antagonistic state which a sovereign Georgia could not tolerate. Accordingly, Russian authority in the country was understood to be a significant hindrance to Georgia’s European aspirations particularly in view of the reality that Russia’s political leadership generally viewed Tbilisi’s foreign and domestic policy agenda as detrimental to Russian state interests.

The Georgian Republic underwent an important transformation after the 2012-2013 elections. Saakashvili’s administration was replaced by the Georgian Dream coalition presenting its somewhat distinct inclination for Georgia’s foreign agenda. The new administration embarked on a program of normalizing relations with the northern power, all the while remaining devoted to the core objective of European and Atlantic incorporation. Membership in the European Union and NATO continued to be the primary foreign policy goals. Dealings with the European Union were expanded by the ratification of an Association Agreement in 2014 that included the creation of a Deep and
Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The consistent discourse of “belonging to Europe” remained persistent in official statements. Although the treaty did not pledge Georgia membership in the European Union in the immediate future, it acknowledged the determination and ambitions of Georgian society to someday become part of Europe. As Georgian prime minister Irakli Garibashvili announced during the adoption of the Agreement: “Today Georgia is given a historic chance to return to its natural environment, Europe, its political, economic, social and cultural space” (Civil.ge, 2014). Georgia’s President Giorgi Margvelashvili, in his part, indicated that “as an individual, a Georgian national is European in terms of self-awareness and an integral part of western civilization by nature” (Giorgi Margvelashvili, 2013, as cited in Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p.175).

Georgia’s integration into European organizations, fast-tracked after the 2003 revolution, marked a new Georgian path away from its northern neighbor towards a Euro/Atlantic orientation. This integration is highlighted with several economic and military agreements with Western powers, explained in the next section.

**4.4 GEORGIA’S ECONOMIC AND MILITARY COOPERATION WITH THE WEST**

The European Union is Georgia’s leading trading partner accounting for almost 27% of Georgian trade, followed by the Turkish Republic (13.6%), and the Russian Federation (11%) (Georgia and the EU, 2018). The European Union’s trade figures with the Black Sea country constitute 0.1% of the Union’s total commerce with a revenue of €2.8 billion in 2018. European exports to Tbilisi totaled €2.1 billion in the same year.
Main exports include mineral goods, appliances and machinery as well as chemicals. Leading European imports from Tbilisi comprise agricultural goods, common metals, and biochemical products. In 2018, the European Union imported Georgian products valued at €653 million. Georgian financial support from the EU amounts to €100 million annually (Georgia and the EU, 2018). Financing comes predominantly from the ENI - European Neighborhood Instrument, which assist Tbilisi to achieve the targets stipulated in the Association Agreement. The main objectives of the European-Georgian collaboration are specified in the Single Support Framework, which distinguishes three domains of focus: reforms in public institutions, developmental cooperation in agricultural and rural areas, in addition to reforms in the judicial sector. The country also benefits from European regional and multi-state programs financed by the ENI, which offer assistance in infrastructural development, enhanced connections with neighboring states in fields such as energy, transportation and environmental spheres; assistance to civil society organizations; and admission into European programs like Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and Creative Europe (Georgia and the EU, 2018). This highlights Georgia’s wide-ranging permeation into Western structures, paving the way for deeper relations and cooperation.

Since 2008, Tbilisi has completed several targets on the European assimilation course: the implementation of the regulation on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in 2014, the endorsement and ratification of the Association Agreement with its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), and the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Agreement allowing Georgians to travel to the EU visa-free for up to 90 days in 2017 (Tsertsvadze, 2018). Prior to the ratification of the visa accord, Tbilisi
undertook a vast array of reform programs, and many analysts considered the western agenda as an incentive for numerous structural reforms. The European Union provided Eastern Partner countries the chance to align with its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which is the adoption of a document or legal statute within the European policy framework that has been formerly ratified by EU member states. This alignment can result in a convergence with basic EU standards and regulations. Throughout the years, Georgian governments have made great strides in adopting EU norms through the adoption of CFSP policies.

By the end of 2017, the country had ratified “over 7000 European standards in the areas of health, safety, and environment protection (Tsertsvadze, 2018). Tbilisi also enlisted in the European Union’s civil and military crisis management operations under the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Endorsement for the European integration agenda in Georgia has been continuous and steady between 70-80% (Tsertsvadze, 2018). More than half a million Georgians have benefited from the Visa Liberalization program and have travelled to the Schengen zone since the ratification of the agreement in 2017, comprising over a million visits (Facts and Figures about EU-Georgia Relations, 2020). Since 2009, “40000 SMEs, microenterprises and farmers have received loans for their activities. In addition, a total of 130 million in loans are made available for innovative SMEs and small midcap companies. This has led to the creation of an estimated 10300 new jobs” (Facts and Figures about EU-Georgia Relations, 2020). This highlights the range of cooperation efforts between the European Union and Georgia.

The European Union upholds Georgia’s territorial sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. Following the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the
Union deployed its Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to the Black Sea country and has undertaken patrol operations in the regions adjoining the administrative borderlines with the two breakaway territories. The EUMM comprises around 200 active monitors. The EU SAFE program provides assistance in the fields of border control, crime reduction, cybersecurity, as well as natural disaster relief while also bolstering administrative oversight (Facts and Figures about EU-Georgia Relations, 2020).

Shevardnadze spearheaded the development of denser relations with Western powers. It was during his presidency that Tbilisi embarked on the construction of pipelines to ship Azerbaijani hydrocarbons through Georgia all the while circumventing Russian territories. The Soviet era Baku-Supsa channel was refurbished in the late 1990s, and the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan channel started at the end of Shevardnadze’s term. The Georgian Republic was an original member of the anti-Russian GUAM coalition (Falkowski, 2016, p.11). During Saakashvili’s presidential term, relations gained new momentum. The country embarked on a wide-ranging reform program, one of the largest in the post-Soviet region, strengthened by western political and financial support (specifically the US, which became the biggest benefactor of Saakashvili’s reform programs) as well as an expansion of cooperation between Tbilisi and Western powers. The Black Sea country succeeded in ending its reliance on energy supplies from Russia and turned to Baku for its energy needs.

Maciej Falkowski (2016), presenting figures from the World Bank, suggests that Tbilisi has obtained $5.6 billion in development support during 2004-2013. The EU, in its turn, has afforded €452 million under the ENI program, between 2007 and 2013, as assistance to Georgia’s state budget, the expansion of communications and energy
infrastructure as well as private sector support, while the United States offered around $400 million between 2005 and 2010 within the context of the Millennium Challenge Cooperation. Some months after the 2008 hostilities, the European Union held a donor conference, during which $4.5 billion were raised as post-war relief for the Georgian state (Falkowski, 2016, p.19). The country also received Western technical expertise to implement its reform program and to acclimatize state institutions to western standards in addition to public service worker trainings. Several hundred development programs have been launched during the years by western cooperation organizations, embassies and NGOs for the development of infrastructure, agriculture, SMEs as well as support for unprivileged social groups. Tbilisi has also received security-related support (largely from the US). The United States’ leading programs in this context include “The Georgia Train and Equip Programme” (GTEP) launched in 2002 as well as the “Sustainment and Stability Operations Program” (SSOP; operational since 2005) (Falkowski, 2016, p.20). The US has provided funding used for reform programs in the Georgian armed forces, for military trainings, and delivered technical equipment to the Georgian army. The participation of Georgian military forces in NATO operations in Afghanistan is also considered a central component of military cooperation between Georgia and the West (Georgia has contributed 11000 soldiers thus far; Georgia’s military participation is the operation’s second largest after the US).

Georgia’s ties with NATO go back as far as the early post-Soviet era, however, this relationship intensified after the events of 2003 as well as after the 2008 hostilities encompassing various domains. In 2015 the two sides ratified the SNGP - Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, which comprises support in thirteen defense and security
associated domains. Within the framework of cooperation, NATO launched a Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC) in Tbilisi intended to provide training to Georgian and NATO soldiers in addition to soldiers from other associated states (Lebanidze, 2018). Georgia was upgraded to NATO’s Enhanced Opportunities Partner category which offers “all of the privileges that alliance members receive except for the collective security umbrella” (Lebanidze, 2018). Nevertheless, these small incentives could not substitute the incentive of a Membership Action Plan, a crucial point that ultimately results in complete membership. The open-ended deferment of presenting Tbilisi MAP status has had a negative effect on how Western powers are perceived in Georgia. Consequently, endorsement for the Atlantic organization has also weakened.

4.5 THE LIMITS OF NEOREALIST EXPLANATIONS OF GEORGIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

Since the middle 1990s, Tbilisi’s western orientation has remained generally constant, a fact difficult to explain through strictly material considerations. Numerous approaches take into consideration material instead of ideational aspects in explaining Georgia’s pro-western policies. These include the economic advantages of aligning with the West, to balance Russia in the South Caucasus, regime legitimacy and survival, as well as the search for a security guarantor. Strictly material considerations fall short of giving a complete explanation, however. The constructivist approach does not reject the co-existence of both ideational and material factors to understand foreign policy choices. Consequently, while the Georgian leadership may consider western integration as a more suitable opportunity for economic advantages or security guarantees than integration with
Moscow, this perception may also arise from ideational beliefs, namely the Georgian leadership’s interpretation of the western hemisphere as a source of liberal democratic values upon which their legitimacy hangs. Furthermore, the claim that Tbilisi is interested in western integration to balance the Russian Federation does not hold ground given the fact that western powers have so far not been willing to play a balancing role. In spite of considerable economic assistance since Georgia regained its independence, in addition to growing contribution with regards to expertise sharing, military support from western powers has been nominal. Moreover, Georgia’s accession into Euro/Atlantic structures is a long way off and can possibly not be achievable in the foreseeable future. Ideational factors thus carry some weight explaining why successive Georgian administrations described the West as a component of Georgia’s ‘self’, at the same time distancing themselves from Russian influence. This reflects how western values, societies as well as institutions and state-building processes are perceived by the Georgian leadership in accordance with their own identity.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the case of Georgia lends itself to the arguments advanced by Keohane and Goldstein, where what may appear as inexplicable foreign policy choices can only be explained once elite ideas and identity are considered. This involved partially endogenizes second-level preferences to the leaderships of the states in question (Wendt, 1992, p.425). Therefore, emphasis is placed on the political leaderships and their ideology and identity as the main agents of foreign strategy formulation in small states. By concentrating on the significance of elite identity, the research challenges structural understandings of the foreign policies of small states as a “black-box” and omit the variables at the individual and state levels of analysis. Thus, the argument advanced
here is based on the assumption that a state’s leadership’s perception and understanding of the country’s national interests, cannot be assumed solely by material factors and must be factored into foreign policy choices. Therefore, the research argues that a state’s foreign policy choices will be influenced not merely by material constraints, but also by the leadership’s perceptions and understandings of the purpose of the state and its orientation. Even though the structural environment of the state is valuable as a tool to understand policy choices, the case of Georgia shows that the incorporation of elite perceptions can provide a better tool to explain changes in foreign behavior.

In spite of numerous transformations in its regional security climate, Tbilisi’s foreign strategy has been generally constant since the Rose revolution. Even the five-day war in 2008, the ensuing de facto annexation of almost 20 percent of its territory in addition to Moscow’s recognition of the breakaway regions’ independence, did not engender a sizeable shift in the country’s foreign policy orientation (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.37). The examination of Georgia’s foreign policy agenda since the onset of the revolution, suggests that its major external strategy perceptions and objectives remained unchanged. Accession into European and Atlantic structures have remained the top foreign policy priority since 2003.

Moscow has stationed heavy armaments like SS-21 short-range ballistic missile systems, within striking distance of Tbilisi. The Russian side has also positioned S-300 air defense rockets in the two breakaway regions. The missiles cover the airspace of the country’s every airport from east to west (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.41). In purely strategic and security conditions, the country is in a much more exposed position than at the onset of the five-day war. However, notwithstanding these substantial variations in its
external security setting, instead of change in Georgia’s external orientation to appease Russian threat, we observe continuity in the country’s path towards Europe.

Georgia’s National Security Concepts represent a strong denunciation of the Russian state of affairs and a deep-seated change in the image of Russia from being a “complicated but necessary partner” during Shevardnadze’s tenure, to an “unpredictable blackmailer” and ultimately to “the existential enemy” during Saakashvili’s presidency (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.43). As a Georgian high-ranking decision maker explains: “bandwagoning with Russia is not an alternative for Georgia, not because we think that Georgia will cease to exist as a state… but because bandwagoning with Russia means a return to the Georgia of the 1990s, when it was a failed, corrupt and criminal state, with no hopes of ever becoming a normal, modern and European state” (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.43). This further highlights the ideational aspect of Georgia’s orientation towards the West.

Saakashvili’s discourse also emphasizes this orientation. He portrays his administration’s main objective as turning a failing country into an avant-garde European democracy by engaging in what he describes as value-based policy making and statehood. While the practical usefulness of public declarations meant for wider audiences may be questionable (Armenia’s case is a prime example), many academics, both Georgian and otherwise, have confirmed a correlation between these public proclamations and the state of affairs in the country since Saakashvili came to power. When comparing Georgia to its regional environment we find that the notions underscored in Saakashvili’s statements do carry weight. Western integration, therefore, is vital not only with regards to security-related and economic considerations but also as an assertion of the country’s western
identity. Saakashvili believed that “Georgia will be a member of the North Atlantic alliance because that is our natural place. This is not conditioned by pragmatic considerations… the European and Euro-Atlantic model are the major driving forces of social, economic and political transformation of Georgia” (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.45). The contention is not that material aspects are inconsequential in explaining Tbilisi’s external behavior. Rather, that the ideas and identity of its policy-makers are vital to comprehending this behavior since they constitute the filter through which the state will interpret the changes in the structural setting. This implies that neorealist and constructivist theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive in their ability to explain Georgia’s foreign policy behavior, but that the theories are complimentary and constructivist theories can offer valid explanations when purely material ones fail.

Russia’s incursion into Georgia in 2008 represented its resurgence in its strategic zone of influence. It also confirmed the self-help character of Tbilisi’s structural environment. Against the background of Georgia’s security climate, most academics would anticipate it to bandwagon with Russia. However, Tbilisi has essentially intensified its integration efforts with the West while the Russian threat was escalating, which is explainable only once elite ideas in foreign policy formulation are taken into account. Most observers would concur that Russian threat was mostly stable between 2003 and 2006 and then intensified in 2006. However, Tbilisi’s foreign policy during this timeframe demonstrated more balancing than bandwagoning. Variations in its external agenda since 2003 could not be adequately justified by Russian threats since this factor was constant during this period. Moreover, even though Georgia was extremely reliant on Russian trade and energy supplies, its foreign policy choices directly damaged its relationship with its
northern neighbor. Moscow was Georgia’s leading trade partner before 2006 and comprised roughly 20% of the country’s total trade revenue. The Russian Federation was also Georgia’s the main energy provider.

4.6 RUSSIA AS AN “OTHER”

Identity centered interpretations can also offer a thorough appreciation of the intricacies of Russian-Georgian ties. First, The Russian Federation is perceived as the heir of the Soviet Empire and its self-declared realm of authority is deemed a threat to Georgia’s territorial sovereignty. Considering Russia as a colonial power that is unwilling to distance itself from its Eurasian expansion agenda and hegemonic aspirations, Tbilisi considers Russia neither part of the West nor appealing with regards to its political and economic model. The Georgian leadership trusts that Moscow does not present a captivating image of a renewed Russian zone of influence, even for its strategic partners, as it “lost the battle for innovation and economic development and is gradually becoming an industrial museum” (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p.177). Georgia’s irreconcilability with its northern neighbor is essentially founded on cultural and societal factors, both existent and ideational, of both countries. Georgian society views the Georgian-Russian conflict as identity-centered, part of a wider Russian-Western ideological contest. Tbilisi’s choice to align with Europe essentially denotes a clash with Russia.

European integration, therefore, is in a way de-Russification for the Georgian administration. This is accomplished by dissociating Georgia from Russian-led structures and organizations like the CIS, CSTO, and the CU, that claw states closer to the Russian center. In a lot of ways de-Russification developed into a countrywide mantra based on
identity-centered dynamics. Compatibly, the ratification of a 2013 bipartisan decree on “Basic Directions of Georgia’s Foreign Policy” eliminates any “military, political and customs alliances with a state that recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia” (Civil.ge, 2013). This precludes foreign interactions with the Russian Federation or Russian-led programs in the region unless Moscow terminates its ‘colonization’ of Georgia’s breakaway regions. In effect, in comparison with this standpoint, surveys also suggest that while the greater part of Georgian society supports friendly dealings with their norther neighbor, they are nevertheless reluctant to participate in Russian-led integration programs at the cost of the country’s sovereignty.

The analysis of Georgian foreign policy in this thesis is centered around a theoretical approach that perceives foreign policies as reflections of internalized beliefs and identities in social orders and the course of this social order in forming its self-identification in relation to an ‘other’ is a central constituent of foreign strategy construction. Policy makers’ understanding of the congruence of the identities and beliefs of their nation and those of foreign actors are likely to influence how national interests are identified and offer parameters for appropriate conduct.

4.7 CONCLUSION

A neorealist theoretical framework based on material and external security considerations fails to offer a valid explanation of Georgia’s foreign policy behavior throughout its post-independence period. While neorealism posits that structural constraints dictate a small state’s foreign policy choices, which should translate in practice as bandwagoning behavior towards Russia, however against overwhelming Russian threats
and Tbilisi’s economic dependence on its northern neighbor, this alignment choice did not materialize. Successive Georgian administrations relentlessly balanced Russia even though the August 2008 war made it clear that Georgia’s western partners were not willing to support Tbilisi militarily. Although Georgia did benefit from vast assistance from the European Union and NATO, membership in these structures, and their ensuing security umbrellas, are still a long-term prospect. This is where constructivist theories come into explanatory use. They offer an effective explanation regarding Georgia’s foreign policy orientation towards the West by demonstrating that Georgia’s western identity and the country’s elite ideas and understanding of the purpose of the state have pushed Tbilisi to align with the West.

In spite of some polarization in Georgian political affairs, an extensive consensus on alignment with the West has so far persevered. Moreover, there is a very limited choice of actors that Moscow can use to sidetrack Georgia’s geostrategic alignment away from the Euro/Atlantic structures. Only two minor political groupings dispute European incorporation while supporting closer relations with the Russian Federation (Kapanadze, 2014, p.5).
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCING IDENTITY WHERE STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS FAIL TO EXPLAIN

Behavioral patterns of small states within the context of alliance formation is not thoroughly developed. Prominent scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, and historians such as Paul Schroeder, would rather concentrate on great power alliance patterns since they are the most important agents in international relations. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks, though influential for rationalizing the foreign policy conduct of great powers, are often weak in explaining the foreign policies of smaller states. Therefore, small state foreign policy behavior is academically less developed. Alliance formation cannot be ‘one size fits all’, but rather the outcome of meticulous and complex decisions of policy makers. The theoretical understandings of great power foreign policy do not travel well when applied to small state foreign policy conduct (Bailes et al. 2016, p.11)

Academic research regarding small state alliance formation patterns upholds the assumption that the environmental structure is the most applicable level of analysis. Therefore, conventional understandings posit that the most effective method to rationalize how a small state behaves in the international system is through a “black-box” lens and concentrate on the conditions of its external security setting. While structural and material-based theories, such as neorealism and economic dependency theory, are prominent theoretical structures, they fall short of providing adequate justifications of crucial
constituents of the behavioral patterns of small states. A quick review of the post-Soviet neighborhood reveals the incapacity of structural and material-based approaches to adequately account for the disparity in states’ behavior vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. Why, for example, has Azerbaijan, whose external security environment resembles that of Georgia, kept its distance from the West and throughout its post-independence history, espoused a more balanced strategy toward regional and international actors present in Transcaucasia, such as the Russian Federation, the US and Iran? Baku is regarded as an active participant in the NATO Partnership for Peace program and enjoys a robust relationship with the northern Atlantic alliance. Simultaneously, Baku leads cooperation efforts with Moscow on security-related matters. Furthermore, why does Kazakhstan bandwagon with the Russian Federation despite its contiguity to the latter; why Turkmenistan abstains from balancing policies, while Tajikistan ingratiates itself with Moscow; and why Belarus has been leading bandwagoning policies vis-à-vis Russia, in spite of its relatively stronger footing and its geographical location? (Gvalia & Lebanidze, 2011, p.25).

As a theoretical framework, structural realism is refined and parsimonious, however during the analysis of foreign policy behavior of small states it almost inescapably must yield some of its straightforwardness and introduce considerations of domestic elements, societal discourse, and cultural specifications. In contrast to structural realism, constructivist theory “assumes that the selves, or identities of states are a variable. They likely depend on historical, cultural, political, and social context” (Hopf, 1998, p.176). The identities of actors represent the results of societal interactions among actors and between actors and structural settings. For constructivist
theorists, power is material as well as rhetorical. “Identities – whether gender, ethnic, religious, national, or state identity – are constrained by experiences and available possibilities and might be thought of as part of a search for a usable past and an acceptable modernity to stave off anxiety about the present and future” (Suny, 2000, p.144). As academics have established during the last few decades, the notion of nation is not set in a vacuum and constant, or prearranged but is a result of generations of social interactions, it is instructed, and infused, mainly owing to academics, political thinkers and officials who transform the association with the imagined political society of a given nation into a material and effective foundation of emotional devotion.

5.2 RUSSIA’S GRIP ON ARMENIA: A CASE FOR STRUCTURAL REALISM

While it is true that Armenian administrations exerted considerable efforts to integrate with the European Union, its external security environment did not allow it to carry on with this agenda. Armenia is a perfect example of the applicability of neorealist theoretical frameworks. The event that highlighted Armenia’s dependence on Russia in almost all domains of political and economic life, was its reversal from signing the EU’s Association Agreement in favor of membership in the Russian-led Customs Union, which later developed into the Eurasian Economic Union. It could not handle the repercussions of angering Russia.

Yerevan chose the Russian integration path as a result of several factors: First, Armenia’s major economic and military alliance partner Russia’s growing belligerence vis-
à-vis the European Union which was pushing its integration programs in the South Caucasus region and in Armenia. Russia pressured Armenia, through several hard and soft power tools, to abandon its European aspirations. Second, conventional security-related circumstances, in the form of Russian arms sales to Armenia’s foe, Azerbaijan, made it clear that any shift in Armenia’s orientation towards Russia, would be disastrous for its territorial integrity. Third, Russia’s ownership of Armenia’s energy producing and distributing assets, as well as Armenia’s reliance on Russian energy provision, which is cleverly utilized by Moscow. Fourth, Moscow’s governing influence in Armenia’s economy, with reference to foreign investment and trade ties. Finally, the substantial Armenian diaspora in the Russian Federation, which will possibly be affected by the deficiencies of Armenia’s alternative alignment decisions. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its ensuing security climate also offer a valid explanation of this alignment choice.

For the Armenian side, who prevailed in the Karabakh war in the sense of physical custody of the territory, any resolution that would mean yielding territory to the Azerbaijani side is unfeasible. Similarly, Azerbaijan will not consent to a resolution that involves it dropping the disputed territory to Yerevan altogether. In view of the psychological and identity-based factors heavily influencing the clash, there “is no common basis of understanding” (Freitag-Wirminghaus, 2008, as cited in Sigurðsson & Bailes, 2015, p.3) between the two states. Nevertheless, Armenia’s triumph in Karabakh has had a hefty cost on its post-independence foreign policy. The unsettled dispute with its ensuing regional security climate (Turkish-Azerbaijani belligerence, and Russian protection as a balance against Ankara and Baku), has become the major hindrance to Armenia’s geopolitical
development and to any possibility of a sovereign foreign policy. Moscow acquires more palpable benefits from a sustained stalemate, which by undermining Baku and prolonging Yerevan’s dependence supports the extended presence of Russian authority in the South Caucasus. Moreover, it is argued that the resolution of the conflict would diminish Russia’s authority and “Moscow would immediately lose a crucial geopolitical leverage it currently has with both Yerevan and Baku” (Torbakov, 2010, p.36).

5.3 GEORGIA’S WESTERN ORIENTATION – AN IDENTITY BASED FOREIGN POLICY

Georgia’s foreign policy orientation became clear from the early years after independence. Integration with the EU emerged in Georgia’s external strategy agenda as an ideational aspiration. First, Western integration was the result of the self-identification of Georgian society as part of the European family. Second, the country’s political elite considered the timeframe of 1800-1991 as a colonization of the country by the Russian empire and later by the USSR. Third, Georgians as a whole perceive Russia as an antagonistic power, on the account its part in Georgia’s separatist conflicts. Accordingly, friction between Moscow and Tbilisi are structural and deeply entrenched. Furthermore, there exists a notable particularity between the political culture of Georgia and the ones of its neighbor countries: civic society in the former plays a substantial part in Georgian political life and to some extent is able of operating as an independent force.

Yet even though there has been some constructive shift in the relationship between Russia and Georgia since the elections of 2012, the Russian agenda is not of high importance. Successive Georgian administrations have remained devoted to the integration
of Georgia into the European Union and NATO and consider the northern Atlantic alliance, in particular, as a potential security patron. Tbilisi’s collaboration with the North Atlantic alliance has increased considerably and is considered the most developed of the Southern Caucasus countries. For Georgia’s political leadership, the country’s European belonging is founded on age-old bonds and a shared culture based on religion. In recent times, Georgia’s ideational links with the European Union is framed in connection with civilizational preference. During Saakashvili’s term, the administration displayed the European and Russian spheres in exclusionary standings. Consequently, the otherization of the Russian Federation appeared as a result of the country’s robust association with the EU and its structures. Tbilisi’s membership in the Council of Europe, together with more intimate relations with Euro/Atlantic establishments, were viewed as a homecoming to the European family after years of enforced integration in the USSR. In a symbolic gesture, this return was exemplified by the hanging of European flags next to Georgia’s national flag in all governmental buildings in the country.

Although Armenia and Georgia both have an affinity with the European Union based on social and political aspects, only Tbilisi has been unrelenting in proclaiming its European belonging. By the same token, both states have engaged in policies of alignment with the European sphere (though considerably less so since 2013 in Armenia’s circumstance), but they have done so utilizing different approaches: Tbilisi has constantly strived to achieve centrality, whereas Yerevan has continually strived to maintain its marginality in the European sociopolitical path and to benefit from the opportunities presented by overlapping marginalities. However, its decision to renege on its European integration course marginalized these opportunities.
5.4 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Armenia’s integration into the Russian-led sphere is explainable through material factors such as its search for a security patron to balance the antagonistic Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic partnership. Economic dependency theory also carries some weight in explaining Armenia’s foreign policy choices. However, security is the major factor in explaining the country’s foreign behavior. In fact, the quest for security has led Armenia to be economically dependent on its norther patron. The research also highlights the limitations of constructivist theories in explaining Armenia’s case. The country’s political leadership often claimed the country’s place in the European family; however, security considerations trumped civilizational belonging sentiments.

Georgia’s case, in contrast, highlights how constructivist theories can play a complimentary role in explaining the foreign policy choices of small states. This is not to say that material and pragmatic considerations are not important. Rather, that an understanding of the country’s foreign policy choices can be made clearer once ideational factors and taken into account. In some cases of Georgia’s post-independence period, neorealist theories predict the exact opposite of the foreign policy choices made by Tbilisi, and in other cases, we observe how material circumstances are viewed through the filter of elite identities and the purpose of the state, thus playing a complimentary role to material theories.

The combination of neorealism and constructivism in explaining small state foreign policy can be valuable in offering more complete explanations of puzzling cases of policy formulation. Samuel Barkin’s take on the capacity of communication and overlap between
different paradigms in the discipline – mainly between realism and constructivism – posits that “constructivist research is as compatible with a realist worldview as with any other, and that the realist worldview in turn can benefit from constructivist research methods” (Barkin, 2010, p.3).

This research does not focus on the aspect of regime survival in the formulation of foreign policies, which could prove beneficial in offering complementary and secondary explanations with regards to the policy choices of the successive regimes in both Armenia and Georgia. The thesis, however, adds to the academic literature on the foreign policies of small states, incorporating material as well as ideational factors to offer a more compelling understanding of foreign policy formulation. The applicability of these approaches together presents a new opportunity for explaining puzzling cases of foreign policy choices in small states that can deepen our understanding of why states and regimes act the way they do.

This thesis does not assume the applicability of the model on weak state foreign policy in general but tries to test the explanatory power of the combination of neorealism and constructivism on Armenian and Georgian foreign policy in particular. Future research on small state studies could benefit from this combination in gaining a more wholesome understanding of weak state foreign policy behavior.
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