Institut für Europäische Politik

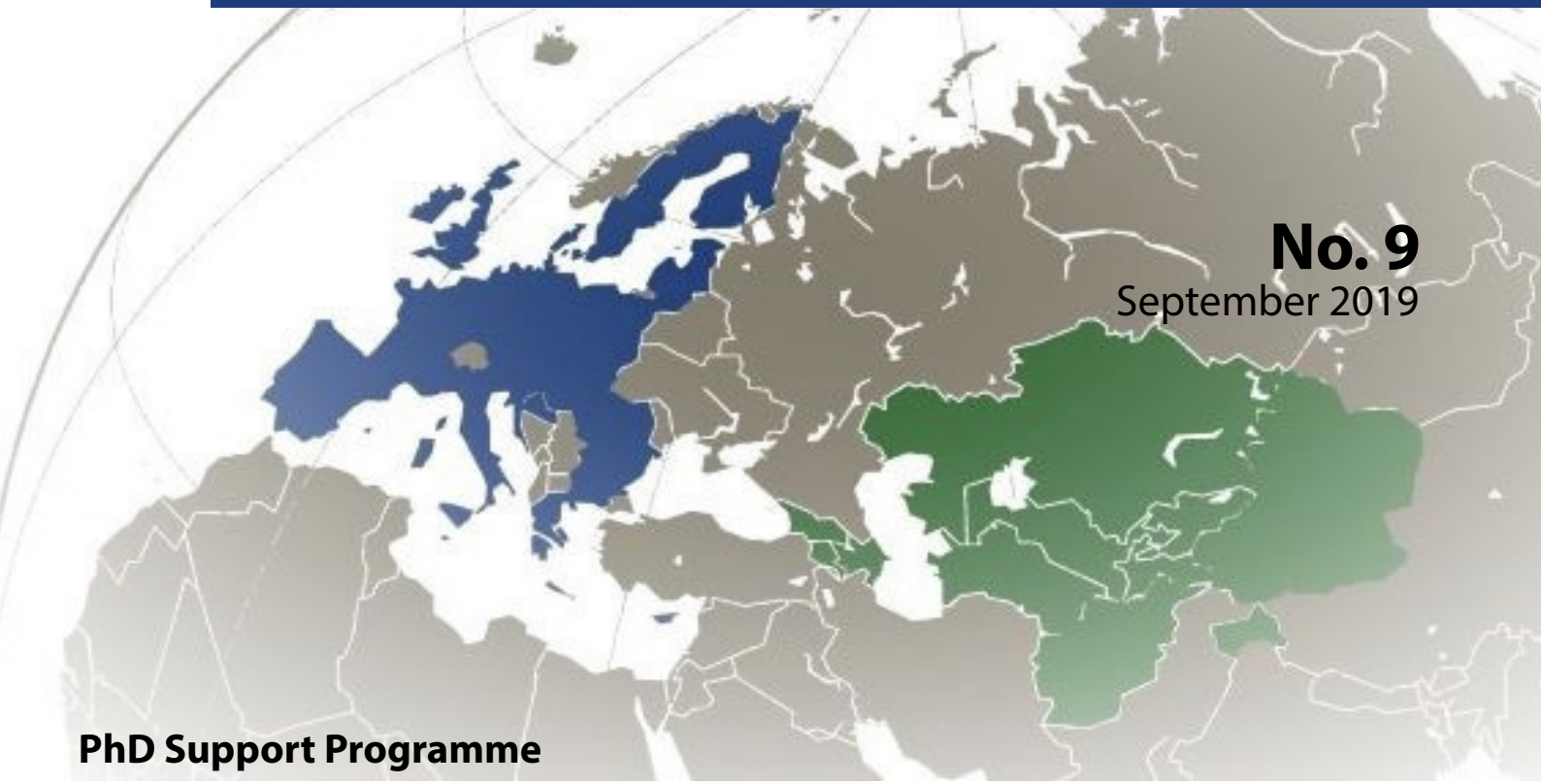
Centre international de formation européenne

FRIENDS AND FOES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: SOURCES OF DIVERGENT SECURITY POLICIES AND ALLIANCES IN THE REGION

Azad Garibov

EUCACIS Online Paper

No. 9
September 2019



PhD Support Programme
The EU, Central Asia and the Caucasus in the International System

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme

VolkswagenStiftung

About EUCACIS

"The EU, Central Asia and the Caucasus in the International System" (EUCACIS) is a PhD Support Programme for Postgraduates and Doctoral Researchers in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, organized by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) and the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE). Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and the programme Erasmus+, it offers scholarships for three years to excellent postgraduates who are working on a doctoral thesis in political science, contemporary history or economics on a topic related to its thematic focus at a university or academy of sciences in the Southern Caucasus or Central Asia (including Afghanistan, the Kashmir region in India and the autonomous region Xinjiang in China).

EUCACIS.eu

It is the objective of the EUCACIS programme to provide intensive PhD research training for its participants to bring them closer to international standards, to support them until they submit their doctoral theses, and to help them establish their own networks with other young researchers in the target regions and in Europe. This will be achieved through four international conferences, four PhD schools, two research training stays and continuous online coaching.

About IEP

Since 1959, the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) has been active in the field of European integration as a non-profit organisation. It is one of Germany's leading research institutes on foreign and European policy. IEP works at the interface of academia, politics, administration, and civic education. In doing so, IEP's task include scientific analyses of problems surrounding European politics and integration.
www.iep-berlin.de

About CIFE

The Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE) is a private institution of higher education and research, founded in 1954 with its head office in Nice and branch offices in Berlin, Brussels and Istanbul. It receives special funding in the framework of the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Union. Students from all continents enroll in its programmes and work as senior officials, consultants and academic experts after graduation. **www.cife.eu**

About the Series

EUCACIS Online Paper comprise research and policy papers on topics related to the thematic focus of the programme, written by fellows of the EUCACIS PhD Support Programme and members of the wider EUCACIS network. It aims at making the debates within the network, notably during the EUCACIS conferences and PhD schools, accessible to a wider public. The papers are available on the programme website: **www.eucacis.eu**

About the Author

Azad Garibov is a regular contributor to various electronic and printed academic journals and newspapers, including the Eurasia Daily Monitor, The National Interest and the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. He coedited and co-authored the book "The Caspian Sea Chess-Board: Geo-political, Geo-economic and Geostrategic Analysis", published jointly by the Baku-based Center for Strategic Studies SAM and the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (Milan, 2014). Mr Garibov is 2016-2019 fellow of the PhD Support Programme "The EU, Central Asia and the Caucasus in the International System (EUCACIS)". His areas of interest include political transitions and security issues in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, trans-Eurasian energy and transport corridors as well as Caspian affairs.

Editorial team

Publishers:	Prof. Dr Mathias Jopp, Head of International Programmes, IEP PD Dr Matthias Waechter, Director General, CIFE
Editors:	Dr Susann Heinecke, Programme Manager EUCACIS, CIFE Janny Schulz, Programme Manager EUCACIS, IEP
Layout:	Fabian Weber, IEP
Place of publication:	Berlin
ISSN:	2627-7204
Internet:	www.eucacis.eu
Email:	info@eucacis.eu
Hashtag:	#EUCACIS

published in September 2019

Introduction

Despite holding similar positions in the international system by virtue of location, size, history, comparable political systems, and involvement in inter and intra-state military conflicts, the three South Caucasus states have taken divergent paths in terms of alliance and alignment choices since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Armenia has become one of Russia's closest allies in the post-Soviet space—if not the closest one—and joined Moscow-led security and political-economic integration frameworks such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The country is in a protracted territorial conflict with Azerbaijan, holds a deep-rooted hostility towards Turkey, and enjoys a well-developed cooperation with Iran. Georgia, despite the lack of a formal alliance treaty, orients its foreign policy towards the United States and Europe and aspires to become a member of NATO and the European Union (EU). For Georgia, Russia constitutes a major security threat, while the country has generally cooperative relations with Armenia. Azerbaijan is allied to Turkey, manoeuvres between Russia and the West trying to maximise security and economic gains as much as possible. The country is in a conflict with Armenia, has developed strategic cooperation with its regional neighbour Georgia, and has experienced a difficult relationship with Iran for the most part of its pots-Soviet history.

The paper addresses the question of why, in spite of having similar "departure points", the South Caucasus states have employed divergent and often conflicting alignment and alliance strategies after the collapse of the USSR. Since most of the alliance theories underline threats as the key driver of alliance and alignments choices, the research seeks to understand and explain sources of incentives that brought about the current situation in the region in terms of alliance and alignments by looking at the security environment and threat perceptions of the countries in the region. In order to uncover these incentives, the paper employs the materially/ideationally hybrid Regional Security Complex theory (RSCT), according to the authors of which, regional security complexes (RSC) are durable patterns of alliances and alignments.[1]

The paper argues that in the South Caucasus, a combination of the three major variables of RSCT, namely long-standing enmities and amities, inherent state weaknesses, and penetration of big powers produce divergent and often conflicting alliance and alignment policies pursued by Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. These three major variables also constitute the three levels of analysis in the RSCT – domestic, regional and international. Their interaction happens in the anarchic nature of inter-state relations and uneven distribution of power in the region. Thus, the small and inherently weak states of the South Caucasus, suffering from long-standing ethnic and territorial conflicts and/or the feeling of insecurity vis-à-vis bigger neighbours, seek alliances with extra-regional actors for ensuring their survival and security. While choosing who to align with or who to balance, the regional states side with historically, or to put it in Ted Hopf's term, "habitually" friendlier power who often also shares certain elements of identity with them; or balance against the power which constitutes an "other" in term of defining their identity. Inherent weaknesses, ethnic or territorial conflicts and regional states' search for extra-regional support paves the way to the big powers' penetration to the region, which in its turn influences and occasionally shapes the course of the conflicts, distribution of power, political systems and foreign policy identities in the SC, thus cementing established alliance and alignment patterns.

Why RSCT is the right framework and what does it say about alliance and alignments?

Before talking about the appropriateness of RSCT for this research, and what it says about causes of alliances and alignments, I would like to briefly examine what is said by major IR theories and specific alliance theories about

1 Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Struture of International Security,* Cambridge University Press, p. 47

the drivers behind the alliance and alignments choices. This is important because all these major theories argue about the need for security and perception of threats as the key driver of alliance and alignment choices, the claim that RSCT agrees with. However, I argue that taken separately, these theories are insufficient to capture the whole essence of the dynamics of the security environment and threat perception at the regional level and thus explain the alliance and alignment patterns in the SC. The security environment of the region is of a very complex nature and requires taking into account both material and ideational factors. It demands a more narrowed-down and tailored regional focus. This is the realm where materially-ideationally hybrid and regionally focussed RSCT comes very handy and represents a comprehensive approach to uncover the incentives for alliances and alignments in specific regions.

While trying to answer the question of what causes alliances and alignment, mainstream neo-realist (structuralist) balance of power theory says that states make alliances to balance the strongest power in the system. According to the founder of structuralist realism, Kenneth Waltz, secondary states opt to align with weaker sides in response to a perceived imbalance of distribution of power in order to prevent the emergence of the potential hegemon.[2] Developing this idea, Stephen Walt, author of the balance of threat theory, argued that although the distribution of power is an important part of the equation, it is not the only one. According to him, instead of making alliances to balance the strongest power in the system, "it is more accurate to say that states tend to ally with or against the power that poses the greatest threat"[3]. Extending Walt's approach, Stephen David, in his omnibalancing theory, mostly focuses on alliances in the Third World. Though he agrees with Walt on the centrality of threats as key determinant of the alliance choice, contrary to his system level analysis he brings in the internal characteristics of Third World countries and argues that these countries do not necessarily balance the most threatening state, but the one which threatens the survival of the regime, or offers the better perspective of doing what its necessary to keep them in power.[4] From the late 1980s, countering dominant neo-realist approaches to the alliance policies, constructivists have stressed the role of identity, norms, and culture in states' alliance and alignment choices. According to constructivists, identity and ideational factors and processes are important for tracing "whether collective actors are likely to form enmity or amity", which consequently play a key role in defining whom states accept as potential allies and foes.[5] Thus, all the mentioned approaches accept the centrality of threat perception and build their theories on alliances around this issue, while they disagree on what is considered as major sources of threats.

Along with paucity of scholarly literature on alliance and alignment in the SC, most of the existing research that has been done on the region is a realist one and falls short to include all possible variables. With its systemic level analysis and generalisations to fit everything to a systemic level, mainstream realism is not capable of fully explaining security dynamics and alliance formation in the SC. For instance, according to the neorealist argument, Russia as the strongest neighbour should be the very natural target of balancing alliances or object of bandwagoning; however, all three states demonstrate a divergent approach to Russia. On the other hand, separate non-realist approaches cannot explain on their own the alliance motivations of the SC states. For instance, "omnibalancing approach" would predict the similar attitudes towards alignment with Russia and the West in Azerbaijan and Armenia, which is not the case in practice. Moreover, the affinity of identities correctly predicts Azerbaijan's alliance with Turkey (constructivists' identity-driven alliances), but what are we to make of Orthodox Christian Georgia's hostile attitude towards Russia? Historical perspectives would also project Georgia's negative perceptions of Turkey, which does not reflect the reality.

In order overcome the weaknesses of mainstream realism—in terms of being a meta-theory to explain the systemic processes rather than a tool useful the for explanation of foreign policy of small states—as well as the limits posed by

2 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc. 1979), p.127.

3 Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Cornell University Press 1990) p.21.

4 Stephen R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991) p.235.

5 Alastair Johnston, Social States: Princeton, (NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), p.197

the narrow lenses of the other approaches, the research will apply Copenhagen school's materially-ideationally hybrid RSCT. It benefits from both realist and constructivist approaches, and thus can better explain certain actors' behaviours in the realm of security.[6] Along with realist power calculations, it brings in ideational threats, domestic considerations, state incoherence, long-standing intra-regional enmities and amities, as well as foreign penetration, and most importantly introduces a securitisation approach. RSCT argues that the "security environment of small states is their region", and—"since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones—security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes."[7] RSCT's regional and sub-regional approach (in contrast to realism's systemic level approach) improves accuracy as well as explanatory and predictive capacity.[8] As Buzan and Wæver posit, "geographical proximity tends to generate more security interaction among neighbours", and accordingly, regional level security interdependence is very important for understanding security dynamics in the various regions of the world.[9] Normally the pattern of conflict "stems from factors indigenous to the region and outside powers cannot (even if heavily involved) usually define, desecuritise, or reorganize the region."[10]

RSCT argues that not every region in the world can be defined as a security complex. Buzan and Waever define a regional security complex (RSC) as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."[11] The standard form for an RSC is a pattern of rivalry, balance-of-power, and alliance patterns among the main powers within the region to which the effects of penetrating external powers can be added as an additional factor shaping the security perceptions and alliance dynamics. Such approach offers a productive formulation for examining the nature of security dynamics in the South Caucasus, a region where security concerns are far from being system-driven and shaped by regional processes rather than global processes. In fact, a closer look reveals that the South Caucasus, despite being labelled as a region, has never been a true "region", as it lacks the common features that would qualify it as such. The three countries have neither developed common and inclusive economic and security cooperation nor established any kind of regional integration framework. Nor do they share a common culture, language or religion, or have been a part of the same civilization. While the South Caucasus lacks many attributes of a region, there is one key common denominator—the interconnectedness of security risks. The major security threats as perceived by these states emanate from within the region or its immediate neighbourhood. Any security dynamic significantly affecting one of the three countries has clear implications for the other two. Thus, as the article argues, the South Caucasus qualifies as a distinct regional security complex. As small countries with limited capabilities, interests, and agendas, the major security environment of the South Caucasus states is the region itself and states in its close neighbourhood that exerts considerable influence over the region.

Buzan and Waever also talk about the South Caucasus as a separate security sub-complex,[12] "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another."[13] One of the leading scholars on the South Caucasus, Svante Cornell, also identifies the South Caucasus as an RSC and argues that, in fact, without a "security variable", the South Caucasus can hardly be called a fully-fledged region.[14] The key variables that the RSCT analyses are evident in the South Caucasus—the regional countries are embedded

6 Ibid, p.11

7 Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security,* Cambridge University Press, p.4

8 Ibid, pp.480-483

9 Ibid, p.45

10 Ibid, p.47

11 Ibid, p. 44

12 Ibid, pp.419-423

13 Barry Buzan, *People*, *State and Fear; The National Security Problem in International Relations, (*Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), p. 106

14 Svante Cornel (2001), *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus,* RoutledgeCurzon, p. 383

in long-standing enmities among them and amities with neighbouring big powers, struggle inherent state weaknesses, and experience considerable foreign power influence over them. Focusing on these factors will be very helpful in understanding threat perceptions of the regional states, and the security dynamics they produce, and accordingly, facilitate to uncover the major drivers of alliance and alignment choices in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, the RSCT approach is well suited to this research and will enable consideration of as many independent variables as possible.

Enmities and amities in the South Caucasus

According to RSCT, "historical hatreds and friendships, as well as specific issues that trigger conflict or cooperation, take part in the formation of an overall constellation of fears, threats, and friendships that define an RSC."[15] These patterns of amity and enmity are influenced by various background factors such as history, culture, religion, and geography, but largely, they are path-dependent and thus become their own best explanation. RSCT argues that such patterns are rather observed at the regional level than the global one as development of enmities and amities presupposes close historical interaction, which in its turn usually happens among the countries, which are geographically proximate to each other. Thus, RSCs are defined by durable "patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence."[16]

The South Caucasus is very rich in terms of deep-seated historic enmities and amities, such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Armenian hostilities against Turkey, Georgia's conflict with its Abkhazian and Ossetian minorities, Azerbaijan's and Armenia's friendships with respectively Turkey and Russia. The roots of these enmities and amities date back to the beginning of the 1900s, particularly to the 1918-20 independence period which was characterised by wars and massacres—an inevitable outcome of dramatically overlapping territorial claims and hopelessly mixed populations. This short period of history outside of direct Russian imperial rule "now occupies pride of place in the nationalist narratives of all peoples of the Southern Caucasus as a focus of grievance and identity."[17]

In fact, patterns of enmities and amities are very important, I would even argue a key variable in defining threat perceptions and alliance and alignment choices in the South Caucasus. Accordingly, the far biggest section of the paper is dedicated to these phenomena. However, since the major aim of this paper is to uncover how divergent threat perceptions shape divergent alliance and alignment policies, rather than to focus on the major drivers of threat perceptions, I will avoid going too deep into the details of the reasons for the emergence of enmity and amity patterns, and instead focus on their influence over alliance and alignment choices.

The history of the emergence of Azerbaijani-Armenian enmity has not been properly researched yet, and in both countries, the official and dominant narrative on the conflict is based on mutually incompatible and accusative accounts of the events. What is more established is that the enmity first turned into violent conflict in the beginning of the 1900s, more precisely in 1905 when, after the first Russian revolution, room emerged for such hostilities due to a certain loss of control over the imperial peripheries by Russia. Ethnic violence re-merged in 1918 and continued throughout the brief independence of the South Caucasus states until 1920-1921. Among them the most violent and massive one was March 1918 pogroms and massacre against Azerbaijanis by armed-groups of Dashnaktsutyun party, causalities from which, according to Azerbaijani account, stands as high as tens of thousands.[18] The Soviet re-conquest of the region again pacified the ethnic tensions, though

15 Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security,* Cambridge University Press, p.50

16 Ibid, p.45

17 Kevork Oskanian (September 2010) "Weaving Webs of Insecurity: Fear, Weakness and Power in the Post-Soviet South Caucasus", PhD dissertation, London School of Economics, p. 25

18 Nurit Greenger (2018) "We must not shun from the 1918 genocide in Azerbaijan, Jerusalem Post", available at: https://www.jpost.com/Blogs/Think-With-Me/We-must-not-shun-from-the-1918-genocide-in-Azerbaijan-547840 (accessed 13 February 2019)

grievances have never been fully forgotten, and no real efforts were made for sustainable inter-ethnic reconciliations.[19] Consequently, with the collapse of the USSR, deep-rooted and already entrenched ethnic tension re-emerged which resulted in the massive relocation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia and vice versa. Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, ownership of which has always been the very centre of ethnic tensions, again became the centre of bloody interethnic violence. The conflict internationalised in 1991 as both countries restored their independence and gradually evolved into a full-scale war claiming lives of approximately 30,000 military personnel from both sides.[20] Active phase of the conflict ended with cease-fire in 1994 which left Nagorno-Karabakh and even much larger (both in terms of population and territory) 7 adjacent districts of Azerbaijan under Armenian occupation and produced over a million internationally displaced people and refugees as local population had to flee the occupied areas.[21] The conflict has resulted in the securitisation of almost everything related to Armenia in Azerbaijan and vice versa. Thus, anything that is seen as posing an advantage to Azerbaijan is perceived as to the detriment of Armenia, and vice versa, leading to zero-sum bilateral relations.[22]

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represents the key security threat for Azerbaijan. The conflict has dominated foreign policy and national security discourses in Baku ever since independence. Vulnerabilities posed on Azerbaijan pushed the country immediately towards searching for foreign alliances. The first addressee of the search immediately became Turkey, a historically friendly nation who shares the same ethnic, religious and cultural background with Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the conflict created distrust towards Russia who was believed to support Armenia's war efforts. Such attitude was particularly prevalent in Baku during the presidency of the nationalist and pro-Turkish Abulfaz Elchibay in 1992-93.[23] The conflict also resulted in the development of close cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia, which has since developed into a trilateral strategic partnership among Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia. In fact, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh hugely increased the importance of Georgia for Azerbaijan, as the only reliable "window" to its major ally Turkey and towards the West. Georgia has also become the passage route for main Azerbaijan energy pipelines and transportation projects that connect the country to Turkey, for which otherwise Armenia would offer the most economic route.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has also dominated and shaped Armenian foreign and security policy since the collapse of the USSR. In a quest for military and economic support, Armenia approached Russia and has now become dependent on Moscow for its security and economic well-being. Armenia's isolation due to its occupation of Azerbaijani territories has further deepened Yerevan's dependence on Moscow, as well as leading Armenian politicians to seek opportunities for cooperation with Iran. Currently, Russia is not only Armenia's sole provider of natural gas; it also controls the country's railway network, electricity distribution, and production facilities, as well as many other strategic sectors of Armenia's economy.[24] Armenian state borders are jointly protected with Russia within the framework of the Moscow-led CSTO, and Russia has one of its largest military bases abroad in Armenia. Armenia also joined the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union in the beginning of 2015.

19 Ibid, p. 135

20 Azad Garibov (2015) 'OSCE and Conflict Resolution in the Post-Soviet Area: The Case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', *Caucasus International*, Istanbul, Vol. 5, No: 2, p: 76, Available at: http://cijournal.az/post/osce-and-conflict-resolution-in-the-post-soviet-area-the-case-of- the-armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-azad-garibov-98 (accessed 12 December 2016)

21 Azad Garibov (2015) 'OSCE and Conflict Resolution in the Post-Soviet Area: The Case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', *Caucasus International*, Istanbul, Vol. 5, No: 2, p: 76, Available at: http://cijournal.az/post/osce-and-conflict-resolution-in-the-post-soviet-area-the-case-of- the-armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-azad-garibov-98 (accessed 12 December 2016)

22 Svante Cornel (2001), *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus,* RoutledgeCurzon, p. 385

23 Garibov, A (December 2015) Alignment and Alliance Policies in the South Caucasus Regional Security Complex, SAM Comments, Baku, Volume XV, p.27-28, available at: http://sam.az/uploads/PDF/SAM%20COMMENTS-5.pdf

24 Vladimir Socor (10 December 2013) 'Armenia's Economic Dependence on Russia Insurmountable by the European Union', *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume*: 10 Issue: 221, available at: http://www.jamestown.org/regions/russia/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41740&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=48&cHash=408a5840473a1f08b45f64b8178116ba#.VrgpN_nhDIV

Another very important enmity in the South Caucasus is the long-standing Armenian-Turkish enmity that dates back to the 1915 events of mass relocation of Armenian population by Ottomans from the proximity of the frontline with Russia in Anatolia to other parts of the empire. Under the condition of shortages caused by the WWI, the relocation eventually turned into a logistical nightmare and led to thousands of civilian deaths.[25] The collective memory of 1915 events along with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was the key pillar of modern Armenian national consciousness and identity, as this memory exerted a major influence on Armenia's perception of past mistakes and goals for the future.[26] In fact, contrary to the natural economic interests of the country, independent Armenia has viewed Turkey as an eternal threat, a dangerous enemy. Along with international campaigns for genocide recognition, Armenia still holds, though semi-officially, territorial claims against the Eastern Anatolian territories of Turkey.[27]

Thus, from the very beginning of Armenia's independence, relations with Turkey were very tense. Despite a lacking official recognition by Turkey of the genocide allegations, Turkey kept its borders open for transportation to Armenia. Borders were closed down only in 1993, when the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia spread out beyond the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh to other territories of Azerbaijan. Along with war with Azerbaijan, the perceived threat of Turkey pushed Armenia further towards Russia as a security guarantor against Azerbaijan-Turkey alliance.

For its part, Georgia has been put in a difficult position by the Armenian-Azerbaijani zero-sum relationship. While Georgia has an interest in maintaining good relations with both states, it has, for a number of reasons, developed better relations with Azerbaijan than with Armenia. First of all, Baku is undoubtedly the economic hub of the Caucasus, and arguably the economic centre of the entire southern rim of post-Soviet states.[28] Georgia, on the other hand, is one of the two existing transportation options between Azerbaijan and Turkey and the West, the other being Armenia. Due to the impossibility of any Armenian-Azerbaijani cooperation, Georgia's role in oil and gas transit, TRACECA, and other trans-regional transportation projects has dramatically expanded. In this sense, Georgia is claimed to have a vested interest in Armenia's economic isolation.[29]

Similar to its regional neighbours, Georgia's security threats come from its enmities within the region—conflict with its ethnic minorities, which further developed into enmity with Russia due to Moscow's support of the separatist entities. Thus, the country's main problem is internationalised separatist conflicts. Georgia has two separatist entities—Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which have been de facto independent since the beginning of the 1990s. Both of the conflicts date back to the first pre-Soviet independence of Georgia in 1918-21, which emerged when the country applied force against its rebellious ethnic minorities. In addition, the situation with separatism in Javakheti, the Armenian majority region of Georgia, is difficult due to the separatist sentiments, which allegedly were supported by nationalists in Armenia.[30] From this perspective, both Georgia and Azerbaijan must deal with separatists who have gained control of parts of their respective territories. As a result, Tbilisi and Baku have a common stance with regard to separatism and minority questions; both support the preservation of territorial integrity and vehemently reject separatism and secession.[31]

25 Edward J. Erickson (2013) *Ottomans and Armenians: A Study in Counterinsurgency*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan

26 Garibov, A (December 2015) Alignment and Alliance Policies in the South Caucasus Regional Security Complex, SAM Comments, Baku, Volume XV, p.37-38, available at: http://sam.az/uploads/PDF/SAM%20COMMENTS-5.pdf

27 Asbarez (July 27, 2011) Erdogan Urges Sarkisian to Apologize for Western Armenia Remarks, available at: http://asbarez.com/97287/erdogan-asks-sarkisian-to-apologize-for-western-armenia-remarks/

28 Svante Cornell (1999) 'Geopolitics and strategic alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia', Perception, June - August , Volume IV – Number 2, available at: http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/SVANTE-E.-CORNELL.pdf (accessed 11 January 2015)

29 Svante Cornel (2001), *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus,* RoutledgeCurzon, p. 388

30 Nika Chitadze (2015) 'Samtskhe-Javakheti as a Potential Flash Point in Georgia: Ethnic-Confessional Composition and Integration Challenges', *Caucasus International*, Istanbul, Vol. 5, No: 3, p: 113, Available at: http://cijournal.az/post/samtskhe-javakheti-as-a-potential-flash-point-in-georgia-ethnic-confessional-composition-and-integration-challenges-nika-chitadze (accessed 13 January 2017)

31 Svante Cornel (2001), *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus,* RoutledgeCurzon, p. 386

These conflicts have led to Russia turning into the major state foe for Georgia. Though it is not the only reason, the conflict played a very important role in Georgia's pro-Western policy in a quest to balance Russia. Faced with the recurring dilemma of Georgian political alignment—Russia or the West—the Gamsakhurdia (first president of Georgia) government's choice was "not Russia"', which, by extension, meant alignment with the West.[32]

In terms of amities, there are two profound examples of this kind—Azerbaijani-Turkish and Armenian-Russian friendships. The military, political, economic and cultural alliance between Azerbaijan and Turkey has existed since the very beginning of the fall of the Soviet regime, and even prior to this. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the armed conflict with Armenia, and concerns about Russia's pro-Armenian stance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, led Baku to question Soviet and then Russian policies towards Azerbaijan. In the face of this threat perception, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and public sought to re-establish the multifaceted relationship with Turkey. The two states quickly revitalised their old ties of brotherhood, rediscovering the alliance that had existed during the first Azerbaijan Republic of 1918-20, when Ottoman military support has been instrumental in liberating Baku from Bolsheviks and armed groups of the Dashnaktsutyun party. The friendship and alliance was also based on ethnic, cultural and religious kinship and commonness of interests. Feeling threatened by the emerging Armenia-Russia alliance, Azerbaijan was in need of a powerful ally that could help to balance this tandem. Azerbaijan also needed Turkish economic aid and support for international recognition. Since then the very close relationship between the two nations has produced, as Hopf calls it—"cascades of benign behavior helping to perpetuate the amity characteristic of the relationship"[33] and the alliance between the two states.

Armenian amity towards Russia based on the widely held view of Russia as a saviour and protector of Christian Armenians in the Muslim and Turkic dominated geography.[34] This friendship is also based on historical memory as in the case of Azerbaijani-Turkish amity, as Russia has historically been supportive of the relocation of Armenian to the South Caucasus and protection of Armenian minority rights in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, despite anti-Soviet slogans and public refusal to participate in a referendum for a new Soviet treaty in 1991, after the collapse of USSR Armenia was fast to join the integration organisations created by Russia such as Commonwealth of Independent States and Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and establish a very staunch orientation towards Moscow ever since.

Inherent state weaknesses in the South Caucasus

Inherent weaknesses of states, or as some prefer to call it—state incoherence—constitute the domestic level of analysis in RSCT. Oskanian, who attempted to expand the theoretical understanding of the RSTC's variables, divides state weaknesses into two types: horizontal and vertical dimension, respectively referring to types of incoherence associated with inter-ethnic tensions/secessionism and general political instability.[35]

In terms of the first dimension, Azerbaijan and Georgia are multi-ethnic countries, where minorities' relations with the central governments have not always been very smooth. Some of the centre-minority tensions (for example, Georgia-Abkhazian, and Georgian-Ossetian) turned openly violent and triggered bloody and protracted conflicts as discussed in the previous parts, some of them boils from time to time (particularly, Armenians in Georgia) threatening to create new sources of instability in the

32 72 James C. MacDougall (2009) 'Post-soviet strategic alignment:The weight of history in the south Cauca-sus', *Georgetown University*, p. 118, available at: https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/han-dle/10822/553091/macDougallJames.pdf?sequence=1

33 Ted Hopf (2010) The Logic of Habit in International Relations, European Journal of International Affairs, 16 (4), p. 553

34 Garibov, A (December 2015) Alignment and Alliance Policies in the South Caucasus Regional Security Complex, SAM Comments, Baku, Volume XV, p.38-39, available at: http://sam.az/uploads/PDF/SAM%20COMMENTS-5.pdf

35 Kevork Oskanian (September 2010) "Weaving Webs of Insecurity: Fear, Weakness and Power in the Post-Soviet South Caucasus", PhD dissertation, London School of Economics, p. 138

region. From this point of view, in term of highly multi-ethnic Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia is horizontally more stable due to its homogenous ethnic composition generated by expulsion of Azerbaijanis in late 1980s – 98 % of the population is ethnic Armenians.[36]

Conflict has also played a key role in generating political instability in the region that made them vulnerable and led to the search for outside support/protection. For example, fall of Mutallibov government in Azerbaijan in 1992, and resignation of Ter-Petrosyan government in 1998 was directly related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as shootings in Armenian parliament in 1999 was allegedly aimed to sabotage the peace process. Each of these government change resulted in certain changes in foreign alignments of the countries, either strengthening pro-Russian orientation in Yerevan, or undermining it in Azerbaijan.

Such perspectives also affect security dynamics in the region – many argue that governments in the regional countries use conflicts as a bargaining chip to stay in power or divert attention from domestic problems. It is no surprise that some of the most serious violations of cease-fire occurred during or right before the expected anti-regime political upheavals, such as mass protest after 2008 presidential elections in Armenia.[37] In short, inherent state weaknesses play an important role in threat perceptions of given state via creating vulnerabilities in the form of state-minority, regime-people or inter-elite tension, or through engendering high levels of regional enmity.

Big power penetration in the South Caucasus

While regional security interactions are not fully independent from global ones, big powers enjoy significant power projection capabilities and wide agendas that often play a certain role in regional security interactions and alliance/alignment choices. As RSCT puts it, "security features at the level are substantially self-contained not in the sense of being totally free-standing, but rather in possessing a security dynamic that would exist even if other actors did not impinge on it."[38] Penetration occurs when outside powers make security alignments with states within an RSC: "An indigenous regional rivalry, as between India and Pakistan, provides opportunities or demands for the great powers to penetrate the region. Balance-of-power logic and regional enmities work naturally to encourage the local rivals to call in outside help, and by this mechanism, the local patterns of rivalry become linked to the global ones."[39]

Thus, the paper argues that the previously discussed two variables, namely enmities and amities indigenous to the South Caucasus, and the inherent weaknesses of the regional states pave the way to big power penetration. Facing the conflicts, either state or sub-state minority groups seek foreign allies to take upper hand in the conflicts. Conflicts in the territories of the South Caucasus states played an important role in the Russian penetration of the region—in the form of an ally for Armenia, major arms provider for Azerbaijan, peace-keeper and later a conflicting side in Georgia. The same conflicts increased alliance incentives with Turkey for Azerbaijan and with the West for Georgia, which resultantly staunchly brought Turkish and US influence to the region. I do not argue that conflicts were the only or even major reasons facilitating the penetration of the mentioned power, but they played a crucial role in their formation and development. For example, the region's former imperial master Russia penetrates the region almost by inertia as it inherited military bases from Soviet times, possesses strong means of influence over the region through Russian minorities and Russian speaking populations, inter-elite relations, economic cooperation inherited from USSR, and a massive labour migration from the region to Russia. At the same time, Azerbaijan's Turkey or Georgia's Western choice was not pre-defined by the

36 The Government of the republic of Armenia, Demographic Statistics, available at: http://www.gov.am/en/demographics/

37 Laurence Broers (2016) The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Defaulting to War, Chatham House Research Paper, available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/NK%20paper%2024082016%20WEB.pdf (accessed 13 May 2019)

38 Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security,* Cambridge University Press, p.47

39 Ibid, p. 46

existence of conflict with Armenia or perceived Russian support to its adversary. It was conflicts that have created fertile grounds for the foreign powers to influence the region.

The reasons of the enmities were also purely in the local inter-ethnic dynamics and not foreign incited as some argue, but foreign involvement to a certain degree changed the course of the enmities and related conflicts, mostly resulting in their freezing and prolongation.[40] On the other hand, amities also played a role in the penetration of big neighbours to the region, mostly in form of a pre-defined "best option" of whom to align with.

Inherent weakness is another issue creating a situation conducive for foreign penetration as well as providing incentives for foreign alliances for the regional countries. The impact of horizontal weaknesses (which are also very closely related to enmities) is discussed above. Vertical weaknesses, as they create conditions to influence domestic politics and thus political decision making in the country, is another fertile ground for penetration. When penetrations happen and gradually strengthen in the form of an alliance with a regional country, they become an important factor in power equation in the region and security dynamics, and the foreign powers occasionally become indirect or direct conflict parties. The deepening of penetrations also makes fundamental shifts in alignment and alliance patterns very difficult making them durable.

Conclusion

At first glance, the South Caucasus seems to be ideally located as a region of cooperation, with every chance of becoming a security community where internal conflict is unthinkable, to use Karl Deutsch's words.[41] The region is small, comprised of nations that can benefit significantly from economic and security cooperation to strengthen their sovereignty, protect themselves from the negative influences of neighbouring powers, and build a firm regional stability conducive to sustainable development. However, the opposite is the case—the South Caucasus is a conflict-driven region that has experienced a number of separatist conflicts and interstate wars; there are multiple intra-regional contradictions and enmities, and the region' countries' relations with their neighbours are problematic. Due to the intra-regional conflicts and inherent state weaknesses, the region is exposed to the influences of its larger neighbours, which play a significant role in shaping the regional security dynamics and the course of hostilities. Membership within or orientation towards the conflicting alliances strengthen intra-regional rifts, further decreasing the chances of peaceful conflict resolution in the South Caucasus.

The paper shed light on the reasons behind such divergent and contracting alliance and alignment policies of the regional states via looking at the nature of security dynamics and threat perception in the region. This study showed that the reason for this highly complex and somewhat paradoxical situation in the South Caucasus is the divergence in threat perceptions, which has produced divergent security strategies, including alliance and alignment policies to address those security threats. Given the perceived security threats, the South Caucasus states seek alliances with the historically friendlier regional and non-regional countries that offer the best opportunities for countering the most serious and most tangible threats. There is an obvious link between threat perception and alliance choices, and therefore divergence in threat prioritisation is the major reason for the different and frequently conflicting alliance choices in the region.

40 Garibov, A (December 2015) Alignment and Alliance Policies in the South Caucasus Regional Security Complex, SAM Comments, Baku, Volume XV, p.21, available at: http://sam.az/uploads/PDF/SAM%20COMMENTS-5.pdf

41 Hasan Ulusoy, 'Revisiting Security Communities after the Cold War: The Constructivist Perspective', *Center for Strategic Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, available at: http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Hasan-Ulusoy3.pdf (accessed 30 January 2017)