The changes underway in the world during the recent period have already affected its multiple regions, including the South Caucasus. It is expected that this impact is not only going to persist, but grow stronger or weaker, also considering what kind of policies will be chosen by the states of the South Caucasus themselves on the one hand and by those powers or power centres, struggling for influence over this region, on the other.

In order to establish a real, stable, and inclusive security system, the following factors are necessary:

- Objective and accurate definition of existing and potential threats (difficulties — objective and subjective criteria);
- Neutralization of the conflict threat (through preventive activity);
- In case of existing conflicts — their resolution as soon as possible.

All of the abovementioned factors are mainly evaluated differently by the South Caucasus states and, in such conditions, establishment of a real, stable and comprehensive system of regional security is possible only theoretically and only in case of guaranteed existence of several vital prerequisites.

Nevertheless, there are certain grounds to suppose that the situation existing in the South Caucasus could be significantly different, had the leading countries of the West pursued a different policy exactly regarding Russia.

As to establishment of a comprehensive and stable regime of security, the likelihood of this being possible is almost at the same level as at the time of restoration of independence by the South Caucasus states. This is so, because unresolved conflicts still remain in the region, the third military power is still present here, the states of the region still have differing viewpoints regarding the possible guarantor forces of their own and the region's security, while the leading countries of the world still cannot agree upon a common policy necessary for turning the South Caucasus into a region of cooperation, and not only in terms of military-political, but also economic, specifically energy aspects.

For establishment of real and sustainable security in the region for the future it is, again and again, necessary to ensure both a high and stable level of democracy in the states of the region itself, which will result in creation of a mutually profitable and good neighbourly regime of economic and political cooperation between democratic states of the region, as well as more active and effective facilitation of these processes by leading countries of the world and international organizations, as well as in terms of containment of the aggressive policy (including the so-called "soft power") of Russia. Only all of this can be followed by peaceful and fair regulation of the conflicts and can provide the region with international security guarantees.

**ABSTRACT**

**KEY-WORDS**

Security, Conflicts, Russia, Politics, International system;
The changes underway in the world during the recent period have already affected its multiple regions, including the South Caucasus.

It is expected that this impact is not only going to persist, but grow stronger or weaker, also considering what kind of policies will be chosen by the states of the South Caucasus themselves on the one hand and by those powers or power centers, struggling for influence over this region, on the other.

We may freely assume that both the South Caucasus and the Caucasus region on the whole, as well as its neighborhood, will turn into the arena of interesting, but, in terms of security, quite contradictory processes in a near future.

The basis for making such conclusion is both to strengthen Georgia, as the central state of the region, in terms of domestic political and economic reforms and further movement towards becoming closer to Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as to intensify the policy of these structures in the region, especially to consider the new NATO strategy regarding the Black Sea region. This will undoubtedly be augmented by changes in development of the Russian policy towards the region.

However, before we move onto the real prospect of strengthening the security of Georgia, as the central state of the region, in terms of domestic political and economic reforms and further movement towards becoming closer to Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as to intensify the policy of these structures in the region, especially to consider the new NATO strategy regarding the Black Sea region. This will undoubtedly be augmented by changes in development of the Russian policy towards the region.

From the very first days of the independence restoration in the three states of the South Caucasus, the level of security level in the region was constantly fluctuating. These fluctuations were not just a result of internal processes development, underway separately in the states of the region, or a result of the policy of outside forces, historically constantly affecting this region. This fluctuation was predetermined by both of these extremely interconnected factors.

We are emphasizing this circumstance once again because no proper attention has sometimes been given to the interdependence of domestic and foreign security of all the three states of the South Caucasus, including Georgia. This was all more damaging to the process of ensuring comprehensive security of all the three states of the region, since considering the fact that the interdependence between domestic and foreign security is especially important for small, comparatively weak countries from the military-political and economic point of view. This is even more so, if they are located in a region of confrontation between the interests of the world and regional leading states.

Always when talking about security of separate South Caucasus countries or the region in general, first of all one main impeding problem is constantly noted and underlined – the political-ethnic conflicts existing on territories of the region’s states. However, if domestic threats are apparent in at least one or several states of the region, they extremely intensify foreign threats, not just for separate countries of the region but for the whole region.

Again, this is particularly noticeable in such regions, which represent the areas of special attention of the leading powers or power centers of the world and, consequently, their confrontation, due to their special strategic, economic and military-political significance (i.e. in our region).

Political-ethnic conflicts are undoubtedly the main obstacle for secure existence of the region, but there are other universally well-known security components: military, political, and economic (energy can be mentioned separately, due to the special significance of energy in the world nowadays), social (which includes human rights, demography, etc.), cultural, and informational. For quite a while already, terrorism has been distinguished as a separate threat, although its exact definition still needs to be verified and agreed.

It is known, although the threats are admissible at various levels, they still affect security and that, when discussing security, in case of deducting even one component, one cannot talk about “comprehensive and stable” security anymore (therefore, for example, it is practically impossible for the region’s states to have common environmental threats and a common environmental security system, while facing different military-political threats, they may be on different levels, but they are not different).

Proceeding from the abovementioned, every individual country or region, if they want
real and stable comprehensive security, needs security with all its components.

“Conflict is undoubtedly the main threat to security on all levels, but when conflict exists within or between the “levels”, it is practically impossible to ensure realistic, sustainable and comprehensive security.

Proceeding from all of the above-mentioned, it is also known, that in order to establish a real, stable and inclusive security system, the following factors are necessary:

- Objective and accurate definition of existing and potential threats (difficulties – objective and subjective criteria);
- Neutralization of the conflict threat (through preventive activity);
- In case of existing conflicts – their resolution as soon as possible.

All of the above-mentioned factors are mainly evaluated differently by the South Caucasus states and, in such conditions, establishment of a real, stable and comprehensive system of regional security is possible only theoretically and only in case of guaranteed existence of several vital prerequisites.

The foremost of these is ensuring high level internal sustainable security of the states of the region themselves and their agreement on the existence of common threats, for each of them and for the region, as well as on availability of the shared means for their prevention.

In our opinion, since restoration of independence, neither the South Caucasus states, whether separately or together, nor the forces or force centers having a positive interest in the region, have managed to fully ensure any of the conditions necessary for guaranteeing security.

It is exactly the circumstance that has led each of the South Caucasus countries and the region on the whole to the existing situation, which is characterized by the still insufficient level of internal security in the separate states and by political-ethnic conflicts, based on the presence of foreign military force, persistent in the whole region. The main thing probably is that the status quo does not facilitate in any way the insurance of sustainable and comprehensive security of separate states of the region or the region in general.

Apart from the above, the governments of all the three South Caucasus states are forced to consider also the so-called Realpolitik approaches of the leading Western countries towards the region and Russia as well.

Nevertheless, there are certain grounds to suppose, that the situation existing in the South Caucasus could be significantly different, had the leading countries of the West pursued a different policy regarding Russia.

On the other hand, this was also possible, had the states of the region themselves developed and implemented correct policies regarding Russia.

We are not mentioning the possibility of Russia itself practicing a different policy towards the region, since a change of Russian foreign policy will be possible only in conditions of existence of at least a medium-level democracy in Russia, which can be followed by alteration of imperialistic mentality of Russia and we consider it impossible in the foreseeable future.

Consequently, it was and is important, how exactly the South Caucasus countries themselves defined and define their interests of security and sustainable independent development.

Here, meanwhile, the reality is (it is of no decisive importance whether this is predetermined by history or differing visions of the present, or by more practical causes) that the South Caucasus states have quite different visions not just regarding arrangement and domestic policies of their countries, but also in terms of their future state security, as well as the guarantors and guarantees of this security.

If we consider the interdependence between domestic and foreign policy since the restoration of their independence, Georgia and Azerbaijan have had seemingly much more in common with each other than with Armenia, as both of them were facing the most important problem of resolving the conflicts, existing on their territory and restoring their territorial integrity. However, if we leave domestic policy alone, it is clearly seen, that in terms of quite important nuances of relations with Russia on the one hand and the West on the other, there was quite a significant difference noticeable between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Never-
theless, initially it was being mentioned quite intensively that one “alliance axis” passing through our region was represented by Russia-Armenia and Iran, while the other included Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey and the US.

Also, if we touch upon other areas of security, for example possible steps made in the direction of economic integration of the region, which should have been first of all within Armenian interests and which first of all implied removal of existing blockades and other obstacles, it was doubtful from the very beginning that this would have practical results, without simultaneously taking care of the political and social components (safe return of refugees, defining the status and security guarantees) of the conflicts.

In spite of this, as we have noted above, there are certain grounds to suppose, that the situation existing in the South Caucasus could have been substantially different, had the leading states of the West pursued another policy regarding Russia, after the Cold War.

Let us remember, what was recognized by Western society as the main objective after the end of the Cold War. This was establishment of a just and safe “new world order”, based on the principles of free market economy and liberal democracy. However, the main things is, that many countries of the world, including the leading ones, immediately upon declaration of the end of the Cold War, recognized this task only in words, while doing exactly the opposite in terms of their actions.

Back at the time, it was extremely important for Russia (one of the largest and strongest states of the world and, most significantly, the former leader (under the name of the Soviet Union) of those forces of the world, whose governments and arrangement were, to put it mildly, very distant from the abovementioned principles) to agree to real implementation of this task.

Back then, the government of Russia expressed verbal readiness to take the abovementioned principles into account, but only in words, for the purpose of, so to say, “domestic use”. As to other, especially formerly Soviet countries, the policy of Russia regarding them, which was mostly based on the interests of Russian generals, still remained unchanged.

Russia was aware, that at the time, in terms of economic and political development, it was not ready to play the role of a superpower again and that it needed a certain transitional period for this. Therefore, Russia seemed to act as a partner country of the US and the West in general in the processes of establishing the “new world order” and, later, of struggling against international terrorism, while in reality the interest of Russia was to use these slogans for its own purposes, in the regions important for it – first of all, in Chechnya and on territory of the former USSR countries.

A facilitating factor for Russia became the policy of Clinton’s administration of the US, which, as current reality shows, apparently turned out to be naive in terms of realistically evaluating the readiness of Russia to build a just world order. This administration called the South Caucasus “Russia’s backyard”, where Russia was to have freedom of action.¹

It was largely such approach which made creation of a new type of international security system problematic, which, in its turn, excluded even the possibility of talking about establishment of a system of regional security in the South Caucasus region.

After the events of September 11, 2000, it seemed that establishment of new strategic relations between the West and Russia in the direction of struggling against terrorism was evident. However, apparently the problems and confusion related to these relations had a negative effect upon certain regions of the world, especially those burdened with unresolved conflicts, which were subjected to a high risk of terrorism.

These regions became not the territories of fighting against terrorism but, first of all the territories of geopolitical confrontation for obtaining influence.²

Already in the 90’s of the past century, peace and security in the South Caucasus seemed to have been within the interests of not just this region, but all of the world, not just due to its geographical location and geostrategic

¹K. Zhgenti - Russia – clash of civilizations, Georgian Institute of Russian Studies (girs.org.ge) 01.05.09. 15
²K. Zhgenti – Problem of international terrorism and security in the South Caucasus, materials of the conference of the South Caucasus Institute of Regional Security (SCIRS) Baku, 13.03.02. 22.
significance, but due to its increasing importance as the main link between those transportation and communication projects, which were at first known as the TRACECA and later as the New Silk Road and included not just delivery of energy carriers from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region, but also other noteworthy economic and communication projects.

This role became even more important after the tragic events of September 11, which made it clear, that there are no more or less important conflicts and crises and that resolution of these problems was possible only through joint cooperation at the international and regional levels.

Change of attitude of the new US administration, already at the time of Bush’s presidency, towards the region of the South Caucasus was also a manifestation of a certain extent altered geopolitical realities after the events of September 11. The US administration probably became more aware then, that Russia’s exclusive rights over the South Caucasus, which is not just located near those territories, where the threat of terrorism may emanate from, but carries the same hazard also on the conflict territories of its own, could cause certain difficulties in the process of fighting terrorism. This was furthered by no less significant clash between Russia and the US related to energy interests in the South Caucasus region, which later occupied a more important place within this confrontation, as a result of the problems of struggle with terrorism moving to the background (which was predetermined by the supposed “victory” of Russia in Chechnya and “enforcement of order” there).

Meanwhile, the so-called “transitional period” for Russia was over and a new reality established itself for the region, as well as for the whole world – the economically and politically recovered Russia, with its new administration, decided to again demonstrate to the West and, first of all, to the US that the formerly Soviet territory was its undisputed area of influence and that it would not allow domination of other powers here.

It was exactly after this, that an answer had to be given to the two questions, important for each country of the South Caucasus, as well as for the whole region – the first, whether states of the region would be capable of developing and implementing an adequate policy, while taking these new realities into account and the second, to what extent were the Western countries and, first of all, the US, ready to “defend” their interests and allies on the territory in question.

Unfortunately, negative answers to both countries predetermined the events of 2008, which further weakened security of both separate countries of the region and the whole South Caucasus region.

Discussing in detail the 2008 Bucharest Summit of the NATO and the Russia-Georgia war of the same year is not the goal of this work, but it is necessary to mention, that negative influence of these events upon security of Georgia and the whole region is indubitable.

As a result, we ended up with the recognition (by Russia and later some of its satellite countries) of the conflict regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia as the so-called “independent countries” and with further strengthening of the Russian military-political status in the region, under the pretext the Agreements “on military cooperation”, processed with these “states”.

These processes were later facilitated by the West pursuing, on the whole, still a moderate and, it can be said, an excessively careful policy regarding Russia, despite the fact that the “problem” of Georgia was supplemented by the “problem” of the Ukraine (including the Crimea).

However, even after this, despite the “sanctions” introduced by the West against Russia, the policy of the latter does not change. According to the opinions of European experts themselves, the reason for this is that “The EU-US negative conditionality (sanctions) against Russia seems to be losing its momentum. This meets Russian expectations to retain the occupied territories and wait for the softening of international reactions, especially after the victory of Donald Trump in the US elections and the Brexit referenda in the UK. This relatively passive attitude of the EU and US in 2016-2017 may also be understood by the Russian side as a signal of the acceptance of the status quo as a long term outcome”.3

According to the opinion of the same experts, “The prerequisite for imposing more advanced targeted sanctions is that the West (and within it the EU) acts unanimously. The EU and the US should show their willingness to raise their bids in terms of Ukraine and give no hope to Russia in terms of softening sanctions and lowering economic pressure. The advantage in terms of economic power should be transferred into initiative and pre-emptive approaches in relations with Russia. Losing initiative and giving breathing space to Russia may lead to a further escalation of the conflict and bring regional instability to Moldova”.

Does such continuation of the processes contribute to strengthening of security in the South Caucasus region?

Only in terms of a certain decrease of the level of possible new military confrontation and that is also only within a short-term prospect. This proceeds from two realities – firstly, that Russia has at this stage achieved the severing of strategic territories from Georgia for an indefinite period of time and solidification of its military presence there, as well as preservation of the status quo in relation to the Karabakh conflict and secondly, that the US and the West as a whole will do anything in order not to allow the second “European war” in this region in the XXI century.

As for the establishment of a comprehensive and stable regime of security, the likelihood of this possibility is almost at the same level as at the time of restoration of independence by the South Caucasus states. This is so, because unresolved conflicts still remain in the region, the third military power is still present here, the states of the region still have different viewpoints regarding the possible guarantor forces of their own and the region’s security, while the leading countries of the world still cannot agree upon a common policy necessary for turning the South Caucasus into a region of cooperation, and not only in terms of military-political, but also economic, specifically energy aspects.

Nevertheless, it should be noted, that constant attempts of Georgia to strengthen its security through cooperation with Western allies and, first of all, the US and NATO, is having its impact upon enforcement of security in the region.

All countries, including the South Caucasus states, need the so-called “security umbrella” for safe and peaceful development. For Georgia, this kind of umbrella is provided by the membership in the Euro-Atlantic alliance and the country is consistently pursuing activities in this direction, especially during recent years. It is also important to emphasize, that the country is combining such a policy with another pragmatic policy in relation to Russian and our neighbors who may have different points of view regarding their “security umbrellas”, but a regional security system cannot be established without mutual cooperation.

For the establishment of real and sustainable security in the region for the future it is, again and again, necessary to ensure both a high and stable level of democracy in the states of the region itself that will result in creation of a mutually profitable and good neighborly regime of economic and political cooperation between democratic states of the region, as well as more active and effective facilitation of these processes by the leading countries of the world and international organizations, and in terms of containment of the aggressive policy (including the so-called “soft power”) of Russia. Only this can be followed by peaceful and fair regulation of the conflicts and provide the region with international security guarantees.

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* Ditto.