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BUILDING SECURITY IN SOUTH CAUCASUS: NATO - EXPLORING THE RULES OF
ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

The purpose of this Master's Essay is to study the certain features of NATO's engagement in the South Caucasian countries for extending democracy, prosperity and security in its Eastern borders. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in major geopolitical transformations worldwide. In post-Soviet era the South Caucasus became vitally important arena for the regional and global interests. Therefore, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was forced to redesign its image in the East.

In this study the theoretical perceptions of the security concept were examined which reveals the multidimensional characteristic of the concept in security studies. The study also refers to the major causes of security deficit in the region and illustrates the bases of the strategic importance of the South Caucasus region for the European security. Then it discusses the involvement of NATO in the South Caucasus region by its various cooperative initiatives.

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as new independent states made those countries experience chaotic internal political, economic and social developments. In post-Soviet era a number of violent clashes became the ground of insecurity in the South Caucasus region. At the same time due to its growing importance in the global geopolitical arena the South Caucasus has become a target of increased attention by the regional and global powers in regard to conflict resolution, security and energy policies.

The international environment surrounding the South Caucasus is complicated as the main actors - including Russia, USA, Turkey, Iran, European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization - have sought to maximize their own influence in the security vacuum of the region. Hence, the SC region has undergone a series of transformations in the security dynamics that have come to define the region. The South Caucasus has become one of the focal points in the geopolitical competition in post-Cold War era, consequently, the various levels of security dynamics - such as national, regional, international and global - within the region have in large part been influenced by the degree of global powers' involvement in the South Caucasus.

The geographic position of the South Caucasus is considered to be of strategic importance for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The SC region is located on the NATO's south-eastern flank, it borders one of the NATO member countries – Turkey, thus the security and stability of this region may influence on the larger security dynamics of the Alliance. Therefore, NATO is very interested in cooperating with the South Caucasus

countries for good governance, democracy and peace in order to enhance the sustained security in the region.

The first chapter of this study illustrates the theoretical perceptions of security. It examines the concept of security, its various aspects and elements in security studies. Through various comparisons the study extracts how much ambiguous and contested is the concept of security. There are also many levels of security but in the framework of this study the national, regional, international and global levels of security are discussed. In the second chapter the main causes of security deficit and the regional importance of the South Caucasus region are examined. Among a wide range of threatening factors of the regional security in the South Caucasus are the protracted ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. As to the regional importance of the South Caucasus the study concentrates on the alternative energy resources of the region and its possibility of becoming a transport of Caspian energy resources. The third chapter studies the cooperation between NATO and SC countries focusing on the Partnership for Peace and Individual Partnership Action Plan programs and also on the other initiatives of the Alliance aiming to engage in South Caucasian countries.

Literature Review

There is a vast amount of literature on the theoretical perceptions of security, regional security in South Caucasus and on the developments of NATO – South Caucasus cooperation. All that literature expresses numerous aspects essential for understanding the concept of security, its dimensions in general and evaluating and managing the developments of security issues and NATO's engagement in abovementioned region in particular.

According to Baldwin redefining 'security' became primary issue when designing

policy agendas of nation-states in 1990s. He provides thorough conceptual analysis of security then discusses some reasons why it was neglected by the specialists of security studies and finally, he treats 'security' as an essentially contested concept. However, in this article 'security' was not used in its first meaning rather it was connected with different spheres and, thus, it can be applicable to various levels: individual, family, society, state, international system or humanity. Baldwin offers three important specifications of security when dealing with systematic comparison of policy alternatives: means, costs and time period. These specifications indicate the primary, core and marginal value approaches of security when defining how important is security relative to other values¹. However, Wolfers, mentions in his security studies that when such concepts as 'national security' and 'national interest' become popular they should be examined properly. He indicates 'national interest' as a source of policy which can be easily distinguished among other policies which are the subordinates of 'national security' policy. Wolfers draws strong parallels between the formulas of national security and national interest where the demand of national security policy is normative. When Baldwin tries to define security in general as a policy objective distinguishable from others, Wolfers indicates that the term 'security' involves so wide-range goals that quite different policies can be considered as policies of security. While Baldwin interprets 'security' as an 'essentially contested concept', Wolfers compares security with power or wealth. In his study Wolfers also concentrates on moral issues of accumulating coercive power meaning that it sometimes can pass the moral judgment².

Stolberg believes that in the 21st century international system the security of the nations and the institutionalization of that security in national strategy and in security-related documents are great challenges for the nation states. Those strategies are designed in a way

¹ David A. Baldwin, *"The concept of security."* Review of International Studies (British International Studies Association), 1997.

² Arnold Wolfers, *"National Security" as an Ambiguous Symbol.* Political Science Quarterly (The Academy of Political Science), 1952.

that if achieved can ensure fundamental conditions for comprehensive security in these particular states. However, Stolberg indicates that nations always have various strategies, but they never can be considered as “good” or “bad”. It is important how much open those strategies are reflected in institutionalized documents³.

DeTemple specifies the rising importance of the South Caucasus region for the broader regional security and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) commitment to expand security under the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. The three South Caucasus states - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - are moving toward a closer relationship with the Alliance. Hence, these developments contribute for future regional stability. The article also examines the military engagement in the South Caucasus states and the strategic locations of South Caucasus region. South Caucasus and Central Asia have become much more interested in greater cooperation with NATO right after the significant increase of the size and scope of Partnership for Peace activities. This PfP cooperation has had great importance and positive impact on the security problems of the South Caucasus region. The author later specifies the strategic importance of the SC region as it forms a strategic corridor which links Southern Europe with Central Asia. In this sense the region could be used as a channel for Caspian energy resources⁴. As DeTemple did, Cornell, also discussed NATO's engagement in South Caucasus. Cornell, begins with an analysis of the security deficit in the South Caucasus and how instability in this region could threaten the interests of NATO. Then, the author provides recommendations both for NATO and the South Caucasus. Simultaneously the author shows his skepticism about Russian opposition. He considers it as an obstacle to NATO's efforts and success in this region as the region is in Russia's interests as well. The enlargement of NATO and the new geopolitical reality of Alliance members' security interests endorse

³ Alan G. Stolberg, *How nation-states craft national security strategy documents*, (Strategic Studies Institute), 2012.

⁴ James E. DeTemple, *Expanding Security Eastward: NATO military engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia*, (Boston University, 2001).

NATO to refocus the zone of its influence to southward and eastward. The NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative was launched in the South Caucasus in order to keep SC countries close to the Euro-Atlantic system. The author is prone to a focused and strategic approach to the South Caucasus on the part of NATO considering the fact that European powers are more responsive to the threats and opportunities which might come from the South Caucasus⁵.

As DeTemple and Cornell, Priego also remarks the importance of Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative in the South Caucasus both for the NATO and for the regional countries. He indicates that this initiative was created by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in order to redesign its image after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and after the end of the Cold War. Due to its flexibility the programme allows the partners to choose the type of cooperation with NATO that they want to take part. Therefore, in the South Caucasus, each country has chosen its own style of participation in the Partnership for Peace. The author mentions, that Georgia is involved in most of the initiatives launched in the framework of the PfP: as Georgia's most important aim is to gain NATO membership in the near future. Nevertheless, for Armenia NATO is not considered to be the ally against its enemies: Turkey or Azerbaijan. So, Armenia tries to cooperate with NATO in other fields through PfP in order to diversify its foreign policy. Azerbaijan also cooperates with the Alliance, but its behavior is more balanced than the Georgian or Armenian ones. Baku does not seek integrating into the Alliance but its relations with NATO are much stronger than those of Armenia. For this reason, the author concludes that NATO Partnership for Peace program is a flexible initiative that allows the partners to fill their foreign and security gaps⁶.

Shahnazaryan highlights the main threats to regional security and stability in the South Caucasus. The establishment of democratic principles, the rule of law, free market

⁵ S. Cornell, *NATO's Role in South Caucasus Regional Security*. Turkish Policy Quarterly, 2004.

⁶ Alberto Priego, NATO cooperation towards South Caucasus, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2008.

economic relations, and the protection of fundamental human rights are not in key significance in the South Caucasus countries. Consequently, all threatening problems of the region continue to deepen which keeps the region both politically and economically unstable. Because of the confronting geopolitical and geo-economic interests the SC region may develop into a center of clashes which would jeopardize the currently manageable political instability. The creation of security and stability in the Caucasus is the rejection of individual pursuits of security by the three states. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia should comprehend that they cannot track security and prosperity at the expense of their neighbors. These are the basis which may lead the three countries to become a full party not only in European security systems but also in Western political, economic, and security structures, such as NATO and the EU⁷. As Shahnazaryan did, M. Mihalka and M. Wilcox too, study the trends in liberal democracy in the South Caucasus region with the connection of economic development. Those trends are mainly connected with the regional changes in civil and military relations and the prospects for violence in the region which makes the South Caucasus more insecure. Economic development is a factor which might lead to a liberal democracy in the country, as in theory economic development is constantly associated with liberal democracy. Hence, democracy is more likely in more developed countries and the regime transitions of all kinds are more likely particularly during economic downwards. Thus, liberal democracy in the South Caucasus was on the rise in the decade prior to the global economic crisis: during that period all the countries in the region saw substantial economic growth. However, despite theoretical forecasts, there has been no increase in liberal democracy in the region⁸.

Thus, we can identify that although the concept of security has been studied for a long

⁷ D. Shahnazaryan, *The South Caucasus: Problems of Stability and Regional Security*. Demokratizatsiya, 14 (3), 2006.

⁸ M. D. Mihalka; & M. R. Wilcox, *Unintended Strategic Consequences of Security Assistance in the South Caucasus*. JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly, (57), 2010.

time in security-related studies, it does not have the same meaning after 1990s as it had before. Similarly, since different great powers and organizations are involved in building security in South Caucasus, security approaches and perceptions in this region differ widely in academic literature. However, NATO with its Partnership for Peace initiative was quite successful in its way of cooperation with the countries in the South Caucasus.

Research Design and Methodology

The study addresses the following research questions:

- Research Question #1: What are the theoretical perceptions of security?
- Research Question #2: Why it is important to have sustained security in the South Caucasus?
- Research Question #3: How does NATO contribute to establishing security in the South Caucasus?

The hypothesis of this study is the following:

Each South Caucasian country has developed its specific way of cooperation with NATO when dealing with security threats in the region.

The method of this research study is qualitative, as it carries out qualitative data collecting approaches: particularly, document analysis.

In this study both secondary and primary data are applied. The secondary data includes scholarly books, academic articles, policy, research and working papers. As for the primary data it comprises official documents and declarations.

Chapter 1: Theoretical perceptions of security

The concept of security

It is difficult to conceptualize security - as many core concepts in the social sciences - when there is no common understanding of what security is. At the empirical level the discussions often arise from the lack of deep and broad understanding of the concepts. In the 1990s the persistent underdevelopment of thinking about security are explained by the facts that the idea of security had been too complex to attract analysts and had been neglected in favour of more obedient concepts. Another explanation assumes that the neglect of security was because of the overlap between the two concepts of security and power in the event of confrontations⁹.

Security and particularly national security is considered to be an 'ambiguous symbol'¹⁰. Therefore, the government officials who practice the policies tend to maintain its symbolic ambiguity for justification of the actions and policies implemented by them. This is another reason for the concept of security to remain neglected in security studies for decades¹¹. In the same way, securitisation and de-securitisation are also interesting but imperfect ideas and they never develop the basis of a more advanced security studies¹².

The "security" term is ambiguous both in content and in format. It is considered to be a goal, a condition, an issue-area, a research program, a discipline, etc. As "national security," "international security" and "global security" refer to different issues and have their origins in various philosophical and historical contexts, thus there is no one concept of security. To fill that gap and to yield more satisfactory results social scientists are called upon to construct suitable researches to offer the most convincing explanations of the many changes in security

⁹ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ Arnold Wolfers, 1952, pp. 481-502.

¹¹ Barry Buzan, 1991, p. 11.

¹² Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 169.

concept in security relations we are witnessing nowadays. That is why understanding the concept of security is a fundamentally different kind of intellectual exercise from specifying the conditions under which security may be attained¹³.

Security is often discussed as an instrumental value. The idea which confirms that security is an instrumental value is based on the political significance of the concept. In order to understand this, three distinctions are necessary: between absolute and relative security, subjective and non-subjective threats, and between survival and security. Firstly, security is always seen as a relative concept. Absolute security is an unachievable dream. In contrast, it is possible to talk about absolute insecurity. This occurs when there is survival not only in a physical sense but also in a sense of total fear. Secondly, it is possible to distinguish between what could be called subjective and non-subjective security. So, one can feel safe with no sense of forthcoming danger without being safe and similarly one can be free of 'real' threats without believing it to be the case. The final distinction is between survival and security. Survival here was equated with the existence while security was described as survival-plus. The plus is the choice that comes from relative freedom from existential threats and it is this freedom that gives security its specific instrumental value. Survival never guarantees security, as it does not fully eliminate threats. The combination of survival and security is a serious inaccuracy but it happens quite often¹⁴.

Security is often depicted as an 'essentially contested concept', which means that security is so heavily loaded concept that no argument can provide an accepted agreement on a single description as the 'correct or standard use' of security¹⁵. However, the core elements of security, which are not essentially contested, expose security to be a simple concept. Security generally implies the absence of threats. If this statement is divided into its

¹³ Helga Haftendorn, *The Security Puzzle: Theory-Building and Discipline-Building in International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, v. 35 (1), 1991, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ken Booth, 2007, p. 106.

¹⁵ David A. Baldwin, 1997, p. 10.

component parts, three things should be discussed: the existence of a referent object - someone or something that is obviously threatened; future or actual danger; and a desire to get away destructive possibilities. But when we apply this template on world politics, the implications become more complicated as the levels of politics are embraced around it¹⁶.

States often have different perceptions to the concept of security. Today's most developed countries emphasize the economic and social as well as the domestic dimensions of security. Developing countries refer to security as the absence of insecurity or freedom from fear. The perception of what constitutes a security threat in the past decade carried out a major transformation. Therefore, the main threat to the security of the nation – states in the international community is the weakness of states which are lacking of the democratic structures. Internal conflicts within the states create the greatest threats to the international stability. Thus, there is a need to reform the major national security institutions so that they can effectively meet the new threats and challenges¹⁷. In any way, when there are threats, challenges and a condition of insecurity here the complications of the meaning of security begins. Insecurity per se implies living in fear and with dangers which arise from one or more types of threat. The latter can be direct threats of violence or not indirect but no less actual threats that come from structural domination. If the degree of insecurity that these threats cause is high, it will be more critical to have them addressed. People may comprehend what security is only when they know how insecurity feels¹⁸. So, when the security of the states is confronted by multiple and serious dangers, changes in the threat environment are unavoidable. This might also have huge unintended consequences for organizational design in states' security affairs.

¹⁶ Ken Booth, 2007, p. 100.

¹⁷ Adam Daniel Rotfeld, "The organizing principles of global security", *SIPRI Yearbook 2001: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ken Booth, 2007, p. 101.

The levels of security

Different levels of security are distinguished in security studies, such as: national, regional, international, global security environments, etc. When we refer to one of them we should bear in mind that each level implies its certain principles and problems.

National security: Since the end of World War II the concept of national security has been present in academic and political discussions and implies a situation when there are no threatening factors within the nation-states. However, national security should never be seen as an ideal condition. It can sometimes work for countries' power holders as national security 'ensures' various opportunities to utilize 'threats' for domestic purposes¹⁹. It is sometimes implied that the certain conceptual problems of 'national security' can be excluded when 'international' or 'global' terms are simply substituted for 'national' security²⁰. Anyway, the essential problems of national security will not be eliminated in this way.

Regional security: The assumptions about the characteristics of the international system may help to construct a comprehensive concept of security over time and regions. The system thus encourages states to search for security either in groups or individually. Regional security assumptions can be explained by various national priorities and the consequential security strategies, which are in a way culturally and geopolitically determined. From the perspective of regional security threat perceptions security concepts are designed as a result of political and social processes within particular states; they are in differing degrees sensitive to transnational interactions²¹. The remaining domestic conflicts and problems both in direct neighbourhoods and in regions have a deteriorating impact not only on the regional security but also on the international security as a whole.

¹⁹Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (Boulder, UK, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p.29.

²⁰David A. Baldwin, 1997, pp. 25-26.

²¹Helga Haftendorn, 1991, p. 13.

International security: The concept of international security, in its turn, becomes meaningful with the configuration of security regimes and with the building of international institutions. Though the concept of international security offers a better idea for current security affairs than the strategies of national or regional security, in its present form it has grave conceptional shortcomings and cannot be applied globally²². There are also various problems for international security strategies. The most important one is that where a serious power effort is in process, the basic conditions for an international security cannot entirely be met. To remedy this problem international security strategies should be followed by a logical world government. But this is not real for the predictable future as it requires the dissolution of the state the state system²³.

Global security: Global security refers to a system of world order or security. It provides a program of universal security for the global community. A system of world order or a global security system, supposes a common concept of security with a collective set of norms, principles and practices which result in common patterns of international behaviour. A global security system, however, implies strong institutions which will regulate the interactions between units and will enforce its rules and norms. Transformation will take place only if states comprehend that they will maximize their benefits with cooperative strategies through building institutions around shared interests, through facilitating the evolution of common norms and principles and through furthering a general understanding of the problems confronting mankind²⁴.

However, a new dimension of security should specifically incorporate the following demands: it should explain diversity and variations in national and regional levels, transition from one central concept to another, systems transformation; also it should be multi-faceted, that is to say not limited to a single area of analysis. The end of the 20th century has

²² Helga Haftendorn, 1991, pp. 7, 10.

²³ Barry Buzan, 1991, p. 335.

²⁴ Helga Haftendorn, 1991, pp. 11-12.

stimulated many observers and politicians to analyse and predict global security scenarios. The main question is whether the existing global security system is sufficient to the new risks and challenges coming from national or regional levels. The basic problem is that the procedures and mechanisms of the existing security system were anticipated on relations regulated by and between states, while in the new 'global world' the main destabilizing threats are emerging from within states²⁵.

To sum, each level of security has its own problems and implications. For the national and regional levels these implications are coming from the idealization of the concept and from the individual pursuit of security by the states, meanwhile the problems coming from international and global security levels are more complex and challenging.

²⁵ Adam Daniel Rotfeld, 2001, p. 2.

Chapter 2: Regional security in South Caucasus

The causes of security deficit in the region

Over the course of last decades, the South Caucasus region became one of the main arenas of the global interests. The tendencies intensifying in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union caused vast and destructive consequences. Regional conflicts establish the logic of development of relations between other countries that include the Caucasus region in the sphere of their strategic interests. On the local level, these conflicts not only prevent the creation of close relations between Caucasian countries, but they also hinder their full participation in international institutions and pose considerable difficulties for the development of political and economic infrastructures.

Russia plays a critical role in several regional conflicts taking place in the Caucasus - Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian policy in the region mainly includes the combination of influence and the setting and preservation of control over this strategically important area. The strategies used by Russia have been felt in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and in other conflictual points as well. Hence, this set of difficult problems in the region has given rise to a sense of uncertainty in the West, particularly, that so much economic assistance and political support has been provided with apparently little tangible results until nowadays. Besides, the strategic relevance of the South Caucasus is growing along with the risk that terrorist and criminal elements could increase in the region unless all the the negative trends are prevented²⁶.

Thus, the conflicts in the South Caucasus engage a large number of non-state and state parties. The interaction between these actors has engendered threats and issues that broaden beyond traditional security concerns. The region is a standard example of a divergent system

²⁶ Svante E. Cornell & Roy Allison, *Strategic Security Dilemmas in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, (The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2003), p. 7.

of states whose geographic closeness to one another has determined the grounds for an interdependent security dynamic and there are strong interconnections between the security concerns of regional countries. The competitions within the region have historic roots and there are certain patterns of partnership and antagonism between the regional actors and these historic hostilities between states continue to deter relations even today. Therefore, an inclusive analysis of the region might extend beyond the inspection of traditional balance of powers²⁷.

In the South Caucasus the security challenges are all attached together by one basic element of insecurity: the weakness of the states. Most of the regional states have so far made only modest progress in reforming post-Soviet bureaucracies and leadership legacy. The collapse of the Soviet order economy also harshly decreased the social functions of the state and engendered widespread poverty. The recent nature of the states and the conflictual characteristic of the region contribute to declining the stability and effectiveness of governments in all of the states. Along with a struggling economy, weakening ethnic and civil disputes and large refugee flows, the challenges to the SC countries' governments to create feasible state bureaucracies, control their territories, reform economies and build the rule of law and democracy have been enormous²⁸.

One of the major challenges to the security of the region is the transnational crime. This sector is flourishing when there is no strong economy and it is benefitting from the weakness of states and extensive corruption. In its turn, the immense returns in the drug trade fortify corrupt practices and the risk of criminalizing the entire states or their bureaucracies. The three states of the South Caucasus have been increasingly troubled by illegal activities implemented by criminal organizations. In addition to smuggling rings - which pose little more than only an economic threat, the region, positioned along the "Balkan" and "northern"

²⁷ Pine Roehrs, Weak states and implications for regional security: A case study of Georgian instability and Caspian regional insecurity, *Research Institute for European and American Studies*, (97), 2005, p. 34.

²⁸ Svante E. Cornell & Roy Allison, 2003, p. 8.

smuggling roads, is a vital international centre for both narcotics and arms trafficking. Moreover, prevalent corruption in the SC states, ethnic conflicts, political and economic instability have helped to the derivation of transnational crime in the Caucasus²⁹.

However, the borders of the South Caucasus are defined by the internal factors such as the conflicts in Georgia and the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The external orientations of the global powers within the region also identify the certain features of the region. These orientations have played a critical role in the development of pipelines and the resolution of what pipeline routes would be the most preferable. So, the interaction and the common roots of these security dilemmas assist in the definition of the South Caucasus region from the rest of the Caspian. Therefore, in the South Caucasus the regional security complex is determined by the pipeline routs that carry Caspian energy resources to the western ports³⁰.

So, the South Caucasus is overwhelmed by a persistent deadlock in the three regional ethnic conflicts and there is a risk to return to a war situation again. These conflicts are the main reason for the lack of developed and effective cooperation between the three South Caucasian states and with the regional and global powers. A compound set of conflicting trends shows that the region is alienated into opposing alliances which have few shared interests and objectives. These unresolved conflicts make difficulties in relations between the three South Caucasus states, thus, assisting to the involvement of the regional powers - Russia, Iran and Turkey - with their own agendas³¹.

It is expected, that after the resolution of the major South Caucasian conflicts, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there will be a growing pace of democratization in the region followed by political and economic integration as well.

²⁹ Svante E. Cornell & Roy Allison, 2003, p. 14.

³⁰ Pine Roehrs, 2005, p. 34.

³¹ T. German, The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia: Security Issues in the Caucasus, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, v. 32 (2), 2012, p. 223.

However, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains the key regional conflict for several reasons. Firstly, unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Karabakh involves two of the three regional states - Armenia and Azerbaijan. That is why the conflict is a major obstacle not only for the regional integration but also for the implementation of regional projects. Secondly, the conflict is considered to be an impediment to communication, which is the main geopolitical and economic advantage of the region. Finally, unlike the other conflicts where only Russia plays a crucial role as an international actor, in the Karabakh case, various external powers are involved which follow a settlement based on their own interests³². That is why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict diminishes regional stability not because of the risk of a regeneration of the war and potential internationalization of the conflict, but it also decreases all the efforts to enhance regional cooperation, destabilizes the area and hinders the economic development of the countries. It also creates a security vacuum which obviously ensures ideal ground for transnational security threats such as organized crime, drug trade and trafficking. Consequently, the continuing dispute has implications not only for stability in the South Caucasus region, but also for Europe and the wider international community³³.

After achieving independence in 1991, Georgia has been troubled by several regional disputes too. Two regions, Abkhazia, located on the Black Sea, and South Ossetia, situated on the Russian border, tried to break away from Georgia in the early 1990s. Russia has been concerned in supporting these movements in both autonomous regions. The Russian enthusiastic support for Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatist demands, which succeeded in achieving de facto independence, was supposedly in response for Georgia's rejection to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) till 1993³⁴. In 1994, Russian "peacekeeping" forces representing the CIS deployed to Abkhazia following a Georgian - Abkhazian cease-fire agreement. In addition, Russian "peacekeeping" troops have been in

³² D. Shahnazaryan, 2006, p. 357.

³³ T. German, 2012, p. 224.

³⁴ James E. DeTemple, 2001, p. 14.

South Ossetia since 1992. Although the cease-fires between the parties had remained in effect in both regions for a long time, the situation had continuously been tense since no comprehensive solution was in prospect. Russian military presence in Georgian territory had been a serious problem for regional stability. Moreover, Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia continued to damage relations. Therefore, removing Russian bases and withdrawing Russian “peacekeepers” have been among the most complicated issues between Russia and Georgia and the removal of Russian bases have been enduring goal for Georgian foreign policy³⁵.

However, recent developments on these two conflicts have created serious shift in the regional balance of power. As a result of the August 2008 “Five-day war” between Georgia and Russia, tension has actually increased as Russia has moved to consolidate and expand its military presence and support for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia has strengthen its position by placing two military bases in the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which include several types of arm units, the Russian Air Force presence and then the active creation and maintenance of military infrastructures. Although not in the same proportion as Russia did, Tbilisi has been continuing to obtain armaments and military equipment in order to replace its losses from 2008 and to equip its army with new types of armaments. While taking into account the devastating lessons from August 2008 and also the related threat of Russia’s international isolation, the risk of any new war between Russia and Georgia in near future is unforeseeable ³⁶.

The relationship between Russia and Georgia got to a low level after the 2008 war. It strictly influenced on the possibility for finding a solution that the conflicting parties could

³⁵ James E. DeTemple, 2001, p. 16.

³⁶ R. Giragosian & S. Minasyan, Recent Trends in Security and Stability in the South Caucasus, *The Quarterly Journal*, v. 11 (1), 2011, p. 74.

agree with³⁷. Since the war in Georgia, the shift in the region's already subtle balance of power has become apparent illustrating an even more serious challenge to regional stability and security. The virtual "arms race" in rising defence spending, the risk of a new wave of rearmament show that any change in the delicate military balance of power in the region could create a serious threat to security³⁸. The Russian - Georgian war also changed the security perceptions of the countries in the region. It is now clear that their security is directly linked with the lasting regional conflicts. After the end of the war certain developments enhanced Russia's role as a regional actor meanwhile Western credibility decreased in the region³⁹.

Thus, the internal system of the South Caucasus region is quite chaotic and there is no clear geopolitical structure in this region. It is because of the fact that the interests of the regional actors are controversial and divergent. In post Soviet era the regional developments of the South Caucasus witnessed huge geopolitical and economic changes and there are certain tasks to the SC countries for both economic and social modernization. In this environment it would be crucial to create cooperative regional security systems which will contribute to the security interests of the region as a whole. Otherwise, the growing security vacuum would be the major geopolitical characteristic of the SC region, which may endanger the security and stability not only in the South Caucasus but also in near regional complexes as well.

³⁷ Dave Stebbins et al, *Defense Institution Building in the Caucasus to Promote Regional Stability*, (Columbia University, 2012), p. 41.

³⁸ Richard Giragosian, *The military balance of power in the South Caucasus*, The Armenian Center for National and International Studies, (2), 2009, p. 2.

³⁹ Mitat Çelikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region*, Commission on the Black Sea, (2), 2010, p.9.

The strategic importance of security in the South Caucasus

The importance of the South Caucasus in both European and in a global security context has been persistently discussed since the end of the Cold War. In the period when Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were part of the Soviet Union the region was seen as the underbelly of the Soviet super power⁴⁰.

The Caucasus is an important area for the West as it provides alternative energy sources from the Caspian Sea basin and alternative routes of access to Central Asian energy reserves. Hence, it is an important region for European energy diversification⁴¹. As the South Caucasus is considered to be transport corridor of Caspian petroleum and natural gas, competitive intervention in this region has been started between the external powers. In an era of high levels of resource dependency, the perceived value of the South Caucasus has significantly increased. While the three South Caucasian states are experiencing slow economic growth and democratic transition and the unresolved territorial disputes continue to engender tensions internally and externally, in the future, global energy security will be highly dependant on an economic and political stability in the Caucasus⁴².

A geostrategic approach to the security of energy supply or energy security is a complex issue. It combines a wide range of economic, geopolitical, geological, ecological and institutional factors and breaks down into multiple (global, regional, national and individual consumer) levels of reference and analysis. In addition, one's perception on energy security depends on the other's position in the energy supply chain. Therefore, for the exporters the most important part of the concept is security of demand for their energy resources which implies the security of revenues from the energy market. Earning high

⁴⁰ D. Sammut & A. Paul, *Addressing the security challenges in the South Caucasus: The case for a comprehensive, multilateral and inclusive approach*, European Policy Center, 2011, p. 1.

⁴¹ M. D. Mihalka & M. R. Wilcox, 2010, p. 24.

⁴² Pine Roehrs, 2005, p. 30.

revenues is often a precondition for producers' economic security and for their own energy security too. In contrast, many consumers chiefly focus their security concerns on the threat of import dependency and the risk of supply interruption. In most important energy-consuming countries the key security issues that were debated comprises diversity of supply, access to energy resources (often involving competition with other major energy consumers), stable oil prices, security margins for emergencies and the introduction of alternative energy sources. Other essentials of the energy supply chain also understand energy security differently: for commercial companies a key component of security is a stable legal investment regime in producer countries⁴³.

In the 21-st century, there is a new belief that has confused itself towards all leaders of the world: oil supply is not unlimited. The main power players in the international community are developing a growing interest for the product while net exports of the oil rich countries have declined in the last few years. This trend is partly due to the ethnic conflicts, lack of investments and reduction of formerly rich reserves. The meaning of energy security has got improved attention in recent years, obsessed by a quick and historic rise in oil prices and defined by concerns over increasing structural dependence on Middle Eastern energy suppliers⁴⁴. The domestic security environment and the SC region's potential to become a counterbalance to the Middle East in terms of energy have caused a number of external powers to become greatly involved in the domestic affairs of the South Caucasus states. In an effort to avoid regional instability, external powers have become interested in developing their own areas of influence in the region⁴⁵.

However, Azerbaijan remains the main trans-Caucasian owner of major natural gas reserves. The Caspian Sea has provided considerable gas supplies to Azerbaijan. Most of this

⁴³ K. Proninska, Energy and security: regional and global dimensions, *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, 2007, p. 216.

⁴⁴ Richard Giragosian, Shifting Security in the South Caucasus, *The Quarterly Journal*, Fall 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Pine Roehrs, 2005, p. 29.

gas wealth is concentrated in the field off the coast of Baku, and mainly this field has created a great interest among Western countries for diversifying natural gas supplies to Europe. In 2012, there have been serious debates over how to transport the Azerbaijani gas through Turkey into European markets. Thus, the European countries have backed the Nabucco pipeline project as the most attractive of an overall Southern Gas Corridor Strategy (SGC) of transporting gas from Azerbaijan and potentially other Middle Eastern countries through Turkey to southern Europe⁴⁶.

So, the development of pipeline infrastructure across the South Caucasus region allows European states to strengthen their energy security by diversifying from Russian energy dependence. Subsequently there has been large investment in new international export pipelines in recent decade, which has led to the progress of a southern oil and gas corridor between the Caspian and Mediterranean seas and brought significant economic and security benefits. The grand BTC oil export pipeline, which began operating in 2006, is a crucial element in increasing oil production in the Caspian basin. The exploitation of the BTC pipeline has created extensive revenues for the transit countries, and has enhanced economic and political links between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the West. However, the BTC runs near to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh and although it is underground, any restoration of the conflict in the region would threaten the security of oil supply globally. Moreover, the likelihood of a renewal of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh could hinder plans to construct new pipelines systems in the region⁴⁷.

In this environment, instability and conflictual situation in the South Caucasus is expected to have far reaching complications for the EU's relations with the regional countries and main regional players. These issues and threats have grown in meaning as Europe seeks to tie its energy security to receiving hydrocarbons through the southern corridor which

⁴⁶ Dave Stebbins et al, 2012, p. 8.

⁴⁷ T. German, 2012, p. 225.

crosses the region. The last developments in the South Caucasus have led to growing instability. In recent years, Armenia and Azerbaijan have gradually increased their military forces and Russia has created a military presence in the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Meanwhile, the international organisations have been unable to function positively in the region, to mediate for solving the three most important conflicts in the region or to extend confidence-building measures in order to bring conflicting parties together⁴⁸. The disputes also have considerable implications for Europe and the West as the regeneration of hostilities would threaten the energy security infrastructures and supplies. The access into the hydrocarbon resources has constantly been a key driver of Western policy in the region, although there was a relative lack of interest in the South Caucasus region during the initial post-Soviet era. The area only began to raise in importance to the USA and Europe during the mid-1990s, when it was identified as both a source of and principal transit route for hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea⁴⁹.

Moreover, the tense situation in the South Caucasus also polarizes the regional powers; hence the Russian support for Armenia and the strategic partnership between Turkey and Azerbaijan separates the wider Caucasus region into two differing blocs. These close alliances provide insecurity for the two South Caucasian states, as they eventually diminish security in the region and hinder the resolution of the conflicts, often worsening the existing tensions and mistrust rather than encouraging the security across the wider region.

⁴⁸ J. Boonstra & N. Melvin, *Challenging the South Caucasus security deficit*, FRIDE, (108), 2011, p. 3.

⁴⁹ T. German, 2012, p. 224.

Chapter 3: NATO's engagement in the South Caucasus region

As we discussed in the second chapter of this study, the South Caucasus is a strategically important region as it links Europe with the East, borders regional powers Iran, Russia and Turkey and it is used as a transport corridor for Caspian energy resources to Europe. Due to its geographic position on NATO's south-eastern flank among post-Soviet regions the South Caucasus is the second only to the Baltic states in strategic importance to NATO; moreover, the territory of the South Caucasus is contiguous with NATO ally Turkey and it is a 'natural extension of Europe'⁵⁰. Therefore, NATO is interested in fostering regional security and stability in the South Caucasus in order to enhance European security. Defence analysts imply that NATO objectives in the SC region include: promoting regional security and stability through peacetime military engagement; providing access to Caspian basin energy resources and combating non-traditional security threats such as international terrorism, drug trafficking and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction⁵¹.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union NATO tried to remake its image in Eastern Europe and develop a new cooperative relationship with Russia and its former allies. Thus, the Atlantic Alliance launched a series of cooperative programs and initiatives⁵². As it was mentioned above in the literature review part in security studies Baldwin offers three important specifications of security in dealing with systematic comparison of policy alternatives. These specifications are means, costs and time period, which indicate the primary, core and marginal value approaches of security when defining how important is security relative to the other values. So, in the case of cooperation between NATO and South Caucasus countries in terms of means, costs and time period, we can regard NATO's programs and initiatives as means towards more secure South Caucasus region. NATO also

⁵⁰ James E. DeTemple, 2001, p. 6.

⁵¹ James E. DeTemple, 2001, p. 28.

⁵² A. Priego, 2008, p. 51.

may require some costs from SC countries along with the cooperation with them. Baldwin mentions that the pursuit of security always involves costs, i.e., the sacrifice of other goals that could have been pursued with the resources devoted to security⁵³. Regarding NATO – SC cooperation these costs can be both loyalty and the strong commitment of the partner countries to the organization (NATO). As to the time period we can distinguish either short – term or long – term time period of the cooperation between NATO and SC countries for gaining security in the region.

So, as we will see later in this chapter NATO is quite flexible by its means for engaging countries from post Soviet space. Moreover, most of the countries from the former Soviet Union are working hard to promote democratic reforms and good governance in their countries for increasing their internal security level and there are even countries which express their willingness to integrate in the Alliance.

During the last years of the Soviet Union, there were many territorial disputes and armed conflicts in the South Caucasus. Thus, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent states of the South Caucasus have searched for ways to provide for the development of a market economy, political stability and regional security⁵⁴. After independence the three countries of the South Caucasus region did not enjoy much attention from NATO. The cooperation between NATO and South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – has mainly developed during mid–1990s. Starting from that period the three Caucasian states and the NATO have widely enhanced their relations.

However, the first steps of cooperation began in 1992 after the independence of the three South Caucasian countries when Georgia⁵⁵, Azerbaijan⁵⁶ and Armenia⁵⁷ joined the

⁵³ David A. Baldwin, 1997, p. 16.

⁵⁴ E. Nuriyev, *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Influences in the Caucasus: An Azeri Perspective*, (Southeast European and Black Sea Studies), 1 (3), 2001, p.153.

⁵⁵ NATO's relations with Georgia, Evolution of relations, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_38988.htm, (accessed in 04.05.2013).

North Atlantic Cooperation Council which was renamed as the Euro – Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997. Among other initiatives the three countries still continue to work in EAPC framework.

The international relations and the core foreign policy directions of the countries of the South Caucasus are determined to a significant degree by their historical roots: Azerbaijan was Turkey's ally, Georgia have been oriented toward the West, while Armenia has continuously been Russia's partner in the region. From the point of view of Russian interests, NATO was still considered as the most dangerous and aggressive organization. Although NATO needed to improve its image especially in Russia, Washington did not want to leave the future of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus under Russia's influence. Taking into account the dual dimension of the problem, an innovative tool was introduced by Warren Christopher - the Partnership for Peace program (PfP) - which allowed NATO to face this considerable challenge⁵⁸.

Although NATO's PfP program in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was launched in 1994, it had mixed success in each country⁵⁹. However, in the period of mid-1990s PfP constituted the key NATO tool for deepening military cooperation in the South Caucasus. Each partner nation after joining developed a two-year individual partnership plan in consultation with NATO which sets distinct interoperability objectives and the basis for expanded cooperation with the Alliance. The size and the scope of PfP activities in the South Caucasus have increased largely and particularly Azerbaijan and Georgia after joining the

⁵⁶ NATO's relations with Azerbaijan, Evolution of relations, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49111.htm, (accessed in 04.05.2013).

⁵⁷NATO's relations with Armenia, Evolution of relations, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-7810FBA6-08212942/natolive/topics_48893.htm?bInSublanguage=true&selectedLocale=uk&submit=selectv, (accessed in 04.05.2013).

⁵⁸ A. Priego, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ S. Cornell, R. McDermott, W. O'Malley, V. Socor, S. F. Starr, *Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Role of NATO*, (United States of America: Central Asia – Caucasus Institute), 2004, p. 66.

program's inception have become two of its most active constituents. These two countries used the partnership as a means to bring their armed forces similar to NATO standards⁶⁰.

Overall, Pfp contributed to the education and professionalism of partner states, supported democratic control over the armed forces and in general terms endorsed democratic values. NATO was the only structure which was qualified to carry out this task providing a framework for such large-scale efforts. In the South Caucasus this was especially important as Pfp helped in the building of security systems as well as structures under quite unfavourable political and economic conditions⁶¹.

When in the framework of Partnership for Peace program Planning and Review Process (PARP) was launched in 1995, Azerbaijan⁶² was the first among the South Caucasian countries to join PARP in 1997. Later in 1999 and 2002 Georgia⁶³ and Armenia⁶⁴ respectively agreed on Pfp PARP with NATO too. It should be noticed that PARP is open to the Partners and they can join to this initiative voluntarily. The main function of Planning and Review Process is to ensure structured basis to identify partner forces and capabilities that could be available to the Alliance to implement multinational trainings and exercises. PARP also serves as a tool for measuring the progress that the Partners achieve in defence and military transformation efforts⁶⁵.

In 2002, during Prague summit, NATO decided to raise its level of cooperation with the three South Caucasian countries and for that purpose it proposed a new framework for multifaceted cooperation called Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). The essence of this program is that each partner country receives focused, counter-specific advice on reform

⁶⁰ *South* James E. DeTemple, 2001, p. 30.

⁶¹ S. Cornell et al, 2004, p. 67.

⁶² NATO's relations with Azerbaijan, *ibid*, (accessed in 05.05.2013).

⁶³ NATO's relations with Georgia, *ibid*, (accessed in 05.05.2013).

⁶⁴ NATO's relations with Armenia, *ibid*, (accessed in 06.05.2013).

⁶⁵ Partnership for Peace program Planning and Review Process, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_68277.htm, (accessed in 06.05.2013).

objectives in a number of political and security related areas: defence, public information, science and environment, civil emergency planning, administrative and resource issues⁶⁶.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have been actively engaged in NATO's IPAP initiative. The three countries began their first IPAP with NATO in 2005, though the first country to present its IPAP for the assessment was Georgia and Georgia also was the one which was offered to an Intensified Dialogue by NATO in 2006⁶⁷. Among the three South Caucasian states Georgia has been identified as the most ambitious country in its path to join the NATO. Therefore, in the 2006 Riga summit, the Alliance highlighted the importance of the Intensified Dialogue with Georgia and the contribution that Georgia provides to international peacekeeping and security operations. The Intensified Dialogue between NATO and Georgia covers a number of political, military, financial and security issues which are related to Georgia's aspirations to membership⁶⁸. In this sense NATO's Bucharest summit in April 2008 was crucial in Georgia's related statements as the allies agreed that Georgia will become NATO member country in near future. They mentioned the valuable contributions of Georgia to the Alliance and the democratic reforms within the country. It is for these reasons that the allies agreed to support Georgia's application for Membership Action Plan (MAP) and initiated a period of intensive engagement at a high political level to address the questions for Georgia's MAP application⁶⁹.

Before the August War in 2008 Priego mentioned that there are two implications for Georgian cooperation with NATO: the first one is the growing defence budget, as Georgia is working very hard to enhance its defence sector to meet NATO's standards as well as to achieve NATO interoperability levels and the second implication is connected with

⁶⁶ Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, Territorial reintegration as a National Security Objective: The cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia, *Journal of East European and Black Sea Studies*, v. 13 (2), 2013, p. 7.

⁶⁷ NATO's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Riga Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_37920.htm, (accessed in 08.05.2013).

⁶⁹ Bucharest Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm, (accessed in 08.05.2013).

integration issues. Although Tbilisi worked hard in its way to NATO and it carried out an ambitious Individual Partnership Action Plan, it was part of the Intensified Dialogue and began working on the approval of its Membership Action Plan, however Russian factor and the two secessionist republics - South Ossetia and Abkhazia - would be the main complications for Georgian accession into NATO⁷⁰.

Later the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia drastically shifted the geopolitical background of the South Caucasus region. It reasserted the Russian power and influence in the region and forcibly “resolved” two of the three formerly “frozen” conflicts. The August war also raised certain doubts over Georgia’s strategic role for the West and hindered Georgia’s aspirations to join the NATO alliance within a broader context of regional security and stability⁷¹.

After the conflict with Russia, NATO and Georgia established NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) in September 2008 which would assess the damage done in the war and would work to assist Georgia in its recovery efforts. The NGC should supervise the process set at the Bucharest summit. Moreover, in December 2008 the Alliance agreed that an Annual National Program should be developed under the auspices of the NGC which would maximize NATO's assistance and support for Georgia's democratic, institutional and defence reforms⁷².

Then, in 2009 Strasbourg/Kehl summit the allies reaffirmed all the elements of Bucharest decision and remained committed to fostering political dialogue and providing assistance to Georgia for its reform efforts in the NATO – Georgia Commission without any prejudice to further decisions which should be taken about MAP⁷³. Later in 2010 Lisbon summit the Alliance again applied to Bucharest summit's and the following decisions and

⁷⁰ A. Priego, 2008, p. 54.

⁷¹ Richard Giragosian, 2009, p. 2.

⁷² NATO’s relations with Georgia, *ibid*, (accessed in 05.05.2013).

⁷³ Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm, (accessed in 09.05.2013).

encouraged Georgia's continual implementation of all necessary reforms – democratic, electoral, judicial, security and defence - for advancing its Euro – Atlantic aspirations⁷⁴.

The official statement of NATO's last Chicago summit in 2012 did not add anything to the previous summit's statements regarding Georgia. It reiterated NATO's commitment to offer Georgia full membership of the North Atlantic Alliance without specifying any dates and it also praised Tbilisi for democratic reforms implemented by the country's government. Besides, NATO once again offered its support for Georgia's territorial integrity, stressing the unacceptability of Russia's military presence on Georgia's breakaway republics⁷⁵. However, it should be noted that Georgia continuously supports NATO – led operations and actively contributes to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Moreover, irrespective of the fact that NATO does not offer Membership Action Plan to Georgia in 2012 May Chicago summit a few months later in October Georgia doubled its already huge contribution to ISAF and made it one of the largest non – NATO troop contributor nations⁷⁶. So, Georgia obviously is committed to the process and from the NATO side as well Georgia's aspirations to the Alliance have being viewed positively during all this period.

Azerbaijan has been an active member of NATO's PfP and has tried to expand its relationship with the Alliance and its member states, as a means to satisfy some of its military assistance needs and to counterbalance its perceived threats. In 2002 Prague summit Azerbaijan declared its aspiration to join NATO and in order to extend its ties with the Alliance Baku developed its own Individual Partnership Action Plan and accepted 28 Partnership Goals (PGs) for 2004 and was also seeking to participate in the Membership

⁷⁴ Lisbon Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm, (accessed in 09.05.2013).

⁷⁵ Chicago Summit Declaration, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm?mode=pressrelease, (accessed in 09.05.2013).

⁷⁶ NATO's relations with Georgia, *ibid*, (accessed in 08.05.2013).

Action Plan (MAP)⁷⁷. In the framework of defence and military cooperation it is important to mention Azerbaijani support to NATO – led peacekeeping operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan and the multinational PfP military training exercise "Cooperative Determination 2001" hosted by Azerbaijan. As it was mentioned above, Azerbaijan began its first IPAP with NATO in 2005 which was successfully implemented and gave ground for the second stage of IPAP accepted in 2008. Moreover, after one year preparation Azerbaijan agreed with NATO on the third stage of Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2011 for the period 2012 - 2013. The document of the third stage plan includes four sections which envisage politics and security, defence and military, public information and civil emergency planning, information security, science and environment, administrative resources and legal issues⁷⁸. However, the fact that Azerbaijan joined the non - aligned movement in 2011 somehow prevents NATO membership aspirations, although it still allows Azerbaijan to cooperate with NATO in different spheres⁷⁹.

Armenia has considered advancing its cooperation with NATO within the PfP framework. The visit between high officials from NATO and Armenia's government shaped an informal agreement on creating an Armenian peacekeeping unit with NATO assistance within the PfP framework. Besides, the country was enthusiastic about other opportunities that PfP offers. Along with peacekeeping, Armenia seeks to learn how to manage better natural disasters, particularly earthquakes⁸⁰. So, Armenia has also benefited greatly from civil emergency planning activities and from NATO's Science Program. It should be stressed that the Armenian armed forces started to participate in the NATO's Partnership for Peace program soon after the beginning of the initiative. The Armenian armed forces were intensifying their participation in PfP - based exercises as well. Moreover, in June 2003

⁷⁷ Cornell et al, 2004, p. 71.

⁷⁸ NATO's relations with Azerbaijan, *ibid*, (accessed in 08.05.2013).

⁷⁹ Vladimir Socor, Chicago Summit: NATO Remains AWOL from Europe's East, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, v. 9 (99), 2002.

⁸⁰ DeTemple, 2001, p. 70.

Armenia hosted the PfP exercise "Cooperative Best Effort 2003" for the first time in cooperation with NATO⁸¹. It is mentioned above that Armenia began its first IPAP in 2005; later Armenia has proceeded the second stage of IPAP cooperation the main outcome of which was the realization of Armenia's Strategic Defence Review. In 2011 the two parties - Armenia and NATO - discussed the draft document of the third stage of Armenia's IPAP⁸².

Armenia's and Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO to some extent covers the territorial dispute between these countries as well. Among a wide range of South Caucasus security issues the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, has also been discussed regularly in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which provides the overall framework for cooperation between NATO and partner nations. The EAPC established an open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Caucasus to intensify efforts to use the Council as a vehicle for conflict prevention and crisis management⁸³. However, the regional cooperation in the Caucasus is still very weak and the EAPC should promote to the South Caucasus states to maintain using the ad hoc working group for resolving regional issues

In the abovementioned final declarations of NATO summits the allies always show their support for peaceful settlement of the regional conflicts in the South Caucasus according to the principles of territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of the countries. Because of this wording prior to the NATO's last summit in Chicago Armenia showed its concerns⁸⁴ as the document made no reference to the principle of people's right to self-determination. Therefore, a necessary condition to create stability in the South Caucasus is the rejection of individual pursuits of security solutions by the three states. The three countries should comprehend that they cannot pursue security and prosperity at the expense

⁸¹ H. Kotanjian, Armenian Security and U.S. Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus, *The Quarterly Journal*, v. 3 (2), 2004, p.23.

⁸² Main outcome of IPAP's second stage was the holding of Armenia's Strategic Defence Review, available at: <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/politics/1907/>, (accessed in 09.05.2013).

⁸³ DeTemple, 2001, p. 17.

⁸⁴ NATO's Chicago Summit: Why Armenia Missed the Party, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65440>, (accessed in 09.05.2013).

of their neighbours. The authorities of the states and the external powers should also realize and attempt together to define common interests deciding on integrated strategies for making the region a single geopolitical unit. Only through these steps the three states will have real prospects for becoming a full part of Euro – Atlantic security systems⁸⁵.

To conclude, as we see in this chapter the dynamics of the cooperation between NATO and South Caucasus countries differs widely from each other. The first stages of the partnership between SC countries and NATO have started together. The three countries joined to the Euro – Atlantic Partnership Council, Partnership for Peace and Individual Partnership Action Plan programs in the same time period. However, the geopolitical developments and the changing context of the countries' foreign policy dimensions made the further cooperation between the two parties – NATO and SC countries - divergent.

⁸⁵ D. Shahnazaryan, 2006, p. 360.

Conclusions

Based on the investigation of the theoretical background of the security concept and the examination of the regional developments in the South Caucasus after the end of the Soviet Union, this Master's Essay studies the regional security in the South Caucasus and the certain characteristics of the cooperation between North Atlantic Treaty Organization and South Caucasian countries.

In order to address the research questions and to test the hypothesis of this study the conclusions will be drawn from the three chapters of this work separately and then there will be the final concluding remarks.

It was seen in the first chapter that the theoretical perceptions of security are multidimensional. Security generally implies the absence of threats. But the perception of the threat can be both subjective and non-subjective; consequently security also can be understood differently. Diverse approaches to the concept of security make the concept to be quite contested. Even the countries often have different perceptions to the concept of security: developed states ponder on the economic and social security; meanwhile developing countries regard security as the absence of threats.

Four levels of security are identified in this study: national, regional, international and global. As the study shows, there are certain implications and complexities coming from each security level. For the national security it is the idealization of it, for regional security it is the individual pursuit of security of the states, meanwhile for the next higher levels the problems are more threatening. In international security level the concerns are coming from the states within the international structures and in global security level there are certain difficulties to achieve a collective set of norms and principles.

Chapter two discusses the regional security issues in the South Caucasus. Firstly the major causes of the security deficit in the region are identified then the study reveals the growing importance of the South Caucasus. The weakness of SC countries provides possibilities for transnational security threats such as organized crime, trafficking and drug trade through the South Caucasian countries. However, the three conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno – Karabakh are the main destabilizing factors of the region. The 2008 August war between Georgia and Russia has greatly changed the fragile balance of the region engendering new problems to the regional security. Moreover, the study explains that the possible renewal of the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict would challenge not only the SC regional stability but also European energy security as it would create certain threats to the Caspian energy transit routs to Europe. Then the study concludes that the conflictual potential of the region hinders not only the regional cooperation among the SC states but it also hinders the interests of the external powers in the region.

Chapter 3 examines NATO's first steps in engaging South Caucasus countries in post-Soviet era. The study reveals the development of the cooperation between NATO and each of the South Caucasian country since 1990s. NATO's interest to expand its scope of security and stability eastward is compatible with the preferences of SC countries to become a part of the European security system. Therefore, the partnerships initiated by NATO were significantly welcomed by the SC states. They launched the Partnership for Peace Program in their countries in 1994 and began their first Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO in 2005. These two programs engage South Caucasus countries in both political and security areas which include public information, science, environment, civil emergency planning, defence etc, overall they contribute to the enhancement of democracy in respective countries.

The study later shows that the recent geopolitical developments in the SC region and the domestic challenges of SC countries made the further cooperation of these three countries

and NATO divergent. For instance, if in 2000s Azerbaijan was enthusiastic in closer ties with NATO, in recent years mainly after joining to the non-aligned movement Azerbaijan's aspirations to NATO have decreased. As for the Armenia its strategic partnership with Russia and membership in other security block made this country to keep its cooperation with NATO in balance. Georgia is the only country which has been seeking membership in the Alliance continuously. Even after the August War in 2008 when the prospects of Georgia's Membership Action Plan are not certain for the foreseeable future Georgia does not reduce its willingness to integrate into the Alliance. Moreover in 2012 Georgia doubled its contribution to International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan becoming one of the largest non – NATO troop contributor nation to ISAF.

Today unlike Georgia, neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia is seeking to become a NATO member country. However, Armenian and Azerbaijani partnership with NATO is in a sustained level. These two countries are enthusiastic for cooperating with NATO but they choose only those aspects of NATO cooperation that meet their own interests. So, the final conclusion of this study is that each South Caucasian country has developed its specific way of cooperation with NATO.

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