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THE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ARMENIA'S AND
GEORGIA'S POLICY TOWARDS EACH OTHER
AMONG TWO STATES' YOUTH.
MYTHS AND REALITY



YEREVAN 2015
ԵՐԵՎԱՆ 2015

POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION OF ARMENIA
CENTER FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Գրքում հումանիտար գիտությունների բնագավառի հայ և վրացի մագիստրոսների շրջանում ֆոկուս խմբերի մեթոդաբանությամբ անցկացված հարցախույզի արդյունքների վերլուծության հիման վրա վեր են հանվում ուսանողության շրջանում երկու ժողովուրդների վերաբերյալ առկա պատկերացումները, ինչպես նաև երկու պետությունների միմյանց հանդեպ իրականացվող քաղաքականության ընկալումները: Հեղինակային խմբի կողմից մշակված համատեղ եզրակացություններն ու առաջարկությունները պարունակում են կոնկրետ նկատառումներ՝ ուղղված երիտասարդության շրջանում միմյանց նկատմամբ առավել ճշգրիտ ընկալումներ ձևավորելուն:

The book reveals the perceptions of the Armenian and Georgian Graduate students in Social Science about the two peoples, as well as the policy of the two states towards each other by analyzing the focus group interviews' results. The joint conclusions and recommendations developed by the group of authors include certain considerations aimed at forming more accurate perceptions among the young people of the two states.

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Project Academic Consultant

Hayk Kotanjian, *Doctor of Political Science (RF), Distinguished Visiting Professor, National Defense University, Counterterrorism Fellow (USA), Elected Full Member of the Academy of Military Sciences (RF), Member of the CSTO Academic-Expert Council, PSAA Chairman*

PSAA Team:

Benyamin Poghosyan, PhD in History, Graduate, Tavitian Certificate Program on International Relations, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Graduate, US State Department Program on US National Security Policy Making, Research Fellow, National Defense University, PSAA Executive Director.

Arthur Atanesyan, Doctor of Political Science, Graduate, Tavitian Certificate Program on International Relations, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Chair, Applied Sociology Department, Yerevan State University, PSAA Board member.

Mikayel Avetisyan, PhD in Political Science, Graduate, Tavitian Certificate Program on International Relations, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Research Fellow, National Defense University, PSAA Member.

CSS Team:

Kristine Margvelashvili, Junior Researcher, Foreign Policy and Security Program, Center for Social Sciences; MA in Black Sea Cultural Studies from International Hellenic University (Greece).

Lia Tsuladze, PhD in Sociology, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tbilisi State University; Research Director, Center for Social Sciences.

Irine Osepashvili, Center for Social Sciences, Junior Researcher, MA in Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Oslo.



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A VIEW FROM ARMENIA*

Introduction

Regional security dynamics in the South Caucasus undergoes tremendous transformations affected by the geopolitical shifts in the neighboring areas. The main factor affecting the region is the intensive deterioration of the Russia – West relations due to the Ukrainian crisis. The South Caucasus is also bearing the impact of unraveling Middle East Security System with defragmentation of secular states in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen and growing influence of different radical Islamic groups including the Islamic State. The possible breakthrough in Iran – P5+1 negotiations and signature of comprehensive agreement on Iranian nuclear program will also have its impact on the South Caucasus.

Meanwhile, the region itself has many unresolved problems such as conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The intensive competition between Russian and EU-sponsored integration processes in post soviet space – the Eastern Partnership program promoted by the EU and the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) driven forward by Russia – also put South Caucasus states in different positions. Georgia has signed an Association Agreement with the EU and moves forward with the EU-promoted reform Agenda. Georgia also actively pushes its NATO integration policy.

Armenia has withdrawn its bid to sign an Association Agreement with the EU and joined the Eurasian Economic Union, but at the same time is trying to boost its cooperation with the EU in all those areas where there are no contradictions with Armenia’s membership into the EAEU. Just before the Eastern Partnership Riga summit The European Union’s executive body had asked the EU member states to authorize it to open official negotiations on a new agreement to deepen political and economic ties with Armenia.¹ These developments prove that the EU is

* *The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any Agency of the Government of Armenia.*

¹ EU Moves To Open Talks On New Deal With Armenia, <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27025388.html>.

also ready to develop its cooperation with Armenia and move towards the signing of a new agreement, which may include some parts from previously negotiated Association Agreement.

As for Azerbaijan, its leadership has decided neither to proceed with Association Agreement signature with the EU, nor towards the membership into the EAEU.

Changing geopolitical juncture around the South Caucasus, as well as intra regional developments has put their stamp on bilateral relations between regional states. In 2014, the Political Science Association of Armenia in cooperation with the Georgian Center for Social Sciences and with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung implemented a joint project “Armenian – Georgian relations: Challenges and Opportunities for Bilateral Cooperation” analyzing from Armenian and Georgian perspectives the main factors influencing the Armenian – Georgian relations and putting forward some conclusions and recommendations on how to improve them.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that both during the elaboration process and report presentation in Yerevan it became obvious that within academic expert community of both states there are perceptions of Georgia's and Armenia's main foreign policy goals toward each other that not always reflect the real situation according to the members of respectful communities. From the Georgian perspective this was the case regarding the Armenian – Russian relations, the role of the Russian 102 military base deployed in Gyumri, the Armenia's policy toward Armenian minority in Georgia, especially in Samtskhe Javakheti region. As for the Armenian side, the concerns were raised about real intentions of Georgia in developing strategic relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey and its implications for Armenia, the Georgian policy towards its Armenian minority, reliability of Georgia's role as a main transit route for Armenia in case of sharp deterioration of situation in the region.

It was obvious that representatives of expert-academic community lack the clear-cut information and vision about the political developments within two states. Lack of relevant information is becoming more urgent for the young generation as middle age people – at least have

shared memory from Soviet past. In this regard it should be noted that thus far very little research has been done to explore the views and perceptions of Armenian and Georgian youth, especially graduate students studying humanities, who more probably will become future policy drafters and decision makers in both countries. The false perceptions acquired during graduate and post graduate education will impact the mindset of young generation and may create additional difficulties for developing bilateral relations in mid- and long-term perspective.

Taking into account the results of the joint 2014 project, the PSAA and the CSS decided to implement another joint program with a core goal to explore through the conduct of focus-group interviews, involving graduate students studying humanities, the mutual perceptions about each other as well as about two states policy towards each other among the young people, and to elaborate reports analyzing the interview findings. We believe that it will be the first right step in expanding the mutual understanding among the young generation which, will help to create sounder base for developing bilateral relations in mid- and long-term future.

Geopolitical context of the Armenian – Georgian relations.

Recent geopolitical developments – the intensive deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, as well as possible nuclear deal between Iran and P 5+1 States have strong implications for the regional security dynamics in the South Caucasus, and for Armenia and Georgia in particular. The most urgent issue is the ever growing possibility of new “Cold War” between Russia and the US which may create new dividing lines in Europe involving also the South Caucasus. Meanwhile it should be noted that the level of uncertainty is very high, which almost preclude the reliable mid- and long-term strategic forecasts on future developments.

The high level of uncertainty is one of the key features of current international relations. The recent US National Intelligence Council report “Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds, published in December 2012 has emphasized the multilayer processes with very low degree of predictability.² The same issue is articulated in the “Global Risks 2015” report published by the World Economic Forum. This situation, in its turn, complicating realistic assessments of regional developments even among experts and of course have a great influence on young generation views about neighboring states foreign and security policies.

Russia – West crisis

Russia – West and particularly Russia – US, Russia – NATO current relations with their potential of transforming into overt animosity, may play a serious negative role for the South Caucasus. It should be noted that Russia – US relations have started to deteriorate since autumn 2011, when then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced his plans to return to Kremlin. Among the contradictions between the two sides was the assessment of situation in Syria, the human rights related issues in Russia, etc. The main trigger of current crisis in relations was the February 2014 *Euromaidan* revolution, which brought into power the pro-Western government in Ukraine with clear stated goal of Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration, and Russia’s view of it as an anti

² Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds, National Intelligence Council, December 2012, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf.

constitutional coup. The Ukrainian Revolution followed by the events in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine put Russia – West relations at lowest point till the end of the Cold War.

Despite different diplomatic efforts to get a solution to the Ukrainian crisis including Minsk 1 and Minsk 2 agreements principal contradictions remain on the causes and possible long term solution of the conflict. Meanwhile, Ukraine events have triggered a strong debate within NATO about the need to reinvigorate its military posture in the Eastern Europe and Baltic region as a response to Russia's behavior. NATO Defense Ministers February 2015 decision to launch very high readiness force or Spearhead Force of 5000 soldiers within its Response Force was a clear message to Russia that Alliance is taking serious steps to strengthen its military capabilities.³

The possible US decision to store battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and other heavy weapons for as many as 5000 American troops in several Baltic and Eastern European countries is another step towards the Western military buildup near the Russian borders.⁴ The hard reaction from the Russian side including strong statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with accusations towards the US for eroding the fundamental provision of Russia – NATO 1997 Founding act⁵, as well as President Putin's announcement that more than 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) able to overcome even the most technically advanced anti-missile defense systems would be added to Russia's nuclear arsenal in 2015, is another example of growing harsh actions and a very little level of mutual trust.⁶

³ Defence Ministers agree to strengthen NATO's defences, establish Spearhead Force, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_117188.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁴ U.S. is Poised to Put Heavy Weaponry in Eastern Europe, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/world/europe/us-poised-to-put-heavy-weaponry-in-east-europe.html?_r=0.

⁵ Comment by the Information and Press Department on US plans to store military equipment on NATO's 'eastern flank', http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/BC6D2C43E4EBC6C643257E660033FC97

⁶ Vladimir Putin announces Russia will add more than 40 intercontinental ballistic missiles to nuclear arsenal in 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-announces-russia-will-add-40-new-ballistic-missiles-to-nuclear-arsenal-in-2015-10323304.html>.

The important role of NATO as a guarantee of security for the Eastern European and Baltic states was discussed also during the US Defense Minister Ashton Carter's visit to Europe in June 2015.

The Western expert-academic community is actively discussing the issue of possibility of a new Cold War and the need to thwart the growth of Russia's influence in the Post Soviet and Post Socialist space.⁷

In this regard, the creation of two main power centers for pressing Russia is being discussed. One is the creation of Baltic Nordic defense security cooperation area which may include three Baltic States, as well as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland, to curb Russian influence in the Northern Europe and especially in the Baltic States with substantial Russian minority, which may create base of emulation of scenarios now under way in the Eastern Ukraine.⁸ The latest reports on possible deployments of the US heavy military equipment in the three Baltic countries, as well as in Poland, Romania and potentially in Bulgaria are indicators of possible long term Russia–West and especially Russia–US growing rivalry.

Another potential arch of containment may include the Southern flank of NATO with involvement of Black sea littoral states such as Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. In this context the possible involvement of Georgia and Azerbaijan in this “alliance” is also being discussed.⁹

Taking into account the Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations including the signature of the EU Association Agreement and strained relations with Russia after the 2008 Russian – Georgian War, current stalemate in Russia–West relations, and growing belligerent rhetoric may further complicate the Russian – Georgian relations. The recent moves by

⁷ Samuel Charap, Jeremy Shapiro, Consequences of a New Cold War, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*: Vol 57, issue 2, 2015, pp. 37-46,

⁸ Nordic nations agree on defense cooperation against Russia, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/09/us-nordics-russia-defence-idUSKBN0N02E820150409>.

⁹ From Estonia to Azerbaijan: American Strategy After Ukraine, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/estonia-azerbaijan-american-strategy-after-ukraine>.

Russia to sign Strategic partnership treaties with Abkhazia¹⁰ and South Ossetia¹¹ added additional tension in relations between Tbilisi and Moscow.

Meanwhile, Armenia is the strategic ally of Russia: Russian 102 military base is deployed in the Armenian territory and Armenia is the member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, as well as the Eurasian Economic Union. It should be noted that the cornerstone of Armenia's foreign policy has been and is the *complementarity* and the desire to build partnerships both with the neighboring states and with power centers involved in the security dynamics formation of the South Caucasus. Nevertheless, the *complementarity* in the foreign policy of Armenia does not mean equal and similar relations with all partners. The strategic ally and number one security partner for Armenia is Russia.

All these developments may have serious impact on the Georgian – Armenian relations. In this context, the perceptions among possible future policy drafters and decision makers in Armenia on Georgian foreign and security policy in general and on Georgian – Armenian relations in particular may play a significant role in shaping mutual relations. It should be noted that the Armenian young people and especially graduate students in humanities with their almost equal access to both Russian and Western media tools (Satellite TV channels, multi layer internet/social media, etc.) are constantly exposed to the pressure of contradictory information flows, which creates more difficulties in the formation of at least relatively clear picture about foreign policy developments in the region and their implications for Armenia.

¹⁰ Putin Signs Law Ratifying Russia-Abkhazia Strategic Partnership Treaty, <http://www.rferl.org/content/putin-law-abkhazia-georgia-treaty-south-ossetia-agreement-tibilov/26829932.html>.

¹¹ Russia signs integration deal with South Ossetia, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/11484030/Russia-signs-integration-deal-with-South-Ossetia.html>.

Potential breakthrough in Iran nuclear program negotiations

Another major geopolitical shift which may influence the regional security dynamics in the South Caucasus and may have impact also on Armenian–Georgian relations is the possible signature of comprehensive joint action plan between Iran and P 5+1 powers on Iran nuclear program. The framework agreement reached on April 2¹² raises chances for the overall success of the process launched in autumn 2013. This deal will make changes in Iran's posture in the region. As for Armenia and Georgia, one of the key changes may occur, if Iran starts to export its energy resources and in particular natural gas to the EU.

According to the Iranian officials one of the possible routes passes through Armenia and Georgia and then via Black sea to the EU. In July 2014, the Iranian deputy oil minister Ali Majedi underscored the country's determination to boost natural gas exports to energy-hungry countries, including the European states. Most recently managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company Hamid Reza Araqi stated that negotiations over Europe gas exports were conducted with some European companies taking part in the 20th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition. He also mentioned that the National Iranian Gas Company is in talks with foreign investors willing to invest in the Iranian gas pipeline projects.¹³ The current impasse in Russia –West relations once again brought the importance of decreasing the EU's energy dependency over Russia with clear understanding that the only viable option to reach that goal is the diversification of the EU's gas supply sources. In this context Iran with its huge gas reserves (2nd place in the world for proved reserves)¹⁴ may play an increasingly important role if international sanctioned are eventually removed.

¹² Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Program, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/parameters_forajointcomprehenisveplanofaction.pdf.

¹³ Iran, European companies to discuss gas exports to Europe next month: Official, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/05/13/410881/iran-gas-export-hamid-reza-araqi-national-iranian-gas-company->.

¹⁴ Top 10 Countries by Proved Natural Gas Reserves, <http://explorationworld.com/top10/127/Top-10-Countries-by-Proved-Natural-Gas-Reserves-and-Their-Production-Rates>.

Definitely, Iran's gas distribution and gas extraction infrastructure is to be modernized to deliver large volume of natural gas to Europe. This means that no short-term supplies are viable, but in case of success in the nuclear negotiation process in mid- and long-term future Iran may become an important player in the EU gas market.

As for Georgia, the country is already serving as a main transit route for delivering gas and oil from Caspian basin to Turkey and the EU. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines are bringing Azerbaijani oil and gas to the Turkish and European consumers. Georgia will serve as a transit route also for additional 16 bcm Azerbaijani natural gas from Shan Deniz gas field which will be delivered to Turkey and the EU since 2019 – as a first phase of the Southern gas corridor project¹⁵. The final investment decision on the project was adopted by the Shah Deniz consortium in December 2013.¹⁶

The possible transit of the Iranian gas into the EU market bodes well with the Georgian strategy to fix and firm its position as an important energy transit country for the EU increasing the geopolitical value of Georgia for the main Western actors involved in the South Caucasus geopolitics. As for Armenia, the possible transit of the Iranian gas to the EU market via Armenia may play an important role in diversifying investments into Armenia's energy sector currently heavily dominated by the Russian companies.

These developments may also strengthen the Armenia's ties with the Euro-Atlantic community supporting Armenia's vision of balanced foreign policy. Taking into account the current level of strategic relations between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, one can argue that in case of the realization of this scenario bilateral Armenian – Georgian relations will also be fostered by the incorporation into them also of a very important economic factor.

¹⁵ Details see in Shah Deniz 2 and Opening of Southern gas corridor, http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/Press/shah_deniz_2_brochure_english.pdf.

¹⁶ Shah Deniz Final Investment Decision Paves Way for Southern Corridor Gas Link with Europe, <http://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/press/press-releases/shah-deniz-final-investment-decision-paves-way.html>.

Of course it should be mentioned, that given the vital importance for Russia to maintain its strong positions in the EU gas market and to thwart the entrance of any new big players into the EU market, as well as level of Russia's influence on Armenia's foreign and security policy, the realization of Iran – Armenia – Georgia – EU gas export project will face enormous obstacles and will require the hard work of multilevel diplomacy.

Summarizing this brief analysis of geopolitical context of bilateral relations, it should be noted that in this new geopolitical juncture the Armenian – Georgian relations play an important role both for Armenia and Georgia. Taking into account the absence of any possibility to have a breakthrough in the Armenian – Azerbaijani and Armenian – Turkish relations in short term perspective, the Armenian – Georgian relations are an important pillar also for ensuring regional stability and security.

Focus group Interviews

Discussion Observations

Five focus-group discussions were held during may 2015 with about 50 participants. 8-12 persons attended each discussion. Given the research topic, first- and second-year Master students in Conflict Studies, Migration Studies, PR, and Political Science were involved in the discussions.

The discussions were recorded. Participants were free, and in relaxed and friendly atmosphere presented their opinions. The discussion of questions showed that future Armenian decision makers are keen to cooperate and have friendly relations with their Georgian colleagues, interested in having many Georgian friends and increasing knowledge about Georgia. It is noteworthy that both emotional and rational approaches to the modern Armenian-Georgian relations were observed.

General Questions

Self-stereotyping revealed more features than the discussion of stereotypes about Georgians in terms of both negative and positive attitudes that confirmed the poor communication between Armenian and Georgian young people.

“When we were talking of stereotypes about Georgians in the Armenian society, it turned out that we had to think long and hard to present our ideas. This means that we lack experience in direct communication with Georgians” – Master student in Migration Studies, female.

The discussions resulted in the deduction of the following stereotypical general features.

	Armenians (self-description)	Georgians
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intelligent • hospitable • trustful • friendly • workaholics • humane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hospitable • state-oriented • humane • free and easy
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having difficulties in uniting • having inferiority complex • boastful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boastful • two-faced • calculating • nationalist

While discussing the ideas about Armenians and Georgians almost all participants after group sessions concluded that two nations are similar. A participant noted that based on the communication experience with Georgians an opinion was formed that some Georgians perceive themselves and Armenians similarly, others distinguish them from Armenians.

“I had an experience of participating in two trainings with Georgian young people. During one of the trainings a Georgian man participated who was repeating “We and Armenians are similar”, “Armenians and Georgians are similar”. And during training, vice versa, Georgians were trying to show they differ from Armenians”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

During discussions the participants tried to compare the images of Armenian and Georgian young people. Some of them mentioned that while being in Tbilisi they noticed that young people are more fashionable, stylish and liberal dressers than those in Yerevan. Some participants tried to use the expression “European style dressers” to describe Georgian young people which led to unclear conclusions. Some noted that the image of Georgian young people is more “European” than that of Armenian ones. On the other hand, others put that their ideas about the “European style” are stereotypical. *“A Spanish friend of mine who visited Armenia after being in Georgia was telling that the relations in Armenia are clearer, organized, and predictable”. – Master student in Public Relations, female.*

A view was expressed that Georgian young people are more emancipated than Armenian ones. This point was considered both as an advantage and disadvantage. In particular, a female expressed her experience:

“Georgian young people are less respectful towards young ladies than Armenian ones. For instance, if in Armenia you are in the café with your boyfriend, no man will dare to approach you and talk to you. Meanwhile, one can approach and talk to a girl who is with a guy in Georgia, and that is considered to be normal”. – Master student in Migration Studies, female.

Another question of comparison was the road traffic. A young participant shared his experience of travelling in Georgia stating that the pedestrians find difficulties on the Georgian roads, nobody yields to them, and it was always dangerous to cross the streets.

“You must pray to God while walking through the zebra crossing not to be hit by a car”. – Master student in Public Relations, male.

What kind of relationships would you like to establish with Georgians?

The male participants would prefer to enter into friendship and working relationships with Georgians: marital relationships were not mentioned. They found it difficult to answer whether they would like to marry Georgian girls, given they knew few Georgians and had no idea about common features.

A participant noted that he also happened to participate in joint trainings with Georgians, and based on that experience he would not like to marry a Georgian girl.

“I respect and love Georgians and have many Georgian friends. Yet I noticed that Georgian girls yield to the Armenian ones in respect of being the closest friends for their husbands, being strong, supportive”. – Master student in Public Relations, male.

In female representatives' opinion, friendship with Georgians is preferable. Working relationships are preferable with Armenians, then with foreigners that – in participants' perspective – is not conditioned by the mistrust of foreigners but the lack of communication with them.

“Firstly I would prefer to establish working relations with Armenians, only then with foreigners. If it does not come to Armenians and Georgians in general, but in particular, then based on my experience maybe I would prefer a Georgian”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

As for marital relationships, the opinions diverged. Some of the female representatives think that marital relationship with Georgians is not possible, as far as the “classical Armenian family is patriarchal”, and “the Georgian one is matriarchal”. The participants also mentioned some differences in everyday life, which would complicate the marital life.

“In everyday life Georgians are very free and easy, one gets impression that in personal relationships they are very inconstant and unpredictable” – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

On the other hand, other female participants stated right the opposite saying that they would consider Georgians among foreigners in the first place after Armenians as potential spouses, being sure that mutual understanding exists between the representatives of two nations.

“On the contrary, I would prefer a Georgian spouse, because we are similar. If not an Armenian, then a Georgian” – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

Participation in Joint Trainings, Communication Experience with Georgians

Armenian participants' opinions on the communication experience with Georgian young people were different. Some even had not had such one. Some were mentioning the good command of English and agility among Georgian young people, others – the opposite. Some of them noticed that Georgian young people often demonstrate that they do not speak Russian.

In general, participants wished to have frequent meetings and closer relationships with Georgian young people.

“I as a person and professional have always been interested in Georgia and Georgians. Some time ago I intensively tried to establish contacts and communicate with Georgian young people in social networks. But they were incommunicable and passive, and eventually I failed”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

Participants also stated that though there is some theoretical knowledge about Georgia, the establishment of closer academic relations would be desirable.

“As I know, classes on Georgia are conducted in two departments of Yerevan State University. The Georgian language is also taught. Yet this is not enough: closer contacts and relations are needed”. Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

“It would be good if visiting professors from Georgia taught the Georgian History during the courses we take on the history of neighboring countries”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, male.

Participants mentioned that there are two kinds of perceptions in the Armenian society of how Armenians are treated in Georgia – positive and negative. Some noted that the relations between Armenians and Georgians in Georgia are very beneficial and friendly.

“A friend of mine, who lives in Georgia, often calls me and we talk, and she talks about her Georgian friends with me all the time”. – Master student in Migration Studies, female.

The opposite opinion was also expressed based on the experience of negative attitude towards Armenians in Georgia.

“My brother has participated in sport competitions in Georgia and he says that the attitude of organizers towards them has been inattentive, negative, and they have always made distinction between Georgian and Armenian athletes”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

“I know a European expert who worked in Georgia and he said that Armenophobia is widespread in Georgia, because Armenians are perceived to be intelligent, businesslike, flexible, quick-witted, and because of that dangerous. Even my Georgian friends related an anecdote where “A Jew wants to cheat an Armenian...”, and at that moment all Georgians laughed showing that’s funny that “Jews are able to cheat Armenians””. – MA student in Conflict Studies, male.

As for Mass Media, participants noted that Georgian media presents Armenians living in Georgia (especially in Javakheti) and Armenians living in Armenia differently. In the first case Armenians are presented as “separatists, who do not want to learn the Georgian language” etc. In the second case the statements are generally neutral.

Security and Foreign Policy

All participants stated that Georgia is of strategic importance for Armenia.

“Georgia is the only Christian neighbor of Armenia. Our relations with this state must have strategic level”. – MA student in Conflict Studies, male.

Georgia's deepening cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan proceeds from the strategic interests of these states, where Georgia is considered as an object to expand the Turkish influence. For Armenia the expanding influence of these two unfriendly states is a direct threat to the national security of Armenia.

“Georgia is affected by Pan-Turkism. Turkish capital already dominates in Batumi, the Azerbaijani community of Georgia is large and influential, and in one of his recent speeches M. Sahakashvili who was quite anti-Armenian president in his times, again considered the Azerbaijani community as a positive factor and the Armenian community of Javakheti as a negative one” – Master student in Political Science, male.

“Georgia is our closest neighbor but it has not recognized the Armenian Genocide so far”. – Master student in PR, female.

Georgia's cooperation with the US is one of the main factors that today influences over Georgian foreign policy. One of the participants regarded Georgia's non-recognition of the Armenian Genocide as natural. *“Once the US recognizes the Armenian Genocide, Georgian authorities can follow its lead and do the same”*. – Master student in PR, female.

Participants also mentioned the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline with Georgia's key role in its implementation. This project contributed to the further isolation of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan. In fact, some activities of Georgia have indirectly threatened Armenia's interests.

“If Georgia conducted more friendly policy towards Armenia, then Azerbaijan would not have reached its current power level”. – MA student in Political Science, male.

An opinion was also expressed that the Armenian authorities also must follow Georgia's lead and conduct a pragmatic policy. Not always is it good to be guided by “traditional” relations, pragmatism must be always in mind of decision-makers. If Georgian authorities find it right

to closely cooperate with Azerbaijan and Turkey with direct negative consequences for Armenia, then Armenia should also primarily think about its own interests.

"We must not feel offended or criticize Georgian authorities. In Armenia people must act so as to protect national interests always and under different conditions regardless of regional dynamics". – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

Russia's factor in Georgia is regarded as an issue for national security. Information and propaganda activities in Georgia show that Armenia's position as Russia's ally can be manipulated to the detriment of Armenian-Georgian relations. Particularly, Armenia can be presented as a state creating problems in Javakheti, that will be served for a particular political power.

"I remember when in 2008 Russia invaded Georgia, Georgian Media published a caricature depicting an ugly-face man with his one hand grabbing Abkhazia and South Ossetia and with the other reaching for Javakheti. Meanwhile, it is well known that Armenia's position on this war was not pro-Russian, on the contrary, Armenian authorities supported Georgians in every way". – Master student in Political Science, male.

An opinion was also expressed that unfortunately Armenian-Georgian relations are not direct and are conditioned by relations among superpowers. Now under the deterioration of the US-Russian relations, Armenian-Georgian relations are also affected, because both the US and Russia want to expand their zones of influence and drag both Armenia and Georgia into their influence.

As some participants noted, the US presence in Georgia under current conditions must not be seen as a threat to the security of Armenia, since the US is not considered as a hostile state for Armenia. Moreover, the US-Armenian relations are important for balancing Armenian-Russian relations. On the other hand, the US (NATO) military base has long been present in Turkey that is why the US presence in the region is not new and should not be surprising for Armenia. Yet it would be desirable that Georgia also tried to keep the balance between the US and Russia to mitigate the negative consequences of disagreements between the US and Russia for the region.

“If relations between the US and Russia are tenser, it may affect Armenian-Georgian relations. As we know from the “cold war” history, the area of the US-USSR confrontation was the third world”. – MA student in Conflict Studies, female.

Armenians living in Georgia

The question of Javakheti and Armenians of Javakheti was discussed not only regarding the regional issues but also separately. Some participants noted that Javakheti question is manipulated both by Georgia and Russia in terms of bilateral relations. Meanwhile, in Armenia not everyone knows about the issues in Javakheti and are guided by stereotypes, according to which, either Javakheti is ignored by the Georgian authorities, or roads or infrastructures there are not improved.

“I have recently met with an Armenian from Javakheti, who told me that in the nearby village inhabited by Georgians and Azerbaijanis there are no problems with electricity, meanwhile in their village the electricity is periodically switched off under the name of cyclic power cutoff. There are also some water problems that the community regulates itself: it seems that Georgian authorities have forgotten about this settlement”. – Master student in Political Science, male.

On the other hand, Javakheti Armenians express their discontent at such an attitude towards them, generally being more active in ongoing processes in Armenia than in Georgia. According to some participants, in their opinion, Javakheti Armenians do not believe that in the future they will be allowed to participate in Georgia's public administration and decision-making circles and therefore they are oriented towards Armenia.

“Javakheti young people come to study in Armenian higher education institutions, because they see perspectives of finding a job rather in Armenia than in Georgia”. – Master student in PR, male.

It was noted that there are some forces in the world that would like to use the Javakheti issue to destabilize the situation in the region. According to participants, external intervention may have some impact, if Javakheti residents do have an objective and serious problems and

complaints. One of the participants brought the example of the “Arab Spring”, during which the destabilization of states was not only the result of external intervention, but also the consequence of human rights violations and cumulative public protest in the countries of the Arab World. In particular, it was noted that such attempts are regularly made by Azerbaijan to destabilize the Armenian-Georgian relations.

“I do not know whether Russia is ready to use the factor of Javakheti Armenians to destabilize current situation, but I have seen many publications in Azerbaijani electronic resources, where it is stated that “Armenians have territorial claims to Georgia”, “want to destabilize the situation in Georgia”, and so on. I am sure that this kind of Azerbaijani propaganda has a certain influence on Georgian society”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

Suggestions to develop Armenian-Georgian relations

It was suggested to facilitate the border communication between Armenia and Georgia as far as possible excluding all obstacles in bilateral relations. Furthermore, Armenian-Georgian relations must serve as a balancing arm for the obstructive Turkish-Azerbaijani factor in Georgia.

It was also proposed to intensify joint academic and educational relations and through them make the Armenian-Georgian relations in political and economic spheres more efficient.

“If we could frankly talk to each other and speak about the fears we have, then maybe it would become clear that most of the fears and stereotypes are baseless. The same applies to the Armenians of Javakheti: one needs to listen to them carefully and to find out their concerns for preventing the possible risks”. – Master student in Conflict Studies, female.

It was proposed to develop a joint program to actively involve Javakheti Armenians in modernization processes taking place in Georgia, and to offer guarantees for them to be engaged in the solution of Georgia's public problems. It is necessary to develop not national, but state and other forms of civic identity among Javakheti Armenians, which will contribute to the security and welfare of Georgia and Armenia.

Assessment of interviews' results

The material acquired during the focus-group interviews provides an important base for identifying the main perceptions among Armenian graduate students about the Georgian – Armenian relations and on Georgia and Georgians in general.

Though the main goal of the project is to identify mutual perception concerning the foreign policy and security issues, some interesting revelations have been made also about general view among the Armenian young people on fellow Georgians, which also may play a role in shaping vision about Georgia, when these students may be involved in political and state institutions having direct or indirect influence on future policy making.

General perceptions of Georgia and Georgians among the Armenian young people

It should be noted that in general perceptions there are some similarities about main features of Georgians and Armenians, but simultaneously there are differences too. It is worthy to mention, that positive features about Georgians among interviewers are prevailing, but meanwhile some negative perceptions in the long term perspective may influence the mindset of young people dealing with the foreign policy and national security issues.

Another interesting result of the focus-group interviews is the prevailing view among participants that Georgians, especially young generation, are more European than Armenians, with mainly a positive connotation of the term “European”. This reveals the fact that especially among young Armenians “European” is often associated with positive perception, despite the recent geopolitical developments and Armenia's decision to enter the Eurasian Economic Union. The interviews' results also bring to the surface the fact that according to the Armenians' perceptions at least some Georgians are viewing Armenians as very close nation, with mostly similar features creating some general sentiment of belonging to the so-called post-Soviet space.

Another interesting feature is the view among Armenians that traffic in Tbilisi is far less regulated than in Yerevan despite the fact that many in Armenia mention that Georgian reforms concerning road police and traffic are an example worthy to emulate.

Meanwhile, many interviewers are elaborating their views based on a one- or two-time short interactions with Georgians or short visits to Georgia either for training/educational purposes or for recreation/holidays. Some mention Armenians living in Georgia as their main source of information. Obviously, at least based on the Armenian perspective, there is a need to foster people to people contacts, especially among students, to create an opportunity for young generation to create a personal experience which will help to elaborate sounder base for future mutual contacts.

Perceptions on Security and Foreign Policy

One of the key issues of concern for Armenia is the deepening strategic relations between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. It's worthy to mention that from interviewers' perspective Georgia is not an equal partner in this triangle. Azerbaijan and Turkey are expanding their influence in Georgia and they may use their involvement in Georgia for having impact on the Georgian-Armenian relations and on Georgia's policy toward Armenia. The remarks on pan-Turkism and on Turkish capital dominating in Georgia and in particular in Ajaria are the signs of growing concern in Armenia about possible manipulation by Azerbaijan and Turkey of their economic influence in Georgia to negatively affect Armenia and the Georgian-Armenian relations.

Taking into account the recent developments in the Azerbaijan – Georgia – Turkey triangle aiming to develop political and military components – trilateral meetings at the level of Presidents, foreign ministers and especially contacts between defense ministers¹⁷ with clear aim to foster defense security cooperation will only add more anxiety in the Armenian society.

¹⁷ Azerbaijani, Georgian, Turkish Defense Ministers Meet in Tbilisi, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28178>.

The overt policy of Georgia to become a transit hub for Azerbaijani oil and gas exports is also viewed as an unfriendly policy towards Armenia, as the oil and gas revenues are used by Azerbaijan for modern assault weapon acquisition which, taking into account the *no war no peace* situation in Nagorno Karabakh is viewed as a direct threat to Armenia.

The fact that Georgia till now has not officially recognized the fact of the Armenian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Turkish authorities is also viewed in Armenia as an unfriendly action and partly is explained by close relations of Georgia with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

The possible impact on the Armenian-Georgian relations of the current crisis between Russia and the West is another important issue for security and foreign policy areas. There is a clear concern that the crisis may have a negative impact on bilateral relations, as Russia makes active efforts to consolidate its influence in the post-Soviet space, and the West and the US, in particular, threats to thwart those actions. There is a common place perception that Georgian-Armenian relations are largely conditioned by the relations between Big Actors. There is also a belief that some forces outside Georgia may manipulate the fact of Armenia being Russia's strategic ally to create an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion within Georgian society towards Armenia and Armenians living in Georgia – as a potential source for unfriendly actions against Georgia.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the strong US positions in Georgia are mainly viewed as a positive development for Armenia as the US seen as a friendly country. The US-Armenian relations are seen also as a possibility to balance Russian - Armenian relations, and the greater involvement of the US in the South Caucasus is welcomed. At the same time, interviewers mainly express the idea that Georgia should try to have a balanced relations with Russia and the US and the overt anti-Russian policy does not contribute to the regional stability and security.

The issue of the Armenian minority living in Georgia, especially in Javakheti is also viewed as a possible source of manipulation by the external forces to negatively impact Armenian-Georgian relations. Meanwhile, many interviewers express concern regarding poor

socioeconomic conditions in Javakheti especially in comparison with the territories populated mainly by Azerbaijanis. There is a perception that Javakheti region is ignored by Georgian authorities and this is the main reason the young generation of Javakheti Armenians sees its future in Armenia, entering Armenian universities, and then mainly looking for jobs in Armenia.

According to interviewers the main way to preclude any possible outside manipulations of Javakheti Armenia issue is to radically improve the socioeconomic situation in the region, thus eliminating any factors that could result in resentment or instability. In this case, the Armenian minority living in Georgia may serve as an additional bridge for mutual understanding between the two societies and the two states.

A VIEW FROM GEORGIA

Introduction

Armenia and Georgia have a substantial history of good neighborly bilateral relations. However, these states face new realities, the challenges caused by the recent developments in Ukraine, Georgia's signing of the Association Agreement with EU and Armenia leaning toward the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. In 2014 PSAA and CSS cooperated under the scope of the project "Armenian–Georgian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for the Bilateral Cooperation", which aimed to identify the security, foreign policy and civil society dimensions of the bilateral agenda. This project has proven that there are some misperceptions among the two states' different stakeholders regarding Georgia's and Armenia's policy and intentions towards each other. In this paper we focus on the perceptions and misperceptions amongst Georgian and Armenian youth towards each other. For this purpose, focus group discussions with the students of social and political sciences were conducted in order to find out what the future leaders/decision makers think regarding the security and foreign policy challenges in the Georgia-Armenia bilateral relations.

Four focus group discussions took place with MA and the final year BA students of private and public universities studying at the faculty of social and political sciences (30 students in total). The following leading universities are represented: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Ilia State University, International Black Sea University, and Georgian Institute for Public Affairs. The students represented the following study programs: BA programs in Sociology, International Relations, Political Science and Journalism, as well as MA programs in Public Administration, Diplomacy and International Politics, and Sociology of Media. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used in order to identify their perceptions of the country's strategic political choices, the regional foreign and security policy, and the Armenian minority's issue in Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

Part 1. Georgian Youth's Stereotypes about Armenians

In order to grasp Georgian young people's perceptions of the Armenians in a comparative perspective, it was decided to collect the focus group participants' views about both the hetero- and auto-stereotypes. Interestingly, based on the listed stereotypes it seems that more negative characteristics are ascribed to the Georgians than to the Armenians. Apart from that, it turns out that the most commonly listed stereotypes are **lazy/not hardworking**, **happy-go-lucky** and **hospitable** for the Georgians and **cohesive/solidary towards each other** for the Armenians. On the basis of the mentioned features, it is possible to differentiate between three sub-groups: dichotomous auto- and hetero-stereotypes, overlapping auto- and hetero-stereotypes and unrelated auto- and hetero-stereotypes.

Dichotomous Auto- and Hetero-stereotypes

Several dichotomous categories can be identified related to the attitudes towards work, rationality and in-group cohesiveness.

- **Lazy, careless and disorganized Georgians vs. Hardworking and organized Armenians**

Auto-stereotypes portray the Georgians as lazy and not hardworking. One participant also mentioned a widespread expression of being "talented but lazy". Other features include: being careless, not being able to plan something ahead and to think in a long-term perspective, being disorganized, finding it hard to finish the work that one started, being unpunctual, disobeying regulations (e.g. when crossing the streets), being reluctant to do less prestigious work, happy-go-lucky and always in good mood. Another widespread expression "wine, pipe women" pointing to the male recklessness and debauchery from a famous poem by Omar Khayyam, was also ascribed to the Georgians.

On the other hand, the Armenians are described as hardworking, well-organized, unlike the Georgians, not being embarrassed to do less prestigious work, devoted to work and finishing whatever started, therefore, making good managers and being skillful in business/trading.

- **Confused and irrational Georgians vs. Pragmatic and rational Armenians**

The features in this category are closely related to the previous one. The following characteristics ascribed to the Georgians can be listed here: emotional, not very rational, not very realistic, prone to fanaticism, driven by stereotypes, confused, not being sure in one's own desires and waiting for others to make a decision for them, lacking one's own opinion and being easily manipulated when it comes to politics and religion, as well as operating with double-standard values.

In contrast to the Georgians, the Armenians are seen as more down-to-earth. According to the participants, they are pragmatic and not wasteful when it comes to money, with highly developed skills of survival, are scattered in many countries and easily fit in various cultures, are able to well-represent one's own culture, are very motivated and able to push forward one's own agenda (e.g. when it comes to raising the topic of Armenian genocide throughout the world).

- **Particularistic Georgians vs. Cohesive Armenians**

The respondents characterize the Georgians as less solidary towards each other and rather particularistic, especially in the context of Georgian regionalism. On the other hand, cohesiveness and in-group solidarity is ascribed to the Armenians.

Overlapping Auto- and Hetero-stereotypes

Apart from the dichotomous categories, some stereotypes appeared to be similar for the Georgians and the Armenians.

- **Warm/Friendly/hospitable**

The Georgians are described as hospitable and warm/friendly. Similarly, the Armenians are portrayed as hospitable, cheerful, open, and warm/friendly.

- **Theatrical, nationalistic and ambitious**

The participants characterize the Georgians as ambitious, proud, arrogant, boastful, chauvinistic (thinks that one's own nation is better than

others) and theatrical (dramatic/artificial) in everyday life. In almost the same way, the Armenians are also portrayed as boastful, ambitious, theatrical, and claiming the superiority of their culture over others.

- **Traditional**

Another feature that is partially overlapping is being traditional. However, the features in this category mostly refer to the Georgians. While the Armenians' conservativeness is mentioned only once, far more stereotypes of this type are ascribed to the Georgians. A Georgian is portrayed as focused on traditions, excessively religious, conservative, closed to innovations, extremely respectful towards the institutions of family and relatives, and collectivistic in a negative way (e.g. relatives and neighbors interfere in one's life, a problem of nepotism).

- **Cheating**

This feature is also partially overlapping. While cheating/lying is mentioned once in case of the Georgians, a number of related features are ascribed to the Armenians, such as cheater, less trustworthy, sly and adroit (a participant named the last two features as common stereotypes the Georgians have about the Armenians rather than one's own opinion).

Unrelated Auto- and Hetero-stereotypes

The rest of auto- and hetero-stereotypes that do not intersect each other are as follows: The stereotypes for the Georgians are stubborn, snobbish (e.g. the style and attitudes among youth), extremely talkative and tolerant (although not everybody agreed with this latter feature). On the other hand, the Armenians are described as somewhat rude, secretive, miser, and finally, misappropriating Georgian cultural heritage.

The above mentioned data resonate with the results of the research concerning Tbilisi's and Akhaltsikhe's Georgians' attitudes toward the Armenians (July 2013, unpublished research by CSS). Here too most common associations of the focus-group participants about the Armenians are related to the stereotypic jobs such as hairdressers, artisans, repairers, and traders. They are perceived as workaholics,

money-oriented, miser and misappropriators of the Georgian cultural heritage. When it comes to the perceived differences between the Georgians and the Armenians, in line with our study the Armenians are seen as more cohesive and hardworking, more profit-oriented, more organized and punctual. When it comes to similarity, both the Armenians and the Georgians are perceived as hospitable, friendly, sociable, nationalistic, chauvinistic, fond of feasting and traditional.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned, the participants were suggested to imagine a hypothetical situation of Georgia left without the Armenian minority. The most frequently mentioned negative outcome turned out to be the loss of diversity in Georgia and the loss of the people in the service sector; while the positive outcome was considered to be the disappearance of separatist threats in Javakheti and the provision of more job opportunities for the Georgians.

How Prejudiced are the Participants?

Although the prejudices are obvious, at the first glance it seems the negative stereotypes about one's own group outnumber the ones towards the Armenians. Apart from that, sometimes the respondents emphasize that the negative stereotypes they mention about the Armenians represent not their own opinion but rather the prejudices spread in Georgia. And of course, there are differences among the participants – some seem to be more liberal during the discussions, while others express more stereotyped views.

Later, when moving to the topic of having Armenian acquaintances, along with mentioning group-mates, friends, co-workers, project partners, trainers, teachers etc., the respondents also identify certain kinds of coping strategies the Armenians living in Georgia develop. The list comprises of such items as changing one's surname, hiding one's own ethnicity, having ambivalent identity (neither entirely belonging to Georgia, nor to Armenia), are more sociable than necessary in order to better integrate with the Georgians. According to the respondents, the local Armenians develop the coping strategies because the environment is prejudiced, xenophobic and discriminatory, where the word "Armenian" already has a negative meaning.

“My impression towards these people (the Armenians living in Georgia) is that they are not complete in an ethnic sense. They belong to one nationality and live in another country – they are neither here, nor there. Here a Georgian may call them “Armenian” in an offensive sense, so they need to have a where-to-go in Armenia. On the other hand, they are not similar to the Armenians over there because of being born and brought up in Georgia; therefore they need a where-to-go in Georgia as well” (Male, MA Student).

“I have Armenian friends who changed their surname into Georgian. By doing this they want to prove that they are Georgians. This is a sign of something – this means that the Georgian society makes them feel ashamed of being Armenian” (Female, MA Student).

The young people try to explain the source of Armenophobia in Georgia. Several historical/cultural arguments are mentioned; interestingly, some of them are prejudicial themselves:

- By 19-th century the Georgians began to move from villages to Tbilisi, where a strong Armenian middle class already resided. Therefore, the Georgians tried to form an identity, which would separate them from the Armenians as “others”;
- By 20-th century the Armenian refugees arrived in Georgia, took the jobs and became successful in trading, thus triggering a sense of competition and envy among the Georgians;
- During the Gamsakhurdia period (1991-92) the Georgians’ views were extremely xenophobic;
- The Georgians are dyophysite Christians, while the Armenians are monophysite;
- In Georgia the Armenians are often associated with plagiarism (of the Georgian historical/cultural heritage);
- The Armenians are not a trustworthy nation, they can betray Georgia for their own interests (e.g. not showing any support regarding visa-liberalization);
- There is a fear of separatism in Javakheti region.

“I think when the Armenians arrived here they got all the jobs, started trading and became more successful than the Georgians. Probably the Georgians were envious, they didn't like that the Armenians came and took their jobs so the stereotypes were spread that they are misers and merchants in order to diminish them and demonstrate one's own superiority”(Female, BA Student).

“Everything has its reason. We are not the disgusting nation that hates someone just for nothing. Why don't we hate the Latvians, the Estonians? The Armenians are not a trustworthy and friendly nation. When we are in need, they will leave us alone as they always act according to their own interests (...) the truth is that Armenia and Belarus did not support us regarding visa-liberalization. Armenia welcomed Putin and Putin told them that they should have the common border. It is not pleasant when a neighboring state acts this way” (Male, MA Student).

In fact, taking the dynamics of the focus groups into account, the negative stereotypes appear not in the beginning of the discussion but later, while talking about other issues. Although the participants display the self-reflection of prejudiced Georgian society and even try to distance themselves from the public opinion, sometimes they too carry the stereotypical views. This is also obvious when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of having the Armenian minority in Georgia and whether the Javakheti Armenians are marginalized by the Georgians or not.

According to the participants, the advantages of having the Armenian minority in Georgia are as follows: The cultures are mixing and the Georgians and the Armenians learn a lot from each other; Diversity; The Armenian cultural heritage (architecture, churches, the famous Tbilisi Armenians, e.g. Parajanov) enriches Tbilisi; It is good to have talented Armenian youth in Georgia; Having ethnic minorities is good for the image of Georgia on the international arena; The Armenian minority of Georgia serves as a bridge between Georgia and Armenia, attracting Armenia's investments to Georgia and finally, the Armenians are good hairdressers and shoe-tailors.

“I think, Tbilisi Armenians are our treasure. The culture they created is very important for us. When tourists come to Tbilisi they see an Armenian Church too. This is richness of Tbilisi and we should be proud of it. If we consider the Javakheti Armenians as an additional potential for Georgia, we would have better attitudes towards them and include in the processes more”(Male, MA Student).

When it comes to the disadvantages, several ones are mentioned: the threat of tensions and separatism in Javakheti and reduction of the Azerbaijani investment as the Armenians live in Georgia.

Generally, the participants agree that the Javakheti Armenians are marginalized by the Georgians as they are neither included in the politics, nor invited to the media talk shows. Apart from that, it was also noted that not only the Armenians living in Javakheti but also those living in the capital or other parts of Georgia are marginalized and discriminated.

“I had an Armenian classmate who was very marginalized. Everyone was laughing at him. I was not. Even the teachers treated him differently assuming that he should be stupid and did not want to study. He was seated on the last desk and was never paid attention. When no one pays attention to you for 12 years and assumes that you cannot learn anything, your self-esteem decreases” (Female, BA Student).

However, when it comes to explanations among various responses some stereotypical views are still present. The following reasons are provided regarding the Javakheti Armenians' marginalization: Georgian politicians do not care about their integration; The Georgian language programs are less successful in Javakheti; The Javakheti Armenians think of separatism; Javakheti is far from the center, hence its Armenians are less integrated than the Armenians residing in Tbilisi; The Javakheti Armenians are passive – they do not have any desire of being involved in politics or in public discourse themselves; One could blame Georgian nationalistic sentiments, but on the other hand, the Armenians too are misappropriating the Georgian cultural heritage; Not only the Armenians but also all other ethnic groups are marginalized in Georgia.

While discussing the Georgians' stereotypes towards the Armenians, two essential aspects should be noted: the specificity of stereotypes and the distinction between various groups of Armenians.

- **Specificity of Stereotypes**

Although while listing the features, more negative stereotypes are ascribed to the Georgians than the Armenians, the specificity of stereotypes differs. Negative features that are ascribed to the Georgians (lazy/irrational/particularistic) make problems for the in-group itself. However, negative stereotypes ascribed to the Armenians (cheating, adroit, misappropriating Georgian historical/cultural heritage) represent more threat for the participants' in-group (the Georgians) than for the Armenians. In contrast, most of the positive characteristics of the Armenians that create dichotomies with the Georgians' negative features appear to be rather beneficial for the Armenians (pragmatic, being organized and hardworking, cohesive). In addition, while the Georgians are seen as collectivistic in a narrow sense (blamed for nepotism and nosy relatives), the Armenians are perceived as collectivistic in a beneficial way, implying national solidarity and cohesiveness.

- **Differentiating between Armenians**

The young people distinguish between the Armenians from Tbilisi, Javakheti and Armenia. The Armenians residing in Tbilisi are viewed most positively: they are associated with art and culture of Tbilisi, while the Javakheti Armenians are seen as more attached to Armenia than to Georgia. As noted above, the Javakheti Armenians are also considered as more marginalized than those living in Tbilisi. The Armenians living in Armenia are mentioned as tourists at the Georgian seaside. One of the participants noted that Armenian tourists throw the rubbish around in the streets as if they do it on purpose, because they are not in Armenia. However, this idea provoked a hot discussion and some opposing views in the group.

On the other hand the participants warmly remember their Tbilisi Armenian neighbors, childhood friends, etc. and often note that these

Armenians are more like the Georgians than the Armenians – they speak Georgian and are very integrated. It was even mentioned that the stereotypes ascribed to the Georgians suit them more than the stereotypes about the Armenians. Therefore, it can be concluded that Georgia's well-integrated Armenians, especially those from Tbilisi are perceived almost as close as the in-group members: they are good because they are like the Georgians.

“These people (the Armenians from Tbilisi) are very adapted to the Georgian environment. Their ancestors also lived here. Many of them do not have the house in Armenia”(Female, BA Student).

“Those who live in Georgia are very different. I have many acquaintances and my best friend is also half-Armenian. None of the stereotypes could be ascribed to the Armenians I know. They are entirely adapted to Georgia. The stereotypes we listed about the Georgians fit them more. I know about Armenia's Armenians from what they say and they characterize them with these features (listed above)”(Male, MA Student).

The participants tend to justify their attitude by citing the Armenians residing in Georgia as a source of stereotypes towards the Armenians: they are so Georgian that they often joke about the Armenians, use the word “Armenian” as an offensive term, and dislike the Armenians living in Armenia.

“I had an Armenian coworker, who had an Armenian husband and their daughter also married the Armenian. They felt quite good and did not think they were discriminated. This woman used to say that when she was angry with her husband, she used to call him ‘Armenian’ as an offence and he was not annoyed”(Female, MA Student).

Sources of Stereotypes: Media

Apart from the personal experience, the participants identify several other sources of stereotypes such as family and older generation, saying that the stereotypic views are more prevalent among them.

“It is interesting that these differences are more visible in our parents’ generation. I remember that the adults used to talk but we, children, played together and there was no difference” (Female, MA Student).

According to the participants, the media appears to be another massive source of stereotypes.

Several media were distinguished: social networks, television (news and comedy sketches) and printed media. It was noted that those printed newspapers are more Armenophobic that are paradoxically also more pro-Russian.

“Paradoxically, the pro-Russian printed media portrays the Armenians as a scarecrow although it’s more than a century that the Armenians have been Russia’s allies. It is strange, they write about changing the surnames, for instance, Zhvania (ex-Prime Minister) being Armenian, etc. They also aggravate the topic of Armenians taking something away from us”(Male, MA Student).

However, according to the participants’ opinion, the printed media monitoring report shows that in fact “Armenian” is often used in a negative sense; moreover, there are occasions when “Armenian” is used as an offensive word.¹⁸ Social media is seen as another arena for the users to display their own prejudicial attitudes. Apart from that, most participants think that the comedy sketches play a serious role in strengthening the existing stereotypes by portraying the Armenians in an extremely stereotypical way (mechanic, TV repairer, uneducated, talking with accent, cheater and money-lover). However, the opposite views are also present: The Georgians living in various regions are also portrayed in a stereotypical way; and the Armenians are portrayed in a positive way in the comedy shows (with rather friendly sentiments).

When it comes to the TV news and talk shows, the respondents mention that they often transmit false information, where the Armenians are blamed for either demanding separatism in Javakheti or requesting

¹⁸ Chachua, Tabagari, “Monitoring of media coverage: Ethnic, religious and sexual minorities in Georgian printed media”, 2nd quarterly report, Addressing hate speech in Georgia: A Litmus test for human rights and social tolerance, 2011.

Georgian churches. However, there are also the cases when the media present the Armenians as discriminated because of their ethnicity.

“TV reports, articles, agencies mention the Armenians as separatists. Most frequently, these are Georgian but also Azerbaijani, Russian and American sources, which negatively influence our integration. When the Georgians hear that the Armenians want to separate, the hatred is born. Such news feed Armenophobia. On the other hand, this is also negatively perceived by the Javakheti Armenians. There is no real basis for such news. Last year they (journalists) were investigating a false story that they want separation. It was said that Chakhalyan is in Javakheti collecting 60armed people and soon there would be armed attacks. Another false information was Armenia applying to UNESCO and requesting 440 churches from Georgia” (Male, MA Student).

Besides the type of media, according to the respondents, what matters is whether it is generally liberal or not. Several printed and online journals and TV programs (Liberali, Netgazeti, TsiteliZona) are identified as liberal, neutral and analytical, not displaying any stereotypes, while less liberal media, pro-Russian newspapers and comedy shows are seen as the sources of stereotypes, either mocking the Armenians or trying to discredit some Georgian politicians by calling them Armenians. Another important aspect seems to be the context of information. It is mentioned that by presenting Armenia as Russia's ally and therefore rather dangerous for Georgia, the local media creates a negative image of Armenia; while on the other hand, showing a Russian soldier killing the family in Gyumri, Georgian media was very sympathetic towards the Armenians as a Russian party appeared to be an offender.

In order to challenge the stereotypes endorsed by the media, the university courses on the related topics can represent a useful tool. However, the participants do not recall any specific course about Armenia in their university curriculum, though according to some of them, the issues related to Armenia were briefly and only descriptively mentioned in more general courses covering the topics of nationalism (in the case of BA students), conflicts in the Caucasus, diplomacy and EU neighborhood policy (in the case of MA students).

Part 2. Security and Foreign Policy

Assessing Georgia's Strategic Partnership with Armenia in the Light of EU/NATO vs. EAEU Dichotomy

Dissolution of the Soviet Union created new military, political and economic realities in the region and international system and all the post soviet states tried to reshape their Foreign and Security policy. Although after the late 1990s and especially from 2003, Tbilisi managed to build a consistent foreign and security policy with a clear-cut focus on the Euro-Atlantic integration and detaining the Russian military and political power. It was not a linear process for Georgia, nor for its southern neighbor Armenia. Having closed the borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, Georgia is the closest road for Armenia to access European market, also plays an indispensable role in the context of Russian-Armenian economic relations. Despite their closer ties, Armenia and Georgia have different foreign policy orientations. Georgia has recently signed the Association Agreement with European Union, while Armenia has chosen to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. EU and EAEU are incompatible economic entities and in some way, this fact can affect the Georgian-Armenian bilateral relations.

Georgia's foreign policy and security is a hot topic for not only experts of the field but also for the general public. One can assume that young people play a key role in such discussions; however, as the CRRC survey on "Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia" shows, an age group of 18-35 is least interested in Georgia's foreign policy.¹⁹ Despite this finding certain segments of the youth, especially the students of social and political sciences, try to follow events in order to be aware of general trends in the foreign and security policy of Georgia. As they get most of this information from social media, it is crucial for them to critically reflect on the provided information and contextualize it in the field of their studies.

¹⁹ CRRC Georgia; *Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*, 2013. <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2013ge/codebook/>.

In order to provide an overall picture on the foreign policy choices in the Caucasus, we will start with the theory of Realism from International Relations, which divides countries into four groups: leading countries, countries who have pretention to be leaders of the world order, countries that strive regional leadership, and countries that are small and only have local standing. Georgia is in the last group, while such countries have to defend themselves from and resist a strong neighbor. They represent an object rather than a subject in international relations.²⁰ Armenia falls in the category of small states together with Georgia.

Due to the lack of military and economic powers, small states form alliances in order to survive. Every state chooses different tactics. Stephen M. Walt in his book “The Origins of Alliances” seeks to explain the states’ balancing behavior. He focuses on Middle East although the assumptions Walt makes can be generalized to any region. Countries usually balance against threats and not against power and balancing is more common than bandwagoning.²¹ Geography, economy, historical experience and cultural values determine a specific behavior of the country. Within the same region we can have different foreign policy tactics, clear examples of which in the Caucasus are Armenia and Georgia. While Georgia chooses balancing Russia, Armenia uses bandwagoning. Georgia’s foreign policy behavior has not changed since 2003, articulating the balancing strategy with closer ties to West, despite its vulnerability to the economic and military threats from Russia. Also the visions of political elite about the identity and aims of the state are important in that matter.²²

Notwithstanding the existing differences, Georgia and Armenia have a long history of stable partnership with close political and economic ties.

²⁰ Aleksandre Rondeli, *Small States in the International System, The Role of the small state in main concepts of international relations*; Neker, Tbilisi, 2009, p. 52.

²¹ Stephen M. Walt; *The origins of Alliances, Balancing and Bandwagoning*; Cornell University Press, London, p. 148.

²² Giorgi Gvalia et al.; *Political elites, ideas and foreign policy: explaining and understanding the international behavior of small states in the former Soviet Union*; *Security Studies*, 22:98–131, 2013 pp. 99-100.

Diplomatic relations were established in 1992 and since then they have close friendship based on the principles of good neighborhood, mutual respect and cooperation. Armenia is the sixth largest trade partner for Georgia. A special emphasis is made on cultural cooperation and tourism between the two countries.²³ Georgia supports the principle of territorial integrity (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), while Armenia advocates for self-determination (Nagorno-Karabakh). Armenia does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Georgia tries to remain neutral in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.²⁴ Thus, there is a stable *modus vivendi* between Yerevan and Tbilisi.²⁵

From the Georgian perspective, political relations between Armenia and Georgia cannot be called strategic. Georgia's National Security Concept uses the word "strategic partner" in relation to three countries: USA, Azerbaijan and Turkey. It also gives specific importance to the Euro-Atlantic integration.²⁶ A new strategic concept emphasizes the importance of having USA as a main strategic partner, which reflects new realities under the Doctrine on Strategic Partnership with USA signed in 2009 and a trilateral agreement with Azerbaijan and Turkey signed in 2012.²⁷

The CRRC public poll survey has shown that Armenia is not considered as an important political partner when asked whether Georgia should have a closer cooperation with Armenia among other listed countries. Most of the respondents did not mention Armenia among the top three political partners at all. Younger people are more skeptical in this

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; *Relations between Georgia and Republic of Armenia*. <http://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/BilateralRelations/ბილატერალური-რეკონსტრუქციის-სახელმძღვანელო.aspx?lang=en-US> (Accessed: 17. 06.2015).

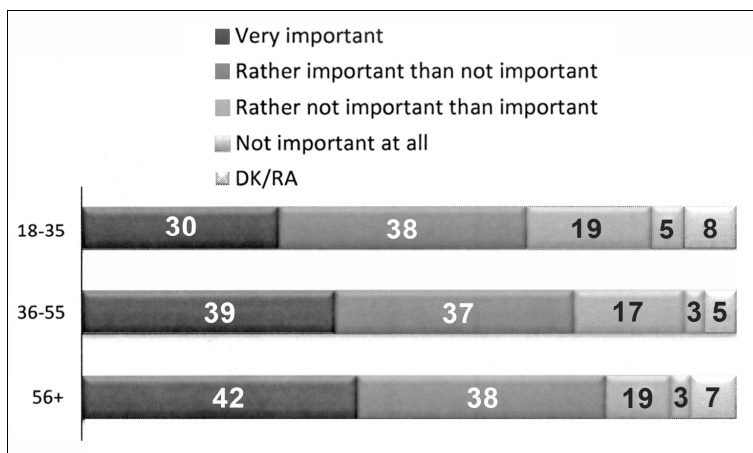
²⁴ Sergey Minasyan; *Armenia and Georgia: A new pivotal relationship in the South Caucasus?*; PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 292, September 2013.

²⁵ S. Neil MacFarlane; *Georgia: National Security Concept versus National Security*; Center for Social Sciences, Tbilisi, August 2012. http://css.ge/files/documents/Papers/0812pp_macfarlane.pdf.

²⁶ National security Concept of Georgia; http://www.parliament.ge/files/292_880_927746_concept_en.pdf (Accessed: 18.06.2015).

²⁷ *Georgia's New National Security Concept*; 23.11.2011; <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24299> (Accessed: 16.06.2015)

matter. The same tendency has been revealed when asking about economic partnership. 90% of those aged 18-35 have not mentioned Armenia in the top three closest economic partners. 87% and 83% have not mentioned Armenia in the 36-55 and 56+ age groups respectively. However, the Georgians think that strengthening ties with Armenia is important: 30% of those aged 18-35 consider it as important, 38% as rather important, while only 5% consider it as not important at all.²⁸



CRRC, 2013, *Importance of Strengthening Ties with Armenia*

In order to understand what young people think about the foreign and security policy of Georgia, we asked them to range the following international organizations, the countries in the region and beyond, based on their strategic partnership to Georgia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, Turkey, USA, EU, EAEU and NATO. The young people emphasized the enhanced partnership with USA, EU, NATO, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

“Deriving from our national interest, EU is the most important partner. Rapprochement to EU is important for the development of Georgia economically, socially, as well as politically” (Male, MA student).

²⁸ CRRC Georgia; *Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*, 2013 <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2013ge/codebook/>.

“Georgia needs the territorial and political strength most of all. Territorial integrity is the biggest problem. NATO could bring us security and political guarantee” (Male, MA Student).

Armenia, Iran, Russian and EAEU were the least important partners in their opinion, though there were differences between those countries: Armenia was considered as a partner but due to its different political path was mainly discussed along with Russia and EAEU. Iran was mentioned in the discourse but because of Iran's strained relations with USA, it was considered impossible for Georgia to have stable relations with Iran. A clear EU/NATO vs. EAEU dichotomy has been revealed, where Georgia and Armenia are on the different sides. These differences are echoed and denoted in the opinion of Georgian youth towards the foreign and security policy of their country.

Despite the abovementioned, it should be noted that the youth discourse is not linear. Georgian youth has an ambivalent attitude toward NATO - part of young people consider it as a strategic partner and others think that Georgia has to restrain its advancement towards NATO or deny its partnership at all. The recent NDI public opinion poll in relation to Georgian government's strategic goal to join NATO showed that 65% of respondents support Georgia's NATO aspiration and only 20 % disapprove.²⁹ As a more detailed observation, Caucasus Barometer 2013 shows that in the 18-35 age group 36 % fully support Georgia's possible NATO membership, while this figure drops to 26 % in the 36-55 age group and to 24 % among those aged 56+.³⁰ Such ambivalent attitudes among Georgian youth can be caused by the possible threats coming from Russia and a shifting politics of the current government with more emphasis on balancing the relations with Russia.

Georgian young people think that Armenia considers Georgia's NATO aspiration as a threat and the emphasis is made on Turkish-Georgian

²⁹ NDI public opinion poll; April 2015. https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20survey-Foreign%20Affairs_ENG.pdf.

³⁰ CRRC Georgia.Caucasus Barometer 2013. <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013ge/codebook/>.

relations in the NATO scope, which can later result in the dislocation of Turkish troops in the Javakheti region. Another scenario is that Russia can use the Armenians in Javakheti and create a direct land connection from Armenia through Javakheti to South Ossetia, thus dividing Georgia in two parts by getting a passage to the South Ossetian territory. This possible scenario is a part of the discourse that the separatist sentiments in Javakheti are used by the Russians against Georgia's sovereignty.

“Probably they (the Armenians) know that we want NATO in order to defend ourselves from Russia. So they would not have negative attitude toward our NATO aspirations. In my opinion, the Armenians have difficulty expressing their interests due to the strong influence of Russia. Armenia wants this security guarantees as well and it will be better for them to have these guarantees from NATO rather than Russia. Russia is a big brother, telling us that they will defend us, but does nothing in reality, they occupy us, wanting rehabilitation of old borders. Armenian government perceives our NATO aspiration as a threat because if they don't do anything, Russia will punish them“ (Male, MA student).

In regard to Georgia's EU accession, Georgian young people think that it will not affect Georgian-Armenian relations, while Armenia can benefit from that.

“I think signing the association agreements with EU will have a positive effect on the country, which can serve as an example for Armenia. I have Richard Giragosian – an Armenian political activist in social network; he writes that he is very happy with Georgia's success, hoping that Armenia will turn toward the Euro-Atlantic politics after that” (Female, MA Student).

However, there are also rather skeptical young people who would consider Georgia's signing of the Association Agreement as a watershed between the two countries, as they are taking different political paths and this automatically means the increased gaps between their political and economic interests.

“Because Russia is Armenia’s strategic partner, it (Georgia’s signing of the AA with EU) will have certain effect on the bilateral relations. On the other hand, the Association Agreement implies a quality control on the export of certain products and they (the Armenians) might have a negative attitude towards this. This is a political issue and we cannot avoid it” (Female, MA Student).

Strategic Partnerships on the Regional Level

The South Caucasus is a turbulent region with frozen conflicts and military escalations, and its small states are surrounded by the powerful neighbors like Russia, Turkey and Iran. When it is up to the strategic partners in the region, Georgian youth prioritize the relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and mention friendly ties with Armenia. All three countries are different in their distinct way; Georgia is an important trade route for Azerbaijan and a transit country for Armenia. Azerbaijan is rich with the oil and gas resources, hence indispensable for Georgian energy security. Armenia is an important economic partner for Georgia and tourism is rather well developed between these two countries. Although they share the Soviet experience and threats from Russia, each of them has totally different strategies to cope with this threat. Being in a strong economic position, Azerbaijan seems less interested in integrating with either EU or EAEU, and with its authoritarian regime and democracy breakdowns, its self-presentation as European (in order to emphasize its civilizational achievements) looks rather unconvincing. Georgia tries to balance Russia and has a strategic partnership with USA, whereas Armenia has a strategic partnership with Russia and thus chooses to bandwagon in order to get the military and economic security.

Georgia broke off its ties with CIS in 2009³¹ though economic ties stay strong. The latest statistics show that CIS countries are one of the biggest trade partners for Georgia, their share both in export and import are quite large. The largest trade partners for Georgia are Turkey (611 million USD), Azerbaijan (360 million USD) and China (304 million

³¹ *Georgia Finalizes withdrawal from CIS*; August 18, 2009; http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgia_Finalizes-Withdrawal_From_CIS/1802284.html (Accessed: 24.06.2015).

USD). A trade turnout with Russia is 274 million USD holding the fourth place with 2015 May-June figures, while Armenia is the seventh after Germany and Ukraine with 155 million USD, having 4 % share in the market.³² Thus, Armenia's joining of EAEU and Georgia's signing of AA cannot possibly disrupt political and economic ties between two countries. According to National Statistics office of Georgia, Georgia's export with Armenia has been growing since 2003, while the import was the highest in 2013-2014. Although with the recent developments, Armenia and Georgia will be associated with incompatible trade associations, it will not directly affect bilateral trade relations.³³

“It is possible that Georgia’s signing of the AA will bring benefit to Armenia, but how they use this opportunity is a different question. Those benefits are mechanism of exchanging products with EU, a quality European product will be imported in Georgia and Armenians will have a possibility to come here, get a better product and spend money in Georgia” (Female, MA Student).

After signing the AA with EU, Georgia has to establish special tariffs for the trade between Armenia and Russia through Georgia, on the basis of their membership of a “different economic union”.³⁴ Armenia fears that the disruption of the trade route from Georgia to Russia will have a significantly negative impact on Armenia.³⁵ Georgian young people know that there can be some obstacles for Armenia regarding the customs duties but they do not have a clear understanding of what it might be.

³² National Statistics Office of Georgia; *Foreign Trade of Georgian in January-May 2015*. http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/georgian/bop/FTrade__05_2015_GEO.pdf (Accessed: 24.06.2015).

³³ Economic Policy Research Center; *Focus on Armenia: Eurasian Customs Union Crawling Closer to Georgia, December 2014; Tbilisi, Georgia*. http://www.osgf.ge/files/2014/Armenia_A5_ENG_WEB.pdf.

³⁴ VakhtangCharaia; *Eurasian Economic Union and possible impact on Georgia, Georgian-Russian Economic Relations after Georgia's joining the DCF TA and the establishment of the Eurasian Union*; Pg. 16, *Caucasian House 2015*. <http://regional-dialogue.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Ekonomika-Pr.pdf>.

³⁵ National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia; http://www.mfa.am/u_files/file/doctrine/Doctrineeng.pdf (Accessed: 25.06.2015).

There are also rather pessimistic observations between the respondents that Armenia's EAEU membership can worsen the economic and political relations between Georgia and Armenia. The main argument has to do with different economic regulations applied to Armenia and Georgia, as well as a disparity between the countries' political courses. In the young people's opinion, Armenia has chosen EAEU due to the security issues and not for the economic benefit.

“Armenia’s decision to join EAEU was based on security issues rather than getting economic benefits. Certain economic interests were foreseen but due to the inflation of Ruble they do not work”(Male, BA Student).

In the Armenian academic circles it is believed that Georgia's success of signing AA will lead to a positive change in the bilateral relations with Armenia. Once “Tbilisi initials the Association Agreement/DCFTA, Armenia's cooperation with Georgia will acquire particular significance by giving Yerevan a common border with the EU customs zone” – states Sergei Minasyan in his article.³⁶

Georgia-Azerbaijan-Turkey: Trilateral relation in the context of Armenian-Georgian Bilateral Relations

On June 8, 2012 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia signed the Trabzon declaration, “celebrating the 20th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations”, which once again emphasized the enhanced partnership between these states and noted the importance of trilateral Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian Business Forum (TAG-BG), which was held in February 2012, in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Georgian young people consider Georgia as a mediator between Armenia-Azerbaijan and Armenia-Turkey and believe that in this respect the trilateral relations between Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia should not be considered as a threat by Armenia. Moreover, they state

³⁶ Sergei Minasyan; *New Challenges and Opportunities in the Realm of Regional Security; Armenia and Georgia in the Context of Current Political Developments. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tbilisi-Yerevan, January 2015. <http://fes.ge/de/policy%20-%20armenia-georgia%20full-1%20-english.pdf>.*

that because Georgia is tolerant to the Armenia-Russian partnership, Armenia on its side has to accept Georgia's special relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. The Georgian-Azerbaijani relations are considered as strategic due to the importance of energy resources for the countries' security and independence. The Turkish-Georgian relations are strategic due to the trade and investments that strengthen Georgian economy.

"If we take the Armenian side, we would ruin our relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, while Armenia does not have anyone besides Russia. We don't like this because Russia is their friend but our enemy, we are crushed in-between. That is why we are not choosing Armenia as a strategic partner" (Male, MA Student).

The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia trilateral relation dates back to the creation of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 1990s, which starting operating in 2006. BTC. Co was found in 2002 and its main shareholders are BP, AzBTC, Chevron, Statoil, and TPAO. The pipeline carries oil from Azeri-Chirag-Deepwater-Gunashli field to the Ceyhan marine on the Mediterranean coast in Turkey.³⁷ The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum pipeline is another project, which unites Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. It transfers natural gas from Shah Deniz field to Erzrum. The gas for export was first pumped in 2007. It is owned by BP, TPAO and SOCAR.³⁸ Georgia imports 65% of its energy needs. Due to its transit role Georgia has a rather resilient energy supply situation.³⁹ For Armenia, Georgia is the only way to receive gas from Russia, thus trilateral economic ties would not affect Armenia as much as those ties do not block a transit route. TAP and TANAP are other important trilateral projects, which make part of the Southern Gas Corridor and bring natural gas from Azerbaijan to Italy and greater Europe.

³⁷ British Petroleum; Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline; http://www.bp.com/en_az/caspian/operationsprojects/pipelines/BTC.html (Accessed: 25.06.2015).

³⁸ SOCAR; Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum pipeline; <http://www.socar.az/socar/en/activities/transportation/baku-tbilisi-erzurum-gas-pipeline> (Accessed: 25.06.2015).

³⁹ Georg Zahmann; *Energy Security of Georgia*; German Economic Team Georgia; Berlin/Tbilisi October 2014; http://www.get-georgia.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PP_01_2014_en.pdf.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is another project, where the trilateral partnership is in action. The project implementation began in 2007 and as expected, it will start operating in the late 2015. This railway is an alternative route for Tbilisi-Gyumri-Kars railway, which stopped operating in 1993 when the border between Turkey and Armenia was closed.⁴⁰ The project is opposed by the Armenian minority living in the region because the railway has to pass Akhalkalaki. The Armenians fear the Turkish influence in the region. In contrast, the Georgians think that it will bring economic prosperity to the region via exchanging goods, people, and ideas between the three states. With an initial operating capacity for 1 million passengers and 6.5 million tons of freight (30 million at full capacity) annually, enabling the shortest distance between markets in Asia and Europe, the connector could also serve as an alternative rail link between Europe and the Far East - essentially a competitor to Russia's Trans-Siberian railway.⁴¹

“Armenians can control public sentiments in Javakheti region. There are radicals there but without having majority. There are people who think that the railway passing Akhalkalaki would banish Armenians from there. Spreading such ideas is used by the Diaspora as a political instrument. That is why Georgia has to develop appropriate politics towards Armenia” (Male, Master student).

The trilateral relations are not defined as anti-Russia though such a categorization is unavoidable. Armenia as Russia's partner is isolated through the pipelines and BTK railway. A clear sign of Moscow's displeasure is the Black Sea naval exercises right in the days of the second meeting of Turkish, Georgian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers under the Trabzon trilateral format.⁴²

⁴⁰ Georgian Railway; *Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway*; http://www.railway.ge/?web=0&action=page&p_id=290&lang=eng (Accessed: 25.06.2015).

⁴¹ ZaurShiriyev; *An alliance built on understanding: The Geopolitics of Georgian-Azerbaijani Relations, Georgian Foreign Policy, The Quest for Sustainable Security*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2013. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37002-1522-1-30.pdf?140304162810.

⁴² Michael Hikari Cecire; *Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan: Trilateralism and the future of Black Sea regional geopolitics*. The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. 16.10.2013 <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12837-turkey-georgia-azerbaijan-trilateralism-and-the-future-of-black-sea-regional-geopolitics.html> (Accessed: 16.06.2015).

Russia's Agency as a Determinant of Armenia's Political Strategy

The main destabilizing factor in the Armenian-Georgian relations is Russia, which has a long-term experience of being military, political and economic “surrogate lobby state” of Armenia. Russia keeps its 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia, which is seen as a deterrent force from the possible Azeri/Turkish aggression.⁴³ Georgian youth unanimously agree that the Russian military base in Gyumri constitutes a threat for Georgia's security. The geographical proximity of military bases adds an additional motive for fear: The Russian base can contribute to encouraging separatism in Javakheti region. But the Russian troops on the territory of Georgia are considered more dangerous than the ones in Gyumri.

“Russia influences Armenia a lot, has army on Armenian territory and defends Armenia; they are the so called peacekeepers. Due to that, Armenia is dependent on Russia and plays along with the Russian foreign policy. On May 12, there was a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Council of Europe states and they were supposed to adopt two decisions regarding the peacekeepers' presence in Abkhazia and south Ossetia, and Russia was reminded of the articles of the 2008 treaty. 43 states supported, Serbia voted against, while Switzerland and Armenia abstained. Russia made a negative comment on the topic. From this we can see that Armenia is forced to adjust to the Russian interest. This is reflected badly on our relations. Maybe we would not react the same way in case of other country, but Armenia is a neighbor” (Female, MA Student).

EAEU is a vehicle through which Russia increasingly engages in the “normative rivalry” with the “shared neighborhood” of EU, including the following ENP and the EaP states: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. Thus, Russia relies not only on the “soft” power, energy resources and military strength, but also on an “institutional, rule-based regime” for proclaiming its position in the

⁴³ Robert Nalbandov; *Uncertain old friends: Georgia-Armenian relations. Georgian Foreign Policy, The Quest for Sustainable Security.* Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2013. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37002-1522-1-30.pdf?140304162810.

post-Soviet space. With creation of EAEU Russia has begun to compete in the area, where EU has exercised a monopoly until now.⁴⁴

“The importance of Russia’s role for the security of Armenia, the traditional friendly links between the two nations, the level of trade and economic relations, Russia’s role in the Nagorno-Karabakh mediation effort, as well as the presence of a significant Armenian community in Russia, all contribute to a strategic partnership” – states the national security concept of Armenia.⁴⁵ The Russian military presence in the Caucasus is an important factor for Armenia’s security and for the preservation of political and military balance in the region.

“Russia does not want its neighbors to become the NATO members. In that case, Russia will encounter NATO as an opponent, because NATO is obliged to defend its member states’ security. Russia will use its leverage to worsen Armenian-Georgian relations and can provoke a conflict as well” (Female, MA Student).

The Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation jointly guard the Armenian borders and cooperate in air defense. From this perspective, it is natural that Russia would resist the NATO intervention in the region and would challenge its neighbors’ aspirations to integrate with NATO; otherwise its influence and hegemony in the region are questioned.

Threats to Georgia’s territorial integrity

The idea of separatism was mentioned when discussing the question of Javakheti’s Armenian minority.

“In 2008 Russian troops in Armenia were dislocated near the border of Akhaltsikhe. At that very time, the Armenians in Samstkhe-Javakheti started to demand autonomy. Russia mobilized its army near the border

⁴⁴ Rilka Dragneva and Katarina Woczuk; *Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?*; Chatham House, August 2012. http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp_dragnevawolczuk.pdf.

⁴⁵ National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia; http://www.mfa.am/u_files/file/doctrine/Doctrineeng.pdf (Accessed 25.06.2015).

and very profitable (for Armenian radicals in Javakheti) situation was created”(Male, MA student).

Also possible spillover effects on other regions were discussed. Although they do not have a legal basis for that, the Armenians can cause destabilization by demanding autonomy-the respondents say. Separatism is successful if the region has autonomy; hence separatism in Javakheti cannot be successful. The youth perceptions of Armenia–Russia relations are encircled with an explanation of indispensable need for security from the Armenian side. Thus they encourage the Georgian government to choose a proper diplomatic solution in relation to Armenia. Most of the respondents see the Armenian-Russian relations as a threat to the Georgian territorial integrity.

“If we look at the map, Tskhinvali region is 300kilometers away from the highway, they can divide Georgia with those troops and separate Kutaisi and Tbilisi. There is a simple possible scenario: Ossetians claim Borjomi gorge in Shida Kartli and Armenians claim Javakheti. Javakheti and Shida Kartli border each other, this is a hypothesis, but there is a threat” (Male, MA Student).

Russia is always a dominant agent in the discourse. The respondents claim that without Russia’s support the Javakheti Armenians’ quest for separatism would be futile. Moreover, the Russian propaganda tries to influence the Armenians in Javakheti via the media as due to the language problems the Armenian minorities only watch the Russian and Armenian media there.

Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti and their involvement in Georgian Politics

According to the 2002 census, 113 347 Armenians lived in Samtskhe-Javakhetiregion. Akhaltsikhe and Ninotsminda had the largest Armenian communities with the population of 16.879 and 32.857 respectively.⁴⁶ The Georgian and Armenian states both pay attention to

⁴⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia; *Ethnic groups by major administrative-territorial units-Census 2002*. http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/census/2002/03%20Ethnic%20Composition.pdf.

this region due to the numerous problems. Georgia lacks communication with the region, thus Georgian youth is not well aware of the daily life and happenings of the Javakheti Armenians. The Armenians themselves are less integrated due to the Georgian educational system drawbacks, which do not provide them with a proper knowledge of the Georgian language.⁴⁷ Consequently, the rate of their political involvement in the region is substantially low. They rarely have a representative in the legislative or executive branch of the government, not to mention that on the local level most of the self-government officials are Georgians. There are some isolated “show-case” representatives (e.g. members of the parliament elected from Javakheti), however it does not mean a real participation in decision-making on the regional/state levels. The reason for such elimination is again considered to be a very limited knowledge of the state (Georgian) language. In addition, some other factors are also named, such as a lack of political will of the central government, nepotism, clan structures, and a passive attitude of the local population.⁴⁸ The Georgian youth we have inquired agree with the idea that the Armenians have to be involved in Georgia's political life. In their opinion, it is important for the government to take into consideration their problems as, if ethnic minorities are not represented in politics, they will most certainly be oppressed.

“Every ethnic minority has to be involved in political processes. If we take 1918-1921 Republic of Georgia, we will see what rights the ethnic minorities had. It was written in the constitution that they should have self-government and be involved in political processes. This is lost today - I cannot name any Armenian Minister or a member of government”(Male, BA Student).

⁴⁷ Crisis Group, *Georgia: The Javakheti region's integration challenges*. Europe Briefing #63, Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels. 23 May 2011. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/B63%20Georgia%20--%20The%20Javakheti%20Regions%20Integration%20Challenges.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Giorgi Gogsadze; *Minority Integration in Georgia: Main Challenges and opportunities (Case of Javakheti)*. Levan Mikeladze Foundation, Tbilisi 2014. Pg. 6 http://mikeladze.foundation.org/multimedia/ups/1/Minority_Integration_In_Georgia_Eng_-_Levan_Mikeladze_Foundation.pdf.

However, some of them think that the Armenians' involvement in the Georgian politics can be wrongly perceived by the society, who might become dissatisfied with it. Despite this, the young people think that the Armenians should participate in the local politics. Furthermore, there is a centralized system in the police and only one Armenian works there, while they would respect police more if a person from their ethnicity was appointed as a policeman. As the statistics show, out of 150 MPs only 3 are Armenian, while according to the 2002 national census, 5.7% of the population of Georgia is Armenian.⁴⁹ Quite often the Armenians feel that a certain political decision is made without their voices being heard, because they do not have a respective representative.

“In my previous job, a deputy minister was Armenian-Aleksandre Nalbandian, I remember how surprised I was, wondering how he had reached this position. Since then, I have not heard of any Armenian on high positions in the Georgian politics”(Female, MA student).

Access to education is the greatest problem for the Javakheti Armenian minority. Due to the language barrier, Armenian youth from this region get education in Armenia. The respondents think that receiving higher education in Georgia will contribute to their integration in Georgian society and they will not feel marginalization anymore. Georgian youth think that there is a lack of socialization between Armenian and Georgian youth. That is why Georgian government has to do its best to integrate them in a wider society, which is the only means to maintain peace in Javakheti region.

⁴⁹ National Statistics Office of Georgia; *Ethnic groups by major administrative-territorial units-Census 2002*. http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/census/2002/03%20Ethnic%20Composition.pdf.

Challenges and Solutions

Three types of challenges were identified in the Georgian-Armenian relations: the issues related to the Javakheti Armenians, The divergent political orientations of Armenia and Georgia, and the stereotypes existing in the media and society.

According to the young people, the solution for the first challenge could be a gradual inclusion of the Javakheti Armenians in Georgia's social and political life, neutralizing Georgian as well as Armenian radical groups, teaching the Georgian language to the Armenians in Javakheti for their enhanced integration, and offering them better opportunities for education.

“The government can arrange certain activities, for instance, improving the quality of education so that the Javakheti Armenians do not have to go to Armenia. They would get education here and hold the positions here as well. This will cause their better integration” (Female, MA Student).

When it comes to Georgia's and Armenia's divergent foreign policy orientations, the respondents think that Georgia and Armenia can find a common ground for negotiations, as the confrontation is not beneficial for either of them. In addition, strengthening touristic and economic ties were also suggested.

“The first challenge is a divergent foreign policy orientation, while the second one, that is economic issues, derives from this divergence: one state will be tied to the EU market and another will be part of EAEU. Armenia will use this, and Georgia will be involved as a transit state. Besides that, there are military challenges. Georgia's aspiration towards NATO and Armenia's (pro-Russian) orientation is a problem, because Russia has an obligation to defend Armenia in the case of military conflict. So to sum up, Georgia and Armenia face military, economic and political challenges” (Male, BA Student).

The respondents offered the following ways to eliminate the established stereotypes in the Georgian media and society: A positive pro-Armenian propaganda in Georgian media and an enhanced emphasis on Armenian culture. At the same time, the importance of strengthening cultural ties is stressed via arranging musical festivals, creating a student exchange platform, and focusing on the stories of Georgian-Armenian cooperation during the history lessons. Also the cooperation between Georgian and Armenian churches and strengthening religious ties are seen as a means to overcome the existing alienation.

JOINT CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The focus group interviews reveal interesting facts concerning the Georgian and Armenian young people's perceptions about each other. There are some similarities in both views – Armenians and Georgians perceive each other as friendly and hospitable nations. We have some similarities in negative stereotypes too: both sides agree on such characteristics as being “boastful” and every now and then – “nationalistic”.

At the same time, we have some striking differences too: In Georgia we face a widespread opinion about Georgians being disorganized and not able to think strategically and Armenians described as a cohesive nation with a great sense of solidarity. Whereas, in Armenia there is a vision that Armenians have difficulties in uniting, and Georgians are perceived as the state-oriented people.

Arguably, Georgians get their impression mainly from the Armenians living in Georgia, and it is obvious that the Diaspora communities need to be cohesive and supportive to overcome the difficulties derived from the life outside the homeland. As for Armenians, they get their information mainly from short visits (trainings/vacations) or from the Armenians living in Georgia. We believe that both Armenian and Georgian young people need more opportunities to get the first-hand and more comprehensive information about each other. The disturbing fact is the overall negative stereotypes about Armenians among Georgian young people, which may influence the relations between the two states in the mid- and long-term perspective. These facts underscore the importance of fostering the bilateral direct contacts between the young people of the two countries.

As for the security and foreign policy, both sides have the concerns that the growing deterioration of Russia-West relations may have a negative impact on the Armenian-Georgian relations taking into account the

different foreign policy orientations of the two states. For Georgians, Armenia plays a less important role in the Georgian defense and security policy in comparison with Turkey and Azerbaijan, which are described as Georgia's strategic partners. The strategic alliance of Armenia with Russia and the deployment of the Russian military base in Gyumri are perceived as a threat to the Georgian national security. Meanwhile, in Armenia the Russian military base is perceived solely in the context of strategic guarantee against a possible threat by Turkey, which has nothing to do with Georgia or the Armenian-Georgian relations.

In its turn, there is a growing concern in Armenia that Turkey and Azerbaijan multiply their influence in Georgia, thus being able to negatively influence the Georgian-Armenian relations. Georgia's clear desire to serve as a transit for Azerbaijani oil and gas export is also perceived negatively in Armenia. Meanwhile, the improvement of relations within the Azerbaijan–Georgia–Turkey triangle is a pragmatic choice for Georgia, which should resist the Russian pressure, and the strategic relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey must not negatively affect Tbilisi-Yerevan connections at all.

The relations with neighbors are the most contested area of bilateral cooperation, where the myths in mutual perceptions are prevailing the reality on the ground.

Armenians living in Javakheti are another source of potential misperception. It should be noted that in Georgia there is a concern about possible destabilization of situation in Javakheti, possibly driven by the outside powers. At the same time, there is a mutual understanding of the fact that Javakheti Armenians are marginalized and the best way to solve their problems is the development of economy and infrastructure of the region and the creation of more opportunities for Javakheti Armenians to be integrated into Georgia's mainstream processes without risking their identity. Another important revelation of the project was the lack of the first-hand information about each other's foreign and security goals, which prevents the formation of an objective view. Obviously, a hard and long-term work has to be done to overcome

negative perceptions and stereotypes. Here the both states and their civil societies should play a significant role with the development of a clear articulated strategy.

Recommendations

1. There is an obvious need to bolster people-to-people contacts between Georgian and Armenian young people. One of the ways to achieve this goal is to increase the number of student exchange programs between the two states' higher education institutions. The two countries' involvement in the Bologna process may play a positive role in this regard. The establishment of special funds in Georgia and Armenia to support these contacts also with the involvement of the private sector may be an appropriate first step.
2. Joint research projects on the regional security dynamics and on the Georgian-Armenian relations undertaken by think-tanks could play an important role in creating the channels to share the views about the two states' foreign and security policy goals with the academic-expert community. Another important step may be the launch of special TV programs about the bilateral relations with participation of Georgian and Armenian experts (also with the use of modern telecommunication technologies), which will support the dissemination of trustworthy and first-hand information.
3. Special expositions of the Georgian products in Armenia and the Armenian products in Georgia should be organized to foster business-to-business contacts, as well as to expand the understanding of possible new opportunities deriving from Georgia's signature of the Association Agreement and Armenia's entrance into the Eurasian Economic Union.
4. As it was also mentioned in the PSAA-CSS 2014 project, the steps should be taken towards attracting Georgian tourists to Armenia, which will serve as another tool for providing Georgians with the opportunity to receive first-hand information about Armenia and Armenians.

Focus Group Interview Guide

General questions

1. Please, list 3-5 general features/characteristics of the Georgians. Please, list 3-5 general features/characteristics of the Armenians.
2. Are there any young Armenians/Georgians in your surroundings" Are your relations with them based on business, studies or friendship? What kind of relations would you prefer to have with them?
3. Have you attended any academic course or worked on any topic related to Armenia? Did it provoke your interest? Why/why not?
4. In your opinion, what is the image of Armenian represented by Georgian online/offline media? Examples.

Security and Foreign Policy

5. Please, range the following countries/international organizations according to their importance as Georgia's strategic partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Russia, EU, NATO, EAEU, and USA.
6. Can Georgia's strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and Turkey complicate the Armenian-Georgian political relations? Why/why not?
7. Can Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia complicate the Armenian-Georgian political relations? Why/why not?
8. In your opinion, will the EU-Georgia Association Agreement have an impact on the Armenian-Georgian bilateral political and trade relations? Why do you think so?
9. In your opinion, will Armenia's membership of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) have an impact on the Armenian-Georgian bilateral political and trade relations? Why do you think so?
10. In your opinion, can Georgia's aspiration towards the NATO membership be perceived as a threat by Armenia? Why do you think so?

11. In your opinion, does the presence of Russian military base on Armenian territory pose a threat to Georgia's territorial integrity? Why do you think so?

The Armenians living in Georgia

12. In your opinion, should the Armenians living in Georgia be more involved in the Georgian politics or not? Why do you think so?

13. In your opinion, is there any risk that the Armenian or Russian government may use the Javakheti Armenians to claim Georgian territories? Why do you think so?

14. What can be considered among advantages and disadvantages of having Armenian communities in Georgia?"Why do you think so?

15. In your opinion, are the Armenians living in Javakheti marginalized by the Georgians? Why do you think so?

16. In your opinion, do the Armenians living in Javakheti pose a threat to Georgia's territorial integrity? Why do you think so?

17. In your opinion, what are the challenges in the Armenian-Georgian relations? What are the ways of overcoming these challenges and improving their relations? What you would personally do in regards of Armenia-Georgia relationships, if becoming a part of decision-making?

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