

Security Concerns of the Russian Federation and Türkiye’s Position Within the Scope of Georgia Intervention to South Ossetia in 2008

Erman TATLIOĞLU* & Elena SAVICHEVA**

Received: 26/02/2024

Accepted: 23/03/2024

Citation: Tatlıoğlu, E., Savicheva, E. “Security Concerns of the Russian Federation and Türkiye’s Position Within the Scope of Georgia Intervention to South Ossetia in 2008”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16-1 (2024): 25-44

DOI: 10.47932/ortetut.1442083

Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus, focusing on Russia’s strategic interests, NATO and EU expansion efforts, and Türkiye’s role as a regional actor. It begins by examining Russia’s “Near Abroad” doctrine, emphasising Moscow’s perceived security threats and its proactive measures to maintain influence in its immediate surroundings. The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia serves as a focal point, illustrating the complex interplay of historical, ethnic, and political factors in the region. The article explores the origins of the Georgian-Ossetian crisis, the escalation into the “Five-Day War,” and the subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia. It also examines Türkiye’s stance on the conflict, balancing support for Georgia’s territorial integrity with economic and strategic interests in the region. It advocates respect for Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty in the context of international law, but at the same time does not ignore its security concerns of Russia and aims to maintain a policy of balance in the Black Sea Basin and the Caucasus in the context of regional peacekeeping. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the international community’s response to the conflict and its implications for regional stability. The conclusion underscores the significance of the South Caucasus in global geopolitics, particularly in shaping the balance of power in the Black Sea region. Overall, this article offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of conflict and cooperation in a strategically vital area of Eurasia.

Keywords: South Ossetia Crisis, Georgia, Russia, Türkiye, Security, Black Sea Region, Five-Day War

* Erman Tatlıoğlu: Ph.D. Student, RUDN University-RU, Email: ermantatlioglu@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-9745-2043.

** Elena Savicheva: Prof. Dr., RUDN University-RU, E-mail: tatlioglu@yandex.ru. ORCID: 0000-0001-8617-3508.

Gürcistan'ın 2008 Güney Osetya Müdahalesi Kapsamında Rusya Federasyonu'nun Güvenlik Kaygıları ve Türkiye'nin Konumu

Erman TATLIOĞLU* & Elena SAVICHEVA**

Geliş tarihi: 26/02/2024

Kabul tarihi: 23/03/2024

Atf: Tatlıoğlu, E., Savicheva, E. “Gürcistan'ın 2008 Güney Osetya Müdahalesi Kapsamında Rusya Federasyonu'nun Güvenlik Kaygıları ve Türkiye'nin Konumu”, Ortadoğu Etütleri, 16-1 (2024): 25-44

DOI: 10.47932/ortetut.1442083

Öz: Bu makale, Rusya'nın stratejik çıkarlarına, Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşması Örgütü (NATO) ve Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) genişleme çabalarına ve Türkiye'nin bölgesel bir aktör olarak rolüne odaklanarak Güney Kafkasya'daki jeopolitik manzaranın kapsamlı bir analizini sunmaktadır. Çalışma, Rusya'nın “Yakın Çevre” doktrinini inceleyerek başlamakta; Moskova'nın algılanan güvenlik tehditlerine ve yakın çevresinde nüfuzunu korumaya yönelik önlemlerine vurgu yapmaktadır. 2008'de Rusya ile Gürcistan arasındaki yaşanan çatışma, bölgedeki tarihi, etnik ve siyasi faktörlerin karmaşık etkileşimini gösteren bir odak noktası görevi görmektedir. Makale, Gürcistan-Osetya krizinin kökenlerini, “Beş Gün Savaşı”nın çıkış nedenlerini ve ardından Güney Osetya ile Abhazya'nın Rusya tarafından tanınmasını araştırmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, Gürcistan'ın toprak bütünlüğüne verilen desteği bölgedeki ekonomik ve stratejik çıkarlarla dengeleyerek uluslararası hukuk bağlamında Gürcistan'ın toprak bütünlüğüne ve egemenliğine saygı gösterilmesini savunan ancak aynı zamanda Rusya'nın güvenlik kaygılarını da göz ardı etmeyen Türkiye'nin çatışmaya ilişkin tutumunu da incelemektedir. Buna ilave olarak bölgesel barışı koruma bağlamında Türkiye'nin Karadeniz Havzası ve Kafkasya Bölgesi'nde denge politikasını analiz etmektedir. Makale, uluslararası toplumun çatışmaya verdiği tepkiyi ve bunun bölgesel istikrar üzerindeki etkilerini sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma Güney Kafkasya'nın küresel jeopolitikte, özellikle de Karadeniz bölgesindeki güç dengesinin şekillendirilmesindeki öneminin altını çizmekte, Avrasya'nın stratejik açıdan hayati bir bölgesindeki karmaşık çatışma ve iş birliği dinamikleri hakkında değerli bilgiler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Osetya Krizi, Gürcistan, Rusya, Türkiye, Güvenlik, Karadeniz Bölgesi, Beş Gün Savaşı.

* Erman Tatlıoğlu: Doktora Öğrencisi, RUDN University-RU E-mail: ermantatlioglu@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-9745-2043.

** Elena Savicheva: Prof. Dr., RUDN University-RU, E-mail: tatlioglu@yandex.ru ORCID: 0000-0001-8617-3508.

المخاوف الأمنية للاتحاد الروسي وموقف تركيا في سياق تدخل جورجيا في أوسيتيا الجنوبية عام 2008

أرمان طاتلي أوغلو* & ايلينا سافيشيفا**

تاريخ القبول: 2024/03/23

تاريخ الاستلام: 2024/02/26

اقتباس: طاتلي أوغلو، أ.، صايتشيا، إ.، «المخاوف الأمنية للاتحاد الروسي وموقف تركيا في سياق تدخل جورجيا في أوسيتيا الجنوبية عام 2008»، دراسات الشرق الأوسط، 1-16 (2024): 25-44

معرف الغرض الرقمي: 10.47932/ortetut.1442083

الملخص

يقدم هذا المقال تحليلاً شاملاً للمشهد الجيوسياسي في جنوب القوقاز، من خلال التركيز على المصالح الاستراتيجية لروسيا، والجهود التوسعية لحلف شمال الأطلسي (الناتو) والاتحاد الأوروبي، ودور تركيا كلاعب إقليمي في المنطقة. يبدأ المقال بدراسة عقيدة «المحيط القريب» لروسيا؛ مع التأكيد على التهديدات الأمنية ضد موسكو وإجراءاتها فيما يتعلق بالحفاظ على نفوذها في محيطها القريب. إن الصراع الذي انطلق بين روسيا وجورجيا في عام 2008 يمثل نقطة محورية تشير إلى التفاعل المعقد بين العوامل التاريخية والعرقية والسياسية في المنطقة. يبحث المقال في أصول أزمة جورجيا وأوسيتيا، وأسباب اندلاع «حرب الأيام الخمسة»، واعتراف روسيا بعدها بأوسيتيا الجنوبية وأبخازيا. كما يبحث المقال موقف تركيا من هذا الصراع، في ضوء دعوتها إلى احترام وحدة أراضي جورجيا وسيادتها في سياق القانون الدولي من خلال التوازن بين دعم وحدة أراضي جورجيا والمصالح الاقتصادية والاستراتيجية في المنطقة، لكن في الوقت نفسه لا تتجاهل تركيا مخاوف روسيا الأمنية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تتناول هذه الدراسة سياسة التوازن التي تتبعها تركيا في حوض البحر الأسود ومنطقة القوقاز في سياق حفظ السلام الإقليمي. ويعرض المقال ردود فعل المجتمع الدولي تجاه الصراع وتأثيرات هذه الردود على الاستقرار الإقليمي. وفي النتيجة، تؤكد هذه الدراسة أهمية جنوب القوقاز في تشكيل توازن القوى في الجيوسياسة العالمية، لا سيما في منطقة البحر الأسود، كما تقدم معلومات قيمة حول الديناميات المعقدة للصراع والتعاون في منطقة حيوية من الناحية الاستراتيجية في أوراسيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمة أوسيتيا الجنوبية، جورجيا، روسيا، تركيا، الأمن، منطقة البحر الأسود، حرب الأيام الخمسة.

* أرمان طاتلي أوغلو: طالب دكتوراه، الجامعة الروسية لصداقة الشعوب (رودن)-روسيا E-mail: ermantatlioglu@gmail.com

رقم أوركيد: 0000-0001-9745-2043

** ايلينا سافيشيفا: أ.د. الجامعة الروسية لصداقة الشعوب (رودن)-روسيا E-mail: tatlioglu@yandex.ru

رقم أوركيد: 0000-0001-8617-3508

Introduction

One of the Russian experts at the Centre for International Security (Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Moscow) notes that a special role of the South Caucasus in world politics is associated with its geopolitical position on the borders with Russia, Türkiye and Iran, access to the Black and Caspian Seas, rich natural resources, and the possibility of transiting oil, gas, and other strategic goods from Central Asia, China, India, and other countries to Europe. The South Caucasus and the Black Sea-Caspian region as a whole may become one of the key links in the international transport corridors East - West and North – South in Eurasia.¹

Due to these characteristics, it is considered by Russia that a delicate balance should be struck in order to maintain security and the current status quo in the region. However, the efforts of NATO and the EU to increase their effectiveness in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus triggered the security concerns of Russia. Russia perceived NATO's expansion to the East, and especially the increase in its activities in the Black Sea region, as a threat to its security interests.² This strengthened Russia's desire to protect its strategic interests and national security and triggered a series of events leading up to the armed conflict in the region in 2008.

The Russian special operation “to force peace in the zone of responsibility of peacekeepers” which was carried out on the territory of Georgia and the unrecognised republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from August 8 to 12, 2008, went down in history under the name “Five-Day War.” This was the first military operation by the Russian Federation outside its own territory. This development was a turning point that increased Russia's regional power and influence and also limited the influence of the West, and especially NATO, in this region. The results of this conflict played an important role in shaping the geopolitical balance in the Black Sea region. These events emerged as the first serious challenge to the security architecture built in the post-Soviet period, nearly 20 years ago. The Caucasus, which was the first region to reflect this change and the policy change of Russia, came to the world's attention with the 2008 intervention and caused conflict between the great powers in the region.³

1 Stanislav M. Ivanov, “Problems of regional security in the South Caucasus”, Russian Academy of Sciences IMEMO, 2018, <https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/ru/events/2018/20072018/20072018-IV-TEZ-01.pdf>

2 Elif Çakır, “Rusya-Gürcistan Krizi: Yerel Bir Çatışma, Küresel Yansımalar”, Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları 4, no.7 (2009): 1-27.

3 Gökhan Alptekin, “2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı Ve Savaş Sonrası Büyük Ve Bölgesel Güçlerin Tepki Ve Politikaları”. Rusya Araştırmaları Dergisi, sy. 6 (Aralık 2021): 110-30. <https://doi.org/10.48068/rusad.1030621>.

This article will focus on the security concerns created by NATO and the West about Russia and its “near abroad” policy, as well as Russia’s short-term conflict with Georgia in 2008. A special attention is drawn to Türkiye’s position as an important regional player and NATO member. Türkiye has its own priorities and policies regarding the Georgian-Ossetia conflict. It advocates respecting Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty in terms of international law, but at the same time does not ignore the security concerns of Russia and tries to maintain a balanced policy in the Black Sea Basin and Caucasus within the scope of maintaining regional peace.

Russia's “Near Abroad” Doctrine

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia adopted a pro-Western attitude for a while and wanted to integrate with the West and join the Western security system. In this context, the idea of creating a “single security area from Vancouver to Vladivostok” was brought to the agenda of the Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in 1992.⁴ Yeltsin emphasised that Moscow is ready to be a part of the “European security system” to overcome security problems. The new Military Doctrine was approved on November 2, 1993,⁵ as the Eurasianists had an increasing influence on Russian policy during that period. In the aforementioned doctrine, no threat of attack from the West or a global war was foreseen; it was stated that the threat of a world war had decreased even if it had not disappeared.⁶

At the same time, Russia’s “Near Abroad” policy (put into practice by Yeltsin in 1993) aimed to end the conflicts in its immediate environment and protect the rights of the Russian-speaking population. It was clearly emphasised that Russia has vital interests in the former Soviet geography. According to this doctrine, Moscow has responsibilities in these regions, and these responsibilities cannot be fulfilled by other international organisations, as “Peace Keeping Forces” in nearby countries when necessary. That meant the creation of a security belt in the close vicinity of Russia.⁷ In this context,

4 Danilov, D. “From Vancouver to Vladivostok: Crossroads of Security Common Space.” *World Economy and International Relations*, no. 12 (2012): 38–51. <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2012-12-38-51>.

5 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of November 2, 1993 No. 1833, “On the Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/4747>

6 Jyotsna Bakshi, “Russia’s National Security Concepts and Doctrines: Continuity and Change”, *Strategic Analysis, A monthly Journal of IDSA*, October 2000, Vol.XXVI, No. 7., https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_oct00baj01.html

7 Sait Sönmez, “Yakın Çevre Doktrini Bağlamında Yeltsin Dönemi Rusya Federasyonu’nun Bağımsız Devletler Topluluğu Ülkeleriyle İlişkileri”, *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, sy. 27 (Haziran 2015).

Russia defined the geography formed by the states that were outside the former Soviet territories and turned it from the south as the primary sphere of its influence, claiming that it was primarily responsible for all kinds of developments in these regions.⁸ With this policy, Russia wanted to make the countries in the CIS⁹ politically, militarily, and economically more dependent by arguing the rights of the Russian minority remaining in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, which constitute its “near surroundings”, and the security problems at the borders. In the post-2001 period, it has further increased its influence on the “Near Periphery” countries, aiming to increase its effectiveness in the region not only in terms of economy but also in terms of security.¹⁰

Especially in the post-Soviet period, after NATO’s enlargement policy, Russia experienced a security dilemma in its own geography and perceived NATO’s enlargement as a threat. For this reason, by changing its military and political policies, it started to produce new policies to become a hegemonic power in the Eurasian geography, especially in its immediate surroundings. In this context, in parallel with the restructuring process of the Russian state, the structures and discourses that are effective on foreign policy decisions have entered a new definition framework with Vladimir Putin’s coming to power, and the concept that Russia is a world power has become the main parameter of Putin’s foreign policy.

With the admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, which were previously members of the Warsaw Pact, to NATO, NATO has reached the borders of the former Soviet geography. In addition to these new memberships, the inclusion of some former Soviet republics in the organisation has started to come to the fore. This situation was seen by Russia as a serious threat to its own security.¹¹ Global actors began to exist in the Black Sea geopolitics, with the EU and NATO initiating expansion policies towards the Black Sea. Due to NATO’s enlargement policy, wars in the Middle East and power changes in North African countries, Moscow perceived these changes in its own geography as a threat. By changing its military and political policies, it started to produce new policies to be an effective power in the Eurasian geography, especially in its immediate surroundings. Thus, the Eurasianism

8 Elnur Hasan Mikail, “Yeni Çarlar ve Rus Dış Politikası”, İstanbul, IQ Yayıncılık, 2007, 254 s.

9 Member countries of the CIS are Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. While Turkmenistan became an observer member by leaving full membership in 2005, Georgia left the union after military conflict between Russia and Georgia.

10 Hatice Dönmez, “Küreselleşmenin Rus Jeopolitik Düşüncesine Etkisi”. Bitlis Eren Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 11, sy. 2 (Aralık 2022): 210-32. <https://doi.org/10.47130/bitlissos.1191342>.

11 Esra Kızılbıça, “Russian Involvement in The Abkhaz-Georgian Conflict”, Yüksek lisans tezi, Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 2006, s. 54-60.

approach, which lost its importance in the process until the dissolution of the USSR, came to the fore in the new period by being different. This approach, put forward by Aleksander Dugin,¹² has been reshaped in a way with the new world order in which Russia is at the centre.¹³ For this reason, together with Putin, Russia implemented more active policies in order to become a dominant country in its own geography and started to be effective in its close environment.¹⁴

Historical Background Intervention of Georgia in 2008

In this section, we will consider the invasion of South Ossetia by Georgian troops, which injured and killed hundreds of civilians, militias, and Russian peacekeepers, which forced Russia to recognise the sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and conclude relevant treaties of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance with them.

Georgia, a Black Sea littoral state located in the Southern Caucasus, has geo-strategic importance thanks to its location surrounding the eastern part of the Black Sea and controlling the majority of the Caucasus Mountain passes. Its neighbours are Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. It has a population of nearly four million. The country's natural resources include iron and steel, timber, hydropower, manganese, copper, gold, and small amounts of coal and oil.¹⁵

Georgia declared its independence on April 9, 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This period has been full of economic and political turmoil, with the process of finding Georgia's new national identity. The break with the Soviet economy deeply affected Georgia. The country has experienced a sharp decline in industrial production and a general economic collapse.¹⁶ In addition, post-Soviet Georgia faced high inflation, unemployment, and corruption.

In the post-Soviet period, although Georgia started the democratisation process, the country faced political instability and internal conflicts. Over time, this situation led to uprisings in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and de

12 Alexander Dugin, "Russia's Eurasian revenge", *Algoritm*, 2014, 265 p.

13 Selim Kurt, "Dugin'in Avrasyacılık Anlayışında Türkiye'nin Yeri", *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi*, C.15, S.3 (2019): 440. 425-467.

14 Ali Hasanov, "Jeopolitik" (A. Ağaoğlu & F. Şammedov, Çev.), *Babı Ali Kültür*, 2010, 132 s.

15 Valeri Modebadze, Fatih Mehmet Sayın ve Reha Yılmaz, "Sovyetler Birliği Dağıldıktan Sonra Gürcistan - Türkiye İlişkileri". *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 4, sy. 1 (Nisan 2014): 359-369.

16 Petrovich-Belkin, O., E. Savicheva, and A. Butorov. "Georgian Experience of Economic Modernization: Achievements and Failures." *World Economy and International Relations* 66, no. 8 (2022): 70-81. <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-8-70-81>.

facto demands for the independence of these regions. Increasing opposition to the authoritarian rule of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who became the first President of Georgia in 1991, led to the civil war in 1992 and the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia. The new government, led by Eduard Shevardnadze, tried to suppress the uprisings in these regions but was unsuccessful. These conflicts have threatened both Georgia's internal stability and regional security.¹⁷

To understand the Georgian-Ossetian crisis, it is important to pay attention to historical and ethnic origins. Ossetia is divided into 2 parts: - The Republic of North Ossetia – Alania, is an autonomous subject of the Russian Federation and is included in the North Caucasus Federal District and South Ossetia. Ossetians are a language-speaking people belonging to the Iranian language family and generally adopted Orthodox Christianity. Ossetia has been under the influence of various empires and states throughout history. In the 18th century, the region was divided between Ottoman and Russian influences.

In the 19th century, Russia took the region under its full control. During the Soviet Union, South Ossetia was recognized as part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.¹⁸ In this period, in parallel with the national policies prevalent in the Soviet Union, Ossetia's autonomy was expanded, and economic investments were made in the region. However, tensions between ethnic Ossetians and Georgians have never completely disappeared. Before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic tensions in Ossetia flared up again. In the late 1980s, an independence movement emerged in Ossetia. This movement became even stronger when Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Ossetians, refusing to be a part of independent Georgia, put forward their own demands for independence. These demands were not accepted by the new government of Georgia, and as a result, a conflict broke out in 1991-1992.¹⁹

At the end of the conflict, the Sochi Agreement was signed in 1992.²⁰ This agreement was realised with the participation of Russia, Georgia, and Ossetia and provided Ossetia with autonomy. However, this agreement did not completely resolve the disagreements between the parties, and uncertainties regarding the status of Ossetia continued. This conflict and subsequent events

17 Spetschinsky, Laetitia, and Irina V. Bolgova. "Post-Soviet or Post-Colonial? The Relations between Russia and Georgia after 1991." *European Review of International Studies* 1, no. 3 (2014): 110–22.

18 Süleyman Erkan, "Güney Osetya Sorunu Vee 2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı." *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10, no. Volume 10 Issue 13 (January 1, 2015): 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.7827/turkishstudies.8846>.

19 Dennis Sammut and Nikola Cvetkovski, "The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict", 1996, Verification Technology Information Centre: 1-32.

20 "Agreement on principles for resolving the Georgian-Ossetian conflict 1992", <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/1902246>

constitute the historical, and political roots of the Georgian-Ossetian crisis. From this perspective, it is seen that ethnic, historical and political factors have a great impact on the crisis.²¹

The Abkhazia-Georgia conflict took place in the autonomous republic of Abkhazia in the northwest of Georgia between 1992-1993. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Abkhazians put forward their demands for the independence of Abkhazia. In 1991, when Georgia declared independence, Abkhazia also declared its independence in the same year. This situation was not accepted by the new government of Georgia, and as a result, conflicts broke out.²² The conflict began in August 1992 and ended in 1993 with the victory of the Abkhaz forces. This ensured the de facto independence of Abkhazia, but it was generally not recognized by the international community. As a result of the war, a large Georgian population was exiled from Abkhazia, and the demographic balance in the region changed significantly. This has allowed political and ethnic tensions to continue in the region.²³ The actual loss of the two regions and the problem of coping with more than 200,000 internally displaced refugees have created an insurmountable political burden for a small country like Georgia.²⁴

As noted above, Moscow has determined the South Caucasus as a priority area and sees it as its immediate surroundings. Russia realised that unless it became an effective power in the South Caucasus, its influence would decrease in the Caucasus, and it won't be able to neutralise other regional and global powers in its priority areas of interest. For this reason, Russia has developed policies and determined strategies for the Caucasus as the region where it implements its near-abroad policy. When we look at Russia's National Security Strategy, it was accepted that the North Caucasus was the top priority for the security area and the South Caucasus was the "closer area", and it was stated that any attempt to be made in these regions would be deemed to threaten its own security.²⁵

In this context, the "colourful" revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia with the support of the West and the moves of the governments that came to power

21 Marietta König, "The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict", OSCE Yearbook, Baden-Baden 2005: 237-249.

22 Alaeddin Yalçınkaya, "Kafkasya da Siyasi Gelişmeler Etnik Düğümden Küresel Kördüğümüne", 2006, Ankara: Lalezar, s. 82-94.

23 Tracey German, "Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests", Research Programme Russia/ NIS, 2006: 1-17.

24 Hansjörg Eiff, "The OSCE Mission to Georgia and the Status of South Ossetia", OSCE Yearbook 2008, Baden-Baden 2009: 35-43.

25 Elşan İzzetgil, "Kafkasya'nın Jeopolitiği ve Rusya'nın Bölgeye Yönelik Stratejisi", Gazi Üniversitesi Bölgesel Çalışmalar Dergisi, c.1, sy.1, Ankara 2016: 51- 85.

after the revolution to join NATO were described as provocations for Russia, which was trying to return to the region.²⁶ So, Georgia sought to integrate into the EU and NATO, which displeased Moscow since this meant the approach of NATO forces to the borders of Russia. It is worth adding to this that relations with Georgia have been considered by Moscow in the context of confrontation with the West and the plans of the United States and NATO to oust it from the “neighbouring countries”.²⁷

In addition, the long-standing partnerships and investments of Russia in the region were also in jeopardy. Especially since 2003, Russia has made investments in Georgia in the field of energy, and in this context, power plants belonging to Western countries were purchased by the energy company United Energy Systems (UES), a Russian-owned energy company located in Georgia. In 2003, the Georgian government and Gazprom signed a memorandum on 25 years of strategic cooperation. In 2005, Gazprom announced that Georgia was interested in privatising the pipeline system, signalling that it would continue the investments.²⁸ The danger of all these investments and the economic and military rapprochement of Georgia with the West worried Moscow. Against these provocations, Putin criticised the West for the first time after the Munich Security Conference in 2007,²⁹ within the scope of NATO’s eastward expansion and the Missile Shield project, which was planned to be placed in Poland, and emphasised that Russia’s regional interests would not be allowed to be harmed by the West.³⁰

As a matter of fact, after the September 11 attacks, the presence of the USA and NATO in the peripheral regions of Russia began to increase, Moscow intervened in Georgia by using the ethnic-based conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia and citing the protection of the Russian people living in those regions in order not to allow “fait accompli” in Georgia. Russia’s short-term war with Georgia both caused the regional problems in Georgia to be resolved in the direction desired by Russia and also prevented Georgia’s NATO membership.³¹

26 İzzetgil, “Kafkasya’nın Jeopolitiği ve Rusya’nın Bölgeye Yönelik Stratejisi”.

27 “How Russia and Georgia slipped into a new conflict”, RBC, 25.06.2019, <https://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2019/06/26/5d11cfbd9a7947ada15501f6>.

28 Ivars Indans, “Relations of Russia and Georgia: Developments and Future Prospects”, *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Volume 9, 2007: 131-149.

29 “Speech and discussion at the Munich Security Policy Conference”, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

30 İzzetgil, “Kafkasya’nın Jeopolitiği ve Rusya’nın Bölgeye Yönelik Stratejisi”.

31 Mustafa Nail Alkan, “Almanya –Rusya İlişkileri Bağlamında Ukrayna Krizi”, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 12, sy. 45 (Mart 2015): 89-103. <https://doi.org/10.17782/ka.61778>.

“Five-Day War” in the South Caucasus (2008)

The 2008 Georgian-Ossetian War occurred 16 years after the signing of the Sochi Agreement, following the first Georgia-Ossetian War in 1992. In an environment where Georgia’s NATO membership was on the agenda, the emergence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia’s demands for independence and Georgia’s opposition to these demands are among the main reasons for the 2008 war.³²

While Georgia rejected South Ossetia’s demands for independence, Russia supported the de facto independence of Ossetia and Abkhazia and provided military and economic assistance to pro-Russia forces in these regions. In August 2008, the fighting escalated into a full-scale war. After Georgia attacked Tskhinvali, the capital of Ossetia, Russia intervened militarily. It demonstrated that it is an active force in international politics again and tried to prevent the West from entering its sphere of influence, thereby ensuring the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.³³

As a result of the clashes that lasted for five days Russia declared its military superiority over Georgia and announced the end of the conflict.³⁴ The Russian Black Sea Fleet also played an active role in achieving a military victory. On August 9, 2008, when the clashes were most intense, the Russian Black Sea Fleet blocked the Georgian coast. This blockade also prevented any Georgian Navy ships from interfering with Russian military actions on land. By neutralising the Georgian Navy, Russia continued to maintain its dominance in the Black Sea Region undisputedly.

After negotiations and pressure from the international community, Moscow agreed to withdraw its troops from the region but recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on August 26, 2008.³⁵ Russian military units are still stationed in the region, and the problem continues as a frozen crisis area with the potential to re-conflict.³⁶ Russia signed a Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Agreement with South Ossetia and Abkhazia and undertook the guarantorship of the security of these regions.

32 Giorgi Gogia, “Georgia-South Ossetia: a Prelude to war did economic assistance strengthen competing spoilers in Georgian-South Ossetian conflict?”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 6 (60), 2009: 32-41.

33 Mustafa Keskin, “Yakın Çevre Doktrini Bağlamında Rus Dış Politikası: Ukrayna Müdahalesi”, *Barış Araştırmaları ve Çatışma Çözümleri Dergisi*, 3 (2), 2016: 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.16954/bacad.15518>

34 “Results of the five-day war”, RIA News, <https://ria.ru/20080814/150365840.html>.

35 “Statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 27.08.2008, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1600343/

36 Zakharov V., Areshv V. and Semerikova E., “Abkhazia and South Ossetia after recognition. Historical and modern context”, 2010, 520 p.

However, the results of the war further increased the ethnic and political tensions in the region. This recognition was not generally accepted by the international community. The international community generally criticised the war; Western countries described Russia's military activities as excessive and disproportionate and defended Georgia's territorial integrity. However, concrete measures taken against Russia's actions were limited.

The declarations of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have created significant effects and a complex situation both in terms of international law and regional balances.³⁷ In terms of international law, this situation has emerged as a reflection of the complex and delicate balance between the principle of territorial sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right of peoples to self-determination. International law aims to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries. In this context, the argument is put forward that Georgia's territorial integrity should be respected. On the other hand, international law also recognises the right of people to self-determination. The independence demands of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are seen by Moscow as an expression of this right. Russia advocated respect for the decisions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the right to self-determination. It also called for dialogue and negotiation to address the root causes of conflict. However, Western countries consider this situation a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and have accused Russia of using the conflicts to exert political pressure on Georgia.³⁸ In terms of regional balances, the declaration of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia also affected the balance of power in the Caucasus. In particular, Russia's support and recognition of the independence of these regions has emerged as an indicator of Russia's influence and power in the immediate environment. This situation was met with concern by western countries and NATO.

Russia's policy regarding the Georgian-Ossetian conflict has been shaped by legitimate geopolitical and security concerns. First, Moscow has consistently expressed its opposition to Georgia's potential NATO membership, emphasising that such membership is a threat to its security interests in the region.³⁹ However, the West's ignorance of these warnings led to a deepening of Russia's security concerns by improving its relations

37 Osman Ercan ve Hakan Kolçak, "Konfederalizm Alternatifi: Gürcü-Oset Çatışmasının Çözümü İçin Yeni Anayasal Düzen", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Sosyal Bilim Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4, sy. 1 (Haziran 2022): 66-88.

38 Gökhan Alptekin, "Rusya'nın Yakın Çevresini Koruma Politikası ve Soğuk Savaş İzlenimleri (2008 Rusya- Gürcistan Savaşı ve 2014 Ukrayna Krizi)". *R&S - Research Studies Anatolia Journal*, 5(1), 2022: 164-204. <https://doi.org/10.33723/rs.1034978>

39 Jim Nickol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests", *CRS Report for Congress*, 2008: 1-17.

with Georgia and increasing its military presence in the region. Therefore, conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be seen as an important part of a broader geopolitical equation rather than a mere regional conflict. Russia gave de facto support for the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia after the 2008 war and became one of the few countries that recognised the independence of these regions. It has positioned itself as a peacekeeping force in the region.

Türkiye's Position

As an important regional player and NATO member, Türkiye has its own priorities and policies regarding the Georgia-Ossetia conflict. Türkiye has consistently advocated respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It did not recognise the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and supported Georgia's position in international forums.

It should be noted that Türkiye paid great attention to the promotion of its positions in Georgia. Favourable geographical location, economic opportunities, and the role of Georgia as a transit state – all these factors attracted Ankara. As a result, there has been a significant expansion of Turkish presence in certain regions of Georgia. Türkiye took a leading position in a number of sectors of its economy.⁴⁰ It has been Georgia's largest trading partner since 2007, and it ranks first among the countries that make the most direct investments in Georgia.

Türkiye has invested in economic projects, especially in the energy field, and cooperated with Georgia on security issues. Türkiye continued its economic cooperation with Georgia by investing in key sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and tourism. These efforts have not only supported the Georgian economy but also strengthened Georgia's ties with the West. Türkiye's decision to include Georgia in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project is an important element of Türkiye's foreign policy, and this project has made a significant contribution to Georgia's economic development and strengthened its independence. The BTC pipeline has enabled the transportation of oil from the Caspian Sea to Western markets via Türkiye, which has made the project strategically important in terms of energy security and regional development. The transit fees obtained through the territory of Georgia, where the pipeline passes, have been an important source of income for the Georgian economy.⁴¹

40 Zhiltsov, S. S., and E. M. Savicheva. "Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Energy Factor." *Post-Soviet Issues* 8, no. 3 (November 30, 2021): 331–40. <https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2021-8-3-331-340>.

41 Giray Sayınur Bozkurt, "Gürcistan'daki Etnik Çatışmalar Karşısında Türkiye Ve Rusya'nın Tutumu". *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 19, sy. 19 (Eylül 2008): 1-30.

In addition, the infrastructure developments and direct investments realised within the scope of the project created employment and stimulated the local economy.

Relations between Türkiye and Georgia are at the level of a strategic partnership. In order to further develop relations between Türkiye and Georgia, the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (YDSK) mechanism was established, and the first YDSK meeting was held on 19 July 2016 in Ankara and the second YDSK meeting on 23 May 2017 in Tbilisi. Türkiye-Georgia-Azerbaijan and Türkiye-Georgia-Azerbaijan-Iran Trilateral and Quadrilateral meetings process are important mechanisms that contribute to regional stability, peace, and prosperity. The first summit of the Presidents of Türkiye-Georgia-Azerbaijan was held in Tbilisi on May 6, 2014. The Ninth Meeting of the Trilateral Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held in Baku on 19 February 2021. One of the most important issues in Türkiye-Georgia relations is the process of returning Meskhetian Turks to their homeland. Türkiye is following this issue closely and demands the removal of all obstacles to the return of Meskhetian Turks to their homeland.⁴² The triple Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian tandem allowed Ankara to significantly expand its presence in the South Caucasus and influence the political and economic development of Azerbaijan and Georgia.⁴³

As an active player in the Black Sea region, Türkiye has often played a role in efforts to de-escalate and mediate between the conflicting parties. Türkiye values regional stability and has often called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. This is a part of Türkiye's foreign policy strategy in the Caucasus, which is shaped to promote regional stability and cooperation, ensure energy security, and at the same time protect the independence and sovereignty of both itself and its regional partners.

Since Georgia's independence, it has generally followed a Western-oriented foreign policy due to the problems it has with Russia and the need for political and economic support from Western countries. Georgia is distant to the CIS and does not respect the common security concept of the mentioned organisation. As a matter of fact, Georgia exited the CIS Joint Security System in April 1999.⁴⁴ Tbilisi attaches great importance to its relations with the USA, with the aim of balancing Russia's influence in the region while at the same time hoping that it can meet its economic expectations. Recently, as the

42 "Türkiye - Gürcistan Siyasi İlişkileri", Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-gureistan-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>

43 Zhiltsov and Savicheva, "Regional Security in the South Caucasus: The Energy Factor".

44 Halil Erdemir, "The Policies Around the BTC Pipeline". Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations 8, no. 4 (October 2009): 20-44.

Caucasus has become the centre of the energy transportation network, it is seen that the USA is also approaching the region and, in this context, Georgia with an increasing interest.

Türkiye continues to follow a balancing policy aimed at maintaining good relations with Georgia and Russia, supporting regional stability, and respecting international law. Türkiye, which applied the provisions of the Montreux Convention at the time of the conflict, significantly limited the influence of the USA in this geopolitical region. Within the framework of the Montreux Treaty, the entry of a third actor that does not have a coast on the Black Sea into the relevant region was prevented. In this way, it prevented the USA from having warships in the Black Sea.

As an influential regional power and NATO member, Türkiye has taken a number of steps to contribute to the resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict while considering the delicate balance of interests in the Black Sea region. First of all, Türkiye has increased its diplomatic efforts to develop dialogue and negotiation between the conflicting parties. It used its bilateral relations with both Georgia and Russia to promote peaceful resolution and advocated respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and the rights of people in the disputed regions.

Türkiye has also provided humanitarian assistance to the affected population in the region. This assistance has been crucial in meeting the immediate needs of people affected by conflict. Türkiye has used regional forums such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) to develop dialogue and cooperation in the region. These actions, while maintaining the delicate balance of interests in Türkiye's Black Sea region, prevented NATO's entry into the region, prevented the deepening of the crisis in the Black Sea region, and contributed to the end in a short time.

Both Russia and Türkiye confirmed their claims to actively participate in the formation of the security architecture in the South Caucasus, the leadership in the region, and the containment of extra-regional and Western powers. That was reflected in the development of the "Platform of Six States" "3 + 3".⁴⁵ Relations between the three regional powers (Russia, Türkiye, Iran), the drivers of this format are ambiguous, but regardless of the existing contradictions, there are common interests.

45 Alla Yu. Borzova, Elena M. Savicheva, Lina T. Kulumbegova. New aspects in relations between Türkiye and Russia (based on materials from German think tank), *Postsovetskie issledovaniya = Post-Soviet Studies*. 2022;8(5):861-871.

Conclusion

States experiencing a security dilemma in the international power struggle may be perceived as a threat by other states in the international system by following various policies and using tools to ensure their own security. Other countries that perceive the threat may also take up arms or pursue an aggressive policy against that state in order to ensure their own security.⁴⁶ The increasing activities of the EU and NATO both in the Black Sea region and in the regions adjacent to Russia and their efforts to settle in this region as actors have raised Moscow's security concerns. Russia's foreign policy, within the scope of the "immediate environment" doctrine aimed at ensuring its own security and maintaining its position in the region, uses pressure elements, including energy, that are actually part of a defensive policy and do not express an aggressive attitude. Russia only implements the military doctrine it has determined before when necessary in order to address security concerns.⁴⁷

The 2008 conflict with Georgia appears to be an event that shows that Russia will not hesitate to use all means, including military elements, in order to protect its immediate surroundings. Within the scope of its developing relations with the West, Georgia entered into many economic projects with the EU and continued its modernization activities by collaborating with the USA and NATO in the military field. Russia was disturbed by the USA and NATO's involvement in its immediate environment and threatened its own economic investments. In this context, Georgia intervened militarily in Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to ensure its own border integrity, and thus becoming a member of NATO and the EU, and to become an economically independent state by providing energy security in the Black Sea Region. Russia, on the other hand, had to intervene in Georgia to defend the population of South Ossetia and to prevent Georgia from getting closer to the EU, the USA, and from joining NATO.⁴⁸

In the 2008 Georgian-Ossetian crisis, Moscow achieved almost all of its strategic goals in a short time. In this process, Russia did not encounter any serious resistance or retaliation from the Western world, especially the USA and other Western states that support the pro-Western regime and government of Georgia. Russia, which succeeded in supporting its military success in a

46 Gökürtük Tüysüzoğlu, "Savunmacı Realizm ve Saldırgan Realizm Bağlamında Karadeniz Havzası'ndaki Çatışma Gerçekliğinin Değerlendirilmesi", *Avrasya Ettüdleri*, 44 (2), 2013: 57-85.

47 Tüysüzoğlu, "Savunmacı Realizm ve Saldırgan Realizm Bağlamında Karadeniz Havzası'ndaki Çatışma Gerçekliğinin Değerlendirilmesi".

48 Süleyman Erkan, "2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşının Bölgesel Etkileri", *Eurasian Academy of Sciences Social Sciences Journal* 4 (2015): 36-48.

short time with diplomatic moves, first declared a ceasefire. Then it ensured its legitimacy in the regions where it deployed its military units. These steps have helped to unify the situation in Russia-controlled areas and establish a status quo in the eyes of the international community. These moves were soon strengthened by the Russian Parliament's resolution recognising the independence of South Ossetia and the other separatist region of Abkhazia. This decision formalised Russia's role in the crisis and its influence in these regions.⁴⁹

In this conflict, Türkiye blocked the entry of the EU and NATO into the Black Sea region by closing the Turkish Straits and indirectly supported Russia. This move of Türkiye played an important role in Russia's achievement of its strategic goals; it prevented non-riparian powers such as NATO or the USA from entering the Black Sea, allowing Russia to easily carry out its military operations in the region. This situation was decisive in ending the crisis before it deepened further. Thus, both countries reached their strategic priorities in terms of the security of the Black Sea and the regional balance and prevented the deepening of the crisis in the region.

In addition, Russia, which perceived the eastward expansion of the EU and NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union as an intervention in its immediate surroundings, showed how serious it is as an actor in protecting its close environment with its policy in the face of the possibility of Georgia's entry into NATO.⁵⁰ During the Georgian intervention in 2008, Türkiye's implementation of the Montreux Convention, preventing the passage of warships from countries that do not have a coast to the Black Sea, gained even more significance when viewed from the point of view of the current Russia-Ukraine crisis. The role played by Türkiye in terms of the security of the Black Sea and the regional balance continues to maintain its strategic importance today.

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