

FROM A FAILED STATE TO A WEAK ONE? GEORGIA AND TURKISH-GEORGIAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In current international relations concepts such as *weak states* or *failing-failed states* are drawing increasingly more attention from the scholars and policy makers. These states appeared to be the main threats, not only as the sources of origin for terrorists, but also as their breeding grounds. In response, eliminating such weak states and replacing them with strong, organized, preferably centralized, free and democratic states became the primary concern of western democracies, especially of the U.S. These weak or failing states come into sight particularly in areas where state building has been relatively recent or closely associated with a supra-national power. From this perspective, Georgia has been displaying the characteristics of a failing state in the early 1990s with its weak political structure, lack of a national financial system and rampant ethnic strife and illegal armed groups. To complicate the matters more, the control of state over its national territory was compromised and the involvement of foreign powers worsened the situation. This article aims at answering questions related with Georgia's state formation or strengthening process with a special emphasis on the Turkish-Georgian relations.

KEYWORDS

Weak State, Georgia, the Caucasus, Turkish-Georgian Relations, US policy in the Caucasus, Russia and Caucasus.

Fighting international terrorism and terrorist groups has become one of the most important topics in international relations, especially after 9/11 attacks and the London bombings. In this context, concepts such as *weak states*, *failing-failed states*, *quasi states* or *fissile states* are drawing increasingly more attention from the scholars and policy makers.¹ These states appeared to be the main threats, not only as the sources of origin for terrorists, but also as their breeding grounds. In response, eliminating such weak states and replacing them with strong, organized, preferably centralized, free and democratic states became the primary concern of western democracies, especially of the U.S. This controversy over establishing new and strong nation-states, in fact, appears to be the irony of modern international politics, since part of the scholarly community has already moved on to discussing the role and even relevance of nation-states in the age of globalisation.

What are the criteria used to define a state as a failing or weak one? How do we categorize a state as 'failed'? The answers to these questions are of the utmost importance because they not only describe a state, but also provide the roadmaps for those states that need to be intervened in and reconstructed. For the most part, states that cannot exercise their monopoly of power within borders, or have lost it to another element within the country are categorized as weak or failed states. Other common symptoms of weak states are: a complete failure of public services because of the erosion of the government's authority; a lack of common decision making processes due to the disintegration of civil society; the inability of state entities to exercise constitutional authority in various parts of the country; the lack of any capacity to establish permanent, healthy and stable relations with neighbouring states. By the same token, states like Iraq and

¹See R. I. Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2004; J. Milliken (ed.), *State Failure, Collapse & Reconstruction*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, and J. S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1988; For a fissile state discussion see, P. Jackson, "Ethnicity, Decentralisation and Fissile State in Georgia", *Public Administration and Development*, (24), 2004, pp. 75-86.

Afghanistan whose national sovereignties are subject to significant restrictions are also categorized as weak or failed states.

For the international community to establish a free and secure world in the 21st Century, it is imperative to address the issue of weak and failing states. The U.S. has vigorously claimed the leading role in this new struggle. President George W. Bush's statements could be evaluated from this perspective: "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in the entire world."² To make freedom permanent and secure at home, the new game plan requires expansion of democracy and the domination of democratic regimes abroad. The series of 'velvet revolutions', beginning with the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003 and continuing with Ukraine and Kirghizstan, were all welcomed by the Western world, as reflections of this new vision.

The U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's remarks also need mentioning in this context:

We should all look to a future when every government respects the will of its citizens -- because the ideal of democracy is universal. For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East -- and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people.³

The main purpose of this democratic nation-building strategy is to establish strong states with pro-Western populations through financial, political and even military support.

These weak or failing states come into sight "particularly in areas where state building has been relatively recent or closely

²For the full text of this 2005 inauguration speech see "President Sworn-In to Second Term", <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>.

³For the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's remarks at the American University in Cairo, Egypt see <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/48328.htm>.

associated with a supra-national power.”⁴ From this perspective, the Caucasus emerges as a troubled and unstable region largely because of its complex ethnic structure. The aspiration of each ethnic group for self-representation fundamentally questions the political structure and the legitimacy of newly emerging nation-states in the region. When we look at the first half of the 1990s, Georgia could be taken as the best example of failing/failed states in the Caucasus.⁵

Georgia has been displaying the characteristics of a failing state in the early 1990s with its weak political structure, lack of a national financial system and rampant ethnic strife and illegal armed groups. To complicate the matters more, the control of state over its national territory was compromised and the involvement of foreign powers worsened the situation.

The general U.S. policy towards the Caucasus and the Central Asia, as well as the U.S. approach to Georgia was affected by the situation mentioned above. As far as the U.S. was concerned, the crucial question was how to make Georgia a strong, self-sufficient and unified state. The U.S. policy makers wanted to establish and secure a strong, liberal and democratic regime in Georgia, through supporting civil society and strong leadership in the country. These goals have proved to be partly successful. Mikhael Saakashvili, the former Manhattan attorney with a law degree from Columbia University, with his image of young democratic and strong leader, during and after the Rose Revolution, could be seen as a concrete result of this policy.⁶ However it should be remembered that this process of establishing new states has not been an easy process. More often than not, it takes a very long time and comes after a painful struggle.

⁴Jackson, “Fissile State in Georgia”, p. 76.

⁵See B. Coppieters and R. Legvold (eds.), *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2005.

⁶For a comprehensive analysis of Georgia’s ‘Rose Revolution’ see C. H. Fairbanks, Jr., “Georgia’s Rose Revolution”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15 (2), 2004, pp. 110-124; L. Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution”, *Current History*, Vol. 103 (675), 2004, pp. 342-348; and Coppieters/Legvold, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution*.

Another crucial question that needs to be asked about this long and painful process concerns the role of Turkey. As a regional power, NATO member and strategic partner of both the U.S. and Georgia, Turkey's role and position in this process calls for a thorough analysis. Has Turkey played a positive role in Georgia's transformation process? Did it largely follow the path of Western powers, or was it able to establish a foreign policy independent of the West. The answers to these questions closely relate to Turkey's Caucasian policy as well as Turkey's relations with the Western World and the U.S. Has Turkey developed a policy in-line with the U.S. or are there contradictions between Western foreign policy towards Georgia/Caucasus and its Turkish counterpart? This article aims at answering questions related with Georgia's state formation or strengthening process with a special emphasis on the Turkish-Georgian relations.

Georgia after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

Together with the Baltic Republics, Georgia played the pioneering role in the process of democratisation in the Soviet Union, which began with the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the individual responsible from the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, Eduard Shevardnadze, together with Mikhail Gorbachev, was among the main organizers of this dramatic course of action. His reputation subsequently gained a privileged status for Shevardnadze and Georgia in the eyes of the Western world. Yet, it never brought about any tangible assistance for the solution of the problems that Shevardnadze and Georgia faced in the early 1990s. Russia implemented troubling and stiff policies towards Georgia without facing any opposition from the Western powers. When we look at Georgia today, almost 20% of its territory is outside the central government's control. The political status of the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains unresolved. About 300.000 people, the majority of whom are ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia's Gali region, have been displaced by these conflicts and have yet to return to home. In addition to them, it is worth mentioning that several thousand Chechen refugees moved into Georgia, namely to the Pankisi Gorge in 1999. This caused serious problems for Georgia, and from time to time even brought Georgia to the point of a clash with Russia. Despite the existence of strong and

sustained support from the U.S., and increasing hopes raised by Saakashvili's new democratic government, all the problems mentioned above continue to exist in Georgia. Georgia's political condition has merely changed from being a failed state to being a weak one.

Following the declaration of independence in April 1991, the state of affairs in Georgia was not very promising. During the early years of its independence, Georgia encountered very similar circumstances to that of the Soviet Union. Georgia's fragile ethnic structure could not effectively resist the ethno-territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This enduring cause of instability resulted in a loss of sovereignty over these regions by the central government. As a result, in Georgia proper at least, *de facto* independent entities emerged. Moreover, these regions or *de facto* independent republics established close relations with Georgia's main rival of all times, the Russian Federation. Russian authorities, on the other hand, perceived all these problems in the Caucasus in general, and in Georgia in particular, as great tools to maintain their presence and influence in Russia's 'near abroad'. Because of her policies of provoking minority groups against the newly established states and supporting separatist movements in the Caucasus, Russia emerged as one of the most important causes of instability in the region.

Additionally, in Georgia proper, apart from these separatist groups and an interventionist foreign power, there was a greater distress among other ethnic and religious groups. Javakheti region, mainly settled by Armenians, was among these potential pockets of distress. Similarly, Adjara, with its overwhelmingly Muslim population under the control of Aslan Abashidze, was a problematic area that lay outside the authority of Tbilisi. Finally, along with the ethnic disputes, the intensity of political power struggles among the Georgians themselves drove the country closer to a civil war. The combination of ethnic and political power rivalries made the situation in Georgia more complicated and fragile.⁷

⁷See C. Zürcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, pp. 83-115 and S. T. Hunter, "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of the Transcaucasian States", in G. K. Bertsch, et al. (eds.), *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 25-47.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the first elected president of the post-Soviet Georgia after independence. Gamsakhurdia grasped power in Georgia, thanks to his personal charisma and his anti-Russian nationalist discourse. Despite having a strong public support, he could not manage to keep his country in good shape. Behind Gamsakhurdia's failures were his lack of experience and vision. In terms of domestic politics, he used populist nationalism extensively both before and after coming to power, thus, aggravated the fears of ethnic minorities. Despite his unquestioned legitimacy, his presidency was clearly becoming ill-defined. Although he continuously proclaimed his commitment to democratic principles, he became progressively more intolerant towards any opposition; he shut down newspapers, denounced intellectuals and other elites, and delayed economic reforms. He lacked the ability and intention to reconcile with different political players. Instead, he alienated the potential allies. As Alieva pointed out: "he failed because he could not translate his popularity into successful state institutions, and once he alienated his supporters, there were no institutions on which to rely."⁸

On the other hand, Gamsakhurdia's foreign policy was basically characterized by a naive reliance on the West. He assumed that the democratic nature of his new forces would be sufficient in attracting Western support. He also aimed to develop a defence doctrine that was oriented towards supporting the European security system. He objected efforts to make his country one of the members of the Euro-Atlantic Community. But, unfortunately he was unable to tie Western interests with Georgia's by choosing the right strategic assets. Meanwhile, he opposed and ignored the role of Russia in Georgia's regional and global policies. As a result of this constricted foreign policy, Gamsakhurdia lost his political power. He was forced to quit the presidency and leave his country. He ended up as a political refugee in another problematic area of the Caucasus, Chechnya.

In March 1992, former communist boss Eduard Shevardnadze returned to Georgia. He took charge of the State Council, which was

⁸For her evaluations see L. Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia: Foreign Policy Strategies and Leadership Assets in Post-Soviet Caucasus*, Berkeley, University of California Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Working Paper Series, Winter 1999-2000, p.17.

to lead the country into the elections scheduled for the October of 1992. In a long and troubled period between 1992 and 1995, Shevardnadze struggled to strengthen his authority and stabilize the political structure in Georgia. During this uneasy process, the year 1995 was an important watershed. The new presidential elections and the constitutional referendum were both held in October 1995, after which Shevardnadze secured his political power. During this period, it is possibly true that Shevardnadze's internal and external political preferences were rational and triumphant. He was well aware of Georgia's 'insecurity of statehood and insecurity of neighbourhood'⁹. Internally, compared to his predecessor, Shevardnadze had closer contacts with the militia and gained the support of their leaders. He was also in touch with some members of the intelligentsia and other elites who were alienated by Gamsakhurdia, the former communist *nomenklatura*, and a substantial part of the population which associated Shevardnadze with an earlier period of order and security.¹⁰ In fact when the Shevardnadze took the lead in Georgia, he inherited almost a failed or collapsed state. Beyond the existence of secessionist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, there was growing disobedience in Adjara, a civil war with the previous government has begun and a Georgian state in which some parts were controlled by either Zviadists or local clans. Shevardnadze was well aware of this situation and thus tried to implement some policies by taking all these restrictions into account. For example, in order to establish domestic order, Shevardnadze relied on the police more than the army. Once he secured order and achieved some peace with ethnic minorities, he got rid of most internal rivals and successfully attracted Western aid and investment.¹¹

In the foreign policy area, Shevardnadze's and thus Georgia's main problem has been how to manage its relations with Russia.¹²

⁹For this approach of insecurity see R. Legvold, "Introduction: Outlining the Challenge", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, p. 6.

¹⁰Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia*, pp.17-18.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p.19.

¹²Hunter, "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy", p. 45 and S. T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994, p.137.

From this perspective, again when compared with Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze followed a more rational and promising foreign policy. Behind this rationality lies the relative freedom of making foreign policy choices, in comparison to Gamsakhurdia. Alieva pointed a number of reasons behind Shevardnadze's relative freedom in his foreign policy options:

First, the level of nationalism during this period in Georgia was relatively low, since the majority of the population was disappointed and politically apathetic. Second, his constituency was more moderate. Third, many attributed Gamsakhurdia's defeat to his ignorance of Russia. Military defeats reduced nationalist sentiments and, in addition, were used by Shevardnadze to eliminate the military opposition.¹³

It has to be particularly mentioned and kept in mind that, in Shevardnadze's early years in power, the war in Abkhazia was still going on, and all the reasons that caused Gamsakhurdia's abandonment of the country were still unchanged. Shevardnadze was well aware of all these conditions and Russia's tricks to hinder Georgian efforts to establish foreign policies independent of Russia as the main reasons behind the failure of state-formation in Georgia. Therefore, he was in a sense forced to establish friendly diplomatic relations with Russia.

In that very same period, after partly resolving her immediate domestic problems, Russia began to implement the policy of 'near abroad' in order to re-establish its hegemonic power in former-Soviet republics, and to balance its global and regional rivals. This made Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular the direct object of the new Russian policy. Under these circumstances, despite the strong anti-Russian sentiments within Georgian society, Shevardnadze was compelled to establish closer relations with Russia. In fact, it was a wise choice for Shevardnadze to eliminate the threat of being a failed state in the region. Therefore, following the defeat in Abkhazia in late 1993, Shevardnadze made some concessions to Russia. He signed an all-embracing 'Framework Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness' with Russia on 3 February 1994, which brought

¹³Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia*, p.18.

Georgia into the CIS. Following this agreement, the first thing Russia did was brokering a ceasefire between the Abkhaz and the Georgians. Then, an agreement in April 1994 included provisions on how to resolve the conflict. This latter agreement introduced Russian peacekeeping forces into the conflict zones of Georgia. Georgia also agreed to have Russian military bases, and have Russian soldiers patrolling the Georgian-Turkish border. Shevardnadze also appointed a former Soviet officer, Igor Giorgiadze, as the Head of Security and Vardiko Nadibaidze, a Russian general of Georgian origin who formerly served as the deputy commander of Russian troops based in Georgia, as the Minister of Defence. After these, with Russian aid, he suppressed the insurrection of Zviadists, who were the supporters of former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Shevardnadze established control over the Western regions and neutralized most of the warlords. Finally, after the October 1995 elections, he fully controlled the state power by exerting control over the police and other security bodies.¹⁴

The reasons behind Shevardnadze's preference of establishing closer relations with Russia could also be found in the policies of Western states, especially of the U.S. Originally, Shevardnadze's preferred foreign policy orientation was a western one, as was Gamsakhurdia's. Almost all the Georgian leaders and elites, as well as Georgian people, saw cooperation with the West as the guarantee of their genuine independence.¹⁵ However, the lack of interest or passivity from the Western world deprived Shevardnadze of any alternative. In 1993, Shevardnadze explained why his policies were seemingly pro-Russian in the following way: "it was because America refused to assist in restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia".¹⁶ All of Shevardnadze's attempts to strengthen Georgia's economic and security ties with the West by convincing his western partners about the strategic importance of surrounding Russia with democratic countries turned out to be unsuccessful. The 'benign disinterest' of the West made the Georgian president question his initial calculation on the West's interests in his country, and in the

¹⁴Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia*, p.18.

¹⁵G. Nodia, "A New Cycle of Instability in Georgia: New Troubles and Old Problems", in Bertsch, *Crossroads and Conflict*, pp.188-203.

¹⁶Alieva, *Reshaping Eurasia*, p.19.

region. It forced him to look out for other assets to attract Europe and the United States to Georgia.¹⁷ Thus, it would not be incorrect to say that the lack of international support forced Georgia to enter the CIS, rather than deepening its confrontation with Russia after the fall of Abkhazian capital, Sukhum.

Initially, as discussed above, the domestic environment in Georgia was not promising, and the support of the Western world towards Georgia was not sufficient to counterbalance Russia. The West was not engaged deeply enough to resolve the acute problems of state building in Georgia. Georgia's reliance on Shevardnadze's international image did not bring about the expected results either. The visits of foreign officials, both European and American, did not produce the vital economic aid. Their economic support could not meet, let alone exceed the existing humanitarian aid and NGO support in Georgia. Limited western aid naturally did not address the acute security problems in a country at the brink of collapse. Nor could it counterbalance the increasing pressures coming from Russia.¹⁸

In sum, during the early years of its independence, Georgia became a textbook case of a failed state. It had a fragile internal political structure with insufficient state apparatuses, including the ones for order and security (i.e. army and police). The state was unable to implement constitutional authority in various parts of the country which, in turn, made the nation vulnerable to the manipulations of foreign powers. Last but not the least, the weakness of the civil society compounded the problems of a corrupt and disorderly economic structure. As Jackson stressed in his article, due to the ideological, religious and political tensions within regions; the lack of management capacity amongst local level officers and councillors and; the fact that there has still not been any restoration of Georgian state jurisdiction throughout the country, "no one knows the future political shape of Georgia."¹⁹

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Jackson, "Fissile State in Georgia", p. 81.

However, the fact remains that, by virtually any strategic measure, Georgia should be at the heart of Caucasian affairs and operate as central pivot for Caucasian foreign policy, despite its lack of significant resources. The country has a great transportation network, with railway and road connections to Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey, and port facilities along the Black Sea. Its central location in the Caucasus, access to the Black Sea and geographically attractive location as the main transportation hub for the region should make the country valuable to the West, especially to the U.S.²⁰

Turkey in the Caucasus

In the strictly centralized administrative system of the Soviet era, it was unthinkable for Turkey or for the Caucasian republics to suggest anything such as bilateral relations. Traffic across the Turkish-Soviet border was extremely restricted. All the contacts went through Moscow, and there were almost no relations between Turkey and these republics at all. Under these circumstances, Turkey's approach to the developments in the Caucasus and the Central Asia during the Soviet dismantling process was a policy of 'wait and see'. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, the predominant political climate was one of uncertainty and fear. In this framework, the official Turkish foreign policy was defensive and non-interventionist. But, despite this atmosphere of uncertainty and reluctance, subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey welcomed the leaders of new republics, especially the Turkic ones, in a quick succession in late 1991 and gave promises of support and assistance. A reflection of these promises could be seen in the fact that Turkey became the first country to recognize the independence of these new republics. After the official recognition, Turkey also signed protocols with each of them, initiating diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. Moreover, to facilitate the activities and to coordinate the flow of assistance to these republics, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) was established in January 1992 and Turkey

²⁰*Ibid.*, p.75.

organised and hosted the Turkic Summit in October 1992 in Istanbul.²¹

A similar frame of mind was also been prevailing among the politicians and statesmen of that period. As President Turgut Özal's September 1991 speech in the opening of the Turkish Parliament (TBMM) illustrates, most considered the breaking up of the Soviet Union as an 'historic opportunity' for the Turks to become a 'regional power'.²² For the first time in its modern republican history, Turkey had a chance to develop its own sphere of influence. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new Turkic-Muslim republics opened up a chain of possibilities for Turkey to play an important role in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. Turkey had, for the first time, an opportunity to capitalize on her common historical, ethnic, religious and linguistic ties with these new nations. At the same time, this possibility contained an immense risk of alienating the historical foe of Turkey, Russia. Lastly, Turkish authorities were also faced with instability and ethnic problems emerging around their borders. There was a serious concern that these ethnically-fuelled problems could have spill over effects at home and aggravate the situation within Turkey.²³

The entanglement of opportunities with serious threats made it very difficult for the Turkish politicians and statesmen to reach a consensus over how Turkey should formulate its foreign and security policy toward the former-Soviet region. The best solution to this problematic situation seemed to be formulating their policies toward

²¹See M. Aydın, "Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of Change", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15 (2), 1996, pp.157-177 and its substantially revised and updated version "Between Euphoria and *Realpolitik*: Turkish Policy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus", in Tareq Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2003, pp.139-160.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 142.

²³See B. Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey's Position*, London, Frank Cass, 2002, pp.2-3; P. Robins, "Between Sentiment and Self-Interest: Turkey's Policy toward Azerbaijan and the Central Asian States", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47 (4), 1993, pp. 593-610.

Eurasia in coordination with the West, particularly with the U.S.²⁴ As it is well known, in the Cold War, Turkey was a part of the Western Alliance and its security environment. Ankara acted as a safeguard against the expansion of Soviet influence into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Thus, Turkish statesmen utilised this situation in the best possible way to maximize Turkish interests, and had the privilege of exercising influence and efficacy than she actually has. But this Cold War balance prevented Turkish authorities from developing any independent foreign and security policy, other than the Western World prescribed. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that Turkey had no special vital national interest other than the Western World has.²⁵ With the end of the Cold War, it seemed that:

Ankara's policy horizons [e.g. Caucasus and Central Asia, areas that were previously closed to Turkish policy and Turkey was cautious] have expanded and Turkey has become a more assertive and independent actor on the international stage. Where once Turkey primarily looked West, today Turkey is increasingly being pulled East and South as well. As a result, Turkey has been forced to redefine its foreign and security policy interests and to rethink its international relationship.²⁶

This, of course does not mean that Turkey was looking for a new security and foreign policy agenda, independent of the West or the U.S. On the contrary, Turkish elites were trying hard to find ways

²⁴See S. Sayarı, "Turkey and the United States: Changing Dynamics of and Enduring Alliance", in Ismael/Aydın (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, pp.27-38; and O. Tanrısever, "Turkey and Russia in Eurasia", in L. G. Martin and D. Keridis (eds.), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2004, pp.129-130.

²⁵For Turkish foreign and security policy during and after the Cold War period see A. L. Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evaluation of the National Security Culture and Military in Turkey", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54 (1), 2000, pp.199-216; M. Aydın, "Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.3 (2), 2003, pp.163-184; Z. Öniş, "Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era: In Search of Identity", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.49 (1), 1995, pp.48-68.

²⁶F. S. Larrabee and I. O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Arlington, RAND, 2003, p.1.

to combine Turkey's assets and interests in this new environment with her existing relations and interests with the Western world. There was a basic rationality to this approach: Turkey lacked the infrastructure capabilities to assess the developments in those regions and design policies accordingly. The resources for establishing efficient and effective channels of communication with these republics and peoples were insufficient. And there was a general atmosphere of uncertainty within Russia in the early days of post-Cold War era. Additionally, the Western, especially the U.S. approach to Russia and the regional republics had a much stronger effect on Turkey's choice or policy planning.²⁷

In this early period of uncertainty, the Western vision toward the region was rather Russia-centric. Particularly the U.S. policy towards the Caucasus had a 'Russia-first' character. This approach, in the early years of independence of these new republics, caused the emergence of a fear among the Turkish policy makers. They were afraid that Turkey and Russia would eventually have to challenge each other, because of their diametrically opposed interests in the region. Without the backing of the Western powers, Turkey could not afford to conduct an activist policy in the region. This would mean the end of everything from the very beginning.²⁸

In sum, at that period, Turkey developed and then followed the policy of regional cooperation by adapting these republics to the regional and global changes with the support and participation of Turkey. The most important aspect of this policy was assisting these new republics in their quest for identity. But, in order to do this, the Western, especially the U.S. backing was necessary. Specifically for the Caucasus, Turkey's even-handed and measured policy, despite some rhetorical flourishes, sought stable relations with Armenia and Georgia, and tried not to directly antagonize Russia and Iran.²⁹

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²⁸See Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, p.161; and S. A. Jones, "Turkish Strategic Interests in the Transcaucasus", in Bertsch, *Crossroads and Conflict*, p. 58.

²⁹Jones, "Turkish Strategic Interests", p. 57; and Robins, "Between Sentiment and Self Interest", pp. 596-597.

Under this political atmosphere, Turkey's priority, generally speaking, were mostly the Turkish-Muslim republics. The U.S. had a striking role on this choice, possibly much more than Turkey's internal political environment. The U.S. has come to see Turkey as a key strategic ally and a more capable actor in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, and began to expect increasing involvements in these regions from Turkey side by side with the U.S.³⁰ The reason behind Turkey's prompt response to such U.S. requests was simple. In those days, among the Turkish policy makers, there was a widespread belief that Turkey was losing its strategic importance in the eyes of Western policy makers, especially the U.S. They worried that Turkey would lose the military and financial support from the West. Therefore, finding a new role for Turkey within the overall Western strategy that would guarantee Turkey's continued importance became a central preoccupation in Ankara and in the pro-Turkish circles of the West.³¹

In this context, from the second half of the 1990s, the prevailing mood of despair and uncertainty among the Turkish decision makers was replaced with optimism. The new approach emphasized the new opportunities and the expansion of cultural, economic and political influences in this vast region. As Hunter put it "it was during this period that the Turkish press and officials began to talk about the emergence of a new Turkic community stretching from the northern Caucasus to the Persian Gulf and from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China. They also declared that the 21st Century would be the Turkish Century."³²

Inventor Behind this new euphoria, there was a feeling of self-confidence among the Turkish decision makers resulting from Turkey's role in Gulf War, and the improvement in Turkish-American strategic relations. Turkish foreign policy makers started to believe that Turkey could no longer follow its traditional foreign

³⁰Larrabee/Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p.1; and Sayarı, "Turkey and the United States", p.30-31.

³¹Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, p.162.

³²The inventor of this approach was S. Demirel and he made this comment during his visit to Paris in 1992, see Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, p.162.

policy posture based on the relative safety and stability of the Cold War politics. Moreover, the then Turkish President, Turgut Özal, took advantage of these new conditions and in a bold departure from the traditional Turkish foreign policy philosophy, declared that the Kemalist dictum of 'peace at Home, peace in the World' was no longer sufficient to guide Turkey's foreign policy.³³

At that point there was an overlap in the Turkish and U.S. policies, in which the Turkish foreign policy makers of the time had been most expecting. Behind this convergence and concordance, were the shared regional security problems and some other commercial priorities.³⁴

Against the backdrop of rising radical Islamic movements and terror that may cause instability and the emergence of failing states in former Soviet territories, the U.S.-based think tanks and the media supported the ideal of Turkish model at that period.³⁵ According to these organizations and some pro-Turkish activists, a geopolitical vacuum had emerged in those former-Soviet regions and there must be an acceptable actor to fill this vacuum. As a result of all these discussions, Turkey stood out as the model country, with its parliamentary democracy, relatively free market economy, and secular regime in a Muslim country. Subsequently, promoting Turkey as the model of economic and political development to those former Soviet republics and defining Turkey as the principal link between them and West became an important component of the U.S. and Western policy. In this way, Turkey realized what was expected from her after the Cold War. By the help of this new Western approach, Turkey had a chance to reshape its foreign and security policy. Turkey could focus on its national interests with a new direction that is concordant with the West, especially the U.S. and could sail

³³Aydın, "Turkey and Central Asia", p.159; and Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, p.163.

³⁴Sayarı, "Turkey and the United States" p. 33.

³⁵For the Turkish model see O. Sander, "Turkey and the Turkic World", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.13 (1), 1994, pp. 37-44; İ. Bal, *Turkey's Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000.

through new opportunities, having the Russian risk edged out.³⁶ As a result of this, as Aydın mentions;

the years of claustrophobia suddenly ended, and under the prevailing atmosphere of subsequent euphoria, Turkey's common cultural, linguistic and religious bonds with the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasian republics were frequently mentioned, both within and without Turkey, as a basis for influential position within the region, and Turkey as seen as an economic and political model for these new states.³⁷

Appropriate to this new approach, Turkish policy makers began to advertise the plan that Turkey could serve as a secular model to the newly independent republics, thereby profiting from the undeniable cultural, linguistic, and religious affinities between the Turkish people and the peoples of these new nations.³⁸

In this new web of relations, at least at the beginning, Turkic and Muslim countries had priority. But in a very a short time, it was understood that Turkey's capabilities, both financially and politically, were insufficient to reach all these countries at the same time and thus Western support was essential. At the same time, Turkish policy makers came to realize that Central Asia was not as 'close' as they thought it would be. There were serious variations in political, economic and cultural aspects between Turkey and these new republics. Within this context, the Caucasus emerged as a 'closer and precedent' to Turkey, compared to the Central Asia. Likewise, the location of the Caucasus made it an essential springboard for Turkey to reach these distant regions of Central Asia.

In the Caucasus, because of the strong ethnic and linguistic links, Azerbaijan naturally gained a privileged position for Turkey. Ankara was closely involved in almost all sorts of developments

³⁶Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, p.159.

³⁷In this period numbers of foreign newspapers like *Newsweek* and *Los Angeles Times* published articles in which promoting Turkey as a Muslim, yet a secular and democratic model. See Aydın, "Turkey and Central Asia", p. 158.

³⁸Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia*, p.2.

related with Azerbaijan, ranging from domestic politics to foreign policy. In this context, Armenia was particularly confined and excluded by Ankara because of a number of issues, such as the Azeri-Armenian war on Karabagh, Armenian territorial demands on North-eastern Turkey, and the allegations of 'Armenian massacre'. In this early period, the other Caucasian republic, Georgia, was much lower on the priority list of Ankara, and therefore did not draw much attention.

The main reason that makes the Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular a vital component of regional politics for Turkey and for the West is the abundance of Caspian energy resources. With the emergence of oil and gas projects in the Caucasus, the region gained priority on the eyes of Western policy makers. Azerbaijan, because of its energy sources, and Georgia, because of its location to secure the transportation of Azerbaijani oil and gas to the international markets, took a vital place in western and Turkish foreign policy making. Thus, bringing stability and peace to the region became the main agenda for international policy makers. As a reflection of this new understanding, the U.S. and then Turkey started to give a special importance to the situation in Georgia. This was the watershed in Georgia's modern history, which made the country an important component of global politics and forced all the powers, whether global or regional, to find ways to strengthen Georgian state. In this way, "US-Turkish cooperation has been particularly close in the Caucasus. Washington and Ankara have worked closely to strengthen ties to Georgia and Azerbaijan and encouraged both countries to adopt a stronger pro-Western position."³⁹

Turkey and Georgia

Because of its closed borders with Armenia, Georgia is the sole land access for Turkey to Russia, Caucasus and to the Central Asia. Georgia has 114 km land border with Turkey, and carries a great potential for the West to expand the transportation network in order to access the Caspian and Central Asia. Even though Georgia did not

³⁹Larrabee/Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p.115.

hold a crucial place in Turkish foreign policy initially, this did not mean that Georgia was entirely neglected by the Turkish foreign policy makers. It is possible to say that, in those early years, Georgian-Turkish relations have been positive on the surface. A number of economic and trade agreements were signed between the two countries, several official visits were made by dignitaries of both sides, and Georgia had joined the Black Sea Economic Cooperation zone and had a special place in Turkey's Black Sea initiatives.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in the very same period, despite Ankara's official discourse of respect to territorial integrity and regional stability, it is possible to say that Ankara remained largely silent when Georgia had to struggle with ethnic problems, separatist movements and a civil war. Furthermore, there was no state interference in the associations of Turkish citizens of Caucasian origin. Through these associations, they were trying to promote a public opinion in favour of the Abkhazian cause. Because of this 'benign neglect' attitude of the Turkish state, one could argue that the Turkish-Georgian relations started on a rocky road initially. Over time, largely thanks to the energy transportation issues, relations with Georgia improved, gained a multidimensional character and have even expanded to the field of defence cooperation.

From that point on, Turkey played a special and critical role in the process of pulling Georgia out of the road to failed statehood, and helped to make the country a stronger and self-sufficient one. This new role for Turkey seems to be a reflection of the general policy developed by the west and the U.S., rather than an independent Turkish initiative. But it needs to be mentioned that this new policy/role was fully concordant with Turkey's interests and objectives. As shaped primarily by the American policy makers, the new role for Turkey binds both Turkey and Georgia tightly together, and imposes a vital and challenging regional responsibility on Turkey. By playing its cards rationally and securing the Western

⁴⁰For the importance of Black Sea region and Turkey's policies towards the region see D. Bazoğlu Sezer, "From Hegemony to Pluralism: The Changing Politics of the Black Sea", *SAIS Review*, Vol. 17 (1), 1997, pp.1-30; Also see N. Dima, "The Black Sea Region: New Economic Cooperation and Old Geopolitics", *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 28 (1), 2003, pp. 77-96.

priority of bringing Caspian energy to international markets safely via alternative ways, Turkey has a chance to realize its regional objectives against the wills of its regional rivals, Russia and Iran. In the Caucasian aspect of this new great game, Georgia gained vital importance at the stage of transportation, especially after the decisions on the allocation and extraction of Caspian energy sources were taken. As a result, Georgian leaders finally managed to seize the western support that they were so enthusiastically looking forward to from the beginning of their independence.

The initial negligent attitudes of Turkey ended in 1994, and new and promising western and Turkish policy preferences towards Caucasus and Georgia took hold afterwards. In 1994, the issue of transporting Caspian and Central Asian energy resources to the international markets via alternative routes became the main concern. From then on, Turkey emerged as a model for the Caucasian states, due to its long established connections with Europe and the U.S. and its economic infrastructure, working state apparatus and strong state tradition. This made Turkey simultaneously an intermediary, supportive and 'transforming' neighbour for Georgia. Shortly after this, Turkey was promoted from being just an ally to being the strategic partner of Georgia. This new role for Turkey not only tightened the relations with the West and strengthened Turkey's position vis-à-vis her regional rivals, but also brought significant economic advantages. Needless to say, all these developments were welcomed with deep satisfaction by the Turkish policy makers.

The early signs of warming in Turkish-Georgian relations could be seen in accelerating social and cultural relations. For example TICA included Georgia in its programs beginning with 1994 and a series of agreements to develop cultural and social relations between both countries were signed.⁴¹ The most concrete reflections of these warming relations, however, can be seen in Turkey's changing approach to Georgia's ethnic problems. Turkey, whose policy initially was not so much concerned with Georgia's 'internal problems', started to get involved with these issues and wanted an activist policy to find a definitive solution to end all these conflicts.

⁴¹See TICA's official web site <http://www.tika.gov.tr>.

During the early period of Georgian independence, Ankara's official policy emphasized the territorial integrity of Georgia, and suggested solutions to the on-going problems that could incorporate mutual understanding with respect for basic human rights. Between the lines of this reserved Turkish policy was the quick the analogy with the problems of its own Kurdish population. Turkey's official policy can probably be described in the answer of the then President Süleyman Demirel to a question about the Abkhazian problem: "We are saying that territorial integrity should be protected because if there is any objection to territorial integrity it would be impossible to protect peace in the Balkans, in the Middle East and in the Caucasus".⁴² Nevertheless, in the very same period that was marked by the upsurge of the Abkhaz issue⁴³ which seriously troubled the Turkish-Georgian relations, the Turkish government by no means restricted the activities of the groups/associations of Abkhaz or Caucasian origins within Turkey. As a result of the intense activism of the pro-Abkhaz Caucasian associations, Turkish public opinion gradually took the Abkhaz side in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.⁴⁴

In spite of the official Turkish foreign policy and increasing Georgian criticisms, Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) did not hesitate to take the issue on its agenda through a parliamentary debate on the Caucasus and Abkhazia on 13 October 1992, largely due to the activities of Caucasian associations.⁴⁵ Against the criticisms of Georgian statesmen and officials, there was a growing public opinion in Turkey and the issue was kept alive through

⁴²See "Georgia and Turkey Agree to Strengthen Cooperation", *Turkish Daily News*, 16 July 1997.

⁴³For a definitive account of the Abkhazian issue see O. Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict Over Abkhazia", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, pp. 205-269; *Abhazy'nın Beyaz Kitabı*, Ankara, Kafkas Derneği Yayınları, 2002; George Hewitt, "Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians (NW Caucasus)", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.18 (4), 1999, pp.463-499 and "Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.12 (3), 1993, pp.267-323.

⁴⁴M. Çelikkpala, "Türkiye'de Kafkas Diasporası ve Türk Dış Politikasına Etkileri", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 2 (5), 2005, pp. 71-108.

⁴⁵For the text of discussions of the cross party initiative meeting see *Marje*, (6), 1992, pp.14-18; (7), 1992, pp.20-23; and (8), 1993, pp.13-16.

constant communications of these associations with the press, radio and TV channels. They organized group meetings with the Turkish MP's who were members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Commission, and these MP's were given detailed files on Abkhazia and the Abkhazian question, and reports and assessments were submitted to international organizations like the UN and the OSCE.

Over time, Turkey began to take an active part to find a solution to the on-going disturbances next door. As a concrete reflection of this policy change, Turkey became a member of the five-nation military observer mission, the United Nations Observers Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), which was established to ensure compliance to the ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia since 1993. In addition to that, especially after 1994, Turkish officials became more proactive in bringing the parties together for a final solution. Meanwhile, it can easily be observed that Turkey placed the Abkhazian issue on the back burner and concentrated on the Georgian leadership for its policy preferences. This new Turkish line, of course, was supported whole-heartily by the Georgian politicians and central government. At that period, Turkish authorities started to use a cautious discourse on the Abkhazian issue and took some measures in order to keep the activities of Caucasian associations under control, all as a response to Georgian expectations. It was under this atmosphere when in September 1996, Turkish foreign ministry informed the representatives of Abkhazia in Istanbul that residents of Georgia's breakaway region will no longer be allowed into Turkey with the Soviet type passports issued by the Sukhum authorities. All Abkhaz wishing to enter Turkey must henceforth obtain valid Georgian passports from Tbilisi. This gesture from Turkey was probably one of the best examples of strengthening Georgian-Turkish relations.⁴⁶

Given these improvements in bilateral relations, Turkey undertook the host and peace broker role in an effort to settle the border problem between Abkhazia and Georgia. Both parties met in Istanbul on 7-9 June 1999, under the auspices of Turkey and also with

⁴⁶"Abkhazian Access to Turkey Curbed", *The Jamestown Monitor*, Vol.2 (177), 24 September 1996.

the participation of the OSCE and the UN, and tried to settle their points of disagreement.⁴⁷ At the end of the meeting, despite the fact that the parties failed to sign a binding document, they did manage to issue a declaration of mutual understanding. With the Istanbul Declaration, as it was named, the parties declared that they would continue their efforts to achieve peace, and that the meeting did yield the possibility of finding solutions to shared problems in a step by step fashion.⁴⁸ Overall, from the perspective of regional power rivalries, Istanbul meeting had an important result in that throughout the meeting, Turkey could once again have a chance to show off her significance and efficacy as a regional power to rest of the world. As the meeting clearly revealed, the sole trustworthy power in the region for both Abkhazia and Georgia was Turkey.

In the process of strengthening Georgian central state and its territorial integrity, beyond all the aforementioned positive and pro-Georgian steps, Turkey's role and importance could also be understood by focusing on two important aspects of Turkish involvement in Georgia: economic relations, and military cooperation and restructuring. Both of these aspects of Turkish involvement are closely related and intermingled. But it can be said that military side is both a result and requirement of economic aspect. This two levelled process has brought Turkey and Georgia from the point of two neighbouring countries to strategic partners from 1994 to 1999.

Economic Relations and Structuring:

The growing Turkish-Georgian economic relations after the Cold War were a natural outcome of sharing a border. In a very short time, Turkey and Georgia surpassed the structural and technical predicaments of Georgia's Soviet heritage and the crippled economic

⁴⁷The meetings were being held had attracted attention from variety of countries, such as the US, Germany, Great Britain, France and the Russian Federation, in addition to the UN and OSCE. See "Abhazya Masaya Yatırıldı", *Radikal*, 8 June 1999; "Abhazya'ya İstanbul Barışı", *Milliyet*, 9 June 1999; "Abhazya İçin Yeni Umutlar", *Cumhuriyet*, 10 June 1999.

⁴⁸For a useful analysis and evaluation of the negotiations, see "Georgians, Abhazians Take Steps Forward", *Turkish Daily News*, 10 June 1999, p. A2.

background and structure, as Turkey became one of the most important trade and economic partners of Georgia.⁴⁹ A major component of that partnership was the U.S.-backed plan for an east-west energy corridor through Georgia, namely the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline. In purely economic terms, the BTC pipeline would not have a large impact on Georgia. Georgia is going to receive approximately \$50 million a year from the tariff fees for its comparatively small section of the route.⁵⁰ But politically, it is an invaluable asset which means that the West and the U.S. have turned their faces to the Caucasus and naturally to Georgia. This symbolizes and assures an independent Georgia. Even Shevardnadze regarded the construction of BTC as perhaps the most important achievement of his presidency, by saying in August 2003 that "Everyone recognizes that Georgia is a key link in this project. The functioning of the pipeline will largely depend on our country. Georgia has become part of a sphere of global interests, which is a serious factor in strengthening our state independence."⁵¹ This project had in fact brought some positive spill-over effects, and was supported with parallel programs from the EU-sponsored TRACECA and INOGATE to create a road, rail, and ferry network linking Central Asia to Turkey and Europe.⁵² In sum, because of all these projects and Western involvement, Georgia gained a new kind of interest and importance in the eyes of Western policy makers and had a chance to find concrete support for its territorial integrity and independence.

⁴⁹Georgia makes 17% of its trade with Turkey and with that percentage, Turkey is the second largest trade partner of Georgia. As it is stated by Turkish state minister Kürşat Tüzmen during his visit to Georgia in September 2005, Turkey has objected to increase the amount of trade to 6 million U.S. dollar annually, within three years period and be the main trading partner to Georgia. See "Devlet Bakanı Tüzmen Tbilisi'de", http://chvnebuluri.net/sp/bpg/publication_view.asp?iabspos=1&vjob=vdoci d,157073.

⁵⁰See T. De Waal, "Georgia and its Distant Neighbors", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, pp. 319-320.

⁵¹See "Special Report: Trans-Caucasus Pipeline Underway at Last", *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service*, (211), 23 December 2003; and De Waal, "Georgia and its Distant Neighbors", pp. 323-324.

⁵²See D. Helly and G. Goggia "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Statehood and Security*, p. 281; and Jones, "Turkish Strategic Interests", p.58.

Turkey, as a neighbour and a regional power, also has an intermediary role in this new game.

The BTC pipeline is a product of long and tedious struggles. Beginning with the Clinton administration, the Americans were interested in the Caspian energy sources and began to develop some policies towards that end. However, the development and transport of Caspian oil and gas has been largely driven by geopolitical calculations, rather than commercial ones. Parallel to the US policy of isolating Iran in the Persian Gulf and in the Caspian, the U.S. policy makers planned the construction of multiple pipelines to export the Caspian oil in such a way that, it would also link the Caucasus and Central Asia to global markets while minimizing the role of Iran.⁵³ Thus as a result of this new policy preference, Turkey and Georgia gained an invaluable strategic role. The strength of Turkish resentment towards Armenia probably played a part in the latter's exclusion from this lucrative arrangement.

When the idea of BTC pipeline first came up in the middle of the 1990s, most of the major oil companies strongly opposed the project, claiming that the pipeline is commercially unviable. Against such strong opposition from the corporate actors, the support and commitment of the U.S. government made the BTC pipeline possible.⁵⁴ Some argued that this project was a result of U.S. efforts to compensate Turkey for her support in the Persian Gulf War, and to make up for the loss of the revenues as a result of the war.⁵⁵ Whether or not it was due to this or some other strategic calculation, the pipeline in the end connected Georgia to Turkey and both of them to the rest of the world.

This article is mostly interested in BTC's importance for Georgia's independence and Turkey's role on it, rather than its

⁵³See F. Hill, "A Not-So-Grand Strategy: United States Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia since 1991" <http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/fhill/2001politique.htm>.

⁵⁴See A. Jaffe, "US Policy towards the Caspian: Can the Wish-list be Realized?" in G. Chufirin (ed.), *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 136-150.

⁵⁵Hill, "A Not-So-Grand Strategy".

priority and economic advantages for Turkey. Thus, the economic and political effects of this project on Turkey will not be discussed in detail.⁵⁶ From a political perspective, we cannot ignore the fact that the choices made by Turkey and Azerbaijan had vital importance on the construction of the BTC, and the way in which it became one of the key elements of Georgia's liberation. Both Turkey and Azerbaijan considered Georgia as the only acceptable choice for the route of the pipeline. The questions of energy resources and their transportation to global markets drew these three countries closer together, and at the same time drew the attention of the U.S. and the western powers. The leaders of these three countries progressively began holding joint meetings and took steps that facilitated further cooperation among them. Examples of such cooperative incentives could be seen in the new border-crossing projects between Turkey and Georgia, Kars-Tbilisi railway project,⁵⁷ and the Deriner hydro-electric project on the Çoruh River, to the south of the Turkish-Georgian border. In all these projects, one can see the establishment of a network of multi-dimensional relations between these countries.

In January 2001, the U.S. also joined this network of economic relations by participating in the tri-party (Ankara-Tbilisi-Washington)

⁵⁶For an information see TPAO's official web-site <http://www.tpao.gov.tr>. Also see S. Bolukbasi, "The Controversy over the Caspian Sea Mineral Resources: Conflicting Perceptions, Clashing Interests", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50 (3), 1998, pp. 397-414; R. G. Lawson, "BTC Pipeline Completed, ready to Move New Crude Supplies", *Oil & Gas Journal*, Vol. 103 (24), 2005, pp. 61-65; N. Pamir, *Bakü-Ceyhan Boru Hattı: Ortaasya ve Kafkasya'da Bitmeyen Oyun*, Ankara, ASAM, 1999; E. Karagiannis, *Energy and Security in the Caucasus*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2002.

⁵⁷This project has always been one of the hottest issues in the agenda of Turkish-Georgian relations since 1993. Because of the lack of financial source and support, however, it has never been passed the level of realization. Nevertheless, in line with the ongoing BTC pipeline the first concrete steps for the realization of the project has taken in late 2003. More than that the project has enlarged to include Baku and its calculated cost is \$350 million. The agreement for the construction was signed by the parties during the BTC pipeline's opening ceremony. See "Kars-Tbilisi (Tiflis) Demiryolu [Hayal Gerçek mi Oluyor?]", <http://www.gurcuhaber.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=584>.

preliminary agreement on economic cooperation and rehabilitation of Georgia. The U.S. engagement in this process was very important for both Turkey and Georgia. Now, global actors were also involved in the region, which was congruent with the Turkish preferences.⁵⁸

It is possible to argue that the emergence of Turkey-Georgia-U.S. relations, which were largely centred on the energy issues, brought the attention of other global actors into the region. Within this context, the EU needs to be mentioned as a relevant actor. When project of BTC pipeline became more of a reality in the early 2000s, the EU began to concentrate its efforts in this region, despite the lack of a common European energy policy, or a common security policy.⁵⁹ A reflection of this novel EU interest in the region is the reason behind European Union's 1997 Black Sea Strategy, which was aimed at connecting the trans-European transportation networks with the Caucasian infrastructure.⁶⁰ This initiative made Georgia an important actor for the first time in the eyes of Europeans. Georgia's newly acquired position was reassured in the Commission's 2001 Green Paper. In short, EU was getting progressively more involved in the projects to export Azeri gas to Southeast Europe via Georgia, and in this process, Georgia getting the affiliations and connections that she wanted to have. From the Turkish foreign policy and national security perspective, all of these were very positive developments.

Another striking aspect of these new relations is the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) or the South Caucasian gas pipeline. This new pipeline should be considered as important as the BTC. The new pipeline will run parallel to the BTC through Azerbaijan and Georgia, before diverging from it within Turkey. It must also be remembered that each of these pipelines is by themselves larger than any infrastructure project ever to be built in the region.⁶¹ These projects

⁵⁸"Turkey's Search for Tri-nation Alignment in Caucasus Awaits Firm US Support", *Turkish Daily News*, 18 Oct 2001.

⁵⁹Helly/Goggia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", pp. 280-281.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹This new project, when compared with the BTC, will certainly bring greater immediate benefits to Georgia by providing a reliable supply of Caspian Sea gas to whole areas of the country that were previously

carry the potential transform Georgia's geo-strategic position in the world both in economic and political aspects. They will connect Georgia closely with Turkey and the with the west, which in turn, will engender extra interest in western countries in the stability of Georgia, through which oil and gas must be safely delivered into their markets.

The relations between Turkey and Georgia that were shaped largely around the BTC petroleum pipeline and the BTE natural gas pipeline had a great role in improving the status of these neighbors into strategic partners. These bi-lateral relations have critical impact on the independence and national security of Georgia. Since the BTC petroleum pipeline is already completed in 2005 and the BTE gas pipeline will be done in 2006, establishing and protecting the peace and stability in the region serves the national interests of both Georgia and Turkey. Moreover, the two countries are trying to replicate this cooperation in carrying Azeri petroleum and gas to the world markets into other areas as well. New areas of economic cooperation is also bearing fruits in the foreign trade performance of Georgia, which has been suffering for quite some time, after the implosion of the Soviet Union.⁶²

Nonetheless, probably the most important dimension in Turkish-Georgian relations, and in Turkey's efforts to rebuild and re-structure Georgia lies in the military-security aspects of the issue. By establishing solid relations regarding security and military restructuring, the two countries have managed to protect these large scale pipeline projects and ensure the long-term viability of economic relations.

dependent on irregular Russian gas supplies or were left entirely without gas. See De Waal, "Georgia and its Distant Neighbors", pp. 319-320.

⁶²As an example of fruits of trade relations Çelebi Holding's undertaking of the construction of Tbilisi international airport could be given. With its \$62 million cost it is an important construction work and following the end of work the Holding will run the management of the airport for 10 years. For a detailed analysis and evaluations see "Gürcistan-Türkiye İlişkileri, Örnek Alınacak Düzeyde", http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=2082.

Military Relations and Restructuring

The most important aspect of Turkish involvement that challenges the balance of power in the Caucasus is its military cooperation with Georgia and extensive role it plays in the reconstruction of the Georgian military.⁶³ In this process, the military cooperation between Turkey and Georgia is part of a larger project to incorporate Georgia into the western and Atlantic security network through NATO and the US. Turkey had a leading role, along with the US to accomplish this goal. Even though the exact figures are not available, the US and Turkey to date have donated at least \$1 billion and \$70 million respectively to fund Georgia's armed forces.⁶⁴ This financial aid and accompanying support has been utilized in restructuring the military apparatus, reforming the military schools and academies, and training of the personnel in line with the newly acquired technical infrastructure and equipment that complies with the NATO standards. Furthermore, it was used to improve the border security measures that can meet the NATO standards as well. If we look back to all these developments, it is quite plausible to argue that they have managed to create a small but mobile and efficient military force in Georgia that is also compatible with the NATO standards.

⁶³For information on armed organization in Georgia, military structure and its impacts before and during this restructuring process, see: D. Darchiashvili, "Georgian Defense Policy and Military Reform", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Statehood and Security*, pp. 117-151.

⁶⁴It is not easy to calculate the total amount of U.S. aid to Georgia. Helly and Goggia is giving the total amount of U.S. aid between 1992 and 2000 as \$778 million. In addition Georgia has received about \$375 million in assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) since 1996. But the amount has increased strikingly after 2001. Helly/Goggia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", pp. 271-305. To see the figures related with the U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with Eurasia in general and Georgia in particular on annual basis see <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/c10250.htm>. The amount on Turkey's aid is provided by Turkish officials during a personal interview. According to 'Gürçühaber' The amount of Turkish aid in the form of donations within the years between 1998 and 2005 has reached to \$37.4 million. See www.gurcuhaber.com/modules.php?name=newsfile=article&aid=610.

Turkey together with the U.S. has been taking a crucial and active role in the reformation of the new Georgian Army in accordance with NATO standards. The beginning date of this process was March 1997, when Turkey and Georgia signed a defence cooperation agreement on military assistance and cooperation.⁶⁵ Following this agreement, Turkey and Georgia signed certain subsequent complementary agreements in light of new developments. The most concrete result of this agreement was Georgian troops that have been serving under Turkish command in Kosovo since 1999. From then on, Turkey managed to balance the Russian influence over Georgia by providing training for Georgian officers and, thereby, strengthened the hand of Shevardnadze in domestic politics. Turkey's actions had direct effects in Georgian domestic politics and in the regional balance as well. Even during the early and rather premature stage of these programs, Shevardnadze stated that the relations between the two countries have been upgraded to the level of 'strategic partnership', in a visit to Turkey in February 2001. Thanks to his cooperation with Turkey, Shevardnadze could now assert control over the army and the domestic politics, and could turn his face towards the West.

The most striking results of this new Turkish and NATO support for Georgia could be seen in Shevardnadze's policy preferences. For example, at NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington, Georgia decided to quit the CIS Collective Security Treaty along with Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, in 1999.⁶⁶ In addition, he managed to replace Vardika Nadibaidze, a career Soviet army

⁶⁵Turkish-Georgian military relations begins when Turkey became a member of the five-nation military observer mission, the United Nations Observers Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), which was established to ensure compliance to the ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia since 1993. In addition Turkish officers are also taking part in OSCE Observation Mission which was established to observe Chechen-Georgian border and refugees in February 2000.

⁶⁶All of the three countries were the members of a new alliance GUUAM, which was founded as GUAM in 1996-1997. Later on it took the name GUAM again with the withdrawal of Uzbekistan in 2005. Later on in 2001 and 2002 Georgia joined in nine NATO partnership for Peace (PfP) exercises and eight exercises held in the spirit of PfP. See Helly/Goggia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", pp. 294-295.

officer who served as the Georgian Defence Minister until 1999, with Davit Tevzadze, a West Point graduate, which in turn meant increasing defence cooperation with Turkey and the U.S. He managed to sign or forced Russians to sign an agreement on the border services in November 1998. Thus, Russia gradually transferred its control over the Georgian-Turkish border to Georgia, by completing its withdrawal by mid-1999.⁶⁷

With the early 2000, the relations between two countries rapidly accelerated. First of all, the then President of Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, came up with the idea of Caucasian Stability Pact that could potentially bring the Caucasian countries closer to Turkey and the West. Despite the problems it had in materialization, this proposal had some important impacts on the politics and the regional balances of the Caucasus.⁶⁸ In this atmosphere, the new Turkish-Georgian agreement on military assistance and defence cooperation was signed on 23 June 2000, during a visit of Turkish Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kivrıkoğlu to Tbilisi. This agreement gave a new momentum to Turkish-Georgian military alliance. In his talks with the Georgian leaders, General Kivrıkoğlu focused on Turkey's ongoing financial and material assistance to the Georgian armed forces and the optimum format for the proposed Caucasian Stability Pact.⁶⁹ This new agreement was envisaging \$2.8 million aid for the construction of military training centres in Kodori and Gori and a shooting range outside Tbilisi, reconstruction of the Vaziani (Marneuli) military base, and the training of Georgian military personnel at the Turkish military bases which included the training of Georgian pilots in Turkish air space.⁷⁰ This agreement was an initial arrangement that brought hopes of concrete western support to Georgia via Turkey. And for Turkey, it was a sign of improving her position as a regional balancing power with a green light from the

⁶⁷Jones, "Turkish Strategic Interests", p.58.

⁶⁸President Demirel made his echoing proposal of Caucasian Stability Pact during his visit to Georgia in January 2000. For an imaginative effort to flesh out the CSP see S. Celac, M. Emerson and N. Focci, *A Stability Pact for the Caucasus*, Brussels, Center for European Policy, May 2000.

⁶⁹See "Turkish Chief of General Staff Visits Georgia", *RFE/RL Newswire*, 26 June 2000, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2000/06/270600.asp>.

⁷⁰Larrabee/Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p.105-106.

western allies, vis-à-vis Iran and Russia. In this regard, this was the beginning of a whole new era that could not be reversed easily.

The most striking result of this cooperation agreement that draw attention was the Marneuli Military Air Base. Marneuli is based 40 km south-west of Tbilisi and is close to Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The ethnic composition of the population is mainly Azeri, and the town itself has a strategically vital role for Turkey and Georgia. Turkey spent \$1.5 million for the modernization of the Marneuli Military Air Base million and it was opened on 28 January 2001.⁷¹ This military base carried great significance for Georgia, since it was the first modern base to be established without the direct control or impact of Russia. It also had symbolic value as the emblem of Georgian independence, and its increasing links with the West. From the perspective of Turkey, this base had great significance as a logistic centre that Turkey can utilize outside its national borders and outside the realm of NATO.⁷²

It must be pointed out that by the early 2000s, Turkish-Georgian relations were now on an irreversible path. Shevardnadze's visit to Turkey on 29-30 January 2001 was symbolizing this new

⁷¹See, "Diplomacy: Turkey and Georgia Set to Boost Ties", *Turkish Daily News*, 30 January 2001; "Tiflis'le Stratejik Ortaklık", *Cumhuriyet*, 30 January 2001; "Kafkaslarda Bermuda Şeytan Üçgeni", *Hürriyet*, 30 January 2001; also see Lale Sariibrahimoğlu, "Türkiye'nin Bölgesel Güç Olması Yolunda TSK'nin Rolü" http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=58.

⁷²Later, Marneuli Military Airbase was transferred to the Georgian Ministry of Defense after a military ceremony on 25 December 2004. In the end, Turkey spent approximately \$3 million, in order to upgrade a military airport that was established in 1940 by the Russians and have not been upgraded since then, and therefore was not in working order. After the renovations, Georgia gained a great military asset with capabilities and lighting structures for night flights, which is the first of its kind in the region. In this same period, the total military aid to Georgian Air Force from Turkey was \$7.515 million. For a detailed analysis, see "Gürcistan-Türkiye İlişkileri Örnek Alınacak Düzeyde", http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=2082; "Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin Başka Bir Boyutu", http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=567.

path.⁷³ Because of Georgia's delicate relations with Russia that result from cooperation on energy issues, extended border disputes and allegations of Chechen support in Pankisi gorge, the timing of this visit was very critical. Under these very tight conditions, Turkey showed its support to Georgia once more on 29 January, when Turkey and Georgia signed an agreement on military-industrial cooperation in a bid to bolster their military ties. During his visit, the then Prime minister Bülent Ecevit underscored the 'strategic nature' of bilateral relations, affirming that "Georgia's problems are our problems. Georgia's security is our security." Turkish media construed that statement as reflection of Turkey's intentions to create a Turkish-Georgian axis to counter the perceived special relationship between Armenia and Russia.⁷⁴

This agreement could be interpreted as the reflection of Turkey's enthusiasm to maintain its regional political influence in the Caucasus.⁷⁵ But again, without Western support, it seems very hard for Turkey to balance Russia and Iran. As a result, Turkey proposed that the existing preliminary tripartite economic cooperation agreement for the rehabilitation of Georgia between Ankara, Washington and Tbilisi, concluded in January 2001 should be expanded to include political and military affairs as well.⁷⁶ This

⁷³In addition to sources mentioned in footnote 71 see Sami Kohen, "Kafkasya Stratejisi", *Milliyet*, 2 Feb 2001; and "Is Turkey Seeking to Enhance its Role in the South Caucasus?", *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 4 (823), February 2001.

⁷⁴This is actually a very credible argument. For example, subsequent to this agreement, on 25 April 2001 Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian said that "Turkish-Georgian military cooperation causes serious alarm in Yerevan because this may considerably upset the regional balance." He also added that Georgia's actions in this regard may effectively make it "a participant in the policy of isolating Armenia now being pursued by Turkey and Azerbaijan." See "Georgian-Turkish Military Ties Disturb Armenia", *RFE/RL Newslines*, 25 April 2001.

⁷⁵"Is Turkey Seeking to Enhance its Role in the South Caucasus?", *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 4 (823), February 2001.

⁷⁶A second agreement dealt with military cooperation between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan to protect the BTC oil pipeline, first discussed in Trabzon in 2001 during the meeting between İsmail Cem and Georgian Foreign Minister Irakli Menagarishvili. See "Turkey's Search for Tri-

request echoed in Washington and a U.S. military delegation visited Georgia to assess both the ongoing bilateral (U.S.-Georgian) and trilateral (U.S.-Turkey-Georgia) military cooperation and to advise on the planned reform of the Georgian armed forces. The tragic event of 11 September 2001 also brought significant change and urgency in the US involvement in the area. The new US foreign policy priorities certainly complemented the Turkish foreign policy choices in the region as well.

As a result of these developments, at the end of February 2002, the U.S. military personnel and hardware arrived in Georgia as part of a longstanding plan to strengthen Georgia's independence.⁷⁷ This was the beginning of the Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP). The main objective of GTEP was supporting Georgia by establishing an efficient and mobile army to fight against international terrorism. With this goal in mind, U.S. launched the GTEP in April 2002. By the help of this project, Georgia would have the U.S.-trained special units to deal with the terrorist threats and possibly to protect the BTC pipeline.⁷⁸ Later on this project was connected with NATO's PfP

nation Alignment in Caucasus Awaits Firm US Support", *Turkish Daily News*, 18 October 2001.

⁷⁷At around the same time, Turkish and the U.S. militaries established a joint 'Caucasus Working Group' and at the end of 2001, Turkish officers and experts began to re-organize Georgian War Academy and Turkey sent significant amount of vehicles that were dropped from the Turkish military inventories. See Ertuğrul Özkök, "Genelkurmay'da Kafkasya Çalışma Grubu", *Hürriyet*, 19 April 2002.

⁷⁸For a detailed and well organised article on Georgian Train and Equip Program see R. Giragosian, "The US Military Engagement in Central Asia and the Sothern Caucasus: An Overview", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol.17, 2004, pp. 43-77. Related with the program the then Georgian Defence Minister David Tevzadze said in an interview posted on EurasiaNet.org. on 7 May that "From the outset we have openly declared that we will participate in the anti-terrorist coalition, ...The help our American colleagues are providing will help us to solve Georgian internal problems and also to assist in international missions." And continued that the program "stands to help Georgia manage its own problems without outside help or involvement." Additionally he noted that "Second, it should be clear that it develops our integration with the structures of NATO. We have long participated in [NATO's] Partnership for Peace [training]

Program and Turkey took an active part in it. As a light of this approach, while the American special training units selected Georgian troops in Georgia, Turkish Partnership for Peace Training Centre (TU PTC) has been providing on-spot-training with its mobile training teams in the states of Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans, in line with the project of "Increasing the Efficacy of TU PTC in NATO" between 8 April and 10 May.⁷⁹ This way, Turkey was also sharing the responsibility with the US in the effort to shape and strengthen the structure of Georgia.

Another interesting development in this period is related to the Russian military bases in Georgia. Russia's policy of maintaining air bases in Georgia has always generated concern in Ankara. The status of these bases was discussed in the November 1999 OSCE Summit in Istanbul, and Moscow agreed to close the Vaziani and Gudauta bases by 1 July, 2001. Additionally, Russia demanded a 14-year period to withdraw from the remaining two bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki. However, this process has not started yet, due to numerous conditions

program, as a result of which we have detachments trained to take part in the Kosovo peacekeeping force." After meeting with Tevzadze at the Pentagon on 7 May, Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said that about 15 countries, including Turkey and Germany, have offered to assist Georgia and its minister of defence in various ways "in developing a better anti-terrorist capability for their armed forces." The United States and Georgia have a military-to-military relationship "that is really an expansion of the Partnership for Peace/NATO relationship," Rumsfeld said. "It's a multi-faceted relationship; it involves diplomatic and economic as well as security issues." See L. D. Kozaryn, "Republic of Georgia: Global Partner in Anti-Terror War", 15 May 2002, http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2002/n05152002_200205152.html.

⁷⁹In this context a mobile team composed of 4 military officers of Turkish Armed Forces and one personnel from each Red Cross and Red Crescent carried out a training program in Kirghizstan (15-19 April), Azerbaijan (22-26 April), Georgia (29 April-3 May), and Albania (6-10 May). In this program there were 40 personnel from each country. For the activities and training programs of TU PTC see the official web site: <http://www.bioem.tsk.mil.tr>. Related with the issue also see, "TSK 5 Ülkede Eğitim Verecek," 20 October 2005, http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=28.

and reservations on the side of Russia.⁸⁰ It would not be wrong to argue that the activities of NATO through Turkey and the U.S. in Georgia also had an impact in slowing down Russian withdrawal. Especially after Turkey's massive renovations in the Marnueli air base, Russia demanded a written commitment from Georgia to not station any NATO bases in its soil.

In addition to the above mentioned developments, starting from 2002, Turkey helped restructure the Georgian National Military Academy in line with the NATO standards, upgraded its curriculum and opened it for training and education.⁸¹ Furthermore, Turkish assistance in training a marine anti-terrorism unit for Georgia's Black Sea flotilla is another proof of the expansion and deepening of relations between Turkey and Georgia.

⁸⁰The Vaziani base near Tbilisi was closed by 1 July 2001, and on 9 November 2001 the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that the Gudauta base, located in Abkhazia, had been closed down as well. But negotiations on withdrawal from the Batumi and Akhalkalaki bases had made no headway through rounds of talks during the rule of Shevardnadze. At the OSCE Summit in Maastricht in December 2003, Russia asserted that it had no obligation to withdraw its troops from Georgia. Pressed by the U.S. and Europe, the Russian Foreign Ministry responded that at the Istanbul meeting it had only expressed an 'intention' to withdraw from the bases, provided that unspecified 'necessary conditions' were met. But after the Rose Revolution broke, parties got together and reached an agreement pledging Russia to withdraw from the remaining military bases by the end of 2008. See J. Devdariani, "Georgia and Russia: The Troubled Road to Accommodation", in Coppieters/Legvold, *Statehood and Security*, pp. 190-195 and also see Larrabee/Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p.114-115.

⁸¹Turkish and Georgian representative signed the last military cooperation and aid agreement under Shevardnadze's rule in October 2004. In this agreement Turkey promised to donate 7 off-road land vehicles, some military wireless devices and military materials. "Gürcistan Askeri Akademisine Türk Yardımı", http://www.diplomatikgozlem.com/haber_oku.asp?id=690.

Concluding Remarks

Turkey played a very important role in the period the lead up to the Rose Revolution of the Saakashvili government in terms of strengthening the central state and the government of Shevardnadze in Georgia. Thereby, Turkey contributed to the transformation of Georgia from being failed or weak state to being a strong and effective one. By increasing the economic relations with Georgia helping in the military restructuring of the country, Turkey played an indispensable role in strengthening the state structure in this neighbouring nation. It was this new state structure that also improved the political chances of the new political leader, Saakashvili.

Despite the fact that Shevardnadze set the country on a pro-Western course and strengthened the relations with Georgia's most important new ally, the U.S., he managed to simultaneously maintain a delicate balance with the powerful northern neighbour, Russia. He, however, failed to prevent the rampant corruption in the country, and could not effectively contribute to the process of democratization. Consequently, political support for Shevardnadze within Georgia began to erode after his re-election in 2000. Zurab Zhvania, the speaker of Parliament, and Saakashvili, his Justice Minister, broke with the President in 2001 and 2002, as did Zhvania's replacement speaker of the Parliament, another one time Shevardnadze protégé, Nino Burjanadze, did in 2003.⁸² These developments drastically changed the attitudes of the pro-democracy forces, especially the U.S. and the west, towards Shevardnadze.

In July 2003, U.S. President George W. Bush sent former secretary of state James Baker to meet with both opposition leaders and President Shevardnadze. To the President, Baker delivered a letter from Bush sternly stressing the need for free elections. Within the same days, The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) spent \$1.5 million to computerize Georgia's messy voter registration rolls. The U.S. and the European governments also gave OSCE funds to deploy an unprecedented number of foreign election

⁸²Mitchell, "Georgia's Rose Revolution", p.343.

observers.⁸³ Despite all these pressures and efforts, elections held on 2 November 2003 were stained with fraud and corruption.

The U.S. reacted this by openly accusing the leadership of a former Soviet republic of rigging an election. On 20 November, the U.S. State Department issued a press statement insisting that the results “do not accurately reflect the will of the Georgian people, but instead reflects massive fraud.”⁸⁴

A series of brief and non-violent mass protests on 22-23 November 2004, also referred as the Revolution of the Roses, forced Eduard Shevardnadze to resign. This paved the way for a fresh round of voting on 4 January 2004 in which the leader of the Revolution of Roses, Mikhael Saakashvili, was elected as the President for a five-year term.⁸⁵

After the elections, Saakashvili quickly launched an ambitious reform agenda that aimed at restoring good governance and ensuring Georgia’s territorial integrity. As a part of this agenda, Turkey retains a vital role. One of Saakashvili’s first diplomatic moves after his election in January was to dispatch an envoy to Ankara to reassure the Turkish decision makers of his commitment to the BTC pipeline. Moreover, during the initial months of his power, the new President revealed his priorities in terms of Georgia’s relations with Turkey, by visiting the country with a group of his ministers, officers and businessman, on 20 May 2004. This visit showed that the existing relations with Turkey were still a crucial agenda for Saakashvili. During this visit, Saakashvili met with Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan as well as Turkish Joint Chief of Staff, and in discussed plans for the continuation of the already existing programs between the two countries.

As Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze said: “This visit is of great importance to Georgia. Turkey is not only our neighbour; it is

⁸³Fairbanks, “Georgia’s Rose revolution”, p.115-116.

⁸⁴*Ibid* and see “Shevardnadze’s Resignation Resolves Constitutional Deadlock...”, *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 6 (41), 24 November 2003.

⁸⁵Fairbanks, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution”.

also our partner in a great number of fields which are very important to Georgia, from defence, security, and law enforcement to agriculture and energy. ... We will naturally hold concrete discussions along these lines. Talks will also include Georgia's accession bid to NATO and the EU." He also added that, since the early periods of their independence, "Ankara provides equipment and training for Georgian armed forces. Turkey has also contributed to renovating military facilities on Georgian territory that have been vacated by Russian troops in recent years. Georgia and Turkey have traditionally conducted joint military exercises along their common border and, on 9 February 2004, they agreed to boost naval cooperation in the Black Sea waterways."⁸⁶

In his visit to Ankara, Saakashvili personally requested Turkish language instructors from Prime Minister Erdoğan, by stating that "Turkish is the language of business and communication. The more Turkish citizens travel to Georgia (either for tourism or for business purposes), the more they would contribute to our development."⁸⁷

Starting from the 1990s, Turkish-Georgian relations reached to a level of strategic partnership, and are further enhanced with the most recent programs on border security.⁸⁸ Beyond this collaboration, one can also expect deepening military cooperation that started around the BTC pipeline project and has continued with the construction of a railway line from Kars to Baku via Tbilisi. All these joint projects help in establishing a stronger regional balance of

⁸⁶See "Georgia: Hopeful President Pays First Official Visit to Turkey", *RFE/RL News*, 20 May 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/05/ce4a6e76-4549-431f-bddc-d6ada28de592.html>.

⁸⁷Osman Nuri Mercan, "Gürcüstan Devlet Başkanı Mikheil Saakaşvili ile Söyleşi: Asıl Önemli Olan Halkın Kendi Gücünü Algılayabilmesi ve Görmesidir", 2 October 2004, http://www.chveneburi.net/sp/bpg/publication_view.asp?iabspos=1&vjob=vdocid,156682.

⁸⁸A special 3-week training course run by Turkish specialists for Georgian border guards ended on 25 March 2005. The training course, held at the Lilo training centre, was offered to the senior Georgian border service officers and was part of the overall program of Turkish-Georgian military assistance.

security, thus, assisting the emergence of a strong and effective Georgian state. Finally, any analysis of this process should not underestimate Turkey's role in the equation as a supportive neighbour, strategic partner and an important regional power.