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Theory in Practice:

Applying IR Approaches to NATO-Georgia Relations

Master's thesis

Author: Salome Tsereteli
Supervisor: Prof. Petr Anděl
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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

Prague, January 2018

Salome Tsereteli
References


**Length of the thesis:** 185 622 characters
Abstract

NATO’s enlargement policy has been a topic of heated discussions both within the academic scholarship and political circles of the member states. Particularly controversial has been its decade-long accession negotiations with Georgia, a nation whose NATO membership has been vehemently opposed by Russia. The disagreements over Georgia’s pro-Western foreign policies resulted in a five-day August War in 2008, or as referred to by Ronald Asmus “a little war that shook the world”. Given its significance, NATO-Georgia relations have been well researched within the academic. However, the overwhelming part of that scholarship focuses on the operational and historical aspects of their cooperation, neglecting the theoretical aspect. This thesis sets out to examine the concept of ‘NATO-Georgia relations’ within the theoretical framework of leading IR approaches in order to compare/contrast different perspectives and determine which explanation has the superior explanatory power. The research examines how Russia, the United States and Georgia (three main ‘pillars’ of NATO-Georgia relations) each perceive the Atlantic Alliance’s enlargement and concludes that these approaches are best theorized separately since all three nations “operate with different playbooks”. The thesis contributes an alternative theoretical explanation behind Georgia’s aspiration to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – the one driven by identity and an idea, rather that security concept.

Keywords

NATO enlargement, NATO-Georgia relations, Russia, international relations theory, neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, social constructivism
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1. Introduction

The past fifteen years of Georgia’s foreign and domestic policies have been marked by the pursuit of NATO membership. Ever since its declaration to join the Alliance at the Prague Summit in 2002, Georgia has consistently followed this policy regardless of the changes in domestic environment or external threats. NATO aspirations were supported not only by the government officials, but by the overwhelming majority of Georgian population as well. A nation-wide advisory referendum which took place in January 2008 surveyed almost 2 million Georgian citizens, with 77% of them favoring the NATO membership\(^1\). The nation received reassurances at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, as the Alliance leaders agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO, provided that it meets all the necessary requirements.

Fast-forward ten years and Georgia is still an aspiring candidate with no MAP (Membership Action Plan) and no specific timeframe of future membership. If we look for reasons behind NATO’s foot-dragging, we will be overwhelmed with a number of different (and often contradictory) explanations put forward by various scholars, analysts and politicians. Georgia’s potential membership in NATO has caused quite the controversy within the scholarly debate and political circles of Alliance’s member states. Many perceive that whatever strategic benefits Georgia’s admittance will bring to the Atlantic Alliance, it is not worth antagonizing Russia. Others, adhering to a more liberal perception of international politics, argue that smaller states’ pro-Western aspirations should not fall victim to Kremlin’s revisionist policies. Whatever our opinions about NATO enlargement may be, we have to admit the Atlantic Alliance’s expansion policy has played a major role in the current state of European security environment. The crisis in Ukraine, the U.S.-Russian relations at “worst point since Cold War”, mixed messages from the White House regarding its commitment to “collective defense” clause

all these factors put NATO and its role in European security in the center of political and scholarly debate once again.

However, when examining the existing literature on the Atlantic Alliance and its history, it becomes apparent that most of the scholarship has focused on the operational activities of NATO, neglecting the theoretical aspect. In line with this premise, I decided to conduct a literature review of NATO-Georgia research to see how much of it was theory-driven. As suspected, the overwhelming majority of scholarship had focused on the operational and historical aspects of NATO-Georgia relations - cooperation in peacekeeping operations, Georgia’s progress in the domestic reforms and other NATO requirements, nation’s occupied territories, August War with Russian in 2008, and so on. The academic research, particularly the Western scholarship, has not yet focused on providing a theory-driven explanation of the relations between the Atlantic Alliance and the aspiring candidate. Perhaps this is caused by the wide-spread perception that there is not ‘much’ to theorize about – Georgia strives for NATO membership in an attempt to gain protection and balance against revisionist Russia; and NATO, on the other hand, is torn between its idealist “Open Door” policy and the realist risks of Russian threat. Disagreeing with this perception, I set out to examine the concept of ‘NATO-Georgia relations’ within the theoretical framework of leading IR approaches in order to compare/contrast different perspectives and determine which explanation has the superior explanatory power.

1.1. Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to evaluate three leading theories in international relations discipline – neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism – by assessing their accuracy when applied to the practical case of NATO-Georgia relations. In order to achieve this, the thesis will first

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provide a comprehensive overview of each of the approaches in detail. I will be examining how neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism theorize about the states’ international cooperation in the global politics, the role of institutions/alliances, and more specifically the post-Cold War evolution and enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Such detailed background is justified by the theory-driven research question – it will be within this theoretical framework that NATO-Georgia cooperation will be examined. Therefore, the main research question posed by the thesis can be framed in the following way:

- Which of the dominant IR theories provides the most comprehensive explanation of the evolution of NATO-Georgia relations since end of Cold War?

It is important to note that ‘NATO-Georgia relations’ is a broad and multifaceted concept and an attempt to theorize about its evolution with all its different aspects as if it were one whole can prove to be counterproductive. Therefore, I proceed to further break down the main research question into three parts. I argue that the concept of ‘NATO-Georgia relations’ stands on three pillars, i.e. the main actors within NATO-Georgia ‘triangle’ – the United States, Russia and Georgia. It is self-evident why Georgia is included in the list, but I justify my choice of U.S. and Russia as the remaining two factors since both ex-superpowers play a significant role in Georgia’s relations with the Alliance and have had a decisive impact on its potential membership. Russia’s opposition to NATO’s enlargement to its neighboring countries has been a major obstacle in Georgia’s path to admittance. It would, therefore, be a mistake to omit Russia’s perspective on the matter when theorizing about Georgia-NATO relations. This leaves the question as to why I have chosen the United States, rather than the Atlantic Alliance in general, as the third major actor. This is explained by the role U.S. has played both in NATO-Georgia relations, as well as the Alliance’s post-Cold War enlargement process in general. It was the United States that initiated NATO enlargement discussions in early 1990s and provided support to its expansion policy in Central and Eastern Europe. Similarly, the United States,
particularly under the George W. Bush administration, was the main supporter of Georgia’s NATO membership following the Rose Revolution in 2003, providing the nation with a substantial assistance in its reforms. Whether this was based on American strategic interests in the region or a mission to spread the democratic norms and values abroad, it is evident that U.S. has played a decisive role on the evolution of European security environment. Therefore, the examination of NATO-Georgian relations within the provided theoretical framework cannot be complete without first exploring how Russia and U.S. perceive NATO and its enlargement policy.

In my examination of U.S. and Russian perspectives on post-war NATO expansion eastward, I largely focus on the initial years of the post-Cold War period up until the first round of enlargement in 1999. The current tensions that exist between the ex-superpowers and their current approach to the Alliance’s policies (including the case of Georgia) can be traced back to the events in those years. As proposed by John Mearsheimer, in order to understand West misperceptions about its policies in regards to Russian and its neighboring nations, “one must go back to the mid-1990s, when the Clinton administration began advocating NATO expansion³”. This is what I set out to do in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the thesis. In the conclusion of each of these chapters, I examine which of the previously stated theoretical hypotheses best accounts for each country’s approach to NATO enlargement. I come to the realization that these two nations, who have so significantly impacted the course of NATO-Georgia relations, view the matter at hand through different paradigms.

Having answered which theoretical approaches best explain the Russian and U.S. “aspects” of NATO-Georgia relations, the thesis finally focuses on the reasons behind Georgia’s aspirations to join the Alliance. The dominant discourse within the political and scholarly debate provides, in my opinion, an overly simplistic explanation of Georgia’s bid for membership. Focusing mostly on the ‘security’

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and ‘balancing’ concepts, the discourse overlooks a variety of factors and arguments that provide a more comprehensive explanatory framework than realist paradigm. The examination of Georgia’s recent history and the reasons behind its unwavering pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration lead me to a conclusion that a social constructivist theory, with its focus on ideas, identity, norms and values, is best equipped to explain Georgia’s pursuit of NATO membership.

To sum up the above discussion, the thesis proposes that three different “aspects” of NATO-Georgia relations - US’s perspective on NATO enlargement; Russia’s opposition to NATO enlargement; and finally, Georgia’s aspiration to join NATO – are best explained separately by different set of theories. The original research question was further broken down to three subjections:

- Which of the dominant IR theories provides the most comprehensive explanation of the evolution of NATO-Georgia relations since end of Cold War?
  - Which theory is best equipped to account for United States’ perspective on NATO Enlargement?
  - Which theory is best equipped to account for Russia’s perspective on NATO Enlargement?
  - Which theory is best equipped to account for Georgia’s aspirations to join NATO?

1.2. Methodology

When examining the theoretical content, I will be relying on the primary writings from the leading theorists of all three approaches. The arguments and discussions will be enhanced further through the utilization of secondary sources, such as scholarly books, articles and major IR textbooks.

The chapters depicting the American, Russian and Georgian approaches and perspectives on the NATO enlargement will also be relying on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include
official governmental documents; interviews, speeches and addresses given by state representatives and high-ranking officials; official statement and publications issued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. One of the major chapters of the thesis (social constructivist explanation of NATO-Georgia relations) focuses on the importance of state identity in its foreign policy objectives. State identity is best expressed and found in the official discourse of the leading state officials. Therefore, special attention is paid to the interviews, inaugural speeches, official addresses and state-issued documents. The sources, both primary and secondary, represent the diversity of the perspectives provided in the thesis; thus, Georgian, Russian and Western sources will be utilized throughout the chapters.

The thesis is based on a qualitative comparative analysis which allows for in-depth examination of why and how of each theoretical proposal, its limitations, and implications for the subject matter. Furthermore, this method is the most suitable approach to examine official data (statements made the officials; formal documents) and tie it to the proposed theoretical hypotheses accordingly.

1.3. Limitations of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify which theoretical approach provides superior explanatory framework for the NATO-Georgia relations. This does not mean that I set out to find a ‘winner theory’ that will disprove the competing theoretical perspectives and provide an all-encompassing explanation of the subject matter. The fact that thesis’s argument links Georgia’s NATO aspirations to the social constructivist theory does not rule out the relevancy of certain neorealist and neoliberal institutionalist arguments. The goal is to compare/contrast these three approaches and demonstrate whose explanation is more applicable to the case of NATO-Georgia relations. The theoretical framework
does not rule out the coexistence of neorealist factors along with constructivism’s ideational concepts, for instance, or vice versa.

The second point I would like to address deals with the analytic and historical aspect of the study. Historical comprehensiveness is not the priority of this research. While I will be examining how the Alliance has evolved since the end of Cold War, I do not set out to provide a detailed overview of its history. For example, I will not be focusing on NATO’s subsequent enlargement rounds, its peacekeeping missions, or intervention in Kosovo. These questions have been well researched and theorized in existing NATO literature. Similarly, the overview of Georgia’s recent history in chapter 4 will focus on the events that are relevant to the research question posed and might omit matters that, although significant, are outside the focus of the thesis.

1.4. Structure

The thesis is arranged in four main chapters. The first chapter begins with the examination of the dominant theories within the International Relations discipline – neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism. Since the theoretical framework plays a significant role in the research question and the final findings, this chapter serves as one of the main pillars of the thesis. Therefore, I begin with a detailed overview of all three approaches in order to provide a sufficient theoretical background for further discussion. I conclude the respective subsections with each theory’s general hypothesis on NATO’s enlargement process. These proposals will be examined in later chapters in order to understand to what extent the dominant theories can explain Georgia’s progress for NATO membership.

The following chapters take a closer look at each of the three main actors in NATO-Georgia relations: the United States, Russia and Georgia. Separate chapters will be dedicated to examining each nation’s
perspective on the expansion of the Atlantic Alliance. The second chapter depicts the U.S. ‘side of the story’: the support of NATO enlargement policy following the end of Cold War; U.S. administration’s justification, domestic and international opposition, relations with Russia, etc. Similarly, the third chapter examines Russia’s perspective on the matter and explains the reason behind Kremlin’s opposition to NATO expansion, particularly in case of Georgia. The concluding remarks look at Russia’s official stance through theoretical lenses and tie its position to one of the hypotheses discussed earlier in the thesis. Finally, the fourth chapter provides an overview of Georgia’s recent history and its cooperation with NATO starting from early 1990s. Having laid this foundation, I move to examine which theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of Georgia’s aspiration to join the Alliance. The subsequent conclusion summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and outlines once again how the United States’, Russia’s and Georgia’s perspectives on NATO enlargement are each best explained by different theories of IR discipline.
2. Theoretical Framework:

In the following section I will be examining the role of NATO, its enlargement process and future through the theoretical lenses of neo-realism, neo-liberal institutionalism and social constructivism. After providing a general overview of each of the theories, I set out to examine how each of the approaches applies to the research question I have posed.

2.1. Neorealism

2.2.1. Background

Before we move to the careful examination of neo-realist school of thought, I believe it’s important we first take a look at its intellection ancestor realism, since its worldview continuous to dominate the thought about international politics. Realist school of thought is the product of a long historical and philosophical tradition that dates back to the works of Thucydides in ancient Greece, Nicolo Machiavelli in 16th-century Italy and Thomas Hobbes in 17th-century England. The paradigm is based on the premise of a flawed humanity - individuals, by their nature, are fearful, egoistic and power-seeking, looking foremost to preserve themselves. This innate striving for power is what drives state behavior as well. Competition in accumulating power in the anarchic international system creates challenges for state survival, the solution to which in seen in further accumulation of even more power.

Realism is not a single unified theory, of course. While it is founded in some common assumptions and premises, there are various interpretations of realism, including classical realism, neorealism (also referred to as structural realism), defensive and offensive realism, and neoclassical

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realism. This research will be taking a closer look at neorealism, as outlined in Kenneth Waltz’s “Theory of International Politics”. Neorealism moves away from the assumption that it is the underlying human nature and its strive for power that is driving the interstate conflict, thus abandoning the anthropological assumption in favour of a systemic imperative. This approach is rather focusing on the structure of the international system as the explanatory factor of states’ behavior. Both realism and neorealism view states as the main actors that exist in an anarchic international system with no central authoritative power to protect and dispense justice equally. The absence of such higher authority to impose enforceable obligations, ensure security or resolve disputes, in addition to the unequal distribution of capabilities among states, leaves them responsible for their own protection and survival (i.e. self-help), creating a distrust and competition among the actors in the international arena. In their pursuit to provide their own security, states would try to advance their position in the international system by building up military capabilities or engaging in opportunistic alliances, which would automatically fuel the insecurity of other states. In this environment, states view their own capabilities, compared to the capabilities of other states, as the main determinant of a state’s future security, “for each state its power in relation to other states is ultimately the key to its survival”.

In the anachronic world order where “the concept of power is always a relative one” any gain in power by one state, even defensive measures, can be misinterpreted by another state as an inherent threat. This concept is best explained by John Herz’s famous security dilemma model, which argues that such action-reaction cycle between the states will result in a spiral of policies with a heightened

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7 Muller, Security Cooperation, p.371.
level of tensions and a potential conflict, even if the states involved had no intentions of it.\textsuperscript{11} An illustrating example of security dilemma would the nuclear arms races between the US and Soviet Union in the 1960s-1980s.

Global anarchy and states’ inherent distrust and competition - realist school of thought, in all its interpretations, paints a rather pessimistic picture for the potential international cooperation. Because of their predisposed nature towards conflict and the established self-help system, the chances of states cooperating, are very slim even if they share common interests. Why? Because under global anarchy, states are concerned about being disadvantaged as a result of the unequal distribution of relative gains in a potential cooperation, as well as the possibility of the other party cheating on the agreement. As Waltz argues:

“When faced with the possibility of cooperating for mutual gains, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelled to ask not ‘Will both of us gain?’ but ‘Who will gain more?’ If an expected gain is to be divided, say, in the ratio of two to one, one state may use its disproportionate gain to implement a policy intended to damage or destroy the other. Even the prospect of large absolute gain for both parties does not elicit their cooperation so long as each fears how the other will use its increased capabilities”.\textsuperscript{12}

Institutions do not help much either, as they are not seen as important actors in this regard. Perceived by neorealists as mere ‘reflections’ of great powers’ self-interested calculations and overall distribution of power in the world, institutions will rise, change and fall based on the interest of the main actors, i.e. states; “institutions are above all a tool of national governments that states use in

\textsuperscript{12}Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, p. 105
ways that suit their national interests”.

They have no power of their own to influence the states’ behavior.

2.1.2. Neorealism and the Role of Alliances

If this school of thought believes so little in the possibility of states’ cooperation, then how do realists and neorealists explain the formation and role of the alliances in general, and in this given case, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in particular? While it’s true that representatives of this theory place small chances on the potential cooperation, they do not rule it out completely and alliances are seen as the key medium in this regard. Viewed as “against, and only derivatively for, someone or something”, alliances are a way for states to combine their military resources in response to, or in preparation for, an external threat. This would allow the states with insufficient resources of their own, to balance the distribution of power and create an appropriate counterweigh to the hegemonic power. Realists argue that “the systemic structure, structural polarity and systemic anarchy, determine the formation of alliances. In particular, the anarchy characteristic of the international system leads state to accord primary to their security”. According to Morgenthau, when faced with a threat of an opposing power, states have three options of maintain or improving their power positions. They can either “increase their own power, add to their power the power of other

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nations, or withhold power of other nations from the adversary”\textsuperscript{17}. Last two of these alternatives will mean pursuing a policy of alliances.

Neorealism further argues that states will base their alliance decisions on the careful cost-benefit analysis. Do the potential benefits outweigh the possible risks – strengthening the state’s security by reducing the chances of an attack vs. compromising state’s interests and unwillingly becoming involved in an ally’s conflict over unrelated issues?\textsuperscript{18} Glenn Snyder’s theory of alliances, the most elaborate body of security cooperation within the realist paradigm, provides an exhaustive description of cost-benefit analysis of the potential alliance membership:

“Security benefits in a mutual defence alliance include chiefly a reduced probability of being attacked (deterrence), greater strength in case of attack (defense) and prevention of the ally's alliance with one's adversary (preclusion). The principal costs are the increased risk of war and reduced freedom of action that are entailed in the commitment to the partner. The size of these benefits and costs for both parties will be determined largely by three general factors in their security situations: (1) their alliance "need," (2) the extent to which the prospective partner meets that need, and (3) the actual terms of the alliance contract. Alliance need is chiefly a function of the ratio of a state's capabilities to those of its most likely antagonist), and its degree of conflict with, or perceived threat from, that opponent”.\textsuperscript{19}

The costs and benefits will vary depending on the state’s relative strength or distribution of capabilities, geographic proximity, political conflicts, and most importantly the level of threat posed by an adversary. The bigger the threat, the stronger the cooperation and unity will be within the alliance. Similarly, once the strength of the enemy starts to decline, so will the cohesion of the given


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.110
alliance. As Snyder and Grieco note, when the threat from the adversary starts to diminish and states no longer feel dependent on the alliance for protection, they will be less willing to constrain their own national interests and conform to membership’s commitments. With the common adversary gone, states will again start competing for relative gains in their power positions and will become concerned with the capabilities of other alliance partners. Neorealism argued that these cooperations, formed and sustained solely to oppose a common threat, are not likely to outlive that very threat they were created to address. In the absence of external adversary to ensure the internal cohesion, the alliance will gradually cease to exist. In the following chapters, we will see how this rationale determined realists predictions about the future of NATO following the end of Cold War.

2.1.3. Neorealism on NATO’s Post-Cold War Evolution and Enlargement

In the previous section our examination of neorealist theory and its approach to alliances concluded that the demise of the original threat undermines the purpose of the alliance and rationale for its very existence. Based on this premise, in the early 1990s neorealism had put forward some very specific and clear-cut predictions about the future of North Atlantic Treaty Alliance and the post-Cold War world order in general. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the subsequent end of Cold War bipolar power struggle, the prominent representatives of neorealist school of thought argued that NATO had outlived its original purpose and predicted its eventual demise. Kenneth Waltz put forward an argument that the alliance will “dwindle at the Cold War’s end and ultimately [...] disappear”, suggesting that “NATO’s days might not be numbered, but its years are”. Similarly, John Mearsheimer strongly expected the alliance to

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20 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, p.168; Grieco, Cooperation among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-tariff Barriers to Trade, p.46
21 Snyder, Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut, pp.115-117; Grieco, Cooperation among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-tariff Barriers to Trade, p.47
lose its reason for existence without an external enemy, i.e., the Soviet Union. After all, “it is the Soviet threat that provides the glue that holds NATO together” he argued, “take away that offensive threat and the United States is likely to abandon the Continent”23 altogether. The demise of common enemy would also weaken the intra-alliance cohesion, as member states started to again prioritize the national interests, unwilling to compromise and reconcile their differences in the absence of a looming external threat.

The second prediction neorealist theory put forward, following the end of Cold War, was the resurgence of traditional interstate rivalries within the alliance.24 The shift in the distribution of power and the establishment of unipolarity in the new international system, which would follow the collapse of Soviet Union, was likely to lay foundation for the creation of the new (and resurgence of some old) rivalries between the members of Alliance. Robert Ruchhaus discusses the neorealist assumption that as the world’s only remaining superpower, the United States would attempt to create a new world order based on its own rationale, values and norms.25 This would push the European members to start actively balancing against their transatlantic ally, in their eyes now a “hegemon” trying to maintain and reinforce its dominance, which would eventually lead to the demise of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. James M. Goldgeier, the director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University, as well as a prominent writer on the NATO-related topics and developments, provides an apt summary of the above discussion:

“Both the theory and history of international politics strongly suggests that NATO should have dissolved, not expanded. No alliance has even survived victory, and the possession of

overwhelming power in the hands of one state typically induces balancing [...] behavior among contenders. Thus, in the wake of the Soviet Union’s self dismemberment, it was entirely reasonable to expect that the United States would either disengage militarily from Europe or be forced out by the Europeans, who should have been eagerly defecting from the victorious American alliance to form a counter-hegemonic coalition.”

Looking back at this scholarly debate decades later, it is fair to say that the neorealists’ predictions failed to come true. Does this mean that the theory is unable to explain the developments and evolution of the alliance, and thus cannot contribute any insights to the NATO enlargement debate? We would argue otherwise. Although the theory predicted a different trajectory for the alliance, neorealists provide several revised explanations for the developments that took place in the post-Cold War period.

The first explanation put forward by the theorists focuses on the endurance and expansion of NATO as a way to counter the potential resurgence of Russia and its revisionist nationalistic ambitions. The end of Cold War and collapse of Soviet Union might have left Russia weakened, but it did not bring a definite end to the country’s nationalism and the threat it could pose in future to its former satellites and European stability in general. According to this perspective, NATO continued to exist and expand as a platform for nations under potential threat to come together and balance against the resurgent Russia. The U.S. government, first under the administration of George Bush Sr., and then under Bill Clinton, justified the support for NATO enlargement with their “New World Order” policy, entailing the advancement of security and stability and spread of democratic values. However, according to neorealist school of thought, it was the “growing doubts about democracy’s

prospects of success in Russia, and fear of the reemergence of an assertive nationalism there” that drove the United States to maintain the alliance and its ties in Europe in case Russia rose again. To quote the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who at the time stated the following: “you don’t cancel your home insurance policy just because there have been fewer burglaries on your street in the last 12 months!”

This reasoning ties to neorealists’ second major argument about the developments within the alliance. In this perspective, the persistence of NATO and its subsequent enlargement is seen as a way for the United States to reinforce its position in Europe and protect its interests and benefits. Following his earlier prediction that NATO will “dwindle [...] and ultimately disappear”, Kenneth Waltz in his later article argued that with the establishment of new unipolar international system the alliance had lost its original purpose and was now being used as a “hegemonic tool” through which the United States attempted to maximize its influence in Europe and promote its egoistic interests on the continent – “the explanation of NATO’s expansion is not found in NATO as an institution but in America’s power and purpose”. Some went even further, arguing that the U.S.’s involvement in Easter Europe and strive to spread democracy was more so connected to enabling the American military-industrial complex to access the markets of the former Eastern Bloc. Luca Ratti prioritizes realist and neorealist explanation of NATO advancement over those of liberal-institutionalism and constructivism, arguing that

“[…] the alliance has continued to provide the United States with a multilateral framework for the legitimization and exercise of its leadership and power. More specifically, the United States

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has continued to use NATO as a political mechanism to secure adherence to its strategies and foreign policy objectives, forestall the development of an independent European security and defense structure, and acquire strategic advantages useful for the projection of U.S. power towards Central Asia, the Middle East and the Caucasus.”

This way, neorealism was able to provide an explanation of the NATO enlargement that fit perfectly within its theoretical doctrine – the alliance persisted and expanded not because of its resilience as an institution, but rather to serve the interests of its dominant members, proving once again that international institutions are subordinate to the main actors, i.e. states.

A third explanation that has emerged from this theory focuses on the significant transformation that the alliance has undergone since the end of Cold War. According to neorealists, all their predictions and assumptions were based on the premise that NATO was a traditional military alliance, but the alliance’s very identity and function have changed so dramatically since the early 1990s, that it has rendered most of realists’ predictions misguided. Celeste Wallander (discussed further in next section) puts forward a theory about the institutional assets (general vs specific) and adaptability, coming to a conclusion that “the alliance will persist and outlive its original enemy/purpose, if it is successful in developing institutional practices (general assets) that will be cost effective and adaptive to the new security environment”. This is exactly what NATO has done since the end of Cold War and the disappearance of its main enemy. Unlike most ‘classical’ military alliances with a sole purpose of deterring a specific threat, NATO has emerged as a highly institutionalized security institution that has embarked on a variety of new missions in order to maintain its relevance - from peacekeeping to countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), to conflict prevention and conflict management in Europe and beyond. It was this transformation and the associated new

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32 Ratti, Post-Cold War NATO and international relations theory: The case for neoclassical realism, p. 102
multifaceted purpose and functions that ensured NATO’s survival. This particular argument views the enlargement of the alliance as one of the key parts of that transformation – this was how NATO adapted to the new security environment and provided its contribution to the stabilization of European affairs.

Following the theoretical background and discussions provided above, it is important we identify what proposal neorealist theory draws about the NATO enlargement process in general, a hypothesis we could apply to Georgia’s case later on. In line with neorealism’s fundamental premise, the Alliance will accept new member(s) if it ensures a successful balancing of a perceived threat. 34 Furthermore, neorealists expect the selection criteria and eventual membership decision to be based on the aspiring candidate’s strategic importance to the Alliance and its leading members (U.S. for example), rather than fulfillment of the formal requirements.

2.2. Neoliberal Institutionalism

2.1.1. Background

The ‘contemporary challenge to realism’ in the field of international relations has come from a broad family of liberal theories. The origins of liberal theory can be traced back to the political thought of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant.35 At the very foundation of liberalism there is a strong belief in the inherent good that can be found in human nature (liberalism if often referred to as idealism, a concept associated with the worldview of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, discussed in later sections). Liberals believe that there is at least a possibility for common progress since “international relations

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35 Kegley, World Politics: Trend and Transformation, p.32
are gradually becoming transformed such that they promote greater human freedom by establishing conditions of peace, prosperity, and justice”. They reject the flawed humanity and its lust for power as the underlying cause of conflicts, as argued by the realists, and rather point to the external conditions in which individuals live. Reforming these very conditions can enhance the prospects for peace and progress. War, conflicts, injustice can all be avoided through the institutional reform and collective action. Foremost reform will have to be a political one, i.e. establishing and maintaining stable democracies worldwide, since the democratic states were seen as inherently more peaceful than authoritarian states and unlikely to make wars with each other. According to Franklin Roosevelt, “the continued maintenance and improvement of democracy constitute the most important guarantee of international peace”. Another important reform liberalist highlighted as a necessity to ensure peace between states was market capitalism, as “nothing is more favorable to the rise of politeness and learning than a number of neighboring and independent states, connected by commerce”. Economic interdependence would create material incentive for states to avoid conflicts in their pursuit of economic prosperity. And finally, the third necessity the liberal thought advocated for the facilitation of cooperation and progress were the development of international institutions and transnational interaction. Based on the principle that a threat to peace anywhere is a threat to everyone, these institutions would mediate conflicts that threaten peaceful relations between the states.

Similar to realist school of thought, liberal tradition too has evolved over the years, creating various interpretations and disagreements within its theoretical framework. We have already discussed

37 Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, Essentials of international relations, p.76
38 Kegley, World Politics: Trend and Transformation, p.33
40 Kegley, World Politics: Trend and Transformation, p.34
some distinct strands of liberal IR theory focusing on different types of collective actions, barriers and possibilities. One strand argues for economic interdependence as a key to international peace, another strand (often associated with Wilsonian idealism) highlights the development of democracies worldwide, and third one advocates the international institutions as means to overcome selfish state behavior and ensure enduring cooperation. Still other strands focus on the role of communication and information in overcoming barriers to collective action; or stress the importance of education and knowledge in shaping the common values and priorities and so on. Whatever the differences in focus, all of these interpretations share a set of common arguments imbedded in the belief in the rationality of human beings, their inherently good characteristics and the ability to develop institutions to resolve international disputes.\footnote{Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, \textit{Essentials of international relations}, p.78}

However, liberalist theory came under intense scrutiny during the interwar period and World War II, as its underlying arguments failed to account for the outrageous events taking place on the global arena and the failure of League of Nations in maintaining the collective security. The unfolding reality contradicted liberals’ view of inherently good nature of humankind and belief in international institutions’ ability to ensure peace. As a result, a revised “new” perspective emerged within the liberal IR theory at the end of the twentieth century, one that challenged not only realism/neorealism’s view of global affairs but classical liberalism’s as well. Scholars of neoliberal institutionalism, such as Robert Keohane and Robert Axelrod, are primarily concerned with the rise, development and successful sustainment of international institutions, focusing on why the states would cooperate with each other given the nature of existing international system.\footnote{Simmons, B.A. and Martin, L.L. (2002). ‘International Organizations and Institutions’, in W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse and B.A. Simons (eds.), \textit{Handbook of International Relations}. London.: Sage Publications, p.192} The theory shares some underlying assumptions with both neorealism and liberalism. Robert Keohane, one of the most prominent theorist
within the neoliberal school, writes that he “borrows as much from realism as from liberalism”.

Despite these shared assumptions, NLI departs from both these theories on the conclusions it draws regarding the causes of organized activity between nations. For instance, neoliberal institutionalists agree with neorealists that states are the dominant actors in global affairs, acting in a rational self-interested way to promote their national priorities in an anarchic international system. Unlike realists, however, this belief does not prohibit neoliberal institutionalists from arguing that mutual cooperation is still possible. While agreeing on this point with classical liberalism, NLI scholars nevertheless depart from their assumption that the cause lies in humankind’s innate characteristics. Instead, neoliberal institutionalists base their argument on the concept of prisoner’s dilemma and propose that states’ cooperation is founded in the self-serving rationale – given the states’ continuous interactions with one another, actors realize the benefits of mutual cooperation in achieving their national interests.

Robert Jervis (1978), a prominent theorist whose Cooperation under the Security Dilemma is considered classic statement of the realist cooperation problematic, has dedicated his work to examining what challenges the security cooperation encounters in the anarchic international system, and comes to a conclusion that states can and will change their preferences based the outcomes (contradicting realists’ belief that states preferences are fixed, and thus unchangeable, by survival imperative in the anarchy).

To quote his work from 1999 - because neoliberal institutionalism believes “there are many mutually beneficial arrangement that states forgo because of the fear that others will cheat or take advantage of them, they see important gains to be made through the more artful arrangement of policies”. This is where the NLI theory stresses the importance and role of institutions in the international system. Defining ‘institutions’ as “persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity and shape

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expectations”, Robert Keohane and Craig Murphy, two of neoliberal institutionalism’s leading proponents, argue that international institutions alter states’ incentives, increasing the attraction to comply and minimizing the reasons to cheat, thus making it less risky for them to cooperate. Knowing that all its partners’ incentives are affected in the same way, states are in a position to predict the behavior of others. International institutions guarantee a stable framework of interactions, which offers both the history of past experiences of repetitive character and suggest that there will be an expectation of future interactions. The prospect of future encounters, the shadow of the future\textsuperscript{46}, minimizes the risks of the first round and reduces the likelihood of defection. Thus, by participating in institutions, states "signal their willingness to continue patterns of cooperation, and therefore reinforce expectations of stability".\textsuperscript{47} It is important to stress that neoliberal institutionalists believe states would enter cooperative relations even if they expect their partner to gain more from that interaction, thus placing ‘absolute gains’ above ‘relative gains’. This is another major difference with the neorealist approach, which argues that “relative gain is more important than absolute gain”\textsuperscript{48} in the anarchy of international system, where the gain for one state is likely to be perceived as a loss by another, as evidenced by Grieco’s argument that “the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is to prevent others from achieving advances in their relative capabilities”\textsuperscript{49}. NLI scholars, on the other hand, believe that states place priority on their individual absolute gains and disregard the gains obtained by others. As long as the cooperation results in an absolute gain for the state, the relative gain or loss is perceived as unimportant.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49}Grieco, Cooperation among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-tariff Barriers to Trade, p.39
In summary, neoliberal institutionalists argue that international institutions provide states with a stable framework of interactions, which given their repetitive character, evenly distributed information, reduced transaction and opportunity costs, and the accumulated gains over time, facilitate further cooperation between the states.⁵¹

2.2.2. Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Role of Alliances

Previous sections have illustrated the importance neoliberal institutionalism allocates to the international institutions and the role they play in the international system. But how to alliances in general, and NATO in particular, fit in NLI’s explanation of global affairs?

*Are alliances considered as institutions?* Neo-liberal institutionalism’s very definition of institutions, “persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations”, as discussed earlier, seems to perfectly cover the general functions performed by alliances. Moreover, the theory itself explicitly states that “alliances are institutions” ⁵². Having established this, it is important we take a look at how neoliberal institutionalism explains the formation, evolution, persistence and/or dissolution of alliances.

NLI scholars believe that alliances (and institutions in general) are formed primarily because states perceive them to be in their interest – either as a response to a threat, or as an attempt to balance the distribution of power between states in the international system⁵³. In the previous section, we took a look at the benefits institutions bring to its member states – reduced transaction costs, acting as

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catalysts for agreement, minimizing the uncertainty about the intentions of other states and thus allowing to predict their behavior. All in all, neoliberal institutionalism believes institutions allow states to maximize their long-term gains, which largely outweigh the costs/constraints associated with the membership in those institutions (the loss of freedom of action, risk of being entangled in external conflict, etc). These advantages that membership brings to the states are the reason alliances are formed, but they also explain why alliances persist even if circumstances in the international system change (disappearance of a common threat, for example). Keohane asserts that "institutions should persist as long as, but only as long as, their members have incentives to maintain them”\(^54\), therefore states will withdraw from the institution if membership in it no longer helps them in achieving their self-interests. However, even with this in mind, the dissolution of an institution or an alliance, according to NLI theory, is not a straightforward process. In addition to the institutional inertia that contributes to the persistence of an alliance, neoliberal institutionalists maintain that given the costs and difficulties of creating a new alliance, states have more incentives to maintain an already existing one, since they are more costly to create than to maintain: "it may be rational to obey their rules if the alternative is their breakdown, since even an imperfect (institution) may be superior to any politically feasible replacement”.\(^55\) Alliances can therefore be rather resistant to a change and potential demise even given the changed circumstances like the disappearance of the overwhelming threat.

Keohane’s explanation of the durability of existing alliances and the states’ decision when to abandon or maintain an alliance has been further developed by Celeste Wallander. In her *Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War*\(^56\) Wallander differentiates between the institutions’ general assets and specific assets (its norms, rules, and procedures) and their impact on institutions’ ability to adapt to new environments. Assets that are “specific to a given relationship,

\(^54\) Keohane, *International Institutions: Two Approaches*, p.387
\(^55\) Keohane, *After Hegemony. Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, p.100
location, or purpose” result in more productive and successful transactions, but are not likely to be useful in chance of a change. General assets, on the other hand, are not as effective for the particular transactions, but since they are not tied to a specific relationship, location or purpose, they can be applied across a broad range and variety of activities, and are thus more adaptable to new purposes. Wallander ties this ‘asset specificity’ to institutions’ ability to adapt, which in return is seen as a determinant of their continued existence. The alliance will persist and outlive its original enemy/purpose, she argues, if it is successful in developing institutional practices (general assets) that will be cost effective and adaptive to the new security environment.

2.2.3. Neoliberal Institutionalism on NATO’s Post-Cold War Evolution and Enlargement

Unlike neorealist, neoliberal institutionalist theory put forward far more optimistic predictions about the future of the Atlantic Alliance following the end of Cold War. In the previous sections when we explored how neoliberal institutionalists theorize about the alliances and international institutions in general, we came to a conclusion that the institutions allow states to maximize their long-term gains and that they will "[...] persist as long as their members have incentives to maintain them". In addition, our discussion has shown that according to NLI perspective, because it’s more costly to create a new institution than to maintain an existing one, an already established alliance by its very nature becomes robust and ‘sticky’. Member states have more incentives to retain and adapt existing institutional structure given their “sunk costs”, such as material resources, the invested time, political reputation and so on. As was the case with NATO in the post-Cold War period, dissolving the

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57 Ibid., p.708
58 Keohane, *International Institutions: Two Approaches*, p.387
alliance and creating an alternative structure did not make any political or financial sense for the member states.

The neoliberal institutionalist reasoning that ‘the fact that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization already exists will make it unlikely to disappear’ ties to another reason the theory strongly doubted the alliance’s disbandment, namely its highly institutionalized character. NATO had developed and provided its members with the unified military command structure, as well as precise rules and joint decision-making procedures for the coordination of security policies.\(^{60}\) Moreover, by the time the Soviet Union collapsed NATO had already set up an extensive and complicated web of institutional structures and bureaucracies, both civilian and military, with almost 3,000 staff members employed at its headquarters at the time.\(^{61}\) Theorists maintain that such institutionalized and highly bureaucratic organizations are not likely to disband, as they have more incentives to redesign their missions in order to remain relevant.\(^{62}\)

We have previously discussed the neorealist argument that NATO’s survival could be explained by its evolution from a traditional military alliance to an organization that was able to adapt to the new security environment and expand its mission. A similar concept can be traced in neoliberal institutionalist reasoning as well, but with a certain difference. The NLI theorists expected the Alliance to persist and flourish due to its multi-faceted functions and responsibilities, and the ability to adjust to the new strategic environment. However, contrary to the neorealists, neoliberal institutionalists never saw NATO as a mere military alliance with the sole purpose of deterring the Soviet threat. Robert Keohane and Celeste Wallander in their work “Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions”


\(^{62}\) NATO’s ‘high level of institutionalization’ as a factor in the potential persistence of the Alliance was noted even by the neorealist representatives. See Walt, M. (1989), "Alliances in Theory and Practice: What Lies Ahead?", Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 43, No. 1, p.11.
differentiate between two separate entities – alliances that address the threats specifically, and security management institutions which are created to respond to a variety of risks.\(^6^3\) In their eyes, NATO belongs to the second category. Deterring the threat from Soviet Union was undoubtedly one of its primary missions; however, the Atlantic Alliance from its very formation had a broader scope of responsibilities, which included developing the cooperation and stable civil-military relations between the member states, as well as addressing the mistrust and security competition between them.\(^6^4\) For example, Wallander uses the example of how North Atlantic Council and other NATO bodies navigated the relations between Germany and the rest of West European states, minimizing the distrust and security/balance-of-power concerns while enabling the successful reintegration of reunified Germany into Europe. Moreover, the end of Cold War left the Euro-Atlantic community facing new threats and a variety of non-military risks, from concerns about the political and economic instability in eastern nations, potential refugee problems, raising fears about spread of fighting from former Yugoslavia to larger regional war, etc.\(^6^5\) NATO enabled a common cooperation and management of these issues, and abandoning the Alliance was not in the member states’ best interests.

The neoliberal institutionalist assertion that alliances and international institutions allow states to maximize their long-term gains and that states will maintain them as long as they have incentives for it leads to the following assumption: NLI would argue that the NATO enlargement will be based on the cost-benefit calculations, but unlike neorealist hypothesis that focuses on balance of threat as the main determinant of alliance choices, neoliberal institutionalists consider more factors in the equation, particularly profits and interests.

\(^6^3\) Wallander and Keohane, *Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions*

\(^6^4\) Rauchhaus, *Explaining NATO Enlargement*, pp.13-14; Gheciu, *NATO in the “new Europe”: the politics of international socialization after the Cold War*, p.217

\(^6^5\) Rauchhaus, *Explaining NATO Enlargement*, p.14
2.3. Social Constructivism

2.3.1. Background

Starting from late 1980s and early 1990s, the dominant theories within the IR discipline (including the approaches we have reviewed so far) have been repeatedly challenged by the constructivism and its particular approach to international affairs. A relatively new addition to the IR family, the constructivist theory follows the reasoning of scholars such as Alexander Wendt, Nicholas Onuf (who coined the term in 1989), Peter Katzenstein, Ted Hopf, Friedrich Kratochwil, and others, and highlights the social structures and social interaction as the driving forces in international politics.

Although often considered a relatively new theory, the origins of constructivist school of thought can be traced back to Immanuel Kant’s idea of “pacific federation”, or a more recent notion of Karl Deutsch’s “pluralistic security communities” in the 1950s. The underlying argument was that democratic nations that share common values, norms and identity are likely to create international institutions to resolve their disagreements through processes of peaceful change, rather than physical force.\footnote{Rauchhaus, \textit{Explaining NATO Enlargement}, p.17} Constructivists reject the materialist view held by (neo)realist and (neo)liberal schools of thought, which as we have seen highlight the primacy of power, national interests, cost-benefit analysis, trade, etc in the analysis of international system. Instead, they argue that actors, their identities, interests and dispositions are all product of social construction that came into being as a result of specific historical processes. This is not to say that power and other material factors are not important factors to consider in the international system, but rather that they gain their meaning, and thus importance, in the context of ideas that make them up. In other words, ideas and social interpretations \textit{define} the meaning of those material factors.\footnote{Wendt, A. (1999). \textit{Social Theory of International Politics}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., pp.135–136} As claimed by constructivists, “how the
material world shapes, changes, and affects human (and international) interaction, and is affected by it, depends on prior and changing epistemic and normative interpretations of the material world.68

In order to show the importance of interpretations, beliefs and expectations in the world of international affairs, Alexander Wendt, one of the most-influential theorists of the social-constructivist approach to the study of international relations, asks us to consider the following statement: “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons”.69 While the statement might seem self-evident to us, the purely materialist approaches that focus primarily on physical objects and factors, will have hard time explaining why to the U.S. a fewer North Korean weapons will be more threatening that a higher number of British weapons. The difference here is the social context and interpretation of the given situation. The United States would be more threatened by North Korean missiles, because there is a wide-spread expectation among the American leadership that North Korea is more likely to resort to hostility and aggression than Great Britain. This expectation is based on their interpretations of the United States’ relationships with both countries, history, past practices and behavior, as a result of which the Great Britain was identified as a “friend”, whereas “North Korea” was identified as a potential “enemy”. This illustrates constructivist argument that actors acquire (and assign) identities on the basis of socially constructed structures and interactions.70

The constructivist explanation of the social construction of identities extends to that of states’ national interests as well, or as Jeffrey Legro puts it “new foreign policy ideas are shaped by preexisting dominant ideas and their relationship to experienced events”.71 The theory further challenge (neo)realist assertion that states’ preferences are fixed due to the survival imperative in the

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anarchy, and argues that since states’ national interests are also a product of social and historical construction, they are subject to a potential change. Let’s consider Wendt’s example once again: the United State’s perception of North Korea as a threat and the expectations of its potential aggression are not ‘fixed’ or ‘given’ facts, but rather a product of the continuous interactions between the two countries. These interactions and their social context might remain the same, or change. This way, constructivists put forward a less rigid and more dynamic view of the international system as opposed to (neo)realists’ notion of ‘anarchy’.

The above-mentioned arguments indicate how constructivist approach theorizes about the nature of international system. To cite Alexander Wendt’s famous phase, “anarchy is what states make of it”. With this statement, Wendt challenges Waltz’s notions of inherently anarchic structure of world politics, self-help system and power struggle. Instead Wendt argues that whether the anarchy is defined by conflict or cooperation cannot be decided a priori, since this will depend on the interactions that will take place between the actors (i.e. states). “Anarchy is what states make of it”, may very well mean an ‘anarchy of friends’ or ‘one of enemies’ according to Wendt, meaning the international system can be characterized by cooperation and/or conflict based on what social structures are formed as a result of states’ processes of interaction. The anarchy will be induced with conflict if states behave towards one another with hostility/fear, or it will be characterized by cooperation if nations approach each other with cooperative attitudes. This is where constructivists once again highlight the role collective identity among states and their shared norms and values. According to Ted Hopf, another leading figure in constructivist theory, in the international system where states have formed a partnership and a mutual understanding of each other, cooperation will

72 Wendt, Constructing International Politics, p.78.
74 Wendt, Constructing International Politics, p.78
prevail. Further extending liberal “democratic peace” theory, Thomas Risse-Kappen argues this argument is particularly true when countries share common democratic identities, since these norms “insure the non-violent resolution of conflicts” and “reduce uncertainties about peaceful intentions”.

“Democracies view each other as peaceful, which substantially reduces the significance of the ‘security dilemma’ among them and, thus, removes a major obstacle to stable security cooperation”.76

2.3.2. Social Constructivism and the Role of Alliances

The above-discussed arguments about the importance of states’ shared identities and values for the international cooperation brings us closer to constructivism’s view of international institutions and the role they place in world politics. Constructivists’ views on institutions go hand in hand with their explanation of the process of ‘international socialization’. Instead of considering the functional efficiency of an organization, its level of institutionalization, or existence of common external threat as the reason of the institutions’ existence, constructivism examines what role these organizations play in shaping states’ identities and interests. According to this view, international institutions express the values and norms embedded in their given international communities. They then transmit these norms and values to the states, which end up shaping states’ behavior and its national interests.77 This way, international institutions ‘teach’ and promote the norms and values, which afterwards decisively influence state’s interests and policies. Constructivists highlight the international organizations’ prevailing ability “to impose definitions of member characteristics and purposes upon the governments of its member states”.78

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Martha Finnemore, a distinguished scholar within social constructivism, explains this process as “international socialization”. As described above, international socialization is regarded as a policy employed by international institutions to transmit the norms and values of the given international community to the individual states.\textsuperscript{79} This can be performed either through an active role, as institutional agencies persuade target nations to adopt the normative rules, or a passive one, by institution and its members acting as a role model for the other states to follow.

Switching the focus of analysis from the international institutions to the “target” states (the aspiring members), Frank Schimmelfennig argues that for these nations the membership in those particular alliances/institutions/organizations serves as a source of identification and legitimation – “being accepted as a member of a group of like-minded countries assures governments and societies of their identity and of the legitimacy of their political and social values”.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, the membership and the socialization into a shared set of normative rules ensure that the competing (potentially even conflicting) identity and values do not take hold in the aspiring member state. The fear of the establishment of ‘unfavorable’ value system and identities is a crucial factor for consideration, and one of the main drivers behind international socialization process - both for domestic leadership and wider international community as well. As discussed earlier in the chapter, socialization of the new states/members to the democratic norms and values of an international community enables the ‘security dilemma’ to be overcome and cooperation to prevail.

Such concerns were of particular importance to Western leaders in the immediate post-Cold War period after the collapse of Soviet Union and fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. On their quest to expand the Western international community in ‘new Europe’, European and Euro-Atlantic organizations and institutions embarked on a mission to induct former socialist states to their


\textsuperscript{80} Schimmelfennig, \textit{Nato enlargement: A constructivist explanation}, p.213
liberal democratic standards. The socialization process has proven to be successful as so many nations from former Eastern Bloc have effectively adopted the Western-based normative rules and collective standards of proper behavior, transforming into legitimate democracies and market economies. In the following chapter we will be taking a look at what role was played by NATO in this region-wide transformation, and how the Atlantic Alliance and its post-Cold War evolution are explained by the social constructivist theory.

2.3.3. Social Constructivism on NATO’s Post-Cold War Evolution and Enlargement

In line with social constructivism’s fundamental concepts and arguments discussed earlier, theory does not regard NATO as a mere traditional military alliance, but rather as an organization of international community that shares common liberal values, democratic identity and cultural practices. While it’s usually the ‘Article 5’ of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) that gets most attention from scholars, politicians, and wider public, the preamble of the document outlines further purpose of the Alliance, focusing on the significance of values and norms of their community. By signing the Treaty, member states declared that:

“They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.”

The Article 2 of the document further reasserts these values, as signatory states proclaim to contribute to “strengthening their free institutions, [and] bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded”. These values that the Alliance was founded on in 1949 - democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law – had allowed member states to forge a

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81 Schimmelfennig et al., *International Socialization in Europe: European Organizations, Political Conditionality and Democratic Change*, p.1
83 Ibid.
common democratic identity. It was NATO's collective identity, based on shared democratic values, mutual trust and sympathies, and “transcending relationships built on particular interest calculations” that helped avoid and resolve conflict and disagreements between the members of the Alliance throughout the Cold War. Moreover, as constructivist scholar Thomas Risse-Kappen argues, NATO’s collective identity was constructed in opposition to Soviet-led “Other”, thus it succeeded not only in defining the nature of the Alliance itself (NATO as a democratic alliance), but in creating the “Other” identity of the enemy as well. Threat was as much consequence as cause of the North Atlantic Alliance”, according to Risse-Kappen.

On the basis of above-mentioned assumptions, constructivist theory was best equipped to explain the unexpected end of Cold War, an event that the rest of international relations theories had failed to anticipate. According to Stephen Walt’s widely cited article “International relations: One world, many theories”, constructivists highlighted the role of new ideas and values that dominated Soviet Union’s foreign policy in its last years, namely Mikhail Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” doctrine. In the late 1980s under Gorbachev’s leadership, a series of new reforms were introduced in USSR’s domestic and foreign policies, aimed at improving Soviet standards of living and improving relations with the United States. Within this doctrine, the nation was embracing new concepts and ideas such as “common security”, “human rights”, “political pluralism” and so on. Constructivists argue that it was this newly founded identity and value system within the Soviet leadership that resulted in the peaceful end of the Cold War. Wendt himself addresses this particular event in international relations

and links it to how social structures and collective meaning shape state’s actions – “if the United States and the Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, the cold war is over”. ⁸⁷

Constructivists go on to reject neorealists’ assumption that with the disappearance of common enemy, old national rivalries in Europe will reemerge or that Western states will start balancing against hegemonic United States. Instead, the theory maintains that the shared identity and values that this transatlantic ‘security community’ has created as a result of decades of cooperation, as well as established social interactions and relationships between its members, will ensure the survival and prosperity of the Atlantic Alliance in future. ⁸⁸ As Luca Ratti states, “its durability is the living demonstration of the causal preponderance of normative and social over material structures”. ⁸⁹

So how does social constructivism explain NATO’s post-Cold War enlargement? Unsurprisingly, contrary to realists, constructivist scholars vehemently supported the Alliance’s enlargement policy. In their perspective, the goal of this process was the international socialization of new member states into the basic norms and values of their Western international community. By expanding eastward, NATO was not only spreading its liberal-democratic values, but also the institutional norms by which Alliance members guide their behavior. As Schimmelfennig argues, security communities such as NATO embody collective norms that define to its member states the proper behavior standards in the international system. The aspiring members are thus socialized into these democratic norms to act as the guiding principles of their actions, instead of what their self interested preferences could have been. ⁹⁰ Risse-Kappen’s constructivist interpretation of ‘democratic peace’ concept, discussed earlier, reinforces this argument:

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⁸⁷ Wendt in Jackson and Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theories and Approaches*, p.165
“Democracies externalize their internal norms when cooperating with each other. Power asymmetries should be mediated by norms of democratic decision making among equals emphasizing persuasion, compromise, and the non-use of force or coercion....Norms of regular consultation, of joint consensus-building, and nonhierarchy should legitimize and enable allied influence.”

After the end of Cold War and collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, expanding the Euro-Atlantic security community and exporting its democratic values and norms to the former states of Eastern Bloc became an important mission of the Alliance. Successful integration of its former adversaries, who had abandoned their “other” identity and instead adopted Western-based norms and values served as a victory for the Euro-Atlantic community. Ronald Asmus, a key figure within U.S. State Department on NATO expansion policy and its vehement advocate, made the following comment in 1996:

“[…] prospect of NATO enlargement has already contributed enormously to reform and reconciliation in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Black Sea, foreign and defense policies are being reconstructed in order to bring these countries into line with alliance norms. Rarely has a Western policy had such an impact in eliciting such positive change.”

Constructivists would argue that their arguments are further supported by the empirical evidence. With NATO members currently including 29 states, the Alliance has admitted 13 new nations since the end of Cold War, more than doubling its previous membership. The accession path includes a number of programs and instruments, specifically designed to assist aspiring members in adopting NATO’s practices, principles and functions, as well as ensure that candidate states have successfully internalized Alliances’ identifying norms and values.

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Thus, let’s summarize the above provided theoretical background and discussion with the general hypothesis that social constructivism puts forward about NATO enlargement process. According to it, NATO will admit a new member, once the aspiring candidate has successfully adopted and internalized Euro-Atlantic security community’s norms and values.

In the previous sections, we have taken a look at how three dominant theories in International Relations discipline explain the functioning of international system, the basis for states’ cooperation, and the role of institutions and alliances in this process. We examined how they theorize about the evolution of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization following the end of Cold War, and more specifically what the IR discipline believes to be the purpose and result of the Alliance’s enlargement policy. This has brought us closer to our case: to what extent do the neorealist, neoliberal institutionalist and social constructivist theories’ explanations apply and account for NATO-Georgia’s decade-long cooperation, challenges and prospects for future relations? In order to answer these questions, we first take a look at what the NATO enlargement has meant (how it was perceived, what purposed it served) to the major actors in our research question – the United State, Russia and Georgia itself.
3. U.S. Perspective on NATO Enlargement:

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as we know it today, was officially founded on April 4, 1949 by twelve original member states, including the United States, Canada and a number of Western European countries. The new alliance aimed to preserve its members’ political and military security, “safeguard the Allies’ common values of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes”, as well as spread these norms and values to the rest of Euro-Atlantic community. NATO was based on the fundamental premise of the ‘collective defense’, meaning that an attack against one would mean an attack against all members, which ensured that the American “nuclear umbrella” was now successfully covering the majority of Western European countries as well. This was foremost a response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Indeed, the Alliance’s primary mission was seen as the deterrence of USSR’s threat and its advancements into Western Europe. However, starting from late 1980s a series of events dramatically shifted the state of global affairs. The year 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, followed by Germany’s reunification in 1990, and already in 1991 both USSR and Warsaw Treaty Organization, the very threats NATO was created to deter, have ceased to exist. And with that, the bipolar world order that defined the international system throughout the Cold War had come to an end. As we have seen from our previous chapter, many expected NATO to share the fate of its major adversary and gradually become nothing but a Cold-War relic. However, instead of being disbanded, the alliance has evolved and emerged as the dominant cooperative security system in Europe. Amidst the chaos and instability that followed the collapse of Soviet Union and the ongoing changes in the

94 The founding members that signed the North Atlantic Treaty included the United States, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.
97 Ghesius, NATO in the “New Europe”: The Politics of International Socialization after the Cold War
international system, the Atlantic Alliance was seen as a beacon of certainty and stability, offering a “uniquely powerful venue in which the new situation could be defined, policies pronounced, forces mobilized”.  

It has been argued by a number of scholars that the end of Cold War brought about a drastic change in the direction of American foreign policy. From the end of 1980s and all throughout the 1990s, the United States pursued objectives, perceived by many as being in line with Wilsonian idealist beliefs. Founded on the premise of Western liberal traditions, Wilsonian idealism believes that global peace can be achieved through the establishment of democratic institutions worldwide. According to this doctrine, “the United States had the ‘obligation’ to guide the world to a democratic peace”\textsuperscript{100}. This was the ideology adopted by American leadership in its approach towards the newly emerged Russian Federation and former states of the Eastern Bloc.  

The nation’s foreign policy, first under the administration of President George Bush Sr. and then President Bill Clinton, were based on the idealist objectives such as American-system based “New World Order”, the spread of democratic values and advancement of the stability and security in post-Cold War Europe. NATO enlargement was seen as means to achieving these goals. As President Clinton addressed UN for the first time during his presidency in 1993, he asserted that:

“we now seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under the free institutions, for our dream is of a day when the opinions and energies of every person in the world will be given free

expression in a world of thriving democracies that cooperate with each other and live in peace”.

The post-Cold War evolution of the alliance started at the 1990 London summit, when the NATO Heads of State and Government began initiating new post-Cold War partnerships by extending “the hand of friendship to former Warsaw Pact adversaries”. At the next NATO Summit in Rome in 1991, the North Atlantic cooperation Council (NACC) was founded, designed to establish an open dialogue and promote the cooperation between the Alliance and the states of former Eastern Bloc. The Central and Eastern European nations’ political, economic and social instabilities, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes were perceived by NATO leaders as the main threats and risks that could potentially dominate the new security environment created by the end of Cold War. Therefore integrating these countries into the Euro-Atlantic community with its ‘democratic’ norms and values became crucial in order to ensure the security, stability and prosperity in post-War Europe.

Based on this rationale, the next item on NATO’s agenda, following the foundation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) at the Rome Summit in 1991, was the initiation of Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Introduced in January 1994, PfP initiative opened the Alliance’s door to unlimited associate membership, by providing a platform for the “enhanced political and military cooperation for joint multilateral crisis management activities” between the member states of the Alliance and its new partners in the former communist bloc, as well as some of Europe's traditionally neutral nations. The partnership program also aimed to lay the foundation for the upcoming expansion by preparing the aspiring nations for the future membership. NATO leadership’s commitment to the evolution and enlargement of the alliance was further attested later that year.

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102 Bill Clinton, “Confronting the Challenge of A Broader World”, Address to the UN General Assembly, September 27, 1993, Dispatch (U.S. State Department), vol.4, no.39, p.650
(December 1994), when North Atlantic Cooperation Council launched the official “Study on NATO Enlargement” designed to “determine how NATO will be enlarged, the principles to guide this process, and the implications of membership”. The findings of the Study, shared with the partners and wider public in September 1995, outlined the very goal and guiding principles of the enlargement process, that is “to build an improved security architecture” and “to provide increased stability and security for all in the Euro-Atlantic area, without recreating dividing lines”. The Study discussed the “why” and “how” questions of the enlargement process, highlighting such important steps as encouragement and support of the democratic reforms, fostering the norms of cooperation, consultation and consensus among in new members, promoting the good relations between the neighboring countries, increasing transparency in defense planning and military budgets and so on. The document also included a list of political and military criteria that aspiring countries would have to meet for membership.

By the time NACC had launched the “Study on NATO Enlargement” initiative, the Council was already comprised of thirty eight countries (Alliance members, Central and Eastern European nations, and all of the Soviet successor states, including the Baltic Republics), offering a platform for consultations on a variety of military, political and social concerns. Following such a rapid development of NATO’s post-Cold War agenda and rising concerns about Russia’s reaction, the Alliance made a conscious effort to establish a new partnership with the former adversary. NATO leadership sought a way to create a particular political platform that would engage Russia in the Euro-Atlantic affairs through means of regular consultations. The result was the Permanent Joint Council

107 Lo Manto, NATO Looks East: A Realist Reassessment, p.104
(PJC) (later replaced by NATO-Russia Council, NRC), a separate forum for consultation and cooperation between NATO and Russian Federation, which came into effect when both sides signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security on May 27, 1997. The Act committed both parties “to build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security”\textsuperscript{109}. Preparing the agreement was a lengthy and difficult process as two sides had very different objectives regarding the NATO’s enlargement policy. As already mentioned, fostering closer relations and improved cooperation with Russia was one of the priorities on the Washington’s foreign policy agenda. At the same time, no non-member state had the right or power to dictate Alliance’s policies on its membership or enlargement. In the end, the Western side hoped the Founding Act would secure Russia’s non-opposition to the Alliance’s enlargement eastward by giving Kremlin reassurances once again that NATO had no intentions of placing nuclear weapons on the territory of the new member states.\textsuperscript{110}

With Russia mollified, the next NATO Summit, held in Madrid in July 1997, already saw the beginning of the accession talks with the Visegrad nations, with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland officially joining the Alliance in 1999. Following the first round of enlargement, the U.S. State Department released an official statement on February 11, 1998, outlining the benefits the expansion policy brings to the Alliance’s current and new members, the United States’ national security, and of course to the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area in general.\textsuperscript{111} By referring to NATO as “the most effective institution for protecting security of the transatlantic area”, President Bill Clinton argued that the admission of Visegrad states would guarantee the long-term stability in the Central Europe. The membership criteria alone requires the aspiring candidates to resolve any ethnic and territorial

\textsuperscript{110} Tsereteli, The Impact of NATO Enlargement on the U.S.-Russia relations  
disputes, thus preventing any potential conflicts from rising in the region and further stabilizing former Eastern Bloc area. As then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated, the Alliance enlargement would finally erase the Cold War dividing line and

“[…] do for Europe’s east what the old NATO did for Europe’s west: vanquish old hatreds, promote integration, create a secure environment for prosperity, and deter violence in the region where two world wars and the Cold War began. Just the prospect of NATO enlargement has given Central and Eastern Europe greater stability than it has seen in this century”.\(^{112}\)

Furthermore, the expansion policy was seen as strengthening the Atlantic Alliance itself, as NATO’s military ranks were now enhanced by additional 200,000 troops from the three new members.\(^{113}\)

However, President Clinton and Secretary Albright’s optimism about the future of the Alliance was not shared by everyone in U.S. leadership. As the member states prepared to start the accession negotiations for first round of enlargement in summer of 1997, a group comprised of fifty distinguished American diplomats, policy experts, academicians, arms control specialists, as well as current and former politicians representing both political parties issued a public letter to the Clinton administration opposing NATO’s expansion policy and demanding a more cautious approach on the matter.\(^{114}\) Seeing it as “neither necessary nor desirable”, the letter outlined the group’s opposition to what they perceived to be a “policy error of historic proportions”. They asserted that the enlargement eastward would not only compromise the Atlantic Alliance’s security and military capabilities, but it would also obligate the Unites States (by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty) to ensure the safety of the new partners, many of whom faced significant territorial and ethnic disputes. In addition to these fears, the authors of the letter highlighted the impact this expansion policy will have on the West’s

\(^{113}\) State Department Official Release, *NATO Enlargement*
\(^{114}\) Sullivan, *U.S.-Russia Relations: From Idealism to Realism*, p.88
relations with Russia. As the former Cold War adversary was no longer in any position to pose a credible threat (military or otherwise) to its former satellite nations or Euro-Atlantic community in general, NATO’s enlargement eastward would only further ignite the anti-Western rhetoric among the Kremlin’s political elites, jeopardizing the potential cooperation in future. For instance, Stanley Resor, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arms Control Association, remarked that the enlargement policy would put under question the ratification of STAR II (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), a bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Russia to reduce total deployed strategic nuclear weapons to 3,000-3,500. The letter concluded that instead of unifying and strengthening the region, the NATO expansion was likely to result in a destabilized and weakened Europe.

A strong opposition to the enlargement policy was also expressed by the ‘father’ of US’s “containment” policy during the Cold War, George F. Kennan. A distinguished American policy expert, diplomat and historian, Kennan viewed the NATO’s expansion as “the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era”, “tragic mistake” that could lead to a potential crisis in future. Kennan did not believe that at its current state, Russia posed a threat that Eastern Europe needed to be protected from, admitting those countries to the collective defense alliance was therefore unnecessary. Instead, the only thing the expansion policy would succeed in is weakening the support of political elites most inclined toward liberal democracy, providing support to anti-Western and nationalistic voices in Kremlin and push Russia closer to a potential military alliance with China.

116 Sullivan, U.S.-Russia Relations: From Idealism to Realism, p.87 in Tsereteli, The Impact of NATO Enlargement on the U.S.-Russia relations
118 Lo Manto, NATO Looks East: A Realist Reassessment, p.105
4. Russia’s Perspective on NATO Enlargement

In statecraft and strategy paradoxes abound. Almost every achievement contains within its success the seeds of a future problem”

– James A. Baker (the former US Secretary of State)

With the end of Cold War and dissolution of the USSR, a new player emerged on the international arena. “The first task of the new regime was to declare Russia as the successor state of the Soviet Union that gave the Russian Federation the Soviet place in all international organizations, acceptance of Soviet treaties and obligations, and responsibility for the nuclear arsenal on Russian territory”.119 In line with Mikhail Gorbachev’s previous “New Thinking” doctrine, the foreign policy of the new state was directed at the cooperative security and strengthening ties with the West120. As then-Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev stated in 1993, his main foreign policy guidelines was to “join the club of recognized democratic states”.121 Russia’s rapprochement with the Western world was further reinforced with the election of Boris Yeltsin in June 1991. President Yeltsin, along with his key advisors such as Foreign Minister Kozyrev and Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, continued pursing a pro-Western approach, which largely focused on the new foreign policy objectives and market economic reforms. It is worth noting that the new leadership’s efforts and approach did result in Russian receiving a significant financial aid from the United States. For instance, within The FREEDOM Support Act122 of 1992, the US contributed roughly $4.5 billion as a part of multilateral G-7 $24 billion package of support for Russia.123 Later in 1993, during the first official meeting

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120 Ponsard, Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security, p.62
122 The Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act
between President Yeltsin and President Clinton, Russia was promised $1.6 billion package of humanitarian aid.\textsuperscript{124} U.S. even supported the Russia’s request of assistance from various international institutions.\textsuperscript{125}

When pursuing improved cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community, the Russian leadership of course realized it would have to make significant concessions on their part. These compromises included reductions in nuclear and conventional weapons, the surrender of the Soviet glacias in the late 1980s, Russia’s agreement to German reunification and united Germany’s admittance to NATO in 1990, the support for UNSC resolutions against Iraq during the Gulf Crisis, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{126} All these concessions were made under the assumption that Russia would emerge on the European security arena as an equal partner with the according decision-making powers.

However, Kremlin’s expectations of the equal partnership in the post-War international system did not materialize. A number of scholars\textsuperscript{127} agree on the observation that following the collapse of Soviet Union, Russia’s relations with the West resembled those of ‘junior’ and ‘senior’ partners, or as Pouliot argues, in the initial post-Cold War period “NATO was able to steer Russian foreign policy in a way reminiscent of the archetypical master-apprentice relationship”.\textsuperscript{128} The perception that the new leadership was turning Russia into Washington’s ‘puppet on a string’\textsuperscript{129} provoked right-wing opposition within against President Yeltsin and his team. The crisis escalated in September 1993,
when Yeltsin decided to dissolve Duma (Russian Parliament), which in turn led to armed rebellion against the ruling administration. While Moscow succeeded in avoiding larger conflict and restoring the order, this revolt, coupled with rise in domestic criticism December 1993 parliamentary elections (which resulted in support for Yeltsin’s nationalist and communist opponents) significantly changed President’s approach to pro-Western policies.130

From that point onwards, the NATO expansion eastwards became considered as a threat to Russia’s national interests. In November 1993, the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) led by Yevgeny Primakov issued an important report focusing on what implications the NATO enlargement will have for Russia’s security. While acknowledging that “Russia has no right to dictate to the sovereign states of Central and Eastern Europe whether or not they should join NATO”,131 the report did feature a strong opposition to Alliance’s enlargement policy, viewing it as a means of isolating Russia in the region. The initiation of Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994 put some critics at ease, as it was seen as a more acceptable alternative to the enlargement itself. However, even the PfP initiative caused the controversy among the Kremlin’s political elite. Presenting it as a compromise did not change the fact that PfP program was one of the steps on the path to official membership. Officials in Moscow also believed that Russia, as a nuclear power, should enjoy certain rights and status in the Program compared to the rest of the partners.132 And lastly, the former superpower could not overlook the rising number of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) members in PfP program, which it viewed as “an infringement on Russia’s sphere of influence” in its near abroad.133

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130 Cotey and Averre, New Security Challenges in Postcommunist Europe: Securing Europe's East, p.123
132 Ponsard, Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the gap, p.67
Russia’ very own membership in the PfP initiative was explained by the Kremlin’s hopes to influence the expansion policy of the Alliance from within.\(^{134}\)

The growing disillusionment with the Western promises and the rising domestic criticism led to a dramatic change in Yeltsin’s foreign policy in mid-1990s. After reelection in 1996, the President fired pro-Western Kozyrev and instead appointed then-Director of Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Yevgeny Primakov as the new Foreign Minister.\(^{135}\) As a long-term opponent of NATO’s enlargement into former Eastern Bloc, Primakov abandoned previous pro-Western approach in favour of ‘multilateralist’ foreign policy. Multilateralism was designed to counterbalance the American hegemony with Russia-China-India strategic partnership. In the pursuit to gain public’s support for the new policies, Kremlin relied heavily on the Russian media. As the press spread the anti-Western and anti-NATO rhetoric among the wider population, denouncing the Alliance as an American attempt to gain influence in Central and Eastern Europe, Kremlin succeeded in strengthening the old deep-rooted division between “us” and “them”.\(^{136}\) This can be seen in the findings of the survey taken later in 1999, revealing that 53 percent now held negative attitude towards the West, with only 33 percent having positive opinion about the former adversary.\(^{137}\)

The NATO-Russia Founding Act, the product of lengthy and intense negotiations between Kremlin and Alliance leaders, was finally signed May 27, 1997. Although the Act stressed that both parties were determined to “build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security”, each side had their own objectives they tried to solidify with this initiative. As NATO leaders tried to secure Moscow’s non-opposition to Alliance’

\(^{134}\) Antonenko, O. (1999-2000) “Russia, NATO and European Security after Kosovo”, *Survival*, vol.41, no.4., p.128

\(^{135}\) Sullivan, *U.S.-Russia Relations: From Idealism to Realism*, p. 83

\(^{136}\) Sullivan, *U.S.-Russia Relations: From Idealism to Realism*, pp.86-87

expansion in Central Europe, Kremlin aimed to gain more decision-making power within the European security community\textsuperscript{138}. While the signing of the Founding Act is often characterized as the former adversaries finally "burying" a Cold War rivalry, the agreement was perceived as a bitter disappointment in Moscow. The final Act gave Russia a rather limited role in the decision-making process – it could consult on a variety of issues and topics, but it would not have the power to block the policies it opposed, thus giving Kremlin “a voice, but not a veto”.\textsuperscript{139} President Yeltsin once again became a target of extreme criticism at home for signing such unfavorable agreement for Russia. His opponents argued the President agreed on such humiliating conditions in order to ensure the continued financial support from the Western nations, as well as acceptance to G7 (Group of Seven) and WTO (World Trade Organization) organizations.\textsuperscript{140}

As discussed in previous chapters, the first round of NATO enlargement in 1999 saw the admission of Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Unsurprisingly, the expansion of the Atlantic Alliance to Russia’s former satellite nations faced fierce opposition in Moscow, further fueling the anti-Western attitudes among the political leadership as well as wider population. Besides perceiving the continuous advancement of its former adversary closer to its borders as a direct threat to the country’s national security, as well as a disruption of military balance of power in Europe, Kremlin also believed that West was exploiting the current state of international security system for its own benefit. The United States, they argued, was taking advantage of Russia’s temporary economic, political and military weaknesses and trying to spread its influence in Central and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{141} As we have seen from the scholarly debates discussed earlier, many theorists, especially the ones representing realist school of thought, have found the Kremlin’s concerns at the time justified.

\textsuperscript{138} Ponsard, \textit{Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the gap}, pp.70-71
\textsuperscript{139} Sullivan, \textit{U.S.-Russia Relations: From Idealism to Realism}, p.87
\textsuperscript{140} Ponsard, \textit{Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the gap}, p.71
\textsuperscript{141} Lo Manto, \textit{NATO Looks East: A Realist Reassessment}, p.106 in Tsereteli, \textit{The Impact of NATO Enlargement on the U.S.-Russia relations}
Russian leaders often justify their stand to NATO enlargement (and more recently, their actions in Georgia and Ukraine) in the context of what has become known as the “broken promise”, i.e. a non-expansion pledge given to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev by the American and German leaders in early 1990s. A topic of a heated debate and disagreement between the political elites of both sides, the alleged non-expansion deal has attracted a lot of attention within the Western scholarly discussions as well. To understand the nature of these discussions, a brief timeline is in order.

The negotiations held between the United States, Western Germany and the Soviet Union following the fall of Berlin Wall, resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet army from the territory and subsequent reunification of Germany. According to Kremlin’s claims, Gorbachev’s consent to pull the troops from the region and support the reunified Germany’s membership in NATO was based on “top-level assurances” from Western leaders, such as the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, that the Alliance will not expand its membership to the East.142 Jack F. Matlock, an American ambassador to the USSR at the time and the author of “Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended”, has publicly supported these claims, stating that “we gave categorical assurances to Gorbachev back when the Soviet Union existed that if a united Germany was able to stay in NATO, NATO would not move eastward”144. These allegations have been repeatedly denied by both American and German officials, with NATO itself making a official statement in 2014 that “no such pledge was made, and no evidence to back up Russia’s claims has ever been produced”.145 Even the examination of the recently reclassified archival materials had led

143 Ponsard, Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the gap, p.92
most historians to conclude that “contrary to Russian allegations, [Soviet President Mikhail] Gorbachev never got the West to promise that it would freeze NATO’s borders”\textsuperscript{146}

A number of scholars argue that given the Gorbachev’s policies at the time and the position that Russia was in, Russian delegation was likely to agree on the compromise (withdrawal of troops, support for Germany’s reunification and its membership in NATO) even without the reassurances about the Alliance’s expansion. First of all, at the time negotiations talks started among the American, West German and Soviet leaders in February 1990, Soviet Union was not in strong enough of position to dictate its conditions or hinder the German reunification process either way. The public dispute and objections against it would have proven pointless and revealed the nation’s weakened status once again\textsuperscript{147}. Secondly, Gorbachev’s “New Thinking” doctrine with the focus on common security cooperation and pro-Western policies justified the compromise, especially since Western world had promised significant financial aid to support Gorbachev’s new domestic reforms. And lastly, Soviet Union was reassured by the provisions of the “2+4” Treaty, signed by the Unites States, Great Britain, France, Soviet Union and both German states, which stated that no NATO military army will be based on the territory of Eastern Germany in future\textsuperscript{148}.

In his award-winning article “\textit{Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion}” published in International Security Journal, Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson provides an extensive overview of the existing archival materials and concludes that while there was no official written agreement between the Western and Soviet leaders regarding the NATO’s future expansion, the topic was brought up repeatedly during the German reunification negotiations in 1990. He argues that the archival evidence clearly indicates that the American officials had offered the


\textsuperscript{147} Tsereteli, \textit{The Impact of NATO Enlargement on the U.S.-Russia relations}

\textsuperscript{148} Ponsard, \textit{Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the gap}, pp.90-91
Soviet delegation numerous “informal assurances” that NATO will not expand eastward\textsuperscript{149}. Scholars have long argued whether such informal commitments are a standard diplomatic practice and how much weight they carry in global politics, but it is the conclusion that Shifrinson draws about the wider U.S.-Russian post-Cold War relations that is the interesting part here. Instead of viewing the non-expansion pledge as an isolated incident or as the Washington’s bargaining chip to achieve Germany’s reunification, Shifrinson argues that this move was in line with the United States’ larger efforts to establish a new order in post-War Europe. While Washington had repeatedly reassured Moscow that Europe’s new post–Cold War order and security system would reflect the interests and objectives of both sides, in practice the United States had used its assurances (such as NATO’s non-expansion promise) to exploit the weakened state of post-War Soviet Union and strengthen U.S.’s positions in the region. As Shifrinson summarizes, “the United States floated a cooperative grand design for postwar Europe in discussions with the Soviets in 1990, while creating a system dominated by the United States”.\textsuperscript{150} The argument lends support to the neorealists’ account of post-Cold War relations between the former adversaries.

Some historians view the U.S.- Soviet agreement over German reunification and NATO’s evolution in the post-Cold War security environment as a testament to how former adversaries can overcome their rivalries and find a way to cooperate in the new world. This chapter has shown a different side of the story. Almost three decades later, certain circles in Russian political elite still accuse the West in “outmaneuvering” them at their weakest hour, which has helped reinforce the image of the West as an unreliable partner. While the Euro-Atlantic community saw the successful expansion and strengthening of its area, the sense of isolation and betrayal that Russian has felt in the

\textsuperscript{149} Shifrinson, \textit{Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion}, p.11

\textsuperscript{150} Shifrinson, \textit{Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion}, p.11
post-Cold War international system have partially contributed to the tense political relations today - “almost every achievement contains within its success the seeds of a future problem”.\textsuperscript{151}

Russia’s relations with its Western partners entered a new, significantly more strained stage with NATO’s military intervention in the Kosovo crisis on March 24, 1999. At the time when the Alliance gave order to commence air strikes on Belgrade, the Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov was on a plane on his way to Washington for an official visit. Upon hearing the news Minister Primakov ordered the plane to turn around and head back to Moscow. As the Russian plane did a famous ‘U-turn’ over the Atlantic, so did Russia’s policies towards the West.\textsuperscript{152} Perceived as a violation of UN Charter, as well as the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, Russia believed that this established a dangerous precedent for the Alliance’s future intervention in ethnic or territorial disputes elsewhere, potentially the ones on the Russian territory as well\textsuperscript{153}. Analysts in Russia argued that the NATO military operations under the “pretence” of humanitarian objects were nothing but an act of aggression.\textsuperscript{154} The Kosovo incident reinforced Kremlin’s fear that NATO was willing to use its troops to “solve” the international conflicts the way it saw fit, without consulting (or, apparently, even warning) the Russian partners.

Many historians and scholars have argued that the Kosovo crisis did more damage to the NATO-Russian cooperation than any other event since the end of Cold War. The incident made it painfully apparent to Russia, as well as to the rest of the world, that the country no longer held any decisive power in the international politics and that the United States and its Western partners were willing to pursue their objectives regardless of Russia’s standpoint\textsuperscript{155}. The Kosovo crisis had

\textsuperscript{152} Rutland and Dubinsky, \textit{U.S.-Russian Relations: Hopes and Fears}, p.7.
\textsuperscript{153} Antonenko, \textit{Russia, NATO and European Security after Kosovo}, p.128
\textsuperscript{154} Brovkin, V. (1999). “Discourse on NATO in Russia during the Kosovo War”, in \textit{Demokratizatsiya}, Vol 7, No.4, .p.547
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
significant consequences for Russia’s domestic political developments, having reinforced almost unanimous anti-Western attitudes among the political parties as well broader public.156

Later that year, the political environment in Russia experienced a dramatic change. In his official New Year Address, broadcasted on the night of December 31st, 1991, President Yeltsin announced his resignation and the appointment of then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as the Acting President. After winning the presidential elections on March 26, 2000 and legitimizing his position, Putin ushered in new era of Russia’s domestic and foreign politics. Citing the dissolution of USSR as “a major geopolitical disaster of the century”,157 Putin has declared his main mission to be the restoration of Russia to ‘great power’ status once again – an agenda he’s been working on for the past two decades.

The above-provided timeline of events traces the evolution of Russia-NATO relations following the end of Cold War in an effort to understand why the former adversaries, to this day, continue to view each other as a threat. Hopefully, this section has thoroughly explained how and why the relations between Moscow and Washington have worsened over the years, and how the “seeds” of the current conflict can be traced back to those early years of post-Cold War era. Unsurprisingly, the subsequent NATO enlargement rounds that took place in 2004, 2009 and 2017, and more importantly the accession negotiations with Georgian and Ukraine have further fueled Russia’s opposition to the Atlantic Alliance. Dismissing Western assurances that NATO poses no threat to Russia, Moscow has repeatedly stated that it will not tolerate the advancement of a foreign military alliance to its borders, especially the one that was created with the purpose of keeping “the Russians out”158. Kremlin solidified its stance by invading Georgia in 2008 and annexing Crimea in 2014. While the prevailing

156 Arbatova, Russia and NATO: A Russian View, p.64
158 Hastings Ismay: “To keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down"
argument in the West has been that these are expressions of Russia’s imperial ambitions and desire to restore its former dominance in the region, the scholars representing (neo)realist school of thought ‘justify’ the nation’s actions in line with the theory’s underlying premise.

In his widely-cited and highly-controversial article on “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault”, John J. Mearsheimer stresses the continuing relevance of realism in the 21st century and argues that Russia’s course of actions makes perfect sense if we view it through the ‘correct’ view of international politics\textsuperscript{159}. He identifies NATO’s enlargement and West “moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core” as the cause of Russia’s aggression both in Ukraine and Georgia. In line with arguments made earlier, Kremlin will not allow the advancement of its former enemy near its home territory. While acknowledging Putin’s autocratic tendencies, Mearsheimer considers this to be “Geopolitics 101”. He concludes his article with an argument that the conflict between the West and Russia has been caused by their different perception of global politics. While the U.S. and NATO highlight the rule of law, liberal principles and democracy, Russia continues to act and think along within the realist paradigm. The international arena is still dominated by anarchy; NATO’s ‘gains’ in Central and Eastern Europe are Russia’s ‘losses’; the United States exploited Russia’s geopolitical weakness after the collapse of Soviet Union and successfully used NATO to spread its influence in the regions of its former influence – these are Kremlin’s perceptions as seen through the neorealist lenses. The detailed account of Russia’s relations with the West, provided earlier, depicts how almost every major event in the international politics after the end of Cold War was perceived by Russia as Washington’s attempts to establish its own version of post–War order in Europe and diminish Russia’s former influence. With NATO’s enlargement policy having served a major role in that, Russia continues to oppose its advancement in its neighboring countries, including both Georgia and Ukraine.

And if Russia’s actions and policies are indeed governed by the realist paradigm, as we have shown in this chapter, this attitude towards its neighbors’ NATO aspirations is very unlikely to change.
5. Georgia’s Perspective on NATO Enlargement

5.1. Overview of Georgia’s recent history and relations with NATO

“I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European”

-Zurab Zhvania (Former Prime minister of Georgia)

Georgia’s rather unique geographical location had resulted in centuries of invasion and division long before the nation was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922. Throughout its long history, Georgian identity formation has been influenced by a number of dominant empires from ancient Greeks, Byzantium to those of Persian and Ottoman empires. Oppressed by largely Muslim invaders and looking towards Christian Europe for assistance, the nation witnessed the establishment of resistant “Christian, European and warrior-martyr” self-identity that Georgians constructed in opposition to oppressors’ “other” image.\(^{160}\) This “other” identity, that Georgians defined themselves against, was later attributed to Russia, as the USSR forced the nation to join the Union in 1922. Instead of basing their distinction in religious identity, Georgia now self-identified as “European” as opposed to communist USSR.\(^{161}\) As a result, throughout this whole period all the way till regaining its independence in 1991, the nation idealized Western-based ideas of social democracy and its political structures, and urged for a “return to Europe”. Claiming its difficult historical circumstances as the cause of prolonged isolation from European civilization and culture, Georgia “has been unable to move in parallel with European advances”, such as liberal democracy,

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\(^{161}\) Ibid. p. 88
modernization and economic prosperity. Therefore, reclaiming European identity and moving closer to Western-based system is seen as a “matter of historical justice”.

With the end of Cold War and collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, newly independent Republic of Georgia embarked on its mission to freely embrace European identity and adopt the according norms and values in its political and social structures. Then-President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze highlighted this point in his state of the union address in 1997 by stating that integration to Europe was “for centuries the dream of our ancestors”. The path was marked by numerous obstacles and difficulties as the new nation faced territorial and ethnic disputes, economic crisis, corruption and domestic instability. However, fast-forward several years and we see Georgia joining NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, after becoming a founding member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council two years earlier. As the nation formally joined the Council of Europe on April 27, 1999, becoming its 41st member, Zurab Zhvania, then-Prime Minister and Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council with following: “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European”. This now-famous quote had since become a wide-spread slogan for Georgia’s path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia proceeded to sign a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the European Union in 1999. Furthermore, during the NATO Summit in Prague in November 2002 then-President Shevardnadze officially declared Georgia’s aspirations to join the Alliance, thus ushering into a new stage of Georgia-NATO cooperation.

Despite all these developments and progress Georgia had achieved in its efforts to affiliate with the ‘West’, it was not until the Rose Revolution in 2003 that the nation declared the integration to Euro-Atlantic community and its institutions to be the priority in its foreign policy objectives and

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domestic reforms. The new administration, led by President Mikheil Saakashvili, a Western-educated politician and a former Justice Minister of Georgia, set ambitious goals of ending the highly institutionalized corruption, modernizing the state apparatus, reinstating Georgia’s territorial integrity, and moving the nation closer to the EU and NATO membership. In his inaugural address in 2004, President Sakashvili argued that time had come to:

“take its own place in European family, in European civilization, the place lost several centuries ago. [...] Our direction is towards European integration. [...] Today, we have not raised European flag by accident - this flag is Georgian flag as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, essence of our history and perspective, and vision of our future”.165

While it is true that Saakashvili’s discourse instigated some unrealistic expectations in Georgian population, his administration did achieve significant progress in its political and economic reforms. Georgia had emerged as a leader among its fellow ex-Soviet states in drastically reducing the corruption, improving the economy and democratizing the state processes.166 It was under this new administration that the NATO leadership decided to deepen its official relations with Georgia. In September 2006, during a ministerial meeting in New York, the Alliance offered the Georgia Intensified Dialogue status, which entailed a more intense political exchange, including high-level consultations with NATO partners on Georgia’s membership aspirations and necessary reforms.167

The next major breakthrough in NATO-Georgia relations took place at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, where the Alliance formally endorsed Georgia’s membership aspirations and declared that it “will become member of NATO”. As stated in official Bucharest Summit Declaration, MAP was seen as the next step for Georgia on its direct way to membership. Later that year the NATO-Georgia Commission was founded. Serving as a “forum for both political consultations and practical cooperation”, it was designed to carry out the agreements reached at Bucharest Summit and assist Georgia on the NATO integration process.

While certainly a significant step forward in Georgia’s path toward Euro-Atlantic integration, the Alliance’s endorsement and pledge about Georgia’s future membership (with no specific timeframe) at Bucharest Summit was perceived by many as a compromise or at best a ‘middle-road solution’. Having achieved a significant progress in state-building processes and domestic reforms, in addition to the avid support of Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic orientation from the U.S. leadership, President Saakashvili’s team had high hopes of Georgia receiving the MAP at the 2008 Summit. The decision had split the NATO allies, as the U.S., UK and Eastern European states supported Georgia’s accession, while the continental European countries, such as Germany, France, Spain, and others, came out in opposition of it, partially due their concerns over Russia’s response. Thus, NATO’s formal declaration of Georgia’s future membership was seen as a compromise, meant to both validate the country’s progress in its democratic reforms but not bind the Alliance to any specific timetable or roadmap in regards to Georgia’s accession path.


The following events that took place in August of 2008 significantly set back Georgia’s chances of near-future membership in the Atlantic Alliance. The five-day war between Russia and Georgia had materialized the worst fears NATO’s skeptic allies held about Georgia’s potential membership dragging “the entire alliance into a ruinous war with Russia”.\textsuperscript{171} This thesis will not be going into details of the conflict or the two sides’ different account of events, as the examination of this matter is beyond the focus of this research. However, it is worth noting the impact the war had on Georgia’s progress in Euro-Atlantic integration. There seems to be a broad agreement between scholars and politicians that nothing has done such a severe damage to Georgia’s prospects of joining NATO as the Russia-Georgia conflict of 2008.\textsuperscript{172}

Despite the disheartening setback, Georgia’s commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration has not waivered and has been continuously reiterated in the official governmental discourse and issued state documents. For instance, Georgia’s National Security Concept, an official document adopted by the Parliament in 2005, outlining the main direction of the nation’s foreign policies, self-identifies Georgia as the following:

“an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and who] aspires to achieve full-fledged integration into Europe’s political, economic and security systems … and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe”.\textsuperscript{173}

The National Security Concept was revised in 2011 in order to reflect the “the changed realities” as a result of the August War in 2008. The updated document reviewed newly perceived

\textsuperscript{171} Cecire, \textit{Security and Symbolism: Georgia’s NATO Aspirations in Perspective}, p.71
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., pp.70-71
risks and threats, mostly related to Russian aggression and its occupation of the separation regions.\textsuperscript{174} The new Concept also reiterated Georgia’s commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, providing a separate chapter that highlighted the continuing prioritization of NATO and EU membership in the national security and foreign policy objectives.\textsuperscript{175}

With the change of leadership in 2012-2013, many feared Georgia’s pro-Western aspirations might not be in line with the new administration’s objectives. However, while the new leading party, the Georgian Dream coalition, did highlight the need for Georgia to ‘normalize’ relations with Russia, it nevertheless continued pursing the goals of EU and NATO integration.\textsuperscript{176} Georgia’s integration into Euro-Atlantic community remained a cornerstone of nation’s foreign policy. The members of the new leadership continued highlighting Georgia’s “European identity” and its cultural affiliation with the West in their official discourse.\textsuperscript{177} For instance, in his inaugural speech in November 2013, Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili spoke about the “irreversibility of Georgia’s European integration” and asserted that “a Georgian national is European in terms of self-awareness and an integral part of Western civilization by nature”.\textsuperscript{178} Furthermore, then-Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili referred to EU Association Agreement, signed on June 27, 2014, as “a historic chance to return to its natural environment, Europe, its political, economic, social and cultural space”\textsuperscript{179}. The irreversibility of the governments’ pro-Western political vision has been reiterated by the current Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who in his interview in 2016 highlighted “the goal of joining EU and

\textsuperscript{177} Kakachia and Minesashvili, Identity politics: Exploring Georgian foreign policy behavior, p.175
NATO to be a necessity that will lead to a higher standard of democracy, security, peace, and prosperity in our country and region”.¹⁸⁰

5.2. Georgia’s NATO Aspirations Explained by Social Constructivist Theory

As we have seen from the brief overview provided in the previous chapter, ever since regaining its independence in 1991, Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations have resulted in an unshaken pro-Western foreign policy. Despite the increasing realization within the nation’s political circles and larger population that NATO membership might not be a near-future possibility, Georgia continues pursuing its integration into the Western institutions and adopting its norms and values. In the following section we be examining the reasons behind it thorough the theoretical lenses of social constructivism.

In the earlier chapter on social constructivism we discussed the theory’s assertion that that states’ interests and preferences are to a large extent derived from the socially constructed identities and interactions, “new foreign policy ideas are shaped by preexisting dominant ideas and their relationship to experienced events”.¹⁸¹ According to a number of scholars, nowhere is this as true as in the case of small ex-Soviet states, such as Georgia, where ideas, identity and symbols play a powerful role in state policies.¹⁸²

Viewing the Euro-Atlantic community as a source of liberal democracy, freedom and rule of law, Georgia has oriented itself ideologically (and strategically) towards the West in its efforts to


¹⁸² Kakachia and Minesashvili, Identity politics: Exploring Georgian foreign policy behavior, p.171
establish a modern democratic state and distance itself from its Soviet past. This process has been theorized by social constructivism as ‘international socialization’, where international institutions transmit the norms and values of their international community to the individual states.\textsuperscript{183} This has been widely perceived as the aim \textit{and} result of NATO’s enlargement policy by social constructivists. Applying the concept to NATO-Georgia case illustrates that Georgia views participation in NATO as means of being “socialized” into the Euro-Atlantic community’s value system and gaining the opportunity to internalize its normative rules and guiding principles within Georgia’s political, social and economic structures. Liberal democracy, rule of law, individual liberty – all these principles that the Alliance is founded on, is what Georgian state hopes internalize domestically. A review of the statements, speeches and interviews by high-ranking Georgian officials and politicians, as well as the excerpts from official state documents, that I have provided in previous chapter, support this argument.

Furthermore, my earlier section on social constructivist theory discussed Frank Schimmelfennig’s argument that for an aspiring candidate the membership in an international institution or organization largely “fulfills the needs of identification and legitimation”\textsuperscript{184} Membership in such organizations provides an international acknowledgement that the candidate nation ‘belongs’ to the group of its like-minded role models. It serves to legitimize their political and social values, and accept their identity as “one of our own”. As an example, the theory takes ex-Soviet states’ push towards NATO membership, and argues that these aspirations reflect the states’ identification with Euro-Atlantic norms and values.\textsuperscript{185} According to social constructivists, this is what drove the Baltic nations towards NATO after the fall of Eastern Bloc, and ensured that states like Georgia and Ukraine

\textsuperscript{183} For further discussion, see Chapter 1
\textsuperscript{184} Schimmelfennig, \textit{Nato enlargement: A constructivist explanation}, p.213
\textsuperscript{185} Ratti, \textit{International Relations Theory and NATO’s Post-Cold War Path: an Ongoing Debate}, p.100
vehemently pursued the membership as well. The symbolic part of the membership in Euro-Atlantic Alliance is perceived to be more important than its practical and operational impact.¹⁸⁶

These arguments find strong footing when applied to NATO-Georgia’s case. The previous section traced the formation and evolution of Georgian identity, its self-identification as “European” and cultural affiliation it has felt with the Western world. After centuries of occupation, invasion and division by foreign invaders, the nation has felt isolated from its historic home and cultural environment. Citing its common religion and historic relations with ancient Europe, Georgians had succeeded in forming and most importantly preserving a common identity and ideological affiliation with the free and democratic ‘West’.¹⁸⁷ This identity and connection to its natural community has been denied until Georgia regained its independence after the collapse of Soviet Union. Therefore, Georgia’s aspirations of Euro-Atlantic integration and membership in the Atlantic Alliance hold a multiple of important meanings to the nation. First of all, in line with social constructivist hypothesis, being accepted to NATO would serve as recognition of Georgia’s “European identity” and its belonging to the Western democratic community, that the nation has claimed for so long. Secondly, and further supporting Schimmelfennig’s general hypothesis, NATO membership would serve as a testament that Georgia has successfully ‘socialized’ and internalized the Alliance’s norms, values and guiding principles within its domestic processes. And thirdly, as mentioned in earlier chapter on social constructivism, membership in NATO and accordingly, the adoption of Western norms and values would ensure that competing value system does not take hold in Georgia. And by ‘competing’ values I refer to Russian “Eurasianism”¹⁸⁸ – an ideology that has characterized Russia’s identity and how it views its role in the global politics. A number of scholars assert that the Georgian “European” identity and idea of the Western community has been constructed in opposition to or against the Russian

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.
¹⁸⁷ Kakachia and Minesashvili, Identity politics: Exploring Georgian foreign policy behavior, p.176
“other”. According to Kornely Kakachia, the founder and executive director of the Georgian Institute of Politics in Tbilisi, “Europeanization” became associated with the “desovietization” process for Georgia. Ever since gaining its independence in 1991, Georgia has attempted to disassociate itself from the previously forced-down “Soviet” identity and norms. Soviet Union’s direct successor, Russia, is perceived as an autocratic nation who continues to pursue imperialist ambitions of regaining influence over its ‘Near Abroad’, in line with its strictly anti-Western ‘Eurasianist’ ideology. Often associated with autocracy, absence of individual freedoms, corruption, instability and poorly developed economic models, Georgia’s idea of Russia and Russian ideology/identity has been constructed as the ‘other’ – the opposite of the democratic, secure, stable, progressive and prosperous ‘West’. The similar concept can be traced in Thomas Risse-Kappen’s argument about the formation of common identity vis-à-vis “Other”, creating the opposing “us” and “them” categories, illustrated in NATO- USSR relations during the Cold War. This way, NATO membership would not only legitimize Georgia’s break with its Soviet past and its ‘rightful’ belonging to the democratic Euro-Atlantic community, but it would also defend the nation from the competing, i.e. Eurasianist “Other” norms, values and ideas.

This last point has gained a significant importance in recent years following the emergence and significant development of Russia’s propaganda schemes and its information operations in Georgia, often specifically targeting the NATO membership debate. Russia regards its information operations abroad as one of its major foreign and security policy instruments. And long before Kremlin’s interference in the presidential elections in the U.S. and Europe became apparent, Russia targeted the nations in ‘near abroad’. As was the case in Georgia, Kremlin relied on one of its most

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189 Kakachia and Minesashvili, *Identity politics: Exploring Georgian foreign policy behavior*, p.177
190 Ibid, p.178
191 Discussed in earlier section on social constructivism
active weapons, “soft power”, to create a necessary ideological and economic platform to influence the political processes in the country. Funding the anti-western local media and organizations, disseminating anti-NATO and anti-EU narratives and political myths, all while stressing the cultural (values and practices), historic and religious ties between the two nations, Kremlin has attempted to hinder the Euro-Atlantic integration and instill anti-Western competing ideology discussed earlier. The propaganda campaigns’ common concepts included the idea of ‘decadent Europe’ and ‘wicked and immoral West’ as opposed to Russian “orthodox brothers”, with cultural ties and common identity stemming from 200-year history. It is worth noting that the very fact that Kremlin’s disinformation efforts have focused so much on the use of Georgia-Russian ‘shared’ identity, culture and values in its attempts to influence the nation’s pro-Western outlook, lends support to the social constructivist fundamental premise that ideas, identity, norms, values, and the social context in which they are all constructed plays a major role in determining the state’s national interests and foreign policy goals.

The fact that I’m proposing the social constructivism as the best equipped theory to explain the Georgia’s pursuit of NATO membership does not mean that material factors do not play an important role in this decision. The interest-based reasoning clearly coexists with the nation’s ideational and identity-driven foreign policy. Western nations, whose political, social and economic structures are based on the democratic principles, have succeeded in developing long-term stability, security and economic prosperity. The ‘Western model’ works, so to speak. Therefore, acceptance to the group of these nations would not only assure Georgia that it’s on the right path, and would also equip the country with the necessary tools and assistance for the state to achieve the same development and maturity. Looking back at Saakashvili’s presidency, which saw the rise of the Euro-Agnatic

integration to the top of policy objectives, “a Western economic model equalled national security. Not only did it bring Europe in, but created an economy strong enough to endure the consequences of a Russian economic embargo after 2006, the deportation of Georgian migrants (2004-2006), and an invasion in August 2008”.  

Furthermore, the security rationale of the Georgia’s NATO aspirations cannot be overlooked, of course. With Russia’s revisionist policies posing a major threat to Georgia’s national security, NATO membership is perceived as a guarantee against further aggression from the northern neighbor. Despite the earlier discussed transformation that the Alliance has undergone after the end of Cold War and its new multi-faceted functions, NATO is still a military alliance, designed to ensure ‘collective defense’ of its members under the Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Both within the academic and political debates, Georgia’s eagerness to join the Alliance has been largely defined solely by ‘security’ perspective. In fact, if we review our previous discussion on neorealist theory and apply its hypothesis to Georgia’s case, then Georgia’s NATO aspirations are explained as an attempt to bandwagon with the Unites States and rest of the Alliance against the Russian threat. However, upon closer examination this hypothesis does not hold up. According to Stephen Walt’s ‘balance of threat’ theory, smaller and weaker states are more likely to bandwagon with the threat in order to protect their own security, not balance against it:

“The weaker the state, the more likely it is to bandwagon. […] Balancing may seem unwise because one’s allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough. This tendency may be one reason that sphere of influence emerge: states that are close to a country with large

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offensive capabilities (and that are far from potential allies) may be forced to bandwagon because balancing alliances are simply not viable”. 195

After the Russia-Georgia war in summer of 2008, it became starkly clear that the Western partners’ support to Georgia in its conflict with northern neighbor will not include military protection. Therefore, in the face of Russia’s offensive threat and limited protection the Western partners were willing to offer, neorealists would have expected Georgia to change the course of its foreign policy to reflect more pragmatic and ‘rational’ objectives. After all, the majority of other small ex-Soviet nations have opted for more realist paradigm (one based on pragmatism, self-interests, balance of power) and adopted bandawoning policy towards Russia196. Indeed, according to a distinguished Georgian scholar, Alexander Rondeli: “Georgian attempts to integrate their country into European structures is often seen as strategic idealism which goes against all geopolitical arguments and even common sense”.197

Liberal theories, neoliberal institutionalism in particular, that highlight the economic interdependence198 and mutual trade also fail to account for Georgia’s choice of foreign policy direction. Prior to intensifying its conflict with Russia over the nation’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Georgia enjoyed the economic incentives that resulted from trade with northern neighbor. Accounting for almost twenty percent of Georgia’s total trade, Russia had been Georgia’s main trading partner up until 2006, when Russia decided to ‘punish’ its former satellite nation for pro-Western foreign outlook and imposed embargo on Georgian imports, significantly hurting the nations’ economy. 199

195 Walt S. (1987), The Origins of Alliances. p. 25
199 Gvalia and Siroky et al, Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States, p.121
The energy security also has to be considered in this cost-benefit equation of Georgia’s foreign policy, as the nation was highly dependent on Russia on its energy supply up until 2006, receiving 100 percent of its natural gas from the northern neighbor. A tool exploited by Russia (not only against Georgia), as the nation waged energy blockade in winter of 2006 in response to Georgia’s pro-Western stance.²⁰⁰

Therefore, the traditional IR theories, other than social constructivism, cannot fully account why Georgia jeopardized its pragmatic self-interests by balancing against Russia despite the looming military threat and economic losses. The theories further fail to explain why Georgia would not change its foreign policy outlook after receiving no substantial backing from its Western partners or any explicit reassurances about the definite NATO membership in future (such as MAP or a clear timeframe). Social constructivism, on the other hand, focusing largely on the role of ideas, identity, and norms and values provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding Georgia’s bid for NATO membership and Euro-Atlantic integration in general.

6. Conclusion

The thesis set out to address the “missing aspect” of research on NATO-Georgia relations within the Western scholarship, namely the theoretical approach to the subject matter. This work has examined concept of ‘NATO-Georgia relations’ within the theoretical framework of leading IR approaches – neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism. The goal was to compare and contrast these different perspectives and determine which provides at least a relatively superior explanation.

Considering “NATO-Georgia” concept to be too broad and multifaceted to be coherently explained within one approach, the thesis has separately examined its three main ‘components’ – U.S, Russia and Georgia, how each of these actors approaches NATO enlargement and its relations with an aspiring candidate. This examination had led to a conclusion that all three actors perceive the concept of NATO-Georgia relations through different paradigms. Russia’s view of the international relations, following the early years of post-Cold War period, can be best understood through the realist paradigm. The review of NATO-Russia relations after the collapse of Soviet Union has highlighted how Russia believes it was ‘cheated’ at its weakest hour by the West, loosing influence over its ‘near abroad’ to a former adversary. The disagreement between Russian and the Western nations over the issue of NATO enlargement (and particularly, Georgia’s potential membership) is based on the fact that the two sides view the matter though two different paradigms. Russia still perceives the international order through concepts of security dilemma and balance of power, hence the realist and neorealist perspective. Western partners (U.S. including), on the other hand, adhere to multiple frameworks in their approach to NATO enlargement. As evidenced by the 2nd Chapter, the United State’s approach to NATO-Georgian relations and the enlargement policy in general, is best explained through a combination of theoretical frameworks. Driven at times by strategic self-interests, and other times by mission to spread the democratic values abroad and build American-based systems and
institutions, the United States’ approach to the research subject posed in this thesis does not fit within solely one theoretical framework. The discrepancy in two nations’ approach to NATO enlargement and associated conflict is caused by the fact that United States’ and Russia’s actions and perceptions stem from different paradigms, causing conflicting perceptions of the international politics.

The most significant contribution of this thesis is an alternative perspective provided to explain Georgia’s persistent pursuit of NATO membership, the one that does not focus on security and fear of Russia as the main determinant. Georgia’s choice to continue pursuing integration into Euro-Atlantic community, sometimes as the expense of its self-interests and despite Western foot-dragging, serves to justify the theoretical explanation provided by social constructivism. Focusing on the role of ideas, identity, and norms and values, this approach is best equipped to consider the complexity of Georgia’s “European identity”, its attempts to disassociate itself from Soviet past and Russian ‘other’, and the legitimation it seeks from NATO membership about its ‘rightful’ belonging in the democratic Euro-Atlantic ‘family’. As examined in earlier chapter, security, economic prosperity, stability – all these factors are major considerations and factors in Georgia’s bid to join the Alliance. However, the theories that focus on these concepts as the major drivers of country’s pro-Western aspirations fail to paint the full picture.

Thus, to reiterate again the conclusion to the major question - social constructivist theory provides a rather comprehensive explanation of the emergence and persistence of Georgia’s NATO aspirations. We have examined how Georgia’s historically formed “European” identity, its social compatibility with Western-type structures and decision-making processes, the nation’s affiliation with the democratic norms and values, and its efforts to disassociate itself from the Russian ‘other’ have all contributed and to a large extent determined the nation’s Euro-Atlantic orientation, ensuring that NATO membership became the priority and cornerstone of its long-term foreign policy. I have tried to support this hypothesis by highlighting how leading Georgian politicians and officials have
repeatedly justified the nation’s NATO aspirations by referring not only to “European identity” and historic “return to Europe”, but the importance of incorporating the democratic norms, values and practices that serve as the foundation of Western-based political and social system.
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