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**Possible Consequences in Georgian-Russian
Relations in case Georgia Receives the
Membership Action Plan**

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the issue of Georgia's possible receipt of Membership Action Plan (MAP), the last stage of accession process to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the possible consequences of this event. The collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining the independence from the regime opened the window of opportunity for Georgia and gave to it a possibility to strive towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Although Georgia still works to gain MAP and has a status of an aspirant country, its already historical as well as present ties to the Alliance remain strong and positive.

This thesis strives to represent the possibility of Georgia's MAP receipt and then subsequently NATO membership, as well as the consequences of political and military dimensions with regard to its final stage of accession to the Alliance, especially focusing on the Russian factor in the geopolitics of NATO's enlargement. Main research areas of the thesis include the importance of NATO enlargement on its Eastern and Southeastern flanks, mainly in the present geopolitical environment where Russia already had and is still challenging status quo of the World Order by breaching international law as well as the Founding act of Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris in 1997. Second area of research is focused on the costs and benefits of Georgia's NATO membership for Georgia, NATO and Russia. Lastly, third area of the research underlines the crucial significance of defense of Georgian territory, in case Georgia is given a MAP but is left without a substantial defense before its (possible) actual membership. This last part of research examines the possible scenario emphasizing the actions and reactions of the Russian Federation against Georgia by using Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia particularly and the whole South Caucasus security architecture, generally.

Keywords: Georgia, NATO, MAP, Russia, South Caucasus, NATO membership, NATO enlargement, Abkhazia, South Ossetia.

Master Thesis Proposal

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Research questions thesis focuses on are the following: 1. Why NATO's enlargement to South Caucasus is important for European security architecture? 2. How Georgia's possible NATO membership will affect political and military relations between Georgia and Russia. 3. Why is it important to defend Georgia in period between MAP granting and possible actual accession?

Keywords: Georgia, NATO, MAP, Russia, South Caucasus, NATO membership, NATO enlargement, Abkhazia, South Ossetia.

Methodology: Thesis is directed towards exploring the future and future possibilities, and what is much more intriguing, tries to predict what sort of actions and reactions might be at face in case the future possibility becomes the real fact. This work is based on the actual processes, focusing on historical as well as current trends in order to explain in what way the vantage point of the future can become a reality.

Title of the thesis says that in a future Georgia might become a member of NATO, which then will change and affect the following future processes. Of course, one can argue whether Georgia is actually able to become the member of the Alliance, and say that this is highly hypothetical phenomenon, but still it can happen and thesis shows how the membership of Georgia in NATO is possible based on what processes have been unfolding, what are the hindrances and what are those necessities affecting the membership aspirations. The complexity of present geopolitical environment conditions such situations, where even the most unreal and highly hypothetical phenomena and decision-making trends become necessary and vice versa - the most real and unavoidable trends are turned out to be obsolete and outdated modes of thought.

Thus the thesis analyzes how the antecedent from which the rest of the future processes might come to be true or possible, is possible itself. By demonstrating the antecedent back story the thesis aims to show the paradigm's validity and future consequences through this paradigm.

It is necessary to underline that the way antecedent - that is the point in the future when Georgia receives Membership Action Plan and then supposedly acceptance to become a full NATO member, - becomes a reality and affects the future phenomena and the way the processes continue. NATO-Georgian relations, which are discussed in thesis demonstrate positive partnership between the two, but other realities – particularly the steps and thoughts taken from the Russian government's behavior and the way she perceives NATO enlargement, also Georgia's past experience related to the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 demonstrate the difficulties and peculiarities of Georgia's possible accession to the NATO club. The possibility of Georgia's Membership Action Plan receipt is only a part of the thesis, and also only the one side of the possibility, the other side being continuation of current positive NATO-Georgian relation without granting Georgia MAP or acceptance, the two radically different possibilities having the power of changing the paradigm and the ways other international players will act in a future. To describe the antecedent back story in the thesis, various second as well as first hand materials connected to NATO-Georgian relations as well as NATO's decision-making system are analyzed, demonstrating examples and the processes of NATO enlargement politics. To make the story full, the thesis analyzes also the third-party

countries, mainly the Russian Federations' activities and reactions to the NATO policies and 'open door' politics as well as the Russian Federations geopolitical interests with regard to the NATO aspirant countries within the post-Soviet space. Thus, the antecedent back story will be based on detailed analyses of three interdependent international personalities – Georgia, NATO and Russia's - intentions and assertions.

Thus, the claim about an alternate possibility and its consequences may be termed a "counterfactual" as Noel Hendrickson puts in his book *Counterfactual Reasoning: A Basic Guide for Analysts, Strategists and Decision Makers*. This thesis, consequently, is based on the method of counterfactual reasoning and produces a theory building with two independent variables first one being the antecedent itself or, as I put it above, the point in the future when Georgia gets MAP.

Fifth part of the thesis analyzes the possible implicit consequences of Georgian MAP gaining without any NATO rotational defense or other representative forces making for Russia less desirable the destabilization of the South Caucasus region in a whole. In this part of the thesis second independent variable is used, namely, NATO's military presence in Georgia.

Thus the key independent variables are: 1) Georgia's receipt of Membership Action Plan and 2) NATO's military presence on Georgian territory which determine the reaction of the Russian Federation and consequently, the security environment of the South Caucasus region.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. The Importance of the Topic

The collapse of the Soviet Union freed states in Greater Central Europe from the Russian ties and currently it is least probable that Russia will be able to restore its influence in these countries on the ideological base, but the vulnerability rooted in the region comes from the historical attitude the Russian Federation has toward it. The states from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea share the Soviet past, and if using the Mackinder's theory in an adjusted way, they structurally represent the part of the Heartland, thus the "sphere of special interest" for Russia. After NATO enlargement, these states became much more vulnerable as Russia exposed coercive tactics, from aggressive diplomacy and energy blackmail to retaliatory economic warfare and cyber attacks. Downsizing of U.S. military presence in the region opened the window of opportunity to Kremlin's revanchist policies. Stalled European political project as an alternative to the U.S. patronage brought the disunity and lessened functional validity of states and state-cooperation. Only after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 the West started to analyze how Russia was starting to challenge the status quo, but the "Reset" button which was clicked stalled the fast reaction and made the West to underestimate the threats growing from the Russia's side. In the region, Poland and the Visegrad and the Nordic-Baltic groups began to modernize their military and regional defense coordination, as well as started to deepen ties with the Western powers, for example with Germany, Sweden etc. but the overall situation was not changed, even the overall attitude towards Russia's movements was more or less neutral. Only the Ukrainian Crisis

revealed how much Russia was dissatisfied with the current status quo and demonstrated the scale of Kremlin's future politics.

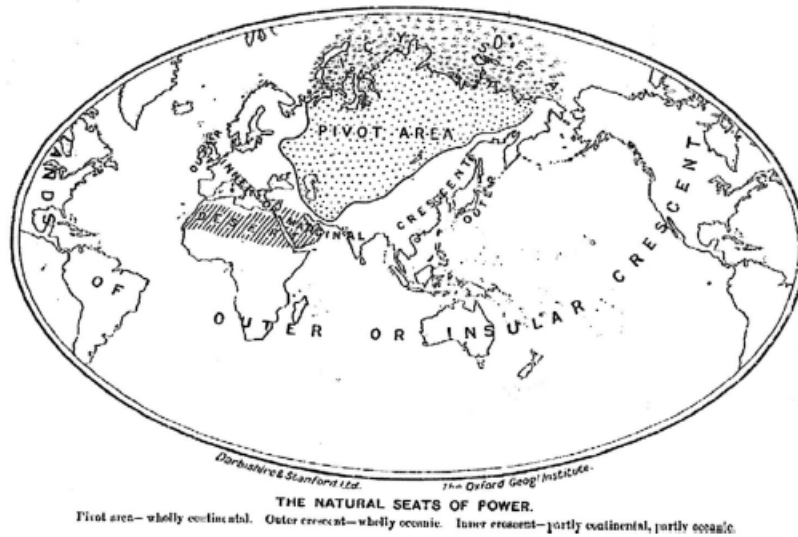
Within the current geopolitical environment the fate of small countries such as Georgia, depend largely on the great and smaller power politics, regional politics and balance of power, and in this interplay of states' geopolitical thinking on the "grand chessboard", politics defines and influences the position and chances for small states which they are eagerly willing to take.

1.2. The Topicality of the Problem

This thesis focuses on the famous geographer and later geopolitician Halford J. Mackinder's theory about Heartland and Geographical Pivot of history. According to Ashworth: "Mackinder's writings absolutely fit into the definition of realism as a mode of thought" (Ashworth, Lucian, M., *Realism and the Spirit of 1919: Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Reality of the League of Nations*. p. 2). But at the time Mackinder produced the theory, it was not popular and highly influential as it became years later (Parker, William, H., *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* in Vernier, Pascal, *The Geographical Pivot of History and Early Twentieth Century Geopolitical Culture*, p. 330, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 170, No. 4). The reason was simple as William Parker thought: Mackinder's theory was concerned with future, not the present, as the real threat in perception of Europe was coming from Germany, not Russia (Ibid., p. 330). It is noteworthy to mention, that Mackinder's theory was a theory about positional supremacy, and although he has changed the theory several times, his main conception of "Heartland" went unchanged. Heartland was a portion of Eurasian landmass, which was the vital position as it was inaccessible from the sea and relevantly strengthened, with the technical instruments, "could be developed and

integrated into a resource and manpower base for the potential superpower of the globe” (Meinig, Donald, W., *Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History*, The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 9, N. 3, p. 554). Mackinder himself made changes in his theory because wartime made changes necessary, and he also went under critique of Nicholas J. Spykman, an American expert in geopolitics who became famous for his *America’s Strategy in World Politics*. Unlike Mackinder, Spykman was indicating that “Mackinder’s “Inner or Marginal Crescent”, the continental periphery of Eurasia, rather than the Heartland was the critical zone. Spykman renamed this periphery as a “Rimland”” (Meinig, Donald, W., *Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History*, The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 9, N. 3, p. 554).

Both Mackinder and Spykman divided Eurasia into three strategic realms: (1) Heartland, (2) Inner Crescent (Mackinder) or Rimland (Spykman) and (3) Outer Crescent (Mackinder) or Marginal Seas (Spykman) (Ibid., p. 556). Mackinder’ geographical pivot of history, later renamed as the Heartland (1919) was name of “the World Island” which was inaccessible to sea power. As Ashworth puts, *Mackinder’s summary of spatial history of Eurasia followed Ratzel’s (and Semple’s) argument that technological developments had had the effect of making larger political units both possible and more dominant... ...At the same time, those at the eastern margins – Russia – had succeeded in conquering the pivot area of central Asia* (Ashworth, Lucian, M., *Realism and the Spirit of 1919: Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Reality of the League of Nations*, p. 8).



Map 1. The pivot area according to Mackinder (1904: 435). Reprinted with permission from the *Geographical Journal*.

While comparing land power and sea power, Mackinder thought that land power had supremacy over sea power as it had two strategies: land power could either conquer all the bases of sea power and consequently could create an internal sea mastering the ownership on it, or it could conquer a resource base larger than the sea power possessed, and then use this space for building a fleet and counterbalance the power of a sea power (Ibid., p.10). It is interesting that Mackinder's above mentioned idea was at some degree realized when Russia took under its control Sevastopol base at the Black sea and increased its presence in the region. What was impossible before became possible with the development of technology, mainly the creation of railway system, which made the Pivot area of the World Island accessible and conquerable. *It was now possible for the land power to dominate a vast area of natural resources that were beyond the reach of sea power, and to use these resources to overcome the relatively resource-weak sea powers of the outer crescent* (Ibid., p. 10). Such findings and reasoning developed two approaches to view the world, as Mackinder called them – seaman's view and landsman's view. The seaman saw the the World Island of Eurasia as a series of coasts, while the landsman discussed it as an Island which was backed and strengthened with the Arctic (1919: Chs III-IV) (Ibid., p 10). In 1919 as the result of the

WWI Mackinder adjusted his theory of the Pivot to include Eastern Europe from the Black to Baltic seas. The changing of borders of Eastern Europe and expansion of Germany in WWI and then the birth of the Soviet Union meant that the most of the territory of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia by her demonstrated that the World Island was now effectively controlled by one entity, thus making the Soviet Union's access to the Pivot area and then to the whole World Island a dangerous reality (Ibid., p.11).

By demonstrating and using the theory written in the beginning of the twentieth century thesis attempts to show that the theory of Mackinder can be adjusted and brought into reality as the geographical factor and the factor of relative power which Russia has in present days, along with her strategic vision and her geopolitical behavior is still relevant and able to give some sort of idea how to react on and answer ongoing issues in geopolitics.

1.3. Motivation of Writing the Thesis

The motivation of writing thesis comes from the current geopolitical situation, current and historic direction Georgia is following regarding to her strong desire for accession to NATO, on the one hand, and her relations with Russian Federation and Russian Federations politics in the region, as well as in the world, on the other hand. Thesis is covering the most important issues Georgia is facing now, particularly, the clash of Russian and her own interests in the South Caucasus Region, and the difficulties and ambiguities in the possibility of her accession to NATO club, due to the deterred stance which part of the NATO member states demonstrate with regard to Georgia's entrance into the military bloc. Besides being a country residing in a difficult geopolitical location, such South Caucasus is, Georgia has two de-facto regions within her internationally recognized sovereign borders, namely – Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Georgia is not able to expand her sovereignty. The situation

becomes much harder, if considering that on the Abkhazian and South Ossetian territories Russian military standing is becoming much heavier.

Although Georgia is politically still directed towards the West and her list of priorities at the top involve stable and close cooperation with NATO and EU, Russian political thinking always voices strong desire not to lose control on South Caucasus region, and is always pro to have South Caucasus region if not under her absolute sovereignty, but at least, as a stable and trusted buffer zone, where her military bases can reside and deter Western political or military interventions.

Thus, as the Georgian political freewill is limited and she is stuck between Russian political orbit on the one hand and Georgia's political preferences – directly coming in contrast with her neighbor's -Russia's interests, Georgia faces serious challenge with regard to realization of her orientation, and simultaneously, choosing the steps for keeping political and military peace in the country and region, generally.

1.4. Structure of The Thesis

Structurally, thesis goes through the history to the present and then, to the future. Thesis starts discussion of geopolitical theory on which it is based, namely Halford J. Mackinder's "Pivot theory", then it goes to the methodological part in order to give the reader understanding of how theory building process is used. Thesis focuses on the importance of South Caucasus region to NATO and makes a proposal that defending only Eastern flank is not enough.

Main research areas thesis is focused on represent: 1) the importance of NATO enlargement on its Eastern and Southeastern flanks: mainly in the present geopolitical environment where Russia already had and is still challenging status quo of the World Order by breaching

international law as well as the Founding act of Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris in 1997. 2) Second area of research is focused on the costs and benefits of Georgia's NATO membership for Georgia, NATO and Russia. 3) Lastly, third area of the research underlines the crucial significance of defense of Georgian territory, in case Georgia is given a MAP but is left without a substantial defense before its (possible) actual membership. This last part of research examines the possible scenario emphasizing the actions and reactions of the Russian Federation against Georgia by using Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia particularly and the whole South Caucasus security architecture, generally

In a theory building process, the most important part affecting the possibility of Georgia's MAP receipt and subsequent NATO membership is the readiness of Georgia to join the Alliance, but what seems much important factor is the political will based on the costs and benefits of NATO to accept Georgia's full membership of the Alliance. Notwithstanding the fact whether a country satisfies all the demands of membership or not, the complex political and military dimensions of world politics make it difficult to concentrate only on the readiness factor and the will of an aspirant country. This situation applies to Georgia's NATO membership issue very clearly. Thesis takes into consideration the complexity of the issue and besides explaining the factors of Georgia's readiness to full membership, analyzes the political barriers which hinder the decision about Georgia's acceptance into the Alliance. Thesis argumentatively tries to set the problem from a different perspective on the basis of phenomena taking place in historical as well as present realities. Thesis describes the importance of NATO enlargement on its Eastern and Southeastern flanks, and possible costs and benefits for NATO of covering new regions under its policy. The method with which the issue is approached uses the analyzes of secondary materials about the threats and necessities NATO's Eastern flank is posed to and also careful analyzes of the NATO-Russia founding act of 1997 signed in Paris to demonstrate the challenges NATO shall meet. Thesis analyzes the benefits of enlargement of NATO to South Caucasus region as well and those possible

consequences that this type of enlargement may condition. Notwithstanding Georgia's individual readiness and willingness factor, as mentioned above, the decision of NATO about Georgia's admission is governed by the cost-benefit system of such a move. Thus, by admitting that South Caucasus region can be represented as a valid region which is worth of covering with regard to the costs and benefits system, claims that the issue of accepting Georgia as a member of NATO is not a zero-sum, rather, it could be beneficial step for the security architecture of the West.

The fifth part of the thesis is mainly based on scenario building, and tries to figure out what can be the consequences for the security architecture of the South Caucasus region if Georgia is given a MAP but is left undefended before its possibly actual membership. For the careful and valid analyzes, this part of the thesis will mostly be based on the treaties Russia signed with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the two breakaway separatist regions of Georgia, and the responsibilities and interests of Common Security Treaty Organization, where Russia has a leading role. Especially, with the consideration of the present day Crimea annexation, the strength and possible movements from Russian side is assessed based on the secondary materials about the Southern Caucasus security architecture, Black Sea security architecture, and the official documents or official statements made by Russian authorities about their intentions and threats Russia perceives from NATO's further enlargement in the region. Thus fifth part of the thesis analyzes the possible implicit consequences of Georgian MAP gaining without any NATO rotational defense or other representative forces making for Russia less desirable the destabilization of the South Caucasus region in a whole. In this part of the thesis second independent variable is used, namely, NATO's military presence in Georgia.

The key independent variables are: 1) Georgia's receipt of Membership Action Plan and 2) NATO's military presence on Georgian territory which determines the reaction of the Russian Federation and consequently, the security environment of the South Caucasus

region. The dimensions under study include the political and military aspects as well as energy security aspect of the Southern Caucasus region.

1.5. key Resources

The resources used in the thesis as a material for information and knowledge, as well as the material for discussion are taken from the broad spectrum of geopolitical field. In writing and discussion process mostly secondary materials are used, along with the first-hand materials, taken from the NATO information site. Also, the articles from the international media are taken in order to better show the most important analytical insights for understanding the problem. Key authors used in the thesis are: Halford J. Mackinder, Noel Hendrickson, Eldar Ismailov and Vladimir Papava, Ladis Kristof, Saul B. Cohen, Stephen Krasner and etc. The materials were used both for acquiring information and for the deeper insights these famous scientists gave to the field of geopolitics and her students. The most important authors in the analytics of NATO-related issues, represented in the thesis are Luis Rodrigues, Nuno a Volodymyr, Dubovyk, Philip Seib, David Batashvili, Edward Lucas, and Wess A. Mitchell. Also, the other authors who were mainly focused on the Black Sea security related issues, such were: Ioannis Parisi, Janusz Bugajski, and B. Peter Doran, led a paramount work to create the valuable material which was used by the author of the thesis for deeper analysis of the issue. Part of the resources was taken from different web-sites, and different sources, and in this case the name of the site's supervisor was written in the bibliography. For instance, such case was with regard the material which was taken from Globalsecurity.org, topic: *102 Military Base*, the site, which was maintained by John Pike. The materials are highly valuable for understanding the issue at hand, as they represent different authors from different epochs and different countries, thus thesis is not biased towards the analytical

understanding of the problem and attempts to demonstrate balanced ideological background for discussing the historical, current and future events.

2. Theories

2.1. History of Geopolitics

Scholarly analysis of geographical factors underlying international politics and relations, at its onset, proposed that geography has a determining character in policy-making for statecraft. With the development of geopolitics as a field of science, this approach for analysis has changed, but still, geography stays as one of the most important factors, which affect states and the ways the statecraft chooses policy-directions according to the preferences and priorities of the time. The discipline which was first introduced more than a century ago, “was first offered as a set of geographically determined laws governing a state’s strategic destinies and evolved as the geographical underpinnings of *realpolitik*” as Cohen put it in his book *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* (Cohen, Saul, Bernard, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, chapter 2, Survey of Geopolitics, p 11).

From times of Aristotle to creation of modern geopolitics, geographical determinism played an important role in the analysis of relations between two scientific fields – on the one hand - geography, which, proposed much long-standing and fixed understanding of environment guaranteeing the deterministic character of the discipline, and on the other hand – politics, full of turbulent and dynamic decisions which changes and varies according to the ideals and ideas governing states and statecraft. Premodern geopolitics, of which the outstanding

writers were Aristotle and Jean Bodin, opened new opportunities and incited many authors to research the field. Aristotle's and Bodin's works are stressing the questions concerned with what is unavoidable and how peoples and states shall respond to the natural realities in which they have to exist. "Compulsory impact of the natural environment on man and his political life" shall always be in sight in order to adapt and exercise the decisions he shall take to survive and maintain his state (Kristof, Ladis, K. D, *The Origins and Evolution of Geopolitics*, p. 18). What about Bodin's argument, it shall be understood as an integral part of a philosophy of universal harmony where man adjusts his doings according to the natural environment he is located in. Arguments produced by early theories of emancipation, although lean towards the modern views, still are affected by the pre-modern writers (ibid, notes 7, 8, p. 18). Notwithstanding the fact that twenty-three centuries had passed from Aristotle's time, the very beginnings of modern geopolitics has demonstrated the influence of mentioned ideas and started discussing modern times in frames of geographical determinism and its effects on policy-making and state relations. Although, the adaptation of sciences to the everyday dynamics of international relations and policy-making made both geography and politics much flexible subjects under study and opened new ways to analyze once produced ideas in these disciplines. Geography ceased to be the main director of state's life, on the contrary it became the main advisor, given state's preferences (Ibid, p. 18).

2.2. Realism, States and Modern Geopolitics

This thesis attempts to show how more than a century old theory can be seen in today's world and used in order to demonstrate the validity of geographical determinism which plays major role in policy-making and setting of priorities in today's politics. Theoretical framework of the analysis is based on Realism which is a theory about international politics. Observing on and explaining both, individual state's behavior and the whole international system where individual states exist involves analysis of individual states, their preferences and modes of

thought, interrelations between states, power politics, regional differences and system of priorities that states include in their politics. The ontological fundament of realism as a tradition of thought is that “sovereign states are the constitutive components of the international system. Sovereignty is a political order based on territorial control. The international system is anarchical. It is a self-help system... ..Sovereign states are rational self-seeking actors resolutely if not exclusively concerned with relative gains because they must function in an anarchical environment..” as Krasner puts in his response to Gilbert - *Realism, Imperialism and Democracy* (Krasner, Stephen, *Realism, Imperialism and Democracy*, Political Theory, Vol. 20, No.1., p.39).

Modern geopolitics took realism as its fundament to analyze individual state entities, their behavior and their interrelations in their spatial environment. The effects of geography on states and their policy-making was one of the most important branches of thought which underwent lots of changes, starting from Kjellen and Ratzel in late 1800s.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1. Methodological base

There are various methods in social sciences to analyze the issue at hand, methodologies are invented and re-invented as the researchers try to come closer to the object under study with regard all those contextual complexities the object is connected to. Sometimes it is very difficult to differentiate between necessary and unnecessary data and materials which should be covered and objectives which should be considered in the process. Researchers resemble to the strategists who should be very careful and motivated to turn raw materials and data into intelligence to uncover and connect facts important in the process of getting the results and exploring valid answers.

This thesis, as it is observable from the title itself, is directed towards exploring the future and future possibilities, and what is much more intriguing, tries to predict what sort of actions and reactions might be at face in case the future possibility becomes the real fact. To explore the future means to set a right, valid question, but questioning some issue in the future is not the most important part, although the rest of the work goes further from this vantage point. This work is based on the actual processes, focusing on historical as well as current trends in order to explain in what way the vantage point of the future can become a reality.

Title of the thesis says that in a future Georgia might become a member of NATO, which then will change and affect the following future processes. Of course, one can argue whether Georgia is actually able to become the member of the Alliance, and say that this is highly hypothetical phenomenon, but still it can happen and thesis shows how the membership of Georgia in NATO is possible based on what processes have been unfolding, what are the

hinders and what are those necessities affecting the membership aspirations. The complexity of present geopolitical environment conditions such situations, where even the most unreal and highly hypothetical phenomena and decision-making trends become necessary and vice versa - the most real and unavoidable trends are turned out to be obsolete and outdated modes of thought.

Thus the thesis analyzes how the antecedent from which the rest of the future processes might come to be true or possible, is possible itself. By demonstrating the antecedent back story the thesis aims to show the paradigm's validity and future consequences through this paradigm.

It is necessary to underline that the way antecedent - that is the point in the future when Georgia receives Membership Action Plan and then supposedly acceptance to become a full NATO member, - becomes a reality and affects the future phenomena and the way the processes continue. NATO-Georgian relations, which are discussed in thesis demonstrate positive partnership between the two, but other realities – particularly the steps and thoughts taken from the Russian government's behavior and the way she perceives NATO enlargement, also Georgia's past experience related to the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 demonstrate the difficulties and peculiarities of Georgia's possible accession to the NATO club. The possibility of Georgia's Membership Action Plan receipt is only a part of the thesis, and also only the one side of the possibility, the other side being continuation of current positive NATO-Georgian relation without granting Georgia MAP or acceptance, the two radically different possibilities having the power of changing the paradigm and the ways other international players will act in a future. To describe the antecedent back story in the thesis, various second as well as first hand materials connected to NATO-Georgian relations as well as NATO's decision-making system are analyzed, demonstrating examples and the processes of NATO enlargement politics. To make the story full, the thesis analyzes also the third-party countries, mainly the Russian Federations' activities and reactions to the NATO policies and 'open door' politics as well as the Russian Federations geopolitical interests with

regard to the NATO aspirant countries within the post-Soviet space. Thus, the antecedent back story will be based on detailed analyses of three interdependent international personalities – Georgia, NATO and Russia’s - intentions and assertions.

Thus, the claim about an alternate possibility and its consequences may be termed a “counterfactual” as Noel Hendrickson puts in his book *Counterfactual Reasoning: A Basic Guide for Analysts, Strategists and Decision Makers* (Vol.2, Issue 5. 1:2008). This thesis, consequently, is based on the method of counterfactual reasoning and produces a theory building with two independent variables first one being the antecedent itself or, as I put it above, the point in the future when Georgia gets MAP.

Central proposal of counterfactual reasoning is that *counterfactual reasoning constitutes an essential component of analysis and strategy* (Hendrickson, Noel, 2:2008). According to the second major counterfactual proposal all three part of counterfactual reasoning that is alternate possibility, its consequences and the relationship between them constitute the whole counterfactual reasoning, being not as a distinct parts but, rather, the pieces of the whole chain of reasoning. What is much important is the conditionality of the counterfactual reasoning, which directly makes the alternate possibilities, their consequences and the relationship between them conditional as well. This is the base for the thesis, as every part of it contains argumentatively backed conditions, which itself are conditional and in any way deterministic. While writing conditional possibilities and its consequences, thesis is concentrated on those arguments that are given from the historical as well as present political directions, which can be used as a lessons and probable prisms from which to predict the future processes. Thus, it relevantly analyzes those most relevant conditions and consequences shall be gathered, which in a most probable way lead to the causal effects under research. The main threat entering the analytic process is to select precise techniques not to go far into the speculation or damaging the reality in order to get the most desirable results. In order to avoid any kind of speculation, thesis selects the techniques that precisely describe the processes and critically assesses the alternate possibility of Georgia entering

NATO and its political as well as military consequences for Georgia, NATO and Russia as the main players in the process.

3.2. Research Questions

This thesis strives to answer three main research questions: 1. Why NATO's enlargement to South Caucasus is important for European security architecture? 2. How Georgia's possible NATO membership will affect political and military relations between Georgia and Russia. 3. Why is it important to defend Georgia in period between MAP granting and possible actual accession?

This thesis starts discussion from the broadest question, particularly why the Southeastern flank of NATO and NATO's enlargement to the South Caucasus is important given the current geopolitical circumstances where the Russian Federation clearly demonstrates its discomfort with the world order. Challenging of the status quo started from the Russo-Georgia war and continuing to the Ukraine to the current threats posed to Baltic States represent the trend in Russian political thinking and the necessity for the West to respond and keep the security and stability of Europe by containing and actively deterring the revisionist movements of Russia much strongly than before. Notwithstanding the degree of readiness of Georgia to join the Alliance, the Alliance shall also be willing to enlarge to the South Caucasus by admitting Georgia and meet the challenges by assessing the importance and validity, also the costs and benefits of such step undertaken.

From the first question thesis goes further to analyze the consequences of Georgia's possible NATO membership, posing a question how Georgia's NATO membership will affect the

political and military relations between Georgia and Russia, as the internationally well known attitude of Russia towards Georgia's NATO membership guarantees that the reactions from Russia can be very actively demonstrated. Georgia, as a NATO member will have certain responsibilities and limitations how to respond to Russia's possibly guaranteed aggression if Russia uses its military bases situated in Georgia's separatist de facto regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the Russian-Abkhazian and Russian-South Ossetian mutual treaties of military and political cooperation as well as integrative cooperation. In frames of this question, thesis will also focus on the de facto regions' case because it is noteworthy to underline NATO's South Caucasus liaison officer's statement which says that Article 5 won't be enacted with regard to Georgia's occupied territories, as the Georgian government shall itself decide how to arrange the reconciliation or negotiations in its breakaway regions.

Lastly, third question which is posed in the thesis is directed at the possibility that Georgia is given a MAP but any additional NATO defense is send to the country before the state is fully accepted to NATO. This question comes from the logical reasoning which considers the fact that the Membership Action Plan, although being the last procedural stage of the membership process doesn't imply the actual membership guarantees and responsibilities of defense. As history shows, after the Bucharest Summit in 2008 when NATO leaders agreed that Georgia would become a full NATO member, the reaction from the Russian Federation was a direct military attack on Georgian state with the legally unjustified "Responsibility to Protect" claim. Almost the same scenario was applied later to Ukraine, which also is EU and NATO aspirant country along with Georgia and which also became the target of Russia's military annexation. Thesis strive to underline that by the destabilizing steps Russia undertakes inside the aspirant countries it tries to make the whole regions undesirable for NATO as destabilization raises the risks for NATO security and decreases the willingness of the Alliance to enter into the post-Soviet space further.

As a result, research questions follow the scale of the problem from larger to the narrower and make the counterfactual reasoning strongly based on the historical, as well as present geopolitical phenomena. Answering first, then second and third questions trace the scenario in a direction from the recent past to the far distant future and maintain the conditionality of the issue as well as the conditionality of three consequent parts of the scenario – antecedent, possible consequences and intermediate modalities establishing relationship between the two.

CHAPTER 4

Assessing the importance of South-Eastern Flank to NATO

4.1. Mackinder's Pivot Theory in the Current Geopolitical Structure of Central Eurasia

Halford Mackinder wrote in the early 20th century however the theories and principles of regional structuralization and subsequent observations about strategic preferences of international actors on the Eurasian landmass play significant role even in current geopolitical atmosphere. As Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava stated in their joint research *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, the theory of the Heartland shall be used “as a reference to an alternative geopolitical conception about the Pivot of the 21st century and possible scenarios for the future” (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p 89).

In order to rethink the importance of South-Eastern flank to NATO, it is vital to analyze this region from the perspective of its location, mainly by considering the fact that although arguably far remote from the West, it constitutes the entire security architecture of Europe and South Caucasus and possibly represents the first stone in the geopolitical game between the West and the Russian Federation. Especially today, if considering the raised importance of the Central Asia, the Middle East, and Ukrainian crisis to the West, the region of South Caucasus gets much more importance being in the middle of conflicts and the clashes of interests. Great geopolitical processes change functional values of the geographical places, thus the theories once applied shall also provide current insights and changes brought by changed political and military preferences.

4.1.2. Transformation of Heartland in the 19th and 20th Centuries

From the beginning of the 19th century, Russian Empire transformed and encompassed the huge amount of Heartland, controlling the key areas of the Pivot. Russia Empire extended from the strategically important littoral strips of the Baltic Sea Basin to the Eastern strategically important places such as Kamchatka, Sakhalin, the Maritime Area and Alaska. Also, additional routes to the northern littoral parts of Arctic Russia made Russia a thalassocratic and tellurocratic power, the dominant nation within the Heartland area. It had access to Central European, Central Caucasian and Central Asian territories, and became an active geopolitical actor in Heartland and Rimland simultaneously. Early in the 20th century Russian Empire was transformed into the Soviet Union and along with the establishment of NATO in 1949, established COMECON and extended the Pivot area to include Central European countries residing under the Socialist umbrella. In Central Asia, the Soviet Union expanded into Afghanistan and Mongolia, thus asserting the highest functional validity of the whole Pivot area (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p. 95). It is noteworthy to mention that the ideas proposed by Mackinder emphasized the structural unity of the Heartland and Eastern Europe and as Vladimer Papava and Eldar Ismailov argue, “especially today the Eastern Europe remains a spatial element of its (*Heartland’s*) structure”. By re-adjusting his theory and involving Baltic and Black Sea Basins in the Pivot area, Mackinder’s famous formula began to change its focus: “Whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island, commands the World” (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p 87). Russia’s contemporary geopolitical ambitions clearly reflect the interests which can be translated as the desire to re-establish the Soviet Union and gain the influence and access to the whole Pivot area to control the Heartland and contain the West, ideologically, as well as practically, thus the earlier geopolitical realities of the late 19th and 20th centuries turn out to be still important and shall be re-adjusted to the contemporary geopolitics.

4.1.3. The geopolitical transformation of the Heartland in late 20th Century

In the late 20th century, particularly in the late 1980s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, another round of Heartland transformation has begun. COMECON and Warsaw Pact, which since the middle of the 20th century have meant the merger of the Heartland and Eastern Europe, thus creating strong and functionally viable territorial fundament, ceased to exist. The Russian Federation found itself in the Northeastern part of the continent bordering the already narrowed Pivot area, which involved three independent regional segments – Central Europe (Eastern Europe for Mackinder), Central Caucasus and the Central Asia (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p 88). Because of the Russia's isolation the central part of the Pivot area was shifted to the center of the continent, directly going through the Central Caucasus and the region's three countries – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. From the shifted Pivot area's perspective, Georgia along with its two Southern neighbors became situated on the very center of Eurasian landmass and from the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and then escalation of conflict by Russia in Ukraine with the result of illegal annexation of Crimea became much apparent the importance of the region for the larger European security architecture. The geopolitical processes unfolding in the current political and military reality, particularly Russia's willingness to become a Eurasian superpower by if not annexing but making neighboring states neutral, represent the beginning of Heartland's another transformational cycle and revival of the regional supremacy by the Russian Federation.

4.1.4. Pivot Area

In April, 1904, Halford Mackinder wrote an article in the Geographical Journal *The Geographical Pivot of History*, where Mackinder's ideas about the Pivot were firstly introduced. Mackinder was a geographer, however his geography except of fixed geographical knowledge was demonstrating a geography of socio-political and economic movements of peoples of the world, and in his writings the motivations and interests of different peoples, tribes, nations and states could become vividly drawn. The conception of Euro-Asia according to Mackinder clearly describes the nature and characteristic, also the socio-political and military trends in the development of the territory and the states' directions on these territories. *The conception of Euro-Asia to which we thus attain is that of a continuous land, ice-girt in the north, water-girt elsewhere, measuring 21 million square miles, or more than three times the area of North America, whose center and north, measuring some 9 million square miles, or more than twice the area of Europe, have no available water-ways to the ocean, but, on the other hand, except in the subarctic forests, are very generally favorable to the mobility of horsemen and camelmen. To East, South and West of this heart-land are marginal regions, ranged in a vast crescent, accessible to shipmen* (Mackinder, Halford, J., *The Geographical Pivot of History*, The Geographical Journal, Vol. XXIII, N4, 1904, p.431). In this part from the article Mackinder writes very general as well as very important characteristics, which underline the main strengths and weaknesses of the continent. Geography dictates, not prohibits, as thought the realists of modern geopolitics, and to this idea the theory proposed by Mackinder becomes valuable and relevant. Contrary to the middle ages and Columbian epoch, which Mackinder describes in the first pages of the above-mentioned article, the developments in the navy changed the world politics and visions of the states. But, *the land power still remains, and recent events have again increased its significance. While the maritime peoples of Western Europe have covered the ocean with their fleets, settled the outer continents, and in varying degree made tributary the oceanic*

margins of Asia, Russia has organized the Cossacks, and emerging from her northern forests, has policed the steppe by setting her nomads to meet the Tartar nomads... ..In the wake of the Cossacks, Russia has safely emerged from her former seclusion in the northern forests...

...Mackinder writes that one of the paramount intrinsic importance for Europe was the migration of the Russian peasants (Mackinder, Halford, J., *The Geographical Pivot of History*, The Geographical Journal, Vol. XXIII, N4, 1904, p.434). Based on description of historical changes in Euro-Asian continent, Mackinder attempts to demonstrate the structure of the world where geographic as well as political spheres become intertwined. Rapid review of the history shows “a certain persistence of geographical relationship”. Conditions of transformation of military and economic power-routes changed the face of the earth. When discussing Russia in this context, Mackinder wrote: *In the world at large she (Russia) occupies the central strategical position held by Germany in Europe. She can strike from all sides and be struck from all sides, save the north* (Ibid., p. 436). This already gives the most important image of the Russian political and military position. Thesis attempts to demonstrate that although Mackinder wrote that the “empire of the world” would be in sight if Russia and Germany created the alliance, the “oversetting of the balance of power in favor of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia”, is observable. Although Russian Federation didn’t ally her-self with Germany, her revisionist politics, especially in South Caucasus, started from the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and in Eastern Europe in the face of Ukrainian crisis demonstrates the threats emanating from the Russian Federation’s political and military visions.

4.1.5. The Pivot Area in the 21st Century

Based on the study conducted by Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava, the function of the Pivot area, – the Central Eurasia – is to be an ensuring connector and crossroad of the parallels (West-East) and meridians (North-South). Pivot area brings to its owner an opportunity to control the vast amount of the territories by controlling the vital routes and also, it gives the dominant nation in the region the possibility to monopolize the resources and what is much more important, to encompass other much remote areas of the Eurasian continent (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p 97). As the Eurasian continent consists of Europe and Asia, the central part of Eurasia shall consist of central parts of each organic segment. Thus the Central Eurasian part where the Pivot is situated involves territories of Central European and Central Asian states, “*as well as a “special zones” where the both segments meet – the territories of Central Caucasian countries*” (Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, p 98).

From this perspective Georgia is on the very center of Eurasian landmass. The location, firstly, makes Georgia important country, and secondly, it is Georgia’s strong desire to closely connect its ideological, socio-political-economic and military future with the EU and NATO. The much stronger is the relations between Georgia and its Western partners much stable is the Southern Caucasus guaranteeing security and openness of the region’s spatial benefits for the West. With respect to Russia’s political and military interests, the involvement of Georgia in the Western clubs means securing also the neighboring states of the South Caucasus, and guaranteeing that Russia and threats emanating from the Federation are contained. Containment of the threats at the very backyard of Russia means the decreased levels of Russian aggression much closer to the West’s home.

4.2. Black Sea Security

Another very significant security issue at stake is the security of the Black Sea Basin. Black sea, once the Soviet lake, turned out to be very important with regard of current geopolitical situation. The annexation of Crimea and the support and encouragement given to the separatists in Eastern Ukraine underline the revisionist character of the Russian Federation and also its huge interest in increasing its naval capabilities. NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow stated the following: “...*To the East, Russia has torn up the international rule book. It has returned to a strategy of power politics. It threatens not just Ukraine, but European and global security generally... ..Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is not an isolated incident, but a game changer in European security. It reflects an evolving pattern of behavior that has been emerging for several years...* (Prospects for NATO–Russia Relations; Keynote Address by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow; Address at the Leangkollen Conference, February 2, in Oslo, Norway).

The seizure of Crimea by Russia is a violation of three international agreements which are committed to the stability of Eastern Europe and Ukraine, namely Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Budapest memorandum of 1994, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act signed in Paris in 1997, confirming the acceptance of measures with regard to stationing of conventional military forces in Europe (*Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO’s Eastern Defenses*, Lucas, Edward and Mitchell, A. Wess, Center for European Policy Analysis, Report No. 35, March 25, 2014).

By gradually using its hard power to promote and protect the interests in its “spheres of interest”, Russia increased its level of maritime power in the Black Sea Basin and dramatically changed the balance of power. As Dr. Igor Delanoë argues, unlike to the late 19th century, when, for example, American historian and strategist Alfred T. Mahan tended to focus more on the naval power rather than on maritime power as the determinant of country’s maritime capabilities, nowadays definition of maritime power has broadened to

include the “*merchant navy, naval diplomacy and the ability for a fleet to perform a wide array of routine maritime missions. Combined to the naval power, all these factors define the maritime power of an actor*” (*The Current Status of the Black Sea Regional Security*, Atlantic Treaty Association, Vol. 4, Issue 4 April, 2014, p.2). The same study reveals that integrating Crimea has provided Russia with a greater coastline in the Azov and the Black Seas. Before March of 2014 Russia had 570 kilometers of coast in the Azov Sea, nearly 400 kilometers of hostile shores, with no deep ports for docking the fleet, between the Kerch straight and Georgian border, and an additional 300 kilometers corresponding Abkhazian coastline, which came under Moscow’s control after Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and declaring Abkhazian independence. Nowadays, because of the Crimean annexation, Russia controls the larger coastline as well as the best Black Sea port – Sevastopol. Moscow now is fully able to dispatch new military hardware, including coastal artillery and land-based forces and aircraft (*The Current Status of the Black Sea Regional Security*, Atlantic Treaty Association. Vol.4. Issue 4 April, 2014, p. 3). Notwithstanding the fact will Russia annex the rest of the Ukraine or other neighboring countries or not, its primary intention of destabilization the region is reflecting its interest to make NATO’s Eastern and Southeastern flanks less desirable for NATO to enlarge or defend, underlining the fact that these countries and the whole region is the pivotal area for the Russian Federation to become at least a Eurasian superpower. The Pivot of history, now shifted to the Central Caucasus demonstrates the vast opportunities for Russia. By losing the Caucasus Region and its Eastern flank to Russia’s interests, Europe loses the security far close to the Western and Central Europe and goes back to the Cold War era World Order, giving the Russian Federation the possibility to restore its influence and capabilities. In such a complex strategic context, Black Sea reflects a critical point needed by Russia to restore its East European and Eurasian dominance, as well as opportunity to project power into the Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. Russian increased presence in the Black Sea locks Georgia and cuts the South Caucasus region off from the West, as well as threatens with closing the choke points, especially the energy routes so

vastly represented under the Black Sea waters. Besides, control of the Black Sea ports gives Russia an ability to reach the mainland Europe, especially Bulgaria and Romania. In effect, economic zones of Russia and Romania have become de facto adjacent and nowadays, Russia shares a maritime border with the EU and NATO in the Black Sea Basin (*Black Sea Rising: Russia's Strategy in South east Europe*, Bugajski, Janusz and Doran, B. Peter, Center for European policy Analysis, February 2016, p.6).

This gives an insight why after the Crimea Crisis the Pivot of World history shifted to the south to cover the region of Central Caucasus. Black Sea is no more just a lake what it was in times of Soviet Union and increasing presence of Russian political and military capabilities turn the area into the “choke point” for power projection.

By controlling the Central Caucasus (with the Black Sea Basin), Russia controls the “choke point”, from where it has the ability to reach five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the East, and what is also important for the West, Russia has the ability to project power in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Although in Southern Caucasus NATO has Turkey, but with regard to Turkey's internal problems currently concerning the system of democracy and its continuous problems with Kurds, Turkey is not able to hold the “choke point” of Russia's power projection alone.

From the Black Sea and subsequently, Crimean territory Russia easily projects power to the Eastern Central Europe, without using much forces via Belarus and Moldova, and threatens not only Baltic States but also Bulgaria, Romania and the states of Balkan Peninsula.

4.3. Defending Only Eastern Flank While Loosing Broader Security

The fate of Crimea emphasizes the ability of Russia to use fast military strikes in order to create political faits accomplis. In its very recent statement newly elected President of the United States said that NATO becomes “obsolete”. Although the Russian media caught the phrase and spread its misinterpreted variant, underlining that President Trump is not willing to support NATO, the very opposite was what Mr. Trump emphasized. United States position with regard to NATO is unchanged. Especially in the current political environment and with regard to Russian Federation’s bellicose stance, NATO is becoming much more important. NATO is first of all the defensive Alliance, but after the Cold War era, NATO became one of the most important Alliance supporting and spreading Western values with the idea of the shared peace. All the members of the Alliance are obliged to spend at least 2 % of their GDP on defense, the term which is hardly fulfilled by most of the European member-states. The present situation - that is the threats coming from the Russia - pose a serious challenge to the NATO member as well as non-member states, as to how to respond to and how to neutralize the aggression or at least how to prepare for the containment. The greatest difficulty which NATO as a defense Alliance faces is the internal disunity of the Alliance on the response the organization shall give to Russia’s militaristic ambitions. Another very important disunity concerns the enlargement policy of NATO, as part of the member states, mostly the core-member states are unwilling to increase tensions with Russia thus they continuously hinder the decision about accepting aspirant countries into the club.

Thesis argues that by only concentrating on Eastern flank defense, NATO leaves the chances for Russia to increase its power projection and influence on the territories such as Ukraine, Greater Central Europe, Central Asia, Greater Central Asia and the Middle East by letting Russia to increase its influence in the Black Sea basin and South Caucasus. This guarantees that the world peace and particularly European peace and unity will be directly affected.

The collapse of the Soviet Union freed states in Greater Central Europe from the Russian ties and currently it is least probable that Russia will be able to restore its influence in these countries on the ideological base, but the vulnerability rooted in the region comes from the historical attitude the Russian Federation has toward it. The states from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea share the Soviet past, and if using the Mackinder's theory in an adjusted way, they structurally represent the part of the Heartland, thus the "sphere of special interest" for Russia. After NATO enlargement, these states became much more vulnerable as Russia exposed coercive tactics, from aggressive diplomacy and energy blackmail to retaliatory economic warfare and cyber attacks. Downsizing of U.S. military presence in the region opened the window of opportunity to Kremlin's revanchist policies. Stalled European political project as an alternative to the U.S. patronage brought the disunity and lessened functional validity of states and state-cooperation. Only after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 the West started to analyze how Russia was starting to challenge the status quo, but the "Reset" button which was clicked stalled the fast reaction and made the West to underestimate the threats growing from the Russia's side. In the region, Poland and the Visegrad and the Nordic-Baltic groups began to modernize their military and regional defense coordination, as well as started to deepen ties with the Western powers, for example with Germany, Sweden etc. but the overall situation was not changed, even the overall attitude towards Russia's movements was more or less neutral. Only the Ukrainian Crisis revealed how much Russia was dissatisfied with the current status quo and demonstrated the whole scale of Kremlin's future politics. The Crisis was particularly relevant for the Baltic States due to geographical and demographic similarities – for example, in Estonia and Latvia Russian minorities are defined to be 321,000 and 556,000 respectively, also the Russia naval activities in the Baltic highly coincided with the highest levels of tensions in Ukraine (*Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO's Eastern Defenses*, Lucas, Edward and Mitchell, A. Wess, Center for European Policy Analysis, Report No. 35, March 25, 2014, p. 2). Decisions which were taken during the Wales Summit only

partially fill the security gaps on NATO's eastern flank. In order to guarantee Article 5, NATO members approved the Readiness Action Plan, which shortens the time needed to defend threatened or attacked member-states. Already created NATO Response Force numbers 13,000 troops out of which some units will be deployable and ready in two days, while the majority of the units will be ready to move in seven days, and the high readiness brigade consisting of up to 5,000 troops is under modernization in order to be deployed faster when necessary and it will be used as an additional equipment for the NRS (*NATO Response Force Fact Sheet 2016*). Multinational Corps North-East, with headquarters in Szczecin on the Polish coast will also be modernized in order to meet higher levels of readiness and response to the needs. NATO emphasized its plans to station the necessary facilities, equipment and logistics with appropriate specialists on the territories of Baltic States as well as Poland and Romania. Through the continuous exercises NATO troops will be deployed with an increased presence in these countries, to guarantee the higher visibility and make those territories unwilling for Russia for attacking. Although these preparations, NATO allies are disunited with regard to the increased militarization of the region, as still they adhere to the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 unlike the Russian politics. This increases the levels of vulnerability of the region as Russian signal is very obvious – it doesn't adhere to the same principles with regard of permanent stationing of substantial combat forces and conventional forces in Europe. Notwithstanding the fact that NATO won't intervene militarily in Ukraine, which would directly mean the proxy-war with Russia on Ukrainian territory, NATO supports Ukrainian territorial integrity and helps Ukraine in Ukrainian Army's transformation and modernization. NATO voluntary trust funds support command control and communications services, strategic communications and cyber defense and also arrange better logistics and standardization. With avoiding direct military confrontation with Russia, also by burdening Russia with sanctions, makes neutralization of Russia a long-term project. It is important to consider that between 2008 and 2013, the Russian defense budget grew from \$43.8 billion to \$87.8 billion, and it is still increasing notwithstanding the sanctions

and severe economic conditions in Russia (*NATO Narrows Military Gap on its Eastern Flank*, Lorenz, Wojcieh, Strategic File, No.20 (55), 2014). Here the character of the Russian Federation shall be underlined, which historically is much interested in militarism and territorial expansion, than in inward development. Thus the interest and enthusiasm in further territorial expansion overshadow the economic crisis presented in Russia. The political influence it exerts on Belarus and Moldova, also annexation of Ukraine gives Russia much wider opportunities concerning territorial dimension it can cover, also influence and closer ties Russia has on these territories gives to it the benefit with regard to time needed for military maneuvers.

By defending only Polish, Baltic States' and Romania's territories, NATO risks less as it still works to counter the Russian aggression on these possible hot spots, but the wider territorial benefits left of Russia need to be recognized as well and assessed in detail. Although compared to the U.S. and EU Russia has much limited resources to increase its political and military influence, but because of the character of the region where Russia tries to bid its superpower status, the vulnerability of the whole Europe increases. As mentioned above, after the Crimea's annexation, Russia gained the most pivotal territory of the region, and started to cut off the Southern Caucasus and Black Sea Basin from the international access. With the Eurasian Economic Union and CSTO – Common Security Treaty Organization, Russia tries to gather the whole Central Caucasus and Central Asia under its influence. Russia makes its controllable territorial segment wider and more secure by militarily strengthening Crimea and Black Sea. As is written in the Strategic File published by Polish Institute of International Affairs, “*access to airports and lack of limitations to the deployment of military equipment such as Iskander ballistic missiles, S-300 and S-400 systems, and Su-25 attack aircraft able to carry tactical nuclear weapons, give Russia new possibilities of exerting military pressure on Turkey, Romania, the Balkans, and even Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary – countries which have so far felt immune from Russian direct military threat*” (p. 3).

By cutting off the Western power projection in Central Caucasus and Black Sea region, Russia monopolizes important energy routes thus increases the vulnerability of European energy security. Energy dependency is the card Russia holds successfully and constantly uses it as Trojan horse in order to disunite the Western attitude towards Russia, especially when it comes to the NATO enlargement and defense policies.

Thus, it becomes clear that defending only NATO's eastern flank is less effective, as under Russian influence and direct control is left the whole Southern part of Caucasus Mountain and Black Sea basin with the Crimea. As it is observable, Russian Federation's current mode of behaving aims at forcing the creation of new security architecture, and at de facto settling of the readjusted "sphere of influence". With regard to the economic problems Russia has at home, the probability that Russia will enter wider-scale confrontation with NATO is very low, while with a high probability Russia will try to stall the current position and make it a new status quo. Thesis argues that the freezing of Ukrainian Crisis (notwithstanding the U.S. and NATO work in Ukraine and support development of Ukrainian Army and logistics), freezing of Georgia's NATO accession and concentrating only on defense of the NATO's eastern flank gives to Russia a possibility for further preparation and militaristic development, and undermines peace and security of a greater Europe leaving the most important "choke point" as is the Central Caucasus and Black Sea Basin under Russian control. Unable to destabilize Eastern Europe on a broader scale, Russia will undermine the security architecture of South Caucasus and for economical purposes will monopolize the energy routes and corridors to increase its communication and security system close to its southern borders.

4.4. Why Defending South Caucasus is Important

As noted in the beginning of the second chapter, the pivot area of Mackinder's theory, according to the study conducted in frames of *Central Asia – Caucasus Institute Silk Road Study Program*, has shifted to the south covering the Central Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. From the three mentioned countries Georgia is the most visible partner of NATO and the strong adherent to the Western values. Although remote from the rest of the Europe, with a turbulent history of independence, its geographical importance makes it attractive to the Russian Federation. After Ukrainian Crisis, Russia holds northern part of the Black Sea basin with which it lessens its isolation and increases its military influence over the Grand European theatre. Neighboring countries, such as Belarus, has very close historical ties with Russia and is least likely to confront Kremlin ideology if Russia would like to use Belarusian support in terms of military usage of its territory. In Ukraine, besides the destabilized Eastern part, the western side of the country is also very much vulnerable because of Moldova's Transnistrian breakaway region where Russia holds its feet. After Russo-Georgia war, Russia increased its military presence in Georgia, and its military bases outside its sovereign borders increased in amount as additionally became presented in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and then Crimea. The possibility that Russia will enter into wide-scale military confrontation with the West is not high, although the intention to freeze the current position and gain time for further military development contains danger and risky results. By deterring Russia on the Eastern flank, by increasing NATO presence in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and Baltic States becomes insufficient as doors for Russia thorough the Black Sea are open. On 20th January, 2011, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on an EU strategy for the Black Sea, where Black Sea Region is called as having a geo-strategic importance for the energy-security of the EU. The resolution emphasizes security issues, protracted conflicts and bilateral disputes in the region. Especially currently, because of the annexation of Crimea by Russian Federation, the area is characterized with strategic rivalries

which lead to militarization and proliferation of arms, cross-border crimes and military tensions. The Black Sea can become a new energy life-line for the EU, if sufficiently defended, as Russia's presence in the region threatens further monopolization of trade and strategic routes and resources located in the vicinity. In this region security shall be based on consent of littoral states, close coordination and cooperation with the EU and NATO for the maintenance of broader security and stability. Without at least minimal additional presence of NATO troops in the region and NATO naval power in the Black Sea, it is impossible to defend the lanes of communication the hub is presenting (*The Maritime Dimension of European Security*, Strategies, Initiatives, Synergies, Parisi, Ioannis, Ph.D. 2015, p.41).

This thesis strives to emphasize that for NATO, defending South Caucasus region has a high importance. The less is Russia's influence in its neighboring region and the more Russia is deterred from the south as well as from the East, the less likely becomes the risk of losing the Black sea's central and northern parts and much higher becomes the probability that the contact with Ukrainian insurgents and Russian Federation will lessen. Although Russian Federation is not able to start valid military tensions on Eastern flank due to its still complex difficulties in economy, it is capable enough to destabilize South Caucasus and cut Georgia from the Western influence. By controlling the "choke point" Russia's freedom of action increases, thus strategic and tactical development becomes possible, serving Russia's Imperialistic ambitions.

Farkhad Aliev in "the Caucasus through the Eurasian Prism", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, puts that the vision proposed by contemporary Eurasianists of an Eurasianist-style organization of the entire Caucasus and Russia's strategic partners there is important to be considered ("the Caucasus through the Eurasian Prism", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No 1, (31), 2005, pp. 91-99). The famous New Geopolitical Order in the Caucasus, proposed by one of the active Russian geopoliticians, Alexander Dugin, rejects the concept of nation-states, and emphasizes the viability of the project under which a Caucasian Federation shall be created, uniting both, the Russian Northern Caucasus and Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

(*Osnovy Geopolitiki*, Dugin, Alexander, pp. 351-352). One part of this project is already done, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which, although recognized by Russia as independent states, are formally functioning only with the Russian Federation's help. Moreover, by signing treaties in 2014 and 2015 with Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively, Russia increases its military presence and political ties in order to finally incorporate these entities into his imperial body, and gain lasting control of Georgian, Armenian and subsequently, Azerbaijani territories. Zbigniew Brzezinski characterizes Azerbaijan as a "geopolitical pivot" and says that "*the independence of the Central Asian states can be rendered nearly meaningless if Azerbaijan becomes fully subordinated to Moscow's control*" (*The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski, Zbigniew, pp. 40-41, 46-47, 129). I would like to stress the same with regard to particularly Georgia and generally, South Caucasus. Georgia is one of the major pro-Western countries in the region, and also is a central country in the South Caucasus directly neighboring with Russia.

The Warsaw Declaration on Transatlantic Security directly stresses the threats coming from Russia and its activities which "undermine rules-based order in Europe". As the heads of state and governments emphasize in the 7th paragraph of the declaration, the stability of NATO's neighbors directly affects the security of the member-states. In 9th paragraph of the same declaration it is stated that NATO will provide more support for Georgia and Ukraine, which strictly emphasizes that the European security architecture is starting from the very borders of Russia, and that the deterrence without fully covering regions such as South Caucasus and Black Sea are not efficient because it leaves much freedom to Russian ambitions (*The Warsaw Declaration on Transatlantic Security*, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July, 2016).

Particular worsening of the security started from 2007-2008, period when Russia unilaterally rejected part of the responsibilities it had according to the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, agreed during Cold War. This gives Russia much freedom in exceeding the limits

and stationing of military equipment in different parts of the Europe. This became the reason why Russia became able to breach the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Commitments with regard to troop withdrawal in the region. Russia has one of the major military bases in Gyumri, Armenia, the southernmost point of Russian military presence. The base is situated on the historical border between Russia and Ottomans for more than two centuries. The ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the beginning of the 1990's interrupted the regular functioning of railroad connection between Russia and Armenia via Georgia. Because of Georgia's request with regard to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia, which was completed in 2007, Russia's military infrastructure in South Caucasus lessened. One of the main reasons of war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 was reconstruction of military bases on the Georgian territory. Some scholars argue that the significance of Georgia is not in its strategic location, nor in its commitments. The greatest significance of Georgia is its democratic views and western ideology that can play a critical role for the U.S. and Europe in the Caucasian region. However, it should be correctly understood that the importance for Georgia to become member of NATO and EU is also of a vital significance also for the U.S. and EU if they want to have a full-right ally in the region alongside with Turkey. Although direct defense is not a responsibility that U.S. takes towards Georgia, but indirectly it can be achieved if Georgia becomes a full-scale member of coalitions. Nowadays Georgia is not a member of any military coalition, thus its strategic importance and security is just formally recognized goods it has.

The importance of strategic partnership with Georgia increases as for instance Armenia and Russia unified air defense system in the Caucasian region. Alexander Luzan, the former deputy undersecretary of the Russian land forces, said he believes this agreement is met after Turkey downed Russian Su-24 warplane along its border with Syria on November 24 on grounds of airspace violation. But whatever is the reason, the fact that Russia tries to defend itself and insulate the whole region under one military umbrella, is a threat not only for Georgia but also for the international community.

Russian stations an estimated 5000 troops in Armenia, including 3000 officially reported to be based at the 102nd Military Base located in Gyumri. This Military Base is the former Soviet Army's 127th Motor Rifle Division of the Soviet Seventh Guards Army is part of the Transcaucasian Group of Forces. Within the framework of Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenia tries to bolster Russian military presence that is perceived as a national security guarantor for Armenia. In 1997 a 25-year agreement between Russia and Armenia was signed, which guarantees military aid and assistance from Russia. The troops involved in Russian-Armenian joint air defense operate according to the system developed in the Soviet era: joint monitoring of the airspace to the south, using combat aviation and air defense units. Russia actively supplies Armenia via Azerbaijan, using the unsettled conflict of Nagorno Kharabakh on its advantage. In 2012 a senior Russian military official told that Russia would double the number of personnel deployed for contacting with Gyumri base, while actively deployed and located personnel on the base would remain the same. Although the number of military personnel on the Gyumri base won't increase, the processes that Russia actively pursues in the region remain still at stake (Material is taken from Globalsecurity.org, topic: *102 Military Base*, site maintained by John Pike).

As Georgia lies in between Armenia and Russia, air-defense unification is harder to accomplish, however the document is already signed. Other document, signed in 2010 extends leasing on the base till 2044. Same relationship Moscow tries to establish with Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. As military coalitions and treaties Russia develops is anti-NATO in their essence, the role of Georgia along with the Turkey as a peacekeeper in the region increases.

The Russian military base in Abkhazia during the Cold War period was seen as a strategically important piece in the broad puzzle that was the Soviet-NATO confrontation. Today, Russian military presence in Abkhazia can be perceived very dangerous as the air defense for example that Russia maintains in the autonomous region covers almost entire region till the borders of Turkey. Also Ochamchire from the Soviet period, namely from 1923 was a Soviet

naval base. Most recently, during the August war in Georgia, it was Ochamchire where the Russian warships arrived and the marines landed before moving on and attacking Georgia. Russia clearly tries to strengthen and expand its military power and bases abroad. On November 24 of 2014 Russia and Abkhazia signed military treaty, according to which ties between Sukhumi and Moscow becomes stronger. The agreement deepens cooperation and effectively integrates Abkhazia's foreign policy in Russia's. Under the terms of agreement Putin granted \$111.4 million to Abkhazia within the framework of "joint defense and security space", as stated on the Kremlin website. As steps taken by Russia are actively denounced by North Atlantic Treaty Organization members, and international community sees threats that Russia poses on post-Soviet space. Georgian foreign minister Tamar Beruchashvili commented on the "strategic partnership" treaty signed by Putin and Abkhazia's leader Raul Khadzimba, "The signing of this document will have a negative impact on the security situation in Georgia's occupied territories as well as in the broader context of European security", she said, adding that "the deal infringed Georgia's territorial integrity" (*The Moscow Times*, *NATO, EU Criticize Accord between Russia and Breakaway Abkhazia Region*, December 5, 2017; *Abkhazia to Integrate Military with Russia*, Eric, Johns, 12.01.2014).

South Caucasus represents the hub of strategic communications and the prior ambitions of Russia focus on controlling the states as Ukraine and Georgia, along with maintaining close ties with Armenia and Central European countries, as for Russia's national security, besides the policy of "no NATO in the vicinity of Russia", the special zones of influence is the most important bid. The special zones of influence serve as buffer zones and as territorial gains, from which the projection of power on Greater Eastern Europe, Greater Central Asia and the Middle East becomes easier. Thus for NATO it is very important to maintain the strong relations with the littoral states of Black Sea, currently particularly with Georgia, and do not give Russia a possibility to exert its power in the region which would further deteriorate the security infrastructure of the whole Europe and international system. The deterrence only

from the eastern flank of NATO would become insufficient if territories south to Russia involving shifted Pivot area are left without balanced defense.

CHAPTER 5

Georgia's Possible NATO Membership and the Russian Factor

5.1. NATO-Georgian Relations Before 2008

The cooperation between NATO and Georgia began almost the same time when Georgia gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Georgia joined North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council was established after the end of the Cold War as a platform for the Allies to give them possibility of better dialogue with former adversaries affiliated with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. In 1997, newly established Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council replaced the NACC to cover much wider scale of partnerships. The EAPC provides a full political framework for NATO's and Euro-Atlantic partners' cooperation and bilateral relationships arranged through Partnership for Peace's program. Georgia joined the individually framed Partnership for Peace program in 1994. Broadly, Partnership for Peace program covers the possible and necessary areas of cooperation in order to build confidence and interoperability between the Euro-Atlantic partners and NATO and directly involve the issues such are: preservation of democratic society, adherence to the international law, adherence to the Helsinki Final Act resolutions, fulfillment of commitments with regard to international disarmament and arms control agreements. Settling the disputes peacefully and respect for the sovereignty of other states, their territorial integrity and borders is one of the most important requirement addressed. It is important to say that Georgia being in confrontation with Russia and having 20 % of its territories occupied by the Federation, is unable to be in a peaceful co-existence with the neighboring country. Thus the commitment to the peaceful solution of the disputes is hard

for the Georgian state however it continuously calls on Russia to adhere to the international obligations. By being into the Partnership for Peace Program, Georgia accepts the terms for building the confident and transparent environment, leading to diminished threats to peace and cooperates with Euro-Atlantic partners by fully adhering the concepts and requirements presented.

Georgia's neighbors, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are all NATO partners, only Turkey being a NATO-member state currently. However it is only in Georgia where majority of the population and the state-government openly supports the Euro-Atlantic integration policies and implementation of state-policies and social life according to Western values. For NATO the region becomes much important if the protracted conflicts and transitional environment is considered, along with the energy-security architecture as the region sits on one of the important energy routes and communication lanes. The ambivalence with which Russia undertakes its international obligations, and its two-sided partnership with the NATO makes it difficult for the region to settle the disputes peacefully, thus here the role of NATO becomes much important. NATO strongly underlines that it is not going to enter and resolve the separatist regions problems, or territorial disputes and claims of neighboring countries such as Russia and Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia or Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh, but it supports territorial integrity and sovereignty of the states and encourages them to peacefully settle the conflicts down (*NATO Background: Deepening Relations with Georgia, NATO 2011*).

In 2002 during the Prague Summit, Georgia for the first time declared officially its desire to become the NATO member. Since then, in frames of different cooperative platforms with NATO, Georgia fundamentally reshaped its political culture by giving it more Western colors. Especially after 2003, when the Rose Revolution brought a new, fully pro-Western government, the real gap between Georgia and Russia became clearly observable, thus the predictions about forthcoming tensions between Russia and Georgia that could lead to a the conflict, most probably, in the Georgia's breakaway regions, became possible.

The year of 2004 became a milestone in NATO-Georgian relations, because Georgia became one of the first countries to acquire Individual Partnership Action Plan which was oriented to reform Georgia's domestic affairs. In 2005, Georgia became the fourth country which joined NATO Response Force and from 2006, NATO started much closer cooperation through the frames of Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues, in order to increase the communication with and coordination of Georgian domestic policies as well as its defense politics.

At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO leaders agreed that Georgia would become a NATO member and acquired a reliable partner in the region, which continuously offered its troops presence in the NATO-led missions, which had a twofold affect on Georgia-NATO relations. On the first hand, Georgia gained a lot from being involved in the NATO-led missions in Kosovo and in Afghanistan as the level of interoperability with NATO forces increased, and on the other hand, NATO also became more convinced about Georgia's ambitions and devotion to its officially declared aspiration for Euro-integration.

It is important to note that the Study on NATO enlargement which was published in 1995, introduced the requirements for the states willing to become members of the Alliance. The requirements underline the importance of functioning democratic political system based on market economy, fair treatment of minority populations, commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, ability and willingness to cooperate with and invest in NATO-led missions, and commitment to a democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures (*Accession of Georgia to NATO*, Zuzana Konecna, 2016, p 3.). The most challenging out of all the requirements for Georgia is the commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflicts, because being under an occupation of Russia with a 20% occupied territories with the potential for further destabilization, the overall political attractiveness of Georgia decreases. Although, Georgia is fully adhered to the concept of peaceful solution of the conflict, the other participants of the conflict make the political and military environment unstable.

Notwithstanding the high-level cooperation and partnership, in 2008 NATO didn't allow Georgia to receive a Membership Action Plan, and the situation from guaranteeing Georgia's would be membership and the disapproval on MAP gave Russia a freedom of action in order to destabilize the region, signaling its disapproval of Georgia's NATO membership and pushed critically for the first time its policy priority - "no NATO in the vicinity of Russia". The protracted and lengthy process of acquiring NATO membership leads Georgia to even more challenge – confronting heightened Russian propaganda in the country, maintaining democratic and peaceful environment and, finally, solution of problems with regard to territorial integrity under the increased Russian military presence in the Breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with which Russia signs treaties of military and political integration and negotiation taking the responsibility further to defend its puppet states within the Georgian sovereign territory.

5.2. Effects of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War

2008 Russo-Georgian war made the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow even more troubled and affected the Russo-Georgian, also NATO-Georgian and NATO-Russian relations. The 5 days war was the first visible shift in the post-Cold War era security architecture which made it visible that the Cold War which was thought by the West to be finished started to melt down. After the August War Russia declared Georgia's separatist regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and took the responsibility to support the well-being of these states, further underlining that the status quo was changed and that Russia was returning not a superpower of world politics, but as a regional superpower with a potential ability to perform military maneuvers unilaterally.

The war with Georgia became a catalyst for Russia's military performance, as it demonstrated Russia's very low-developed and outdated system of military command and control, as well

as its problems with outdated military equipment. Following years, Russian defense budget rose for almost threefold, making the Federation able to readjust status quo further by annexing Crimea. By posing such a grave threat to the European security system, and by signaling its intention to become a regional power with unilateral decision-power on the continent (at least in its vicinity), Russia demonstrates its growing ambitions further. Thus if the South Caucasus region was important for NATO and for the security architecture of Europe because of protracted conflicts, present functionality level of once failing states' and because of the South Caucasus being an energy corridor guaranteeing the ability for Europe to the energy diversification, for the present day, after Russo-Georgian war and Ukrainian crisis, its importance grew and underlined the necessity to be involved into the entire defense system NATO represents.

The low attention and reaction from the West on Russo-Georgian war, which ended for Russia without economic sanctions, made it possible for the country to further develop its militancy and gave it the sense of power for destabilization without risking anything more than strict comments while assessing its reputation. After the Russo-Georgian war, NATO-Russian council was suspended, but this move further increased the gap and miscommunication between the already visibly opposing parties.

The 5-days war between Russia and Georgia made it clear for the West that much more attention to Georgia was needed, and had an interesting effect on NATO-Georgian relations. Although not accepting Georgia's MAP granting, the Alliance further deepened its relations with the state, signaling to Russia on its side that no third country, according to the NATO' Washington Treaty' 10th paragraph, has the right to intervene into the cooperation between NATO and its partners and that, driven by NATO's supply-demand policy, every country willing to join the Alliance has the right to do so if it is sufficiently ready to join and if the members of all already NATO-member states approve the aspiring country's membership potential.

5.3. Russia's Relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia

This sub-chapter strives to highlight the relations Russia structured with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's two breakaway regions, and Georgia's priorities underlined in the strategy for 2017-2020 on Membership Communications in EU and NATO. The strategy gives an important insight into the attitude of the state towards the territorial integrity, its intention to cooperate with the Western blocks, and its priorities with regard to the relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia have silenced after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and its consequents – Russia's recognition of Georgian breakaway regions as an independent states. Since then parties have met 33 times in Geneva for talks but nothing has changed the situation. Since the recognition of de facto regions as independent entities, the international isolation of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia grew as UNOMIG was suspended and UN observations in these regions subsequently declined and then ceased to exist. After Ukrainian crisis, both regions faced even worse suppression as they had to support Russia's policies, but at the end, because of the sanctions and war the subsidies coming from Russia declined and the political relations, notwithstanding the mutual treaties signed with Russia, became only beneficiary for the Russian Federation. Besides, the law of Georgia on occupied territories made the isolation of South Ossetians and Abkhaz much deeper, as Georgia was refusing to negotiate with the self-proclaimed governments of both breakaway regions unless the territories are occupied by Russia. After the annexation of Crimea, Russia acquired much wider power-projection over the Black Sea and Abkhazia's importance to Russia sharply declined, additionally Russia doesn't welcome the policy of Abkhazians which bans property ownership for foreigners, including Russians. South Ossetia, which was discussing with Russia a scenario and a possibility to integrate with North Ossetia, stayed without

development as Russia became busy in Ukraine and additionally, acknowledges the fact that annexation of Crimea had brought strict sanctions against the Federation (*Crimea, Russia and Options for Engagement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, De Waal, Thomas, Carnegie Europe, 2016). Since 2013 Russia has engaged in the security measures in both regions readjusting and militarizing administrative borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is not a coincidence that Russia's increased activity with regard to security lines on the administrative borders begun at the time when Georgia was actively engaged in the negotiations over free trade agreement and association with the EU. The relationship between Russia and Georgian de facto regions is structured within the documents signed mutually.

Treaty on "alliance and strategic partnership" signed between Russian Federation and Abkhazia on 27th November 2014 was an interesting case representing how Abkhaz side stressed its interests notwithstanding different interests Russia had offered first. Draft, which was sent to Abkhaz side from Russia on October 13, followed the criticism from the Abkhazians who sent corrected version of the treaty draft back with an intention to underline their own preferences. Finally signed on 27th November, treaty presents the multifaceted agreement on cooperation, creation of mutual defense structure, competences for joint coordination center for organs involved in security system have been installed, however the possibility for Russian to obtain Abkhaz citizenship easily has been removed, however the mutual coordination for harmonized foreign affairs and legislations on budgetary and customs was agreed. Statement delivered by Mr. Andrey Kelin, permanent representative of the Russian Federation at the 1028th meeting of the OSCE permanent council on 28th November 2014 about the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on Alliance and Mutual Partnership emphasizes that due to "Saakashvili's military venture" in August 2008 "irreversible changes" have occurred in the South Caucasus, leading to creation of two independent states – Abkhazia and South Ossetia,

and Russian Federation will inevitably co-operate with the states for mutual benefits and harmonized relations. Russia established “solid legal framework” with each country.

“The treaty was the logical outcome of collaborative efforts to update and give systemic structure to the legal framework of Russian-Abkazian inter-state relations based on almost 80 different bilateral agreements, starting with Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance of 17 September 2008” (OSCE, November 28, 2014).

Thus, as Dieter Boden stresses *“This treaty text replicates to some extent the association and free trade agreement concluded between Georgia and the EU on 27th June is confirmed not least by a series of textual correspondences. Article 6, which concerns the two signatories’ obligation to assist each other in the event of an attack, replicates Article 5 of the NATO treaty”* (*The Russian-Abkhaz Treaty*, New Tensions in the South Caucasus, Boden, Dieter, 2014). With this treaty, and due to the dissatisfaction what came from the Abkhaz side, it is clearly seen that Abkhazian independence is suspended by the Russian Federation itself, as if we take into account the fact that Abkhazia is thoroughly isolated internationally, Russia treats the entity as its part mainly with the intention to control territory of Georgia and to keep a closer position to its southern flank.

Mr. Andrey Rudenko, Deputy permanent representative of the Russian Federation, at the 1072nd meeting of the OSCE permanent council on 23rd of October 2015 delivered response to the statement by the co-chairman of the Geneva International Discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus that the Geneva Discussions remain the most important tool for ensuring Georgia’s direct dialogue with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The statement emphasizes the necessity of maintaining cease-fire agreement and underlines that the Georgian side makes the situation heavier because of its attempt “to force unjustified obligations on Russia”. Mr. Rudenko was positively noticing that in frames of Geneva Discussions efforts, the borders became stabilized and that the exacerbation of the situation on South Ossetian border by Georgian radicals who damaged the border signs located on South Ossetian territory in summer 2015, risks further escalation of the tensions. The only

way out from this situation is to clearly demarcate and delimit the borders of South Ossetian, Abkhazian and Georgian territory. As Mr. Rudenko noticed, Tskhinval and Sukhumi are ready for this work. The most important part of the statement delivered by Mr. Rudenko was about Georgia's intention to become a NATO member which clearly harms the security architecture of the region. *“The intensifying military co-operation between Georgia and NATO has the potential to seriously destabilize security in the region. During the recent round of Geneva International Discussions, the delegations of Abkhazia, Russia and South Ossetia once again expressed their growing concern at the start of practical implementation of the so-called Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and the opening near Tbilisi in late August 2015 of the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre, where there are plans to hold joint exercises and training sessions to improve the interoperability and cohesion of NATO Member States’ Units and Georgian Armed Forces and also partners of the Alliance, including working on more rapid deployment of troops and military equipment from Europe. It also contravenes Tbilisi’s commitments regarding military restraint adopted in accordance with the agreements of 12 August 2008”*. Thus, it is very simply stated that the triangle of Russia-Abkhazia-South Ossetia jointly see threats coming from NATO-Georgia cooperation, notwithstanding the fact that agreements of 12 August 2008 and NATO-Georgian partnership are addressing different issues, not crossing each other. Another important issue discussed was the problems with “Double-standards by Western states” that those persons holding Georgian passport are issued visas without hindrance while South Ossetian or Abkhaz residents are denied such a right, which raises tensions in the region.

The case of South Ossetia along with the treaty signed between Russia and the de facto sovereign entity. South Ossetia as well as Crimea represents parts of parcel of the same trend in Russian foreign policy which are becoming as a constant behavior – disregard of the sovereignty of former soviet-states in order to defend Russia's interests in the region. On 18th of March Mr. Putin signed a treaty of Alliance and Integration with Leonid Tibilov, de facto leader of South Ossetia. Treaty was welcomed by South Ossetians as a sign of

integrating/uniting with Russian Federation that is South Ossetia's officially stated desire. South Ossetia, unlike to Abkhazia, lacks any sign of independence. Out of whole South Ossetia's population, as it is estimated, 90 percent are Russians, which, due to Russian "passportization" policy started since 2000, have Russian passports. This shows how Russia started to acquire "compatriots" whom then it would defend within the "Responsibility to Protect Doctrine". 90 percent of the budget is directly sent by Russia, the higher subsidy than in Russia's own Chechnya and Ingushetia. Russia's military presence in South Ossetia involves 3500 Russian soldiers, while the border is guarded by 1500 FSB border guard. South Ossetia is financially already integrated in Russia, as the currency in this entity is Russian rubles. "In practice, this (Russian-Georgian) border has now been abolished. Border formalities and customs barriers are vanishing and Russia and South Ossetia form a "single space" (Articles 3 and 5) (*The New Alliance and Integration Treaty Between Russia and South Ossetia*, When does integration turn into annexation? Saari, Sinikukka, The Finish Institute of International Affairs, March 2015).

The Russian propaganda in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia emphasizes the scenario that in case Georgia is accepted in NATO, it will then use the force against its de facto entities, claiming the sovereign right on them. Thus, Abkhazia more than South Ossetia, is oppressed by the Russian Federation, as it has no other option not to accept the benefits Russia gains from this mutual treaty, only in fear not to be attacked by Georgia, which is a least likely scenario, but from the attempt of Saakashvili's government to expand Georgia's sovereignty on South Ossetia in 2008, this scenario propagated by Russia still is powerful. By signing this treaty, Russia signals that even according to international law Georgian de facto regions stay within Georgia's sovereign borders, Russia will firmly claim 20 % of Georgian territory and the security arrangements which will be against Russian interests would directly be responded, or at least will be responded by increased Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This treaty suspends the re-negotiation with Georgia even if Abkhazia will have such an interest individually. Under the obligation to have harmonized relations

with each other, Russia won't accept the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations as well the negotiations between Georgia and South Ossetia, however such a scenario especially with regard to South Ossetian-Georgian negotiations more unrealistic than with Abkhazia.

5.4. Georgia's strategy for 2017-2020 on Membership Communication in EU and NATO

After 2012, when President Saakashvili was voted out from office, Russia had hoped to negotiate with the new government of Georgia and stabilize the relations highly supposing that new government in Tbilisi would be much fearful of Russia and reject Western policies and restructure relations with Moscow, but as it became clear, Georgia's newly elected government was also strictly against Russian Federation's politics, actively was claiming the sovereignty of Georgian territory, recalling that 20% of the territories are occupied and demonstrated its pro-Western mind. The warming of the relations as it was firstly supposed, ever realized. Though, the internal affairs of Georgia have changed drastically, and adjusted constitutional amendments demonstrating the changes in the Presidential model. The constitution Georgia accepted in 1995 was the prototype of American constitution, with a powerful Presidential institute and the National Security Council, a body prescribed by the constitution. The 99th Article of the Constitution of 1995 defined the National Security Council's task to take a charge of the process of creation and development of Georgian Armed Forces, and organization of Georgia's defense system (*Review of Georgia's National Security Architecture – Strategic Level*, Atlantic Council of Georgia. April 15, 2015).

As a change, Georgia accepted constitutional principles of Parliamentary governance, which means that the popularly elected president of Georgia will no longer acquire the strength it had, and the executive strength of the Prime Minister and Cabinet approved by the Parliament will be higher. This change underlines the future policies, which Georgia will

most likely execute towards its occupied territories. And especially, if the MAP would be given the Georgian government would be much careful with the decisions and responsibilities they will have. The NATO-membership policy is a great motivation for maintaining the democratic institutional principles, the ladder of decision making is enhanced and the contributions the government will have with regard to conflict solution on its territory will be much framed and limited. This is the prior possibility to neutralize Russian propaganda dictating the necessary result of Georgia's NATO membership, emphasizing the bellicose stance of Georgia towards its de facto regions and also the fundamental possibility to stay attractive for NATO as a country is much directed towards carefully weighted decisions in the security field.

Meanwhile, the government of Georgia created a strategy emphasizing NATO and EU membership communication needs and priorities for the following four years. The membership in EU and NATO is a strategic priority for Georgia, and it is a country's foreign and internal policy priority, which is accepted and encouraged by the majority of Georgian population. This priority was officially sited in the resolution of "Georgia's foreign affairs policy" signed on 29th of December 2016. This policy addresses the necessity to increase public awareness about Georgia's foreign affairs priorities. First Chapter of the resolution involves notes about strategic environment in Georgia, mainly emphasizing the elements of hybrid warfare Russia used against Georgia, including cyber attacks and increased Russian propaganda. During 2014 Ukraine crisis Georgia again became the target of Russian propaganda and misinformation. The Russian propaganda addresses the Western aspiration of Georgia, mainly the aspiration to become NATO and EU member. Russian information warfare is actively pursued in Georgia as well as other East European countries, destabilizing the security infrastructure and Euro-Atlantic integration. In 2014, the NATO Strategic Communication Center was established in Riga, and in 2015, during the meeting of Ministries of NATO Foreign Affairs the Alliance accepted a new strategy on hybrid warfare. Georgia, along other partners also called the strategic communication on integration topics as

its priority policy (ევროკავშირსა და ნატოში საქართველოს გაწევრიანების კომუნიკაციის შესახებ სტრატეგია 2017-2020 წლებისთვის, Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Affairs, April 13, 2017). Georgia is a very close ally of NATO in Southern Caucasus and its value can be risen when considering the value of close deterrence of Russian threats NATO can accomplish by accepting the state in Alliance and by close relations with Georgia which can maintain country's democratic institutions and the democracy itself, which is one of the strongest deterrents which can be used against anti-Western policy expansion.

One interesting issue with Georgia's NATO membership and the solution of the problem of Georgia's de facto regions was raised in the interview with the NATO liaison officer in South Caucasus William Lahue, who spoke with the Kommersant-Vlast magazine. Mr. Lahue told that *"NATO certainly won't (fight). NATO's task is to protect peaceful relations. And Georgia should determine the status of these territories itself. It needs to be understood clearly that as long as Russian troops are deployed there, we won't use Article 5 in Georgia. Because no one wants a war.. .. Presence of Russian military forces in Georgia will not stop Georgia's accession to NATO"* (Interfax: Ukraine, April 1, 2017). This statement approves that the threats propagated by Russia in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, in Georgia is without a true fundament, and that Georgia's NATO accession is a case of politics, as some Alliance members still preserve their relations with Russian Federation or doubt whether enlargement in Georgia will further escalate tensions and raise costs of such enlargement by threatening the whole European security.

As thesis strives to show, on the contrary, by not accepting Georgia into the Alliance and thus, accepting the Russian interests in the region, which provides Russia with a buffer zones and uncontained from the south, as well as east, the fundamental threat against the East European and broader European security architecture is becoming under question.

The current relations between Russia and Georgian de facto regions underlines the necessity of increased presence of OSCE and UN missions to Georgia and its breakaway regions now

prohibited, and international presence of NATO troops on the Georgian territory in case Georgia is given a MAP in the future. Costs of Georgia's accession to NATO will be directly represented by the increased Russian military presence on the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but the military connections between Russia's outside border bases, especially with Armenian Gyumri base will be distorted and also, Black Sea's strategic use by Russia will be damaged.

Next chapter of the thesis discusses two possible scenarios in case Georgia is given a MAP but 1) any NATO troops are stationed in Georgia and 2) NATO troops in a balanced strength are presented in Georgia. Scenarios are structured according to current political and military relations between Georgia and Russian Federation discussed in the 3rd chapter and regard possible outcomes for the arrangement of the security structure of the region. By underlining the importance of South Caucasus region for the entire European security which was discussed in the 2nd chapter of the thesis, I discuss why deterrence provided by balanced NATO troops in Georgia after granting Georgia a MAP could be less costly for the entire security architecture, while not stationing troops can cause much larger problems in South Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

CHAPTER 6

The possible consequences of Georgia's Membership Action Plan receipt

6.1. Problem summarization

This thesis strives to underline the importance of South Caucasus flank to NATO, the NATO-Georgian relations and Russian political and military factor in NATO-Georgian relations. The discussion attempts to forecast what would be the immediate consequences of Georgia's Membership Action Plan approval by the Alliance, based on the experience and Russia's current political-military stance towards the region.

In order to summarize the discussion about the first two issues, namely – the importance of South Caucasus to NATO and the Russian Federation's political and military factor in NATO-Georgia relations, the 4th chapter firstly sums up the discussions presented in the second and third chapters of the thesis and then based on the presented theory, attempt to delve into the future possibilities.

Theoretical background used to emphasize the importance of the South Caucasus region is focused on the readjusted theory about the Pivot originally introduced by Halford Mackinder before the World War I. Mackinder interpreted the world and world historical processes as being inherently divided into isolated areas with specific functions to perform. He maintained that Europe's advance and development was the end result and reaction to the tensions derived from the center of Asia. Thus, accordingly the Heartland, the space where continental masses of Europe and Asia met, was the pivot area stimulating different processes undergoing in Europe and broadly, in World Island. His doctrine suggested that the actor dominating through the Heartland was able to dominate on the World Island. Mackinder

placed the pivot in the center covering river basins Volga, Yenisey, Amu Darya, Sir Darya and two seas – Caspian and Aral (*The Round World and the Winning of the Peace*, Mackinder, J. Halford. Foreign Affairs, Vol 21, No. 4 (1943), pp, 595-605). In order to always be in an ability of controlling the processes in the Pivot, Mackinder stressed the importance of controlling the “inner crescent” and formulated his famous formula “whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World Island; whoever rules the World Island, commands the World” (*Democratic Ideals and Reality*, Mackinder, p. 113). However, Mackinder’s later works suggest revised theory about Heartland, where East Europe with Baltic and Black Sea basins, is structurally included in the Heartland. And here it is noticeable that the famous formula became different in nature: “whoever rules the Heartland, rules the World Island; whoever rules the World Island, commands the world”. This was confirmed during the Soviet Union, when the COMECON and Warsaw pact merged Heartland and East Europe and demonstrated the structural wholeness. All the geopolitical processes resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union also led to the restructuring of the Heartland area. “*The geopolitical transformations of the late 20th century isolated Russia as a Eurasian geopolitical subject in the northeastern part of the continent and narrowed down the Pivot in its central part, that is, in three relatively independent regional segments of the latter – Central (Eastern according to Mackinder) Europe, the Central Caucasus and the Central Asia*” as Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava write in their study. Out of the three segments mentioned, Central Caucasus is the segment where other two meet each other and merge. But it would not be correct if discussing the structuralization of the regions only emphasizing the geographical-spatial factors, because the structuralization of the geographic realm should also rest on “*the principle of the functional unity of the given expanse, compatibility and mutual complementarity of the independent neighboring states, their social-cultural affinity rooted in their common past, as well as their joint functional importance for world politics and economics*” (*Rethinking Central Eurasia*, Ismailov, Eldar and Papava, Vladimer, Silk Road Program, p.98).

Thus, the readjusted theory suggests that Central Caucasus consisting of three states – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan represents the center of Eurasian continent and is produced by the merger of two basic segments of the continent – Europe and Asia, and within them from Central (Eastern European according to Mackinder) European and Central Asian segments. Because of the geographic location and because of the changed functional validity the Central Caucasus region is turning into the “special zone” along with the structural part of the Heartland which is represented by Central (Eastern) Europe. Common past rooted in the historical connection with Russia, makes Georgia as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan targets of special interest of Russian Federation, clearly demonstrated in recent decade. Russia’s intention to control the zones of former Soviet Union, namely former COMECON and Warsaw pact countries directly represents symbolically the desire to wholly control the Heartland, the Pivot, which because of Russia’s isolation in the 1990’s shifted to south. The pivot, or the “choke point” as I call the Central Caucasus region generally and particularly the central part of Central Caucasus – Georgia, stems from the belief that social-economical and political routs merging paths towards three different directions – Eastern Europe, Middle East and Asia represent the highest functional validity to Russia. Thus, the clash of interests between the West and Russia takes place in the vicinity of Central Caucasus region and within the region itself. By giving up the region to Russian control the result will be increased Russian propaganda, increased social-economical ties or increased control by Russia of transportation routes, would directly affect the whole security architecture of Europe, because the security of Greater Central Europe and generally, of the West, is starting from the security architecture of its neighbors.

Theory suggests that the importance of Central Caucasus grew especially after Russia started attempts to revive and transform the Heartland again. The process started from the 2008 August War between Russian Federation and Georgia and then continued in Ukraine. The strongest Russia becomes, the wider it has the will to subjugate the special zones of interest and if not annex but at least neutralize the territories so that its power projection grows

along with the buffer zone expansion. Changing image of Heartland and the cycle of its transformation shall be controlled and charged by the West, because if undefended, the Central Caucasus can become the central region from which Russian power projection towards three different sides – Greater Central Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia can be realized. By cutting the access off from Russia and defending the choke point of the continent, along with the defense of the Heartland's structural part – Central (Eastern) Europe, will thoroughly guarantee that Russian power projection and proliferation of Russian propaganda and militancy will be increasingly deterred.

Thus, theory gives a special insight into the changed importance of Central Caucasus, and strives to legalize the necessity to include Georgia in NATO and defend the territory. The discussion also emphasizes that deterring Russian power projection only from the East European side would lead to damaging security architecture and guarantee the growth of Russian power projection capabilities in long-term period.

Georgia's NATO accession is not dependent only on Georgia's readiness to join the Alliance. The decision has strong and deep political implications which mainly disunite the NATO member-states. The discord in relation to Georgia's NATO accession issue is in a very close connection to the Russian factor. Georgia is the most devoted ally of the Alliance in the region, actively involved in the cooperation process since the early 1990's, although partnership became strongest after the Rose Revolution and arrival of Saakashvili government in 2004. Georgia is committed to NATO policies and contributes a lot to NATO led operations if taking into account Georgia's non-member status. It is noteworthy to mention that the country's populations overwhelming majority supports Georgia's Euro-integration policy seeing the membership in the strongest defense block the necessary condition for self-defense. Also, as NATO became not only military organization but also the most active organization committed to expand the Western values into the former Soviet states, the partnership with NATO becomes one of the most important reasons that Georgia strengthens its democratic regime and market economy, judiciary and civil-military

relations. But there is a risk - if NATO is very slow with the decision to accept decision to give to Georgia MAP or with the decision to allow Georgia's accession without a MAP stage (as during NATO-Georgia cooperation almost all stages of the partnership is already covered), population support can decrease because the damaged trust factor. Also trust factor can become less because without active involvement and final accession much freedom is left for Russian propaganda, which continuously works and damages the population's aspiration towards country's Euro-integration. The Russian factor in NATO-Georgian relations currently is the only strongest reason why NATO is not developing much decisive steps towards Georgia's acceptance into the Alliance. The costs of accepting Georgia is perceived by core-NATO member states as being much higher than the benefits, due to Russia's firm stance towards the issue and additionally, due to the still weak trust Georgia gets from the West, especially because of the confrontation experience it had with Russian Federation in 2008 August war.

The possible scenario which is discussed in the final 4th chapter of the thesis is based on the antecedent point – point in the future, when Georgia is given a MAP. Theory involves two possibilities. Two variables are chosen in order to make a difference between much stronger decision by Alliance and benefits as a result, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the costs and disadvantages NATO and European security architecture is met if no defense is stationed on the Georgian territory after Georgia will receive MAP. Thus variables involved in theory are: 1) acceptance by the Alliance to give to Georgia Membership Action Plan and 2) stationing of NATO troops in Georgia after Georgia' MAP acceptance, before Georgia's possibly actual membership.

6.2. Georgia is given a MAP but no NATO Troops Stationed on the Georgian Territory

Partnership with NATO and Georgia has a multilateral dimension. In 1999 Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PAPR), which represents the requirement for the MAP being offered. In 2004, since two years after declaring officially its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Georgia became the first country to acquire an Individual Partnership Action Plan, the program oriented on the domestic reforms. In 2005 Georgia became the fourth country to join NATO Response Force. In 2008 at the Bucharest Summit the idea was proposed that Georgia would become an actual member of the Alliance, however due to the position of Russia and disunity of the member-states the idea was blocked, although the partnership increased and strengthened further (*The Security Context in the Black Sea Region*, Triatapyllou, Dimitrios, p.84). In reaction to the Bucharest Summit the head of Russian military, General Yuri Baluyevsky stated in case Georgia will become an Alliance member “*Russia (would) take steps aimed at ensuring its interests along its borders and these (would) not only be military steps, but also steps of a different nature*” (*Perceptions of NATO and the New Strategic Concept*, Rodrigues, Luis Nuno a Volodymyr, Dubovyk). However, statements from the Russian Federation, additionally Russia’s military incursion in Georgia in August 2008 didn’t stop NATO-Georgia partnership, although stalled it in terms of the final stages of Georgia’s accession. In 2004, Georgia started contributing to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, in 2009, 173 troops were sent for training in Germany before their deployment in Afghanistan in 2010. The number of the troops raised and became 925, which was the largest contribution per capita to the ISAF among non-member states. In 2016, Georgia was second largest contributor among all participating countries (after the US) to the Resolute Support Mission, a follow-up mission (Resolute Support Mission, Key Facts and Figures, NATO online, 2016). Thus, the

partnership represents the viable fundament to consider that Georgia is strongly devoted to the Alliance and is practically working to become a full member of it. These data demonstrate that Georgia in case of its accession will not be just a security consumer, which is very important for the long-term bilateral relations. In addition to participating in NATO-led operations, Georgia demonstrated its preparedness with regard to the defense budget. Georgia has already met 2% requirement of defense spending (*The Case for Georgia Joining NATO*, Seib, Philip, 2016). But as long as Russia remains an enemy of Georgia, the country is not able to have a credible national defense of its territory in accordance to the Article 3 of the Washington Treaty is almost impossible. The main argument why Georgia's membership is still doubted is that 20% of Georgian territory is occupied, however, de jure, as the example of Germany' NATO accession in 1955 demonstrates it is possible. Georgia already fulfilled all the requirements and "*is currently more prepared for NATO than the majority of post-communist countries were at the time of their admission*" (*Accession of Georgia to NATO*, Konecna, Zuzana, 2016, p.9-10, *Georgia's NATO Aspirations: Rhetoric and Reality*, Hamilton, Colonel Robert E. 2016 cit [2016-09-10]). In 2016, October 14th, the Ministerial Council on Energy Community approved the accession of Georgia to the Energy Community (Decision 2016/18/MC-EnC). Since 2007 Georgia had an observer status in the community (*Protocol Concerning the Accession of Georgia to the Treaty Establishing the Energy Community*, 14th October, 2016, Sarajevo). Thus, South Caucasus Pipeline Project is having a high importance and along with Georgia's accession to NATO and subsequent defense of the territory, the diversification of energy resources for Europe will be secured and guaranteed. These processes along with the statement made by the NATO liaison officer in South Caucasus William Lahue, "*NATO certainly won't (fight). NATO's task is to protect peaceful relations. And Georgia should determine the status of these territories itself. It needs to be understood clearly that as long as Russian troops are deployed there, we won't use Article 5 in Georgia. Because no one wants a war.. .. Presence of Russian military forces in Georgia will not stop Georgia's accession to NATO*" (*Interfax: Ukraine*, April 1, 2017) clearly

demonstrate that Georgia's accession to NATO is well possible and that the result will be used as a means to build confidence and security in the region.

The scenario regards the period when, based on all the processes developed so far, NATO gives to Georgia the Membership Action Plan. It is noteworthy to mention that the Membership Action Plan couldn't be translated in a full membership in the Alliance, although it represents the final stage of the membership process. The acquisition of MAP will trigger Russian reaction based on the statements and attitude Russia continuously reaffirms with regard to Georgia's possible NATO membership and NATO's enlargement policies that are directed at post-soviet countries. The scenario puts the main hot spots where Russia would most probably increase its tensions and the possible types of reaction in case Georgia gets MAP but any defense will be stationed on the Georgian territory and in the Black Sea before Georgia's possibly actual membership in the Alliance.

First of all, the scenario focuses on the possible increased tensions in Georgia's breakaway regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Secondly, the scenario targets threats posed to the Black Sea security architecture. All these possibly increased tensions are forecasted to take place in case Georgia gets Membership Action Plan but no NATO troop presence in Georgia and Georgia's Black Sea zone before Georgia gets a possibly actual membership.

6.3. Russian Military presence and Southern Military District

One of the most important events during the last three years was the merger of Tskhinvali regime military units under Russian command. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu the sharp increase in military presence to the South of Russia is due to "Build-up of NATO military presence in Eastern Europe, the situation in Ukraine and the activities of international terrorist groups, including the North Caucasus". Subsequently, Kavkaz-2016 military exercises in September 2016 – involving Abkhazia and South Ossetian separatist

regions – prepared some 12,500 troops in a sum. Russia’s offensive military posture leaves open the possibility to attack Georgia again, and also underlines the possible counter-reaction if NATO presence is increased in Eastern Europe only. Russian military forces within Georgian territory increased since the August 2008 and sharply bolstered after the Ukrainian Crisis. The Russian forces currently are able to attack the whole Georgia within the Georgian territory, especially because, Russia occupies Tskhinvali region which is situated very near from the Georgian Gori military base, where also the main East-West route is located.

The two Russian bases both include the following assets:

- 1) Approximately eight thousand Russian soldiers.
- 2) More than 80 tanks out of which 41 are modernized T-72B3 models).
- 3) 370 armored vehicles, with 130 recently modernized BTR-82AM.
- 4) 36 BM-21 Grad multiple rocket launchers.
- 5) 72 self-propelled 2S3 Akatsya 152mm artillery systems.
- 6) 54 other artillery pieces (material taken from *Russia Troop Deployments Menace Georgia*, Batashvili, David, Civil Georgia, 2017)

Russia currently upgraded its high grade offensive weapons with the range fully covering Tbilisi, Georgia’s Capital. And the most important item in Russian military arsenal that is presented in the Georgia’s occupied territories is the S-300 (SA-10 Grumble) air defense missile system, stationed in Abkhazia. In case Russia attacks in the Anti-Access/Anti-Denial (A2-AD), these S-300 SA-10 Grumbles can successfully deter Georgia’s allies. Similar systems Russia deployed in Ukraine early in 2014 as well as anti-ship K-300P Bastion (SS-C-5 Stooze). This data show clearly that in case NATO presence increases only in the Eastern Flank, Georgia, especially if given a MAP will be with a high probability attacked immediately before its possible then actual membership. The merger of the Russian military bases within Georgia under Russian command is becoming much wider in scale if taking into account the Black Sea basin, where Russia prevails on the northern part and systematizes and

upgrades its military presence in Crimea (*Russia Troop Deployments Menace Georgia*, Batashvili, David, Civil Georgia, 2017). If taking into consideration the statement by the head of Russian military, General Yuri Baluyevsky in case Georgia will become an Alliance member “*Russia (would) take steps aimed at ensuring its interests along its borders and these (would) not only be military steps, but also steps of a different nature*” (*Perceptions of NATO and the New Strategic Concept*, Rodrigues, Luis Nuno a Volodymyr, Dubovyk). Russia demonstrated the contra-signal to NATO-Georgian relations with declaring Abkhazia and South Ossetia independent after the military incursion in Georgia, and based on the experience, also based on the current militarism by Russia on the Georgian territory, the probability that Russia would attack Georgia as soon as country is given a MAP is very high. The integration of Russian military bases increases the interoperability of the forces and increases the level of readiness and command response. In 2014 Russia created Unified Group of Forces with Sukhumi, Abkhazia and since 2015 Russian 7th Base in Abkhazia has additionally been in command with other additional forces. In 2017, incorporation of Tskhinvali forces into the Russian army even increased and bolstered the coverage and range of military control. Both Abkhazian 7th and South Ossetian 4th military bases administratively enter the Southern Military District (SMD) and out of the entire Southern Military District area better equipped and prepared is the segment situated within Georgian territory. The part of SMD is located in Northern Caucasus as well and southernmost point of SMD is situated in Armenia, 42nd Gyumri and the military airport in Armenia as well as forces in Sevastopol and Crimea.

In 2016, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu transferred Colonel-General Alexander Dvornikov, who was chief of the Syrian operation to head the SMD. As David Batashvili, ex-worker of Georgian National Defense Council states, Russia rejected the divisions of about 10 thousand soldiers and started to use much more agile brigades, the trend taken from the NATO troop structure. However, since the Ukrainian Crisis Russia re-established divisions that is more suitable for large-scale, conventional frontal combat. The mentioned tactics

gives Russia a free hand to expand within the whole Georgia with large-scale conventional forces and without having NATO troops presence as a deterrence Russian freedom of action will be very high, as Senaki and Gori military bases are very close to the South of Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, respectively. Additionally, the main E60 route connecting East and West Georgia is located in between Senaki and Gori military bases and almost directly goes along the Gori military base. Mr. Batiashvili also writes that the first two divisions were established near Moscow and as they were successful, Russian Federation formed five more military divisions during 2016-2017. Three of them are near Ukrainian border, forth is stationed in the Ural region and fifth – 42nd Mechanized Division is deployed in Northern Caucasus. Russia used 42nd Division in August 2008 conventional war against Georgia. Mr. Batiashvili gives another data with regard to the 42nd Mechanized Division stationed in Northern Caucasus: *“the 42nd Division and other Russian forces based within 250 kilometers from Georgia’s border currently include tens of thousands soldiers with: over 200 tanks, most of them modernized T-72B3 models, with 41 tanks being the T-90; over 1700 armored vehicles; over 500 artillery pieces; almost 130 multiple rocket launchers – majority of them BM-21 Grad, but also the powerful BM-27 Uragan, Tornado-G (upgraded BM-21) and thermobaric TOS-1A systems”* (Russia Troop Deployments Menace Georgia, Batashvili, David, Civil Georgia, 2017).

Thus, from the mentioned military bases Russia can easily cover the whole South Caucasus region, from Abkhazia to Armenia and by using Crimea and Black Sea naval bases Russia will be able to close the basin for NATO troops. It shall be noticed that there is no Black Sea security architecture today and using of hard power is the only mean to ensure the maintenance of the positions. The main parts sharing Black Sea security dynamics are Turkey, Russia, EU and NATO and such an external stakeholder such as United States. NATO has become an actor in the Black Sea since integrating with Turkey and Greece in 1952 and later increased its contacts by accepting Bulgarian and Romanian membership in 2004. Moscow now is fully able to dispatch new military hardware, including coastal

artillery and land-based forces and aircraft (*The Current Status of the Black Sea Regional Security*, Atlantic Treaty Association, Vol.4, Issue 4 April, 2014, p. 3-4). Notwithstanding the fact that interested parties are more than Russia and Turkey, declined interest towards the Black Sea and South Caucasus during Obama administration led to the shifting of balance in the basin at Russia's advantage. It is clearly seen how Russian military umbrella is covering the whole region and how without substantially balanced NATO troops in the region, the whole South Caucasus falls under Russian bellicosity. Especially if Georgia is given a MAP without a substantial defense, Russia will directly attack the region.

The main argument is that with if Georgia will be given a Membership Action Plan and a substantial NATO troop presence will be at face, Russia won't be able to start military incursion in Georgia and broadly in South Caucasus. For example, during Russo-Georgia war in August 2008, Senaki military base in western Georgia, situated to the south of Abkhazia was attacked by Russia. Russia was able to take/attack another military point Georgia has in the west, near Senaki military training base - Sachkhere Mountain Training School. The school is based on a bilateral cooperation agreement signed in 1997 between France and Georgia, which according to the statement made by French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian during his visit to Georgia on 13th September 2016 "is a milestone in French-Georgian partnership" (*This School is a Milestone in French-Georgian Cooperation*, Ministry of Defense of Georgia, 2016). This military base, although very closely situated from the Senaki military base was not attacked by the Russian side, while other important routes as well as military or civilian areas were bombed by Russian airplanes. This fact stresses the inability and unwillingness of Russia to enter into wider scale conflict where international forces will be involved. In case of NATO troop presence in the region, the costs of defending the region would be much less compared to the benefits for the entire European security architecture. By deterring Russian military from development inside the South Caucasus region, and by defending the hub or "choke point" of the security system as thesis strives to represent South

Caucasus, Russia would be unable to maintain its power projection further than the range of Caucasus Mountains.

Thus, according to the official information about Russian military presence in Northern and Southern Caucasus, it becomes clear that in case Georgia is given a Membership Action Plan, the tensions will inevitably increase and threaten the broader security architecture of Europe, not only of South Caucasus region, not to discuss Georgia separately.

Russian forces are able to create a triangle of military area with three points respectively – Crimea, Ukraine on the west, Gyumri, Armenia from the South and the Russian Federation to the North. Umbrella covers the most part of the Black Sea and what is more important, it gives Russia an ability to project power and threaten Black Sea littoral countries to the west thus it creates the corridor for power projection to the Greater Europe. Potential hub of Energy security and the mean to diversity energy supplies for Europe fell under Russian umbrella which monopolizes the energy routes going through Georgia. The railway route from Russian Federation to Armenia is opened and direct logistics via Georgian territory is guaranteed. By creating the Southern flank and by integrating the strength of Abkhazian 7th, South Ossetian 4th and Armenian 102nd military bases, as well as military bases on Crimea, Russia gains 1) a strong buffer zone, 2) the ability to project power in Greater Central Europe, in Middle East (Iran is especially important ally) and 3) Central Asia and Greater Central Asia, 4) controls the routes, strategic as well as transportation and energy routes, 5) as in case of Crimea, Russia doesn't respond to the sanctions and works on the maintenance of the re-adjusted status quo. As stated, according to the theory proposed by Eldar Ismailov and Vladimir Papava, the transformation of Heartland has started already and thesis strives to underline that the first example of Heartland readjustment was the conventional war between Russia and Georgia, resulted in increased Russian presence on its southern flank. Next came Ukraine, and it was the stronger manifestation delivered to the West that Russian militarism and revisionism bolstered in the region.

Because Russia responds to the NATO's Eastern defenses by increasing its presence in the South as was clearly stated by Russia's Defense minister Shoigu, the direct answer from the West shall be represented correspondingly by increasing defenses on the Eastern flank, as well as in the Caucasus region. Deterring Russian militarism at the neighborhood of Russia will be less costly than focusing only on the Eastern flank. Controlling and defending the "choke point" or South Caucasus along with Eastern Europe will bring much stability to the entire European security architecture.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This thesis is directed towards exploring the future and future possibilities, and what is much more significant, tries to predict what sort of actions and reactions might be at face in case the future possibility becomes the real fact. To explore the future means to set a right, valid question. The way antecedent that is the point in the future when Georgia receives Membership Action Plan and then supposedly acceptance to become a full NATO member, becomes a reality affects the future phenomena and the way the processes continue. Argumentatively backed hypothesis that Georgia can receive Membership Action Plan is only a part of the thesis which then changes the paradigm and changes the way other international players will act in a future. The thesis analyzes also the third-party countries, mainly the Russian Federations' activities and reactions to the NATO policies and 'open door' politics as well as the Russian Federations geopolitical interests with regard to the NATO aspirant countries within the post-Soviet space. Thus, the antecedent back story will be based on the careful analyses of three inter-dependent international personalities – Georgia, NATO and Russia's intentions and assertions. This thesis, consequently, is based on the method of counterfactual reasoning and produces a theory building with two independent variables first one being the antecedent itself or, the point in the future when Georgia's receives Membership Action Plan from the NATO. While writing conditional possibilities and its consequences, thesis is concentrated on those arguments that are given from the historical as well as present political directions, which can be used as a lessons and probable prisms from which to predict the future processes. Thesis takes into consideration the complexity of the issue and besides explaining the factors of Georgia's readiness to full

membership, analyzes the political barriers which hinder the decision about Georgia's acceptance into the Alliance.

This thesis argumentatively tries to set the problem from a different perspective on the basis of phenomena taking place in historical as well as present realities. This thesis argumentatively analyzes the necessity of enlargement to South Caucasus region as well and those possible consequences that this type of enlargement may condition. Notwithstanding Georgia's individual readiness and willingness factor, the decision of NATO about Georgia's admission is governed by the cost-benefit system of such a move. Thus, by admitting that South Caucasus region shall represent the valid region which is worth of covering with regard to the costs and benefits system, claims that the issue of accepting Georgia as a member of NATO is not a zero-sum, but rather, very necessary step for the security architecture of the West.

The key independent variables are: 1) Georgia's receipt of Membership Action Plan and 2) NATO's military presence on Georgian territory which determines the reaction of the Russian Federation and consequently, the security environment of the South Caucasus region. The dimensions under study include the political and military aspects as well as energy security aspect of the Southern Caucasus region.

Halford Mackinder wrote in the early 20th century however the theories and principles of regional structuralization and subsequent observations about strategic preferences of international actors on the Eurasian landmass play significant role even in current geopolitical atmosphere. As Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava stated in their joint research *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, the theory of the Heartland shall be used "as a reference to an alternative geopolitical conception about the Pivot of the 21st century and possible scenarios for the future". Currently, if considering the raised importance of the Central Asia, the Middle East, and Ukrainian crisis to the West, the region of South Caucasus gets much more importance being in the middle of conflicts and the clashes of interests. Great geopolitical processes change functional values of the geographical places, thus the theories once applied

shall also provide current insights and changes brought by changed political and military preferences. Russia's contemporary geopolitical ambitions clearly reflect the interests which can be translated as the desire to re-establish the Soviet Union and gain the influence and access to the whole Pivot area to control the Heartland and contain the West, ideologically, as well as practically, thus the earlier geopolitical realities of the late 19th and 20th centuries turn out to be still important and shall be re-adjusted to the contemporary geopolitics.

In the late 20th century, particularly in the late 1980s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, another cycle of Heartland transformation has begun. COMECON and Warsaw Pact, which since the middle of the 20th century have meant the merger of the Heartland and Eastern Europe, thus creating strong and functionally viable territorial fundament, ceased to exist. The Russian Federation found itself in the Northeastern part of the continent bordering the already narrowed Pivot area, which involved three independent regional segments – Central Europe (Eastern Europe for Mackinder), Central Caucasus and the Central Asia. Because of the Russia's isolation the central part of the Pivot area was shifted to the center of the continent, directly going through the Central Caucasus and the region's three countries – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thus the Central Eurasian part where the Pivot is situated involves territories of Central European and Central Asian states, *“as well as a “special zones” where the both segments meet – the territories of Central Caucasian countries”*.

NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow stated the following: *“... To the East, Russia has torn up the international rule book. It has returned to a strategy of power politics. It threatens not just Ukraine, but European and global security generally... ...Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not an isolated incident, but a game changer in European security. It reflects an evolving pattern of behavior that has been emerging for several years.”*

The seizure of Crimea by Russia is a violation of three international agreements which are committed to the stability of Eastern Europe and Ukraine, namely Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Budapest memorandum of 1994, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act signed in Paris in 1997, confirming the acceptance of measures with regard to stationing of

conventional military forces in Europe. By gradually using its hard power to promote and protect the interests in its “spheres of interest”, Russia increased its level of maritime power in the Black Sea Basin and dramatically changed the balance of power. Notwithstanding the fact will Russia annex the rest of the Ukraine or other neighboring countries or not, its primary intention of destabilization the region is reflecting its interest to make NATO’s Eastern and Southeastern flanks less desirable for NATO to enlarge or defend, underlining the fact that these countries and the whole region is the pivotal area for the Russian Federation to become at least a Eurasian superpower. The Pivot of history, now shifted to the Central Caucasus demonstrates the vast opportunities for Russia. By losing the Caucasus Region and its Eastern flank to Russia’s interests, Europe loses the security far close to the Western and Central Europe and goes back to the Cold War era World Order, giving the Russian Federation the possibility to restore its influence and capabilities. In such a complex strategic context, Black Sea reflects a critical point needed by Russia to restore its East European and Eurasian dominance, as well as opportunity to project power into the Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. Besides, control of the Black Sea ports gives Russia an ability to reach the mainland Europe, especially Bulgaria and Romania. In effect, economic zones of Russia and Romania have become de facto adjacent and nowadays, Russia shares a maritime border with the EU and NATO in the Black Sea Basin.

By controlling the Central Caucasus (with the Black Sea Basin), Russia controls the “choke point”, from where it has the ability to reach five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the East, and what is also important for the West, Russia has the ability to project power in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Although in Southern Caucasus NATO has Turkey, but with regard to Turkey’s internal problems currently concerning the system of democracy and its continuous problems with Kurds, Turkey is not able to hold the “choke point” of Russia’s power projection alone.

By only concentrating on Eastern flank defense, NATO leaves the chances for Russia to increase its power projection and influence on the territories such as Ukraine, Greater

Central Europe, Central Asia, Greater Central Asia and the Middle East by letting Russia to increase its influence in the Black Sea basin and South Caucasus. This guarantees that the world peace and particularly European peace and unity will be directly affected.

By defending only Polish, Baltic States' and Romania's territories, NATO risks less as it still works to counter the Russian aggression on these possible hot spots, but the wider territorial benefits left of Russia need to be recognized as well and assessed in detail. Although compared to the U.S. and EU Russia has much limited resources to increase its political and military influence, but because of the character of the region where Russia tries to bid its superpower status, the vulnerability of the whole Europe increases. As mentioned above, after the Crimea's annexation, Russia gained the most pivotal territory of the region, and started to cut off the Southern Caucasus and Black Sea Basin from the international access. With the Eurasian Economic Union and CSTO – Common Security Treaty Organization, Russia tries to gather the whole Central Caucasus and Central Asia under its influence. Russia makes its controllable territorial segment wider and more secure by militarily strengthening Crimea and Black Sea.

The possibility that Russia will enter into wide-scale military confrontation with the West is not high, although the intention to freeze the current position and gain time for further military development contains danger and risky results. By deterring Russia on the Eastern flank, by increasing NATO presence in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and Baltic States becomes insufficient as doors for Russia thorough the Black Sea and South Caucasus are open. By cutting off the Western power projection in Central Caucasus and Black Sea region, Russia monopolizes important energy routes thus increases the vulnerability of European energy security. Energy dependency is the card Russia holds successfully and constantly uses it as Trojan horse in order to disunite the Western attitude towards Russia, especially when it comes to the NATO enlargement and defense policies.

Thus, it becomes clear that defending only NATO's eastern flank is less effective, as under Russian influence and direct control is left the whole Southern part of Caucasus Mountain

and Black Sea basin with the Crimea. As it is observable, Russian Federation's current mode of behaving aims at forcing the creation of new security architecture, and at de facto settling of the readjusted "sphere of influence".

This thesis emphasizes that for NATO, defending South Caucasus region has a high importance. The less is Russia's influence in its neighboring region and the more Russia is deterred from the south as well as from the East, the less likely becomes the risk of losing the Black Sea's central and northern parts and much higher becomes the probability that the contact with Ukrainian insurgents and Russian Federation will lessen. Although Russian Federation is not able to start valid military tensions on Eastern flank due to its still complex difficulties in economy, it is capable enough to destabilize South Caucasus and cut Georgia from the Western influence. By controlling the "choke point" Russia's freedom of action increases, thus strategic and tactical development becomes possible, serving Russia's Imperialistic ambitions. The famous New Geopolitical Order in the Caucasus, proposed by one of the active Russian geopoliticians, Alexander Dugin, rejects the concept of nation-states, and emphasizes the viability of the project under which a Caucasian Federation shall be created, uniting both, the Russian Northern Caucasus and Azerbaijan, Armenia. One part of this project is already done, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which, although recognized by Russia as independent states, are formally functioning only with the Russian Federation's financial and political support. Moreover, by signing treaties in 2014 and 2015 with Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively, Russia increases its military presence and political ties in order to finally incorporate these entities into his imperial body, and gain lasting control of Georgian, Armenian and subsequently, Azerbaijani territories.

One of the most important events during last three years was the merger of Tskinali regime military units under Russian command. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu the sharp increase in military presence to the South of Russia is due to "Build-up of NATO military presence in Eastern Europe, the situation in Ukraine and the activities of international terrorist groups, including the North Caucasus". Russian military forces within

Georgian territory increased since the August 2008 and sharply bolstered after the Ukrainian Crisis. The Russian forces currently are able to attack the whole Georgia within the Georgian territory, especially because, Russia occupies Tskhinvali region which is situated very near from the Georgian Gori military base, where also the main East-West route is located. Given data show clearly that in case NATO presence increases only in the Eastern Flank, Georgia, especially if given a MAP, will be with a high probability attacked immediately before its possible then actual membership. The merger of the Russian military bases within Georgia under Russian command is becoming much wider in scale if taking into account the Black Sea basin, where Russia prevails on the northern part and systematizes and upgrades its military presence in Crimea. Russia demonstrated the contra-signal to NATO-Georgian relations with declaring Abkhazia and South Ossetia independent after the military incursion in Georgia, and based on the experience, also based on the current militarism by Russia on the Georgian territory, the probability that Russia would attack Georgia as soon as country is given a MAP is very high.

The integration of Russian military bases increases the interoperability of the forces and increases the level of readiness and command response. In 2014 Russia created Unified Group of Forces with Sukhumi, Abkhazia and since 2015 Russian 7th Base in Abkhazia has additionally been in command with other additional forces. In 2017, incorporation of Tskhinvali forces into the Russian army even increased and bolstered the coverage and range of military control. Both Abkhazian 7th and South Ossetian 4th military bases administratively enter the Southern Military District (SMD) and out of the entire Southern Military District area better equipped and prepared is the segment situated within Georgian territory. The part of SMD is located in Northern Caucasus as well and southernmost point of SMD is situated in Armenia, 42nd Gyumri and the military airport in Armenia as well as forces in Sevastopol and Crimea. From the mentioned military bases Russia can easily cover the whole South Caucasus region, from Abkhazia to Armenia and by using Crimea and Black Sea naval bases Russia will be able to close the basin for NATO troops.

It shall be noticed that there is no Black Sea security architecture today and using of hard power is the only mean to ensure the maintenance of the positions. without having NATO troops presence as a deterrence Russian freedom of action will be very high, as Senaki and Gori military bases are very close to the South of Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, respectively. The fact that Russian airplanes during 2008 August War didn't attack Sachkhere military school in Georgia, which is co-founded with France, might be pointing on the inability and unwillingness of Russia to enter into wider scale conflict where international forces will be involved. In case of NATO troop presence in the region, the costs of defending the region would be much less compared to the benefits for the entire European security architecture. By deterring Russia from further military aggression inside the South Caucasus region NATO will have the ability to deter Russian militarism in its Southeastern flank. By defending the hub or "choke point" NATO would be able to control important energy as well as military routes. Control of the Black Sea will bring much stability in Crimea and Greater Central Europe. Thus, by arranging security system in South Caucasus, along with the defense of NATO's Eastern flank, Russia would become unable to maintain its power projection further than the range of Caucasus Mountains.

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