

UNITED STATES SUPPORT FOR YOUNG DEMOCRACIES AND DEEPENING COOPERATION WITH GEORGIA IN ADDRESSING SECURITY ISSUES IN THE CAUCASUS, 1996-2002

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Abstract. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, official Washington, developed its own interests in shaping the political course of relations with the Caucasus region. These interests can be summarized as follows: a) By strengthening the independence and democratic values of the countries in the region, the United States sought to weaken the influence of Russia in the Caucasus, while expanding its own; b) To maintain control over the Iran-Russia balance, since an unrestricted alliance between these two countries was viewed as highly dangerous for official Washington; c) To prevent Russia from unilaterally managing energy resources and to diversify the transit of energy resources of the Caspian region; To strengthen the extreme southwestern flank of the North Atlantic Alliance and turn the region into a springboard for its strategic actions.

European countries and the United States remained cautious in their relations with the Caucasus countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Due to various circumstances, the Baltic countries were initially the main priority. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that both the United States and the leading Western European nations supported the establishment and development of democratic values and the market economy principles in all allied countries, that were part of the Soviet Union. Fiona Hill, a well-known American researcher and Special Assistant for European and Russian Affairs at the National Security Council under former US President Donald Trump, notes that during the administration of Bill Clinton, Washington's interests in the South Caucasus region became strategic and the energy sector became a field of interest for the United States – unlike in the early years of independence of the newly formed states. The deepening of strategic cooperation began, due to the changed geopolitical circumstances following the events of September 11, 2001.

Keywords: disintegration of the Soviet Union, strategic partnership, Caucasus, United States, Georgia, 9/11 terrorist act

Introduction: Official relations between the United States of America and Georgia were established after the restoration of Georgia's independence. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States officially recognized Georgia's independence on December 25, 1991. This was an important step in the process of Georgia's international recognition and its rapprochement with the Western world.

In order to deepen bilateral relations, the U.S. Embassy was opened in Tbilisi on April 23, 1992, symbolizing the beginning of direct cooperation between the two countries. In the same year, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Georgia, marking the first visit by a high-ranking American official in the history of independent Georgia.

In the early 1990s, the United States primarily assisted Georgia in strengthening state institutions, implementing democratic reforms, and promoting economic development. Although Georgia faced serious

internal political and territorial conflicts during that period, the United States supported its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Methods. The presented scientific paper is based on the following research methods: source analysis, the comparative-historical method, the identification of cause-and-effect relationships, and systemic analysis.

Discussion. In the last decade of the 20th century, the political order of the world underwent changes, giving rise to a “new world map”. Among these geopolitical shifts, the collapse of the Soviet Union is particularly noteworthy. Following its disintegration, fifteen independent states emerged, including Georgia. After the collapse of the USSR, the world was no longer bipolar, and by the last decade of the 20th century, the United States had assumed the role of the unconditional leading power.

Initially, the United States of America carefully monitored the events taking place in the Soviet Union. At this early stage, it was in no hurry to establish direct diplomatic relations with the post-Soviet countries.

A new stage of Georgia-US cooperation began during the second term of US President Bill Clinton. At that time, official Washington's interest in the Caucasus and, more specifically, in Georgia, took on the character of a strategic relationship. During Bill Clinton's administration, Washington's interests in the South Caucasus region became strategic, which had not been the case in the first years of the newly independent states' freedom. During this particular period, the energy sector became a sphere of US interest. The American and Russian sides reached an agreement, and two of the five energy projects in the Caspian Sea basin were implemented taking into account the requirements of the Russian Federation. These were: Baku-Novorossiysk and Kazakhstan-Novorossiysk energy projects; As for the remaining three: the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, the South Caucasus gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project: these projects were implemented in the South Caucasus region, bypassing Russia. Thus, an energy alliance among Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was created, which would have been impossible in this region without the active involvement of the West. Despite the considerable influence of the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus, the United States of America still managed to achieve the desired results in the region. This fact was of great importance for the deepening of Georgian-American political relations. Bilateral cooperation reflected US interest and the identification of US priorities towards the Caucasus region. The American diplomat W. H. Courtney paid special attention to the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, since, in his opinion, the creation of a transit corridor between East and the West, along with close economic and political cooperation between the two countries - depended on this project. Regarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project, the ambassador noted that, in the future, this program would significantly change the political and economic situation in the region. According to him, the construction of the pipeline would be impossible without commercial goals, therefore, the role of the private sector was crucial for combining economic, political and commercial factors and creating common benefits.

The initiation of a new phase in bilateral relations was marked by an invitation from the official Washington side to the President of Georgia and the Georgian government delegation. In 1998, the Georgian delegation, led by President Eduard Shevardnadze, visited Washington D.C. The meeting was held with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Armed Forces, General John Malkhaz Shalikashvili. The discussions addressed key issues such as mechanisms for resolving regional problems in the Caucasus and the Abkhazian conflict.

During the same visit, an agreement was signed at the Pentagon, which laid the foundation for future military cooperation between the two countries. It was decided to intensify the engagement of US senators and congressmen in relation to Georgia. As part of this initiative, a delegation of US legislators (including senators S. Kalapan, J. McCain, F. Graham, K. B. Hutchinson, among others) conducted a return visit to Tbilisi

in August. These reciprocal visits and high-level meetings between the officials of both nations represented significant progress toward strengthening bilateral relations and developing strategic cooperation.

By the end of the decade, in 1999, the U.S. Congress adopted an important resolution concerning Georgia, which served as a major milestone in advancing bilateral collaboration. In the same year, the U.S. Senate passed the *Silk Road Strategic Act*, involving the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia – namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Additionally, in 1999, Istanbul hosted a major summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), attended by the representatives of 54 member states and several international organizations. Among the participants were the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, and the President of the United States, Bill Clinton. The United States and Georgia both recognized that without stability and security in the region, international projects would lose their significance. The principal objective of the summit was to discuss an emerging geopolitical configuration of Europe, with particular emphasis on the issue of limitation of conventional weapons in Europe.

For Georgia, the Istanbul summit was especially significant in addressing several strategic issues:

1. Integration of Georgia into the European security framework;
2. Military bases of the Russian Federation in Georgia;
3. Georgia's participation in major transnational projects.

Within the framework of the summit, a declaration was signed, according to which the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project, financed and supported by the United States of America, was subsequently implemented. Furthermore, the United States government allocated \$10 million in the 2000 budget to support the withdrawal of Russian military bases and surplus weapons from Georgia.

By the end of the twentieth century, official cooperation between Washington and Tbilisi was focused on several key areas:

1. The development of bilateral cooperation.
2. Deepening ties between Georgia and the United States within the framework of the *Partnership for Peace* program and discussing future prospects;
3. Providing assistance in the proper management of defense resources and in the process of developing defense planning reforms.
4. Continuation of bilateral dialogue on airspace management issues, including discussions on potential inclusion of Georgia in the Central and *Eastern European Aerospace Initiative*;
5. Starting an official dialogue on environmental protection issues.

Overall, the cooperation between official Tbilisi and Washington during this period (1996-2000) was characterized by progress, mutual trust and a result-oriented approach. Relations between Georgia and the United States deepened and key strategic goals were defined.

The largest terrorist act in modern history occurred on September 11, 2001 in the United States of America. The phrase: *The world will never be the same again* – has been repeated countless times since that day. The attacks of September 11 marked a clear division in contemporary history – between the periods before and after the event.

At that time, the President of the United States of America was George W. Bush, whose administration initiated a fundamentally new foreign policy toward both Georgia and the wider world. In 2001, one of the main priorities of US was cooperation with Georgia in the fields of defense, security, economic development and other important areas. This orientation was demonstrated by the meeting held in Georgia between representatives of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia and the US Department of Defense. The bilateral meeting between the presidents of Georgia and the United States was scheduled for the second half of

September 2001. However, the date was postponed due to the tragic events of September 11. Despite the global crisis, tension and almost 24-hours work schedule of official Washington, close coordination between the Georgian and American sides continued, resulting in the following official meeting between the leaders of Georgia and the United States. On October 7, the attention of the entire world media shifted to Afghanistan. The prospect of war was visible on the horizon. As the United States prepared for the military action against those who made the world's superpower - the United States of America - defenseless, even for 1 day.

During this period, the US Secretary of State, contacted Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze and conveyed the message from President Bush, stating that within hours the United States would begin military operations against Al-Qaeda and related facilities in Afghanistan. This moment signaled the beginning of a completely new stage in international relations and defined the strategic framework of cooperation between Georgia and the United States.

Following the September 11 attacks, the global political landscape changed profoundly. Washington significantly expanded its relations with Georgia which became an increasingly valuable partner and ally for the United States. In the following year, 2002, this cooperation deepened in several key areas and was exemplified by the US assistance programs - particularly, those aimed at strengthening security in Pankisi region of Georgia, thereby helping Georgia prevent the emergence of a third conflict zone, besides already existing two separatist regions. (T.D).

Conclusion. In conclusion, it can be noted that since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the United States has paid significant attention to the events taking place in Georgia. These political relations laid the foundation for and fostered the development of modern Georgian-American relations, which are distinguished by shared partnership interests in the South Caucasus. By contrasting the functioning of the US foreign policy system towards Georgia with its policies towards the rest of the South Caucasus states, we can identify general models of US policy in the region as a whole.

US policy towards Georgia is aimed at preserving and strengthening its democratic values. From both economic and geopolitical perspectives, the West is interested in ensuring stability on the periphery of Europe and the Middle East, and Georgia represents an important factor of stability in the Caucasus. However, for Georgia to maintain its stabilizing influence in the Caucasus, it is necessary to resolve its own security challenges. The US is actively pursuing a combination of energy and geopolitical policies in order to establish comprehensive regional stability in the South Caucasus.

Georgia has long been the United States' primary and geopolitically reliable ally in the South Caucasus region. It can be concluded that the United States has become one of the most important international guarantors of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

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