


The geopolitical consequences of Georgia's EU and NATO accession processes in the context of Russia's regional policy


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UDC: 327; **EDN:** WJKQDQ

DOI: 10.58587/18292437-2025.4-8

Keywords & phrases: South Caucasus, Georgia, Russia, NATO, EU, foreign policy, multilateral diplomacy

Վրաստանի ԵՄ և ՆԱՏՕ-ի անդամակցության գործընթացների աշխարհաքաղաքական հետեվանքները ՌԴ տարածաշրջանային քաղաքականության համատեքստում

Ալավերդյան Արմինե Գ.

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Միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետ, Երևանի պետական համալսարան (Արարատ, ՀՀ)*

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Անփոփագիր. Աշխարհաքաղաքական զարգացումները՝ մասնավորապես Ուկրաինայի պատերազմը ուղղակի ազդեցություն ունեն չարավայի Կովկասի վրա: Ռուսաստանի յարված հարաբերությունները ԱՄՆ, ՆԱՏՕ-ի և ԵՄ-ի հետ գնալով խորանում են՝ ազդելով տարածաշրջանի վրա:

Հոդվածում քննարկում ենք Ռուսաստանի կարմիր գծերը Վրաստանի ԵՄ-ի և ՆԱՏՕ-ի անդամակցության ձգտումների հետ կապված և ԵՄ-ի, ՆԱՏՕ-ի և ԱՄՆ-ի հետ հնարավոր հակասությունները այս համատեքստում:

Համապարփակ պատկերացում կազմելու համար որոշակի անդրաձեղ ենք նաև նաև Հայաստանի և Ադրբեջանի արտաքին քաղաքական օրակարգերին՝ ՌԴ-ի և ԵՄ-ի հետ կապված: Հոդվածի հիմնական նպատակն է վերլուծել Վրաստանի ԵՄ անդամակցության ռիսկերը: Գիտական աշխատանքի ընթացքում օգտագործել ենք իրադարձությունների վերլուծության, սցենարային կանխատեսումների, ՄՎՈՏ վերլուծության և համեմատական մեթոդները:

Վերլուծական աշխատանքի հիմնական եզրակացությունն այն է, որ ՌԴ ազգային անվտանգության ընկալումների տեսանկյունից Վրաստանի անդամակցությունը համարվում է սպառնալիք: ԵՄ տարածաշրջանային ինտեգրացիոն քաղաքականությունը Ռուսաստանի սահմաններին մոտ համարվում է ՌԴ ազգային անվտանգության ռազմավարության ռիսկ:

Հանգուցաբառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝ չարավայի Կովկաս, Վրաստան, Ռուսաստան, ՆԱՏՕ, ԵՄ, արտաքին քաղաքականություն, բազմակողմ դիվանագիտություն

Геополитические последствия процессов членства Грузии в ЕС и НАТО в контексте региональной политики РФ

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Аннотация. Текущие геополитические события, в частности война в Украине, оказывают прямое влияние на Южный Кавказ. Напряжённость в отношениях между Россией, США, НАТО и Европейским союзом усиливается и всё более отражается в регионе.

В данной статье рассматриваются «красные линии» России в отношении стремлений Грузии к членству в ЕС и НАТО, а также анализируются возможные конфликты между США, НАТО, ЕС и Россией в этом контексте. Для более полного представления кратко рассматриваются также внешнеполитические повестки Армении и Азербайджана в отношении России и ЕС.

Ключевым аспектом анализа является понимание рисков, которые потенциальное членство Грузии в ЕС представляет для России. В исследовании применяются методы анализа событий, сценарного прогнозирования, SWOT-анализа и сравнительного анализа.

Основной вывод исследования заключается в том, что в контексте восприятия национальной безопасности России членство Грузии в ЕС рассматривается как угроза. Более того, политика региональной интеграции ЕС вблизи российских границ воспринимается как серьёзный риск для стратегии безопасности России.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: Южный Кавказ, Грузия, Россия, НАТО, ЕС, внешняя политика, многосторонняя дипломатия

Introduction

Since the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of newly independent states, the South Caucasus has consistently attracted the attention of major powers. This interest stems from the region's resource richness and the dividing lines of spheres of influence and contradictions. For Russia, the region holds strategic importance due to shared historical, economic, and cultural ties, as well as its geographic position between Russia and NATO member Turkey. The United States also has significant interest in the region due to economic and other strategic factors, particularly in curbing the influence of Iran and Russia. Post-2020, there has been increased activity in Pakistan-Azerbaijan relations, which has prompted India to strengthen its ambitions for presence in the region. China, driven by economic considerations, has also begun to engage more actively. Since the 1990s, the EU and its member states have gradually deepened relations with the South Caucasian countries, developing diverse partnerships. The EU has regarded the South Caucasus as a compact and interdependent area demanding a regional approach. Since their independence in 1991, and following this rationale, the EU engaged with Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in a highly coordinated way, looking at involvement with these countries in simultaneous terms. All three states signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force in July 1999, and the EU established a regional delegation of the European Commission in Tbilisi, dealing with all relevant regional issues. The post of a Special Representative for the South Caucasus was created in 2003, envisaging a coordinated implementation of EU policy objectives in the region. Moreover, the European Parliament established, in the framework of the PCA, a Parliamentary Cooperation Committee dealing with the three countries simultaneously [26]. The ENP, despite its differentiated approach, once again reinforced a

regional perspective of the South Caucasus. This approach was maintained throughout negotiations for the bilateral ENP Action Plans and, to the detriment of the countries' expectations, the three were adopted simultaneously in November 2006[10]. From a Euro-Atlantic integration perspective, forcing some level of regional cooperation among Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis was a priority for the EU,31 in an attempt to avoid a new "Cyprus scenario [26]. This was seen as a necessary step to stimulate confidence among actors, searching for common values and objectives that the entrance into a new "ENP family" could help forge. The EU had established by then that good neighborly relations would be at the heart of any attempt to integrate the South Caucasus countries, and that regional cooperation would certainly precede any future attempts at regional integration [15]. Due to regional conflicts and geopolitical developments, the foreign policy orientations of these countries have undergone substantial changes between 1991 and 2025, affecting even the character of their relationships with regional players. Against this background, it is crucial to understand the contentious issues related to the Western integration aspirations of these countries and why such aspirations are unacceptable and constitute a security red line for Russia. Russia's national security and strategic documents repeatedly stress that NATO expansion, particularly near Russian borders, is viewed as a threat to national security. This is explicitly stated in Russia's National Security Strategy documents of 2009[32], 2015[6] and 2021[7], where NATO's expansion is described as a significant threat to Russia. These and other documents emphasize that the CIS region is of strategic importance to Russia, highlighting the role of structures like the EAEU and CSTO [18]. Since the 1990s, Russia has actively sought to expand its influence in the CIS space. Through involvement in regional conflicts and direct mediation, Russia has

gradually increased its leverage in the South Caucasus. It is no coincidence that by the late 1990s, Russia had signed strategic documents with Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, forming the foundation for deeper cooperation in various sectors. Russia also developed allied relations with Armenia both bilaterally and within the CSTO framework. Allied relations with Georgia later led to deeper cooperation in the field of security, particularly when Russian military bases were stationed in Armenia [3] and Georgia [5]. Russia also emerged as a key economic partner for these countries. Russia's role in conflict resolution—particularly in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia—has been pivotal, despite the involvement of other stakeholders. In the OSCE Minsk Group [30], Russia co-chaired alongside the USA and France in the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but due to its substantial ties with Armenia and Azerbaijan and its economic influence, Russia maintained a leading role in the process. The same can be said about Georgia's internal conflicts, where Russian forces were deployed within Georgian territory and in conflict zones. Notably, Georgia's former President Eduard Shevardnadze maintained strong ties with Moscow since the Soviet era and prioritized developing relations with Russia as a foreign policy objective. All of this changed after Georgia's 2003 "Rose Revolution," which brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power and shifted Georgia's foreign policy priorities [16]. This led to the 2008 "Five-Day War," during which Georgia lost control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia [1]. The war dramatically altered Georgia-Russia relations, making Russia, once Georgia's key partner, the main threat to its national security, as reflected in Georgia's strategic documents. Georgia's NATO and EU membership aspirations were reaffirmed not only in strategic documents but also embedded in its constitution [11]. Despite the war and internal challenges, Saakashvili's government continued deepening cooperation with NATO, EU, and USA. However, in the 2012 parliamentary elections, his party lost power to the Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili [38]. The new government revised some foreign policy directions, maintaining the strategic goal of NATO and EU accession while initiating efforts to normalize relations with Russia. Economic ties were prioritized, and within a few years, Russia reemerged as one of Georgia's leading economic partners (Transparency international 2024)—by 2022, becoming the second largest partner after Turkey (Swiss institute for global affairs 2024). A format known as the Karasin–Abashidze dialogue was established for addressing humanitarian and

other bilateral issues, with Switzerland playing a key mediating role. From 2012, under the Georgian Dream government, cooperation with NATO and the EU intensified, and domestic reforms, including legal system changes, were undertaken with their support. In 2013, Georgia signed the EU Association Agreement at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit alongside Moldova and Ukraine [25], while Armenia declined. Armenia later joined the Russia-led Customs Union with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, which evolved into the Eurasian Economic Union [25]. The Treaty of formation of the EAEU was signed on May 29, 2014, in Astana. This economic union consolidates a market of 182.7 million people with a combined GDP of about 3 trillion US dollars and covers 14% of the world's firm land. The EAEU offers to facilitate the four economic freedoms: free movement of goods, services, capital and labour with an objective to create harmonized and coordinated economic policy in the selected sectors. The Russia-led EAEU aims at transforming economic relations in the post-Soviet space and providing an alternative to the EU in their shared neighbourhood. The law of the EAEU is based on the principle of equality of all member states, which is reinforced with the union's institutional structure. The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) is the executive and coordination body of the EAEU [34]. Apparently, besides opportunities, there are also new security challenges for Armenia within the context of continuous rival in the contested neighbourhood between the two big power centres and their unequal relations with a small state. Unlike the other two founding members of the EAEU, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Russia has strong geopolitical intentions regarding the Eurasian integration project. For Russia the access to the small market of Armenia is not economically beneficial, as the Eurasian integration is presently costing Russia more than the desired benefits. In the context of Eurasian economic integration, economic motivations for Russia appear as secondary [34]. Nevertheless, On November 24, 2017, in the margins of the 5th Eastern Partnership summit, Armenia, on the one hand, being a member state of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and in a "strategic partnership" with Russia and, on the other hand, an active member of the European Union's (EU) Eastern Partnership (EaP), signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU becoming an associated country with the latter. This milestone agreement has been articulated by the ruling circles of Armenia as a successful return to the "both... and" balanced foreign policy [34]. The CEPA's legal distinctions could raise challenges due to

Armenia's EAEU membership, which guarantees free movement of capital, goods, and labor. In contrast, the EU Association Agreement also envisions eventual visa liberalization, already implemented for Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. Notably, the EU-Armenia visa liberalization process entered a new phase in 2024 [21]. Regarding Azerbaijan, in February 2022, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a new declaration on allied interaction [4] establishing strategic bilateral relations and marking a new era of deeper cooperation. At that time, Russia was fulfilling its peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh under the November 9, 2020 trilateral declaration [2] signed with Armenia and Azerbaijan following the 2020 war. Although Russia withdrew its peacekeepers from Nagorno-Karabakh between 2023–2025, it remains a key regional actor. Another significant development was the EU–Azerbaijan energy cooperation agreement signed on July 18, 2022 [22], which elevated their bilateral ties to a higher level. Given Russia's strategic interests in the South Caucasus, numerous inter-state issues persist in the region, and Russia aims to assume the primary role of balancer. Regional developments are unfolding rapidly, driven by broader geopolitical shifts—notably the Russia–Ukraine war beginning in 2022, which has had a direct impact on the South Caucasus considering Russia's military and economic presence in the region.

The USA-Russia, NATO-Russia Confrontation after the Collapse of the USSR

During the 1990s Russian interests were downplayed by Washington and Brussels, while the United States undertook a couple of policy actions that simply ignored Moscow's interests: the NATO eastward expansion, military intervention in former Yugoslavia, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the emplacement of a missile defense system in Central Europe, a series of gas pipelines projects in the Caspian Sea region designed to bypass Russia [27]. The NATO-Russia confrontation in the South Caucasus following the collapse of the USSR has gone through various developments and stages; however, the most profound example of this confrontation can be considered the "Five-Day" War of 2008 [16], in which the Russian side intervened militarily in processes that had actually begun back in 2003. In order to fully understand the broader picture, it is also important to examine the regional policy adopted by the U.S. administration during and after the collapse of the USSR. When discussing the challenges and issues that arose for official Washington due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, first and foremost we must mention the need to neutralize security threats, then the formation of a new foreign policy agenda, and of

course, the establishment of relations with newly independent states. Clearly, in the post-Soviet period, the task of ensuring stable security had to become a top priority on Washington's foreign policy agenda. Therefore, it is not surprising that the representatives of the White House immediately began implementing international treaties and agreements aimed at limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, guaranteeing global security and peace, and reducing the likelihood of new conflicts and clashes. Washington's work in this direction has always had a continuous nature, laying the foundation for launching future processes. Already in 1991 (July 31, Moscow Summit), U.S. President George H. W. Bush and USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which entered into force on December 5, 1994 (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (START I)). According to the agreement, both parties committed to reducing the number of deployed warheads to 6,000, and the number of missiles and bombers to 1,600. It is enough to note that by the end of 1990, these figures were almost twice as high for both the U.S. and the USSR [12]. Following the signing of the aforementioned agreement, the statements made by official Washington and official Moscow also continued to reflect intentions to reduce strategic arms and lower military tensions. On September 27, 1991, President George H. W. Bush, in addition to other declarations about arms reduction, announced his readiness to remove or destroy all tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, Asia, and on U.S. naval vessels, calling on Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to resume negotiations in that direction. In response to these American actions and statements, the Soviet President announced reciprocal reductions of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, including the dismantling of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons [12]. The logical continuation of these processes was the START II agreement signed on January 3, 1993, between President George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin, which was ratified by the U.S. Senate on September 26, 1996, and by Russia's State Duma and Federation Council on April 14 and 16, 2000, respectively. It is important to note that the purpose of START II was not to replace START I but rather to make it more comprehensive and inclusive. Thus, it can be assumed that the above-mentioned processes provided official Washington with a certain foundation to take concrete steps toward neutralizing security threats caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and establishing global peace. In this context, it should be emphasized that the U.S. could not limit itself to its own territory—it had to work with other post-

Soviet states and regions, especially considering the massive stockpiles of nuclear, biological, and weapons of mass destruction that were previously under Soviet control. The aim was to implement comprehensive measures to eliminate the associated risks and challenges [15]. This very goal was also pursued by the initiative introduced by U.S. Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar—the "Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program" (commonly known as the Nunn-Lugar program), which was adopted by the U.S. Congress in November 1991. The program had fundamental importance, as its main objective was to help countries dismantle various types of nuclear weapons and systems while also providing support for creating guarantees to prevent their proliferation. Following the collapse of the USSR, the program's assistance was mainly directed toward Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan [15]. Presumably, this program was also expected to significantly reduce the likelihood that other entities, including terrorists or terrorist organizations, could capture weapons and equipment from the former Soviet arsenal and use them for their own purposes. In other words, it can be stated that the processes of dividing zones of influence and spheres of interest in the region have deeper roots and began even before the collapse of the USSR. There were agreements not only between the U.S. and the USSR, and later the U.S. and Russia, regarding arms reduction and control, but also in terms of implementing policies that did not contradict each other's interests in different regions. While there was no significant tension in U.S.-Russia relations during the Yeltsin years, the same cannot be said for the period starting from the 2000s, when Vladimir Putin was elected President of Russia [27]. In his early presidency, Putin held fairly constructive meetings with European leaders, discussing the idea of pan-European security and Russia's key role in it. Specifically, in meetings with leaders of France and Germany, the idea of creating a common European security system was frequently raised—an idea that was, naturally, met with skepticism, especially by the U.S. and the UK. In any case, it can be noted that over time, West-Russia relations entered a new phase, which from the second half of the 2000s began to intensify, considering the clashes of interests in various regions, including the South Caucasus.

The development of Georgia-NATO, EU and USA relations and confrontation with Russia's interests

After the "Rose Revolution" of 2003, Georgia began to place greater emphasis on its foreign policy goal of joining NATO and the EU, initiating more in-depth discussions with representatives of

the aforementioned organizations. Despite the condemnation of Russian actions by the EU and NATO during and after the 2008 "Five-Day" war, and the support shown to Georgia by certain individual countries, it is important to note that there was no military intervention by third countries during the war and military operations, which can be considered unsurprising. As of August 2008, Georgia did not have mutual security agreements or alliances with any third country. This fact became the most significant criticism of President Saakashvili and his government, with particular emphasis on the miscalculations and failure to balance foreign policy. There was also public dissatisfaction with Saakashvili's actions, with Georgians blaming him for drawing the country into war, territorial losses, and excessive and imprudent pro-Western steps [14]. The war also had significant economic consequences for Georgia, which further fueled the wave of discontent. In contrast to all of this, Saakashvili emphasized that he would continue efforts to strengthen Georgia's security, and that the country's future lay in NATO and EU membership [8]. From 2008 to 2012, Georgia focused on Euro-Atlantic integration against the backdrop of strained relations with Russia, actively working to develop ties with NATO and the European Union. During this period, Georgia's foreign policy was characterized by persistent efforts to strengthen relations with Western institutions, as well as a fight against Russian occupation. After the August 2008 war, when Russia's military intervention resulted in Georgia losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, these two regions were recognized by Russia as independent states and have remained under Russian control ever since [36]. Georgia rejected this recognition and continued to present these issues to the international community. Russian armed forces remained in Georgia's territories, which had a profound impact on Georgia's economy and security. Russia also imposed economic sanctions, including customs restrictions and the closure of air routes, forcing Georgia to quickly search for new opportunities to move toward the West [13]. For Russia, the war with Georgia was a global, rather than regional, exercise, and Georgia was never a political target. As Medvedev put it, "For some of our partners, including NATO, this was a signal that they need to think about geopolitical stability before making a decision to expand the alliance" [33]. The real reason for the Five-Day War was the accumulation of tensions in the region over several years. In the mid-2000s, the U.S. administration decided to expand NATO into the post-Soviet space. Ukraine and Georgia wanted to join, but were ultimately

rejected due to the opposition of several European countries, particularly Germany and France. Washington and several European capitals ignored Moscow's warning that expansion would be seen as crossing a red line. They argued that Russia had always opposed NATO expansion, but would ultimately accept the inevitable [33]. In September 2012, the situation became more complicated when a group originating from the North Caucasus attempted to infiltrate Russian territory (Dagestan) from Georgia. Georgian soldiers reported casualties in the clashes. For the first time since the 2008 war, Georgia's security service, through Swiss mediation, provided detailed information to its Russian counterparts about the dead, signaling that Tbilisi was concerned about developments in the Russian part of the Caucasus and did not want to create instability there. As we can see, the only practical issue that remained with Georgia – its accession to the CIS – was already resolved. Under Saakashvili's leadership, Georgia tried to create a theoretical alternative to Russia, demonstrating a complete and irreversible break with its powerful neighbor in terms of historical and cultural ties. The essence of this policy was to forcibly retrain the Georgian people. President Saakashvili's sharp anti-Russian stance seemed more like a means than an ultimate goal. The decisive break from Russia and its dual cultural heritage appeared to be the best method for rebuilding the Georgian nation. His reforms, particularly in law enforcement, produced significant and positive results. Saakashvili and his young team believed they needed to stay in power until they had realized their vision of Georgia's secure and prosperous future. However, they had an overly idealistic view of the people's attitude towards the policy they had adopted. Even after the war, they believed they had sufficient legitimacy and public trust, and that nothing should hinder Georgia's Western integration and its development through Western reforms. However, in reality, the negative economic consequences, the uncertainties surrounding security issues, and the daily rapprochement of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Russia created a new atmosphere of challenges and fear within the Georgian population. Against this backdrop, there were no documented security guarantees from any Western country or institution. Despite the president and his team decisively pushing forward the policy of Western integration, the support Georgia received from the West did not resolve the issues of economic isolation or the emerging social problems. Notably, there was significant discontent, especially among Georgians who had been displaced as a result of the war and had not received adequate support from the government. Over time, hatred speech became

more noticeable, not only against Russians but also between Abkhazians and Georgians, Ossetians and Georgians, and vice versa. The Georgian side continuously tried to actively initiate the issue of membership in Western organizations (NATO, EU), but these organizations were not as eager to move as the Georgian side had expected.

Why Georgia Could Not Become a Member of the EU and NATO?

If we draw geopolitical parallels between the events of the 2008 war and Russia's actions, we can see that Russia's policy in regional and international processes was changing. Back in 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a speech emphasizing that a unipolar system and governance from a single center was unacceptable, and Russia, in a sense, challenged the existing system and rules [9]. He particularly highlighted the importance of Russia's new role and the clear steps necessary to strengthen it. Russia repeatedly declared that the expansion of NATO, particularly near its borders, was unacceptable and a red line for its national security. The 2008 war seemed to be a practical manifestation of these statements and a signal to the West that Russia was serious about its declarations and was ready to intervene militarily and resolve issues threatening its national security by force. Prior to 2008, senior Russian officials had almost daily declared that countries aspiring to join NATO must consider these realities. In Russia's 2009 National Security Strategy, the section dedicated to NATO states that Ukraine and Georgia's membership in NATO is unacceptable for Russia [24]. Official statements were also made that Georgia's accession to NATO would be a threat to Russia, and Russia would be compelled to intervene militarily [27]. One after another, Russian military and political leaders declared that NATO's expansion, particularly Ukraine and Georgia's membership, posed a threat to Russia's national security, and Russia would do everything possible to prevent this threat [37]. Critics of President Saakashvili and experts pointed out that Georgia's leadership, without any security guarantees, decided to resolve the internal conflict through military means and directly confronted Russia and its security interests in the region. This wave of criticism continued to grow, especially after the war, as Saakashvili persistently continued his policy, believing that he could make Georgia a member of the EU and NATO. It is important to understand whether Georgia, which did not share a land border with the EU, had a realistic chance of becoming a member. In theory, the EU does not rule out the possibility of membership for countries that express interest. However, in practice, many

geopolitical factors must be taken into account, along with the challenges that such membership might bring. Russia clearly showed its stance regarding Georgia's Western aspirations and the threats arising from them. At the same time, 2008 brought a new economic crisis that had a significant negative impact on the EU and its member states. Against this backdrop, was it likely that a new, economically weaker Georgia would be welcomed into the EU? Another question arose: Was NATO the only red line for Russia, or was the EU also a concern? Theoretically, the EU is considered an economic integration body without a defense or security component. However, an attack on an EU member state cannot be ignored by the EU. Although Georgia would have had to meet the EU's criteria for membership, which would require internal legislative reforms, economic changes, and more, it is still crucial to understand why Georgia could not have become an EU member after 2008, given the geopolitical developments.

Analytical Example 1: Lisbon Treaty and EU Common Security and Defense Policy

The 2009 Lisbon Treaty is a foundational document reforming the EU's foreign and security policy, aiming to deepen cooperation among member states. It strengthened the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), promoting joint defense and cooperation in military and civilian security matters, including conflict prevention and international assistance.

Key provisions include:

- The EU can conduct military interventions, especially peacekeeping missions, by mutual agreement.
- The EU can defend its members independently, without relying solely on NATO.
- The EU cooperates with international organizations to protect human rights and international law.

The treaty enhances the EU's ability to act cohesively on the global stage, emphasizing unity and independence in foreign and security policy.

Relevant articles from the Lisbon Treaty:

- Article 42(1): EU and members ensure the common security and defense policy to preserve international peace.
- Article 42(2): Ensures consistency of external action; members cooperate to promote peace, security, and defense.
- Article 42(7): If a member state is attacked, others must aid it by all means, akin to collective defense under the UN Charter.
- Article 43(1): EU may conduct joint military operations such as peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

- Article 46: The EU uses military and civilian capabilities for international peacekeeping, based on member consent [35].

Example of using Article 42(7):

France invoked Article 42(7) after the 9/11 attacks, offering support to the U.S., demonstrating the EU's collective defense mechanism in global security threats beyond traditional military attacks, paralleling NATO's Article 5.

Analysis:

The Lisbon Treaty's Articles 42(2), 42(7), and 46 significantly enhance EU defense capabilities, creating binding defense obligations among members. The EU's collective defense, as shown in France's 9/11 response, is a flexible, multi-dimensional mechanism combining diplomatic, military, and security efforts to maintain peace and stability. This framework means that if Georgia joins the EU, it gains protection under these collective defense provisions, strengthening its security and facilitating potential NATO membership.

Analytical example 2: EU-NATO Cooperation: Key Documents (Condensed Overview)

The institutional framework of EU-NATO cooperation is anchored in several pivotal declarations and arrangements:

- **2002 EU-NATO Declaration:** Established the strategic partnership and mutual access to planning capabilities [20].
- **2003 Berlin Plus Agreement:** Enabled the EU to use NATO assets for military operations, laying groundwork for shared crisis management [31].
- **2016 Joint Declaration (Warsaw):** Identified seven priority areas, including cyber defense, hybrid threats, and military mobility [29].
- **2018 Brussels Declaration:** Reaffirmed commitments, emphasizing interoperability and operational coordination [19].
- **2023 Joint Declaration:** Responding to evolving threats (e.g. Russia's aggression), it expanded cooperation in infrastructure protection, space, disruptive technologies, and information security [23].

These documents underscore a progressive convergence of EU and NATO in strategic domains, reinforcing both organizations' roles in European and transatlantic security governance. Beyond its internal legal framework, the European Union (EU) has also signed in-depth cooperation agreements directly with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). That is, while some EU member states enjoy security guarantees through their NATO membership, they also benefit from additional

support within the EU framework, particularly through Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union. At the same time, EU members that are not part of NATO still benefit from the EU's defense mechanisms at the Brussels level, and through individual member states—many of which are also NATO members—have opportunities for support at the NATO level as well. This is facilitated by the deepening of EU–NATO cooperation in the field of security and their mutual strategic interests. Such dynamics further strengthen the EU's geopolitical standing, especially considering the political and strategic support it receives from key non-EU countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada—actors with considerable influence in various international security processes. It is thus essential to examine the major EU–NATO documents to better understand the nature of their cooperation. This once again confirms that Georgia's accession to the European Union will serve as a form of protection on its path toward eventual NATO membership—an outcome that represents a red line for the Russian Federation's national security. Therefore, Georgia's EU membership is, in itself, also considered a red line by Russia.

EU and NATO Membership Scenarios for Georgia: Risks and Realities

Scenario 1: Georgia Becomes EU Member

In this scenario, Georgia joins the EU. While EU membership alone may not provoke Russia militarily, it would strengthen Georgia's prospects for NATO integration. As most EU states are NATO members, Georgia would benefit from implicit security guarantees, especially under Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty. EU membership would thus serve as a buffer against Russian threats and a step toward NATO accession. For Russia, the EU integration of strategic states like Georgia and Ukraine constitutes a red line.

Scenario 2: Georgia Joins EU, But Commits Not to Join NATO

Here, Georgia joins the EU but formally renounces future NATO membership, with penalties for violating the agreement. This is seen as unlikely for Georgia, though more plausible for Ukraine due to its greater strategic importance and EU border proximity. Nonetheless, absent a formal NATO opt-out, Russia is unlikely to accept Georgia's or Ukraine's EU accession without interference.

Scenario 3: Georgia Becomes NATO Member

If Georgia joins NATO, the South Caucasus' geopolitical balance shifts dramatically. Russia would see this as a direct threat, potentially escalating military activity in Abkhazia and South

Ossetia, imposing sanctions, and activating CSTO support. NATO's Article 5 would obligate defense of Georgia, risking confrontation with Russia. Internally, Georgia could face divisions, especially in pro-Russian regions. Azerbaijan may deepen ties with Georgia; Armenia, bound to Russia via CSTO, may respond with caution. Turkey would support Georgia but face pressure in balancing alliances. The result: intensified CSTO–NATO rivalry in the region.

SWOT Analysis of Georgia's NATO and EU Membership

Strengths

NATO:

- Georgia maintains strong bilateral and multilateral relations with NATO members, especially the U.S., Turkey, Germany, the UK, and France. Its strategic alliance with the U.S. is pivotal for deepening NATO cooperation.

- NATO membership would enhance Georgia's military capabilities, provide access to advanced Western technology, and offer vital security guarantees.

- Collective defense under NATO would bolster Georgia's resilience to internal and external threats, given its limited economic and military capacity.

- Membership would expand NATO's strategic presence in the South Caucasus and Black Sea, reducing Russian influence.

- Georgian accession could positively influence Armenia's Euro-Atlantic alignment and shift the regional balance in NATO's favor amid tensions with Russia and Iran.

- NATO support might aid in restoring Georgia's internationally recognized borders.

EU:

- EU membership would enable Georgia to benefit from comprehensive economic development initiatives and harmonization with European standards.

- Article 42/7 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty offers security guarantees that would enhance Georgia's national defense.

- Georgia would play a key role in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood and South Caucasus strategies.

- Access to the EU's internal market of over 440 million people offers substantial trade prospects.

- Georgia's Black Sea coastline, adjacent to EU-member Bulgaria and Romania, creates strategic logistical trade advantages.

- Integration could elevate governance standards and quality of life within Georgia.

- Shared Christian heritage reinforces cultural ties with the EU.
- A pro-European foreign policy since 2003, enshrined in Georgia's Constitution, demonstrates enduring commitment.
- Georgia has signed an Association Agreement, and has a free visa with EU, and achieved candidate status in December 2023.
- The EU's global diplomatic influence aligns with Georgia's foreign policy ambitions.
- Georgia's neighbors—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey—have constructive relations with the EU, supporting regional integration.

Weaknesses

- Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations are viewed by Russia as threats, leading to ongoing military presence on Georgian territory.
- Russia considers NATO expansion near its borders a strategic danger, possibly prompting military reactions.
- As a buffer zone between Russia and NATO-member Turkey, the South Caucasus remains geopolitically sensitive.
- Georgia must cautiously balance its goals with Russian interests, particularly in the post-2008 war context.
- No binding defense treaties guarantee Georgia USA, NATO, EU and etc. military support in case of aggression.
- Absence of formal alliances with Western powers increases vulnerability to Russian pressure.
- Lack of a land border with the EU adds logistical and infrastructural challenges.
- The EU faces internal strains, including security and energy issues intensified by the war in Ukraine, potentially delaying Georgia's path.
- Georgia's accession could provoke confrontation with Russia—something NATO and the EU prefer to avoid.
- Ongoing Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South ossetia complicates Georgia's NATO eligibility politically and legally.
- Economic reliance on Russia exposes Georgia to coercive pressure, as shown post-2008.
- NATO and EU may hesitate to fully commit to South Caucasus security responsibilities.
- Russia's staunch opposition to NATO expansion, as seen in Ukraine, intensifies Georgia's risks.
- Certain Georgian business and political elites maintain Russian connections, hindering integration.
- Georgia's NATO bid faces political and legal obstacles, particularly due to ongoing territorial conflicts. At the 2008 Bucharest Summit,

NATO declared that Georgia and Ukraine “will become members,” but noted “questions still outstanding” regarding their MAP applications—clearly referencing unresolved disputes. As long as these conflicts persist, NATO membership remains unlikely.

- Shifts in U.S. foreign policy could slow Georgia's Western momentum.
- Western inaction during the 2008 war compelled Georgia to renew ties with Russia.
- Georgia's current economic and military conditions lag behind NATO/EU standards.
- Broader global crises (Ukraine, Israel-Iran, India-Pakistan, U.S.-EU tensions) complicate enlargement prospects.
- EU integration may weaken Georgia's ties with regional organizations like BRICS, CIS, EAEU, or BSEC.
- Georgia's location may be seen by the EU as financially and logistically burdensome.
- EU prioritizes Western Balkans expansion, where obstacles are fewer.
- Georgia's progress depends heavily on future shifts in U.S. strategic priorities.
- Limited Western support since 2008 forced Tbilisi to re-engage with Moscow.
- Georgian exports—especially agricultural and alcoholic products—are more competitive in Russian markets than in the EU.
- Political dominance by Bidzina Ivanishvili, known for Russian affiliations, slows NATO/EU alignment.

Opportunities

NATO:

- Membership would solidify Georgia as a reliable regional ally and enhance national defense.
- Georgia could become a crucial player in limiting Russian sway in the Black Sea and South Caucasus.
- NATO integration might increase international leverage on Russia to withdraw from occupied regions.
- Stronger ties with NATO-member Turkey could help balance Russian and Iranian regional influence.
- Hosting NATO infrastructure could foster Georgia's defense industry and boost strategic importance.

EU:

- EU integration might pave the way for eventual NATO accession through improved security cooperation.
- Georgia's role as a transit hub enhances trade potential between Europe and Asia.
- Expanded Black Sea trade routes could benefit both Georgia and neighboring Armenia.

- Georgia's EU accession might influence Turkey's evolving relationship with the Union.
- Closer EU ties could help reduce economic reliance on Russia.
- EU development funds could improve infrastructure, attract foreign investment, and promote tourism.

Threats

NATO:

- Accession could provoke military escalation with Russia, echoing the 2008 war.
- NATO membership may ignite broader geopolitical rivalries involving the U.S., Russia, and CSTO.
- Georgia risks becoming politically and economically isolated if escalation occurs.
- Russia may use Abkhazia and South Ossetia as justifications for preemptive action.
- Deployment of NATO troops in Georgia could trigger Russian retaliation.
- Installation of NATO missile systems could lead to an arms race and further destabilization.
- Georgia might be drawn into regional tensions as a base against Russia or Iran.
- NATO's interactions with Armenia and Azerbaijan could complicate South Caucasus security dynamics.
- Regional power shifts could cause instability or open conflict.

EU:

- EU accession alone might invite Russian military or hybrid responses.
- EU defense cooperation with Georgia could be interpreted by Moscow as a NATO-aligned move.
- Georgia's lack of a direct EU border may increase isolation risks and logistic difficulties.
- Russia could exploit regional levers to block or undermine Georgia's EU integration.
- Rising Russia-Georgia tensions may negatively impact neighboring Armenia.
- Increased Western presence through Georgia could provoke counteractions from Iran or China, threatening regional balance.

Conclusions

Thus, we can conclude that, both in 2008 and today, Georgia does not have the opportunity to become a NATO member. Just as in 2008, NATO is not ready to enter direct conflict with Russia, considering that for the Russian side, Georgia's accession to NATO is a red line and a threat to national security. NATO and individual states supported Georgia in security and defense matters, but a strategic document that would ensure Georgia's security and defense, as was the case in 2008, has still not been signed, which makes

Georgia vulnerable in terms of ensuring its security. Since 2003, especially the efforts of France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the USA in the field of military cooperation with Georgia have been significant, but these efforts are limited to signing documents aimed at deepening relations. The soft policy pursued by US President Donald Trump towards Russia has further weakened Georgia's efforts to join Western institutions. Since 2012, Georgia's leadership, under the "Georgian Dream" party, has made adjustments in its relations with Russia, understanding well that negotiations with the EU and NATO have not reached the level that would ensure Georgia's security, solve its economic problems, and so on. Therefore, especially during Donald Trump's tenure, we believe that Georgia-Russia relations may develop in a more active and dynamic manner.

Also significant are the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are of fundamental importance to Georgia, and their resolution is more likely through maintaining relations with Russia and negotiating. The West (NATO, EU, USA) does not have the political will to resolve this issue by military means, directly entering into a war with Russia. Even the EU and NATO, as well as their member states, did not engage in direct war with Russia over Ukraine, knowing well that Russia's success in Ukraine would create serious security issues, primarily for Europe. More than 15 years have passed since the 2008 war, yet Georgia is still waiting to become a member of the EU and NATO, but the issues arising on this path are not being resolved by Western countries and institutions in a way that Georgia does not incur losses. This is what forces Georgia's leadership to make revisions in its foreign policy, especially in relations with Russia, which has become one of Georgia's top five trade partners in recent years, and was second in 2022. The issues related to Armenia's membership are also filled with security, economic, and other concerns, as Armenia is a member of the CSTO and EAEU and heavily dependent on Russia in terms of economy and other areas. Russia has a military presence in Armenia, which also poses a significant challenge for Armenia's integration into Western institutions. Russia did not unequivocally accept the EU observer mission on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, although it is officially stated in diplomatic and political terms that it is Armenia's sovereign right. There was a similar reaction from Moscow regarding the document adopted by the Armenian National Assembly on the importance of Armenia's accession to the EU, where Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was Armenia's sovereign right. Despite all this, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly emphasizes that

Russia-Armenia allied relations and cooperation within the EAEU and CSTO frameworks are important and have no more effective alternative, which Armenia should understand well. Regarding Azerbaijan, the EU has numerous problematic issues, considering Azerbaijan's internal processes related to human rights violations, disrespect for international norms, ignoring democratic processes, and other problems. This was the basis for the removal of Azerbaijan's delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which later seemed to transform into a new "duel" between the sides. Azerbaijan proudly displays its strategic relations with NATO member Turkey, but seems to conceal its high-level strategic relations with Russia, which was also mentioned by Russian State Duma deputy Konstantin Zatulin. In the complex and rapidly evolving South Caucasus region, it is difficult to imagine that the South Caucasus countries can become EU and even more so NATO members in the near future, considering that the EU and NATO would directly confront Russia, which, as shown by the events of 2008, is not ready. The cases of Ukraine also show that the West, even for Ukraine, which has strategic geographical importance for the EU and NATO, is not ready to engage in direct conflict with Russia, despite substantial financial and military assistance. Russia demonstrated in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2022 that it is ready to neutralize threats, as outlined in its strategic documents, concerning NATO enlargement and the spread of Western influence near its borders, through military means. This is another signal to the West and, at the same time, to the countries of the South Caucasus regarding the need to consider the security and other interests of regional actors in the Western integration processes.

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Содана / Հանձնվել է 08.07.2025

Рецензирована / Փրիվիտվել է 15.07.2025

Принята / Ընդունվել է 22.07.2025