



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**NATIONAL IDENTITIES, REGIONAL
FRAGMENTATION AND THE PROSPECT OF BUILDING
A SECURITY COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS**

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ADVISOR: PROF. DIMITRIOS TRIANTAPHYLLOU

PHD THESIS

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2020

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PHD THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in the Program of
International Relations.

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2020

I, NAZRIN GADIMOVA, hereby declare that;

- this PhD Thesis is my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources;
- this PhD Thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

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NATIONAL IDENTITIES, REGIONAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE PROSPECT OF BUILDING A SECURITY COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

ABSTRACT

Despite sharing geographical borders and a common historical legacy, the South Caucasus remains a divided region in political terms, as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia do not share a common regional identity and have different visions of the future. This thesis aims to find the correlation between national identities and the current regional fragmentation of the South Caucasus, as well as to define the elements necessary for the formation of a security community in the region. In this regard, the thesis comprises two discussions in analysis of the factors that are interrelated with the national identities of the three states. The first discussion introduces the role of domestic factors in the current situation in the South Caucasus and analyzes the influence of societies and national identities in regional relations. The second discussion analyzes to what extent their foreign policy orientations are defined by national identities, including linguistic and cultural affinities and memory of the past, or the existing global order and pragmatic calculations. The methodology of the study includes analysis of the recent history of the South Caucasus and the theoretical basis of security communities, explaining different aspects necessary for successful regional cooperation. Interviews with local and international experts contribute to the study by presenting different visions of the origins of regional fragmentation and different solutions to the existing situation. While the establishment of cooperation at the level of a security community requires both domestic transformation and favorable international conditions, this thesis aims to show that proper policies of the states of the South Caucasus can significantly contribute to the transformation of the national self-images and the attitudes of the nations toward their immediate neighbors.

Keywords: South Caucasus, national identity, security community, regionalism, integration

GÜNEY KAFKASYA'DA ULUSAL KİMLİKLER, BÖLGESEL ÇÖZÜLME VE GÜVENLİK TOPLULUĞU KURMA PERSPEKTİFİ

ÖZET

Coğrafi sınırlara ve ortak tarihsel mirasa rağmen, Güney Kafkasya siyasi düzlemde bölünmüş bir bölge olarak varlığını sürdürüyor. Ermenistan, Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan ortak bölgesel bir kimliğe sahip olmadıkları gibi birlikte farklı gelecek tasavvuruna sahipler. Bu çalışma, bir yandan ulusal kimlikler arasında ve Güney Kafkasya'nın mevcut bölgesel parçalanmışlığı içinde karşılıklı bir ilişkiyi bulmayı hedeflerken, diğer yandan da bölgede güvenlik birliği kurmak için gerekli unsurları tespit etmeye çalışıyor. Bu noktada çalışma, her üç ülkenin ulusal kimlikleri ile etkileşim içindeki unsurların incelenmesi üzerine iki tartışma içermektedir. Birinci tartışma Güney Kafkasya'daki mevcut durumu etkileyen ulusal unsurları ele almakta ve toplumların ve ulusal kimliklerin bölgesel ilişkilerdeki etkisini incelemektedir. İkinci tartışma, dış politika yönelimlerinin hangi ölçüde, dilsel ve kültürel bağlılıklar ve tarihi anılar dahil, ulusal kimlikler, mevcut global düzen veya pragmatik hesaplar tarafından belirlendiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın metodolojisi Güney Kafkasya'nın yakın tarihinin ve başarılı bölgesel birliklerde gerekli unsurları tespit için güvenlik örgütlerinin kuramsal temellerinin incelenmesini içermektedir. Yerel ve uluslararası uzmanlarla yapılan nitel mülakatlar, bölgesel parçalanmışlığın kökenleri üzerine farklı bakış açıları ve mevcut duruma farklı çözüm önerileri sunarak çalışmaya katkı sunmuştur. Her ne kadar güvenlik birliği seviyesinde bir işbirliğinin kurulması ulusal bir dönüşüm ve uygun uluslararası şartlar gerektirse de bu çalışma, Güney Kafkasya devletlerinin uygun politikalar ile ulusal görünümüne ve ulusların yanı sıra başlarındaki komşularına yönelik tutumlarına ciddi katkı sağlayabileceklerini göstermeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Güney Kafkasya, milli kimlik, güvenlik topluluğu, bölgescilik, entegrasyon.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement ^[L] _[SEP]
AAC	Armenian Apostolic Church
ADR	Azerbaijani Democratic Republic
ANM	Armenian National Movement ^[L] _[SEP]
APF	Azerbaijani Popular Front
ARF	Armenian Revolutionary Federation ^[L] _[SEP]
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia ^[L] _[SEP]
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BSEC	Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation ^[L] _[SEP]
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline ^[L] _[SEP]
BTE	Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline ^[L] _[SEP]
BTK	Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway ^[L] _[SEP]
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States ^[L] _[SEP]
CSCP	Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union ^[L] _[SEP]
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union ^[L] _[SEP]
GDP	gross domestic product
GUAM	Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (member states: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova)
IDP	internally displaced person
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force ^[L] _[SEP]

NATO	North-Atlantic Treaty Organization ^[1] _[SEP]
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (province) ^[1] _[SEP]
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ^{[1][1]} _{[SEP][SEP]}
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PfP	Partnership for Peace Program
SOCAR	State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic ^[1] _[SEP]
TANAP	Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Central Asia ^[1] _[SEP]
TSFSR	Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic ^[1] _[SEP]
TDFR	Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic ^[1] _[SEP]
UN	United Nations ^[1] _[SEP]
UNM	United National Movement
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ^[1] _[SEP]
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

Situated at one of the main strategic crossroads of the globe, the South Caucasus comprising the territory of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia occupies an important place in the international geopolitics. Despite its small size and a relatively small population of seventeen million people, the region attracts the world's attention for its rich energy resources and advantageous location, placed at the crossroads of the European, post-Soviet and Middle Eastern worlds connecting the Caspian and Black Seas, and bordering the global and regional powers of Russia, Turkey and Iran (figure A.1). Historically torn by the confrontation between the three empires, the region was formed under the influence of different cultures, religions and mentalities, leading to confrontation between the local nations as well. During the last two hundred years, Russian and Soviet influence has played a significant role in the formation of the South Caucasus as a region, by leaving both positive and negative legacies in terms of its political, economic and social development, as well as in terms of the relations established between the local states. The Soviet totalitarian methods of control over the society, as well as the seeds of future confrontation that were covered under the official ideology of the "friendship of peoples" during Soviet times, transformed into post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, corruption, lack of business culture, and most importantly, into open interethnic conflicts that keep the region fragmented, vulnerable and weak. As the result of these transformations and mostly due to the existing conflicts, the traditional image of the South Caucasus as the "crossroads" of Eurasia was replaced with the ignominious status of a regional "deadlock" (Iskandaryan, 2000). Zbigniew Brzezinski, (1997, pp. 123-124) the former National Security Adviser of the United States labeled the regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia as the "Eurasian Balkans".

Still, despite the existing problems of the region, there are elements that can serve as a basis for integration and in the final stages the establishment of a security community in the South Caucasus. These elements include the commonality of a "Caucasian" culture, the potential complementarity of local economies, along with some positive examples of common postcolonial legacy that are still present (although decreasing) in the local

societies, such as the traditions of secularism, the usage of Russian as a *lingua franca* and many others. In other words, there is a big potential for the formation of a common regional identity, even though the current situation in the region and the unresolved status of the interethnic conflicts keep the states dissevered and their national identities mutually exclusive. This thesis will focus on the reasons lying behind this failure, as well as discuss whether there is a chance of cooperation and building a security community – an area free of wars and conflicts.

1.1 Empirical Context

Most scholars agree on the definition of the South Caucasus as a fragmented, or “broken” region. Despite geographical borders separating the region from the rest of the world, as well as their common historical legacy and similarity in the cultures of these nations, the South Caucasus remains a divided region in political terms, as the three states of the region do not share a common regional identity, they choose different international orientations and have different visions of the future. It is also a “negative” region, as there is some interdependence between the states, however this interdependence is caused by enmity (German, 2012c, p. 25): two states of the region, Azerbaijan and Armenia, are involved in an interethnic conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, while Georgia is torn by two conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition, the underdeveloped traditions of democracy, weak civil societies and lack of communication between the nations provide additional obstacles to the process of the formation of the region as a common political unit. It partially explains the reason why the friendly relations between the political leaderships of Azerbaijan and Georgia, bound by a series of energy and transport projects, failed to transform into a regional integration process, despite the great expectations of the 1990s.

While a large number of experts on the South Caucasus see the source of the regional fragmentation in external factors, such as an instable neighborhood and the influence of Russia in the region, others focus on the level of democracy of local regimes and the relations between the states in the context of regional interaction. Both aforementioned approaches have their basis in the theories of international relations: international

factors can be explained from the perspective of neorealism, while the role of democratic development can be best interpreted from the position of liberal theory. This thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of national identities and the role they play in the domestic and foreign policy of the regional states, using a constructivist approach: while the international orientations of the governments matter along with the political regimes, these arguments fail to give a full picture and require deeper research in order to understand the roots of the conflicts and antagonisms between the hostile nations (in the Armenian-Azerbaijani dyad) and the reasons for shallow cooperation between the friendly states of the region (in the Azerbaijani-Georgian and Armenian-Georgian dyads).

The analysis of the national identities and historical memory of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia can explain the reasons for the emergence of the conflicts, and the current stances of their societies towards them, as well as the motives behind decisions in the domestic and foreign policies of the regional states. For the latter, the thesis will discuss the role of the “greater region”, and most notably Russia and Turkey in terms of the images and perceptions these states have formed in the national identities of the local states. However, these developments can be understood differently, depending on the two different interpretations of an identity as a given and unchangeable concept established by geographic, ethnic, religious and other “primordial” elements, or as a transformative process influenced by the constantly changing political developments, policies of states, propaganda and official rhetoric, communication and economic transactions between nations, as well as by international historical processes. The constructivist approach might give a clue to the resolution of the conflicts and regional fragmentation through a change of attitude, the reemergence of trust between nations and the search for common values, interests and visions of the future. While the South Caucasus remains divided, this theoretical discourse gives hope for the transformation of the region through the transformation of identities and the rebuilding of trust between nations. Although the idea of the establishment of a security community, as an area free of war and violence with a common identity and common vision of the future, sounds utopian in the modern circumstances of conflicts and ethnic animosities of this region, an analysis of the theory of security communities can significantly contribute to the

understanding of the missing elements in the recipe for regional cooperation and, as a final goal, economic and political integration.

While the South Caucasus is torn by three interethnic conflicts involving each of the regional states, nevertheless the main obstacle to regionalization lies in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, “the Gordian knot” impeding the transformation of the region (Oskanian, 2013, p. 104). The conflict divided the two nations and impeded the establishment of full-scale integration projects, thus putting an obstacle in the path of the broadening of cooperation between the two states and Georgia as well. Although the conflict is considered to be “frozen”, it can explode at any moment, as the “Four-Day War” in April 2016 showed (Garibov, 2017). The possibility of war puts under threat not only the population of Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also the regional projects involving Georgian and international interests. The conflict to a large extent defines the domestic policy of the two states, keeps both countries weak and impedes their democratization and development. Last but not least, the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh keeps economically isolated Armenia extremely dependent on energy imports from Russia and Iran and forces it to use the Metsamor atomic power station that threatens the ecological and humanitarian security of the whole region.

As for the situation in the unrecognized republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, although these conflicts directly affect the stability and internal peace of Georgia, and these factors are seen as a precondition for the establishment of a security community by many authors of the theory, still the Georgian ethnic conflicts do not define the relations between the states of the South Caucasus in the way the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh does. To a large extent, they remain a matter of relations of Georgia with Russia and its federal regions in the North Caucasus (particularly North Ossetia), bringing this aspect of their inter-relations to the extra-regional level. Still, these conflicts might also affect the situation in other parts of the South Caucasus, namely in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as the extreme dependence of both states on the stability in Georgia caused by their borders being closed became obvious during the war of August 2008. Another aspect of the relationship of the conflicts to the regional issues is the

origins of the Georgian conflicts that lay in the mistakes of the Georgian authorities, the rise of nationalistic and populist rhetoric, as well as in the failure of the local government to set norms and regulations to provide the necessary conditions for the protection of minority rights in the protesting districts of Georgia. In this regard, this thesis will analyze the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the light of their influence on regional stability and the lessons they can bring to the implementation of a state policy on national minorities in order to prevent future violations and clashes.

1.2 Research Question and Significance of Study

This thesis aims to find the correlation between national identities and the current regional fragmentation of the South Caucasus, as well as to define the elements necessary for the formation of a security community in the region. For this purpose, the research objectives are structured on the definition of a theoretical framework for the concept of national identities, regional integration, and the construction of a security community; a discussion of the commonalities in the existing security communities and their application to the region of the South Caucasus; as well as a historical analysis of the formation of national identities and the attempts to build regional integration in the South Caucasus. As the ethnic conflicts remain the key factor that keeps the region divided, the analysis of the role of clashing national identities in the onset of these conflicts will be discussed in detail.

In addition to these objectives, the thesis will comprise two discussions on the analysis of the factors that are interrelated with the national identities of the three states. The first discussion will introduce the role of domestic factors in the current situation in the South Caucasus and analyze the influence of local regimes and their democratization process, in contrast to the role of societies and national identities in regional relations, by juxtaposing the constructivist approach with the theory of democratic peace. Taking into account the necessity of interaction lying at the basis of the theory of security communities, it will also discuss the potential of implementing transactions through economic cooperation and communication as a tool of identity transformation and trust building between the nations of the region. Based on the constructivist perspective, this

analysis will show whether the policy of governments and the development of inter-social communication, people's diplomacy, as well as changes in the rhetoric of state officials can positively affect the peace-building process and the construction of a security community in the future perspective. Notably, this thesis does not aim to give a detailed analysis of the history of the conflict, the negotiation process and the proposals made by the mediators, or other details regarding the development of the conflicts; instead, it will focus on the attitude of the societies, the role of conflict in the national identities of the countries of the region, and the reasons lying behind the intransigence of the public and the leadership, as well as discuss how the transformation of public opinion could possibly contribute to achievements at the negotiation tables.

The second discussion will include an analysis of the international orientations of the states and their interrelation with national identities. Here, the traditional neorealist approach in the context of Russian-Western confrontation will be juxtaposed with the constructivist approach and the perception of threat of the local governments and societies. The analysis will discuss to what extent foreign policy orientations are defined by national identities, including linguistic and cultural affinities and memory of the past, or the existing global order and pragmatic calculations. It will also show to what extent foreign policy choices affect the current situation in the region including the unsolved status of regional ethnic conflicts. Notably, this thesis does not focus at a discussion of the position of the regional and great powers and the motives lying behind their policy in the region, but will analyze to what extent perceptions of threats and, in many cases, distorted visions of enemies and friends of the nations concerned have formed the foreign policy choices of the local states.

While the concept of national identity stands at the core of this thesis, the time framework of the study will cover the process of the formation of identities of the three South Caucasian nations, starting from the late nineteenth century, and will discuss the history of integration projects initiated throughout the twentieth century, first during the period of independence in 1918, and later under the Soviet occupation in 1922-1936 and the following years. At the same time, a bigger emphasis will be given to the analysis of political developments in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia during the period from their

gaining independence in 1991 to the present (late 2019). In this regard, it will analyze the interconnection between the policies of the different regimes, the international situation and its influence on their national identities during the different periods, including the declaration of independence of the former Soviet republics in 1991 and the ensuing onset of military operations in 1992-1994 (characterized by political chaos and the highest level of violence between nations), the efforts to find peace and the launch of new projects of cooperation in the 1990 - early 2000s (peace negotiations at the state level, “TV-bridge” and other platforms for people’s diplomacy between Azerbaijan and Armenia; Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation in energy and transport projects, the creation of GUAM), the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 and its consequences (the growing influence of Russia in the region and the failure to transform Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation into a regional integration project), and the current period of regional impasse (growing nationalistic rhetoric and lack of cooperation between the regional states).

Although there is a wide variety of works written on the topic of conflicts in the South Caucasus, not much research has been done into the correlation of national identities and the domestic and foreign policy of the regional states. Also, while some literature covers analysis of the historical origins of the conflicts, as well as the scenarios of conflict resolutions, it rarely discusses the issue of the role of national perceptions of threat and the general attitude and readiness of the societies toward mutual concessions and cooperation. Additionally, not much literature exists on the positive factors that could contribute to regional cooperation, such as cultural and historical commonalities between the nations, the potential of economic and social communication, and to what extent changes in mutual perception can serve as a basis for peacebuilding in the region. The thesis outcomes can be valuable for policy makers of the South Caucasian states, Turkey and the greater region, as well as for members of academia specializing in the domestic and foreign policies of the South Caucasus. At the same time, it might bring a fresh approach to the discipline, while testing the constructivist approach in terms of the importance of identity in regional cooperation (or fragmentation) applied in the unstable region of the South Caucasus, which is characterized by enduring ethnic conflicts, weak democracies, underdeveloped economies, and an unfavorable international situation.

1.3 Methodology and literature review

The study of the obstacles to peace, and the basis for cooperation in the South Caucasus is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires the formulation of a clear set of methods. The methods of this study are structured around the chronological analysis of formation and development of national identities and their influence on the domestic and foreign policy of the regional states. Here, the usage of historical methods is important for the understanding of the causes of tension in the relations between the states of the region. As the coverage of the whole historical development of these local ethnic conflicts lies beyond the scope of this study, it will analyze the main trends and milestones that played a significant role in the process of formation of the national identities of the three states, and will also discuss to what extent these national identities had an impact on the development of local ethnic conflicts.

While this thesis is based on the theory of social constructivism, the content analysis of official documents, statements and speeches of public officials can contribute to the understanding of the position of local governments, as according to the constructivist approach, official rhetoric and political line is deemed to be essential in formulating and expressing state identity, and shapes national self-consciousness in the long-term perspective (Helbling, Reeskens and Wright, 2016). The main primary sources for the subject of this study include the following three groups of documents:

- The official documents of the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, defining the domestic and foreign policy of each country, including the constitutions of the states, the concepts of foreign policy, national security concepts, strategies and doctrines;
- Statements and speeches of the political leadership and other senior officials of the three states;
- International agreements, treaties, declarations, charters, adopted through multilateral negotiations; reports and recommendations, adopted by international organizations.

This research was supplemented with expert interviews with former foreign policy officials, political advisors and think-tank experts of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, as well as international experts specializing in the domestic and international development of the South Caucasus (Appendix D.2). In the framework of this study, twelve interviews were held with three experts from each country of the region and three international academicians, representing different approaches to the current situation in the South Caucasus and the prospect of the development of regional cooperation. While the position of the government was derived from the official sources, including the statements and public interviews of state leaders, the choice of interviewees for this research was made in favor of independent experts with different backgrounds and experience, as well as different visions of the future of the South Caucasus. Some of them were holding an official position of the government, while others were representing alternative visions, with neutral or critical positions on the current policies of the states. As for the international experts, they were chosen in order to represent the positions of Turkey, Russia and the West, as the three crucial players in the regional development of the South Caucasus.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with a fixed list of questions (Appendix D.1), covering different aspects of the regional fragmentation discussed in the thesis, including the role of national identities and the elements they consist of, the influence of political, economic and social factors, as well as the motives lying behind the foreign policy choices of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. The interviews were held in January-April 2020, in an online format (orally via Skype or in written form via email) and reflected the most recent developments of the situation in the South Caucasus.

Finally, the existing statistical materials and surveys held by different local and international research centers substantially contributed to the analysis of sociological trends affecting interstate and inter-social relations, and also defined the current trends in public opinions and the elements forming the existing national identities of the three states. In this regard, the statistical data provided by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (Caucasus Barometer) have made a substantial contribution to this field of study. The research was complemented with the surveys held by international research

centers, such as Pew Research Center, Gallup International, the International Republican Institute, and others. The majority of the statistical data reflects the years from 2013 to 2019; at the same time, while no survey has been held in Azerbaijan since 2013, the statistical data of 2013 were used to show the comparative analysis of the situation in the whole region.

In addition to the primary sources mentioned above, a variety of secondary sources were used in this thesis, including various monographs, dissertations, and research papers covering different facets of interstate relations in the South Caucasus. The literature of regional, Western, Turkish and Russian authors, as well as the analysis of works covering different factors of regional fragmentation helped to approach the problem from different aspects. Although the bibliography includes different books and articles in English, Russian, Turkish and Azerbaijani, and misses out the ones in Georgian and Armenian, the balance of approaches was reached with the equal usage of works by authors with opposing positions (Armenian and Azerbaijani, as well as Georgian and Russian authors) in order to derive the most objective picture of the current situation in the region.

Much of the literature is devoted to the historical causes of the local conflicts and their development, the role of political regimes and the official discourse in the formation of national identities, the influence of global powers in the political climate of the region, and other domestic factors affecting the process of peace building in the region. The most notable works written on the topic of the origins of conflicts and the history of the formation of national identities in the region include the monographs of “Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War”, “Caucasus: an Introduction”, and “Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide”, by Thomas de Waal; “Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus”, and “Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – cases in Georgia”, by Svante E. Cornell; “Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus”, by Ohannes Geukjian, “The end of the second republic” by Zardusht Alizade, “A ghost of freedom: a history of the Caucasus” by Charles King, and others.

Another group of works is dedicated to the analysis of political regimes, economic development and other internal factors affecting the relations between the states of the South Caucasus at the regional level. The works of “South Caucasus: 2021”, edited by Fariz Ismailzade and Glen E. Howard; “Emergence of New Political Identity in the South Caucasus: Energy, Security, Strategic Location and Pragmatism”, by Elin Suleymanov; “Azerbaijan and Georgia: Strategic Partnership for Stability in a Volatile Region”, by Mamuka Tsereteli; “Integration in Energy and Transport amongst Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey”, by Alexandros Petersen; “Religion, nation and democracy in the South Caucasus”, edited by Alexander Agadjanian et. al; and others contributed to the analysis of the interconnection between domestic factors and regional fragmentation in the South Caucasus.

The international aspects of the problem and the role of national identities in the foreign policy choices of the regional states was broadly discussed in different books and articles, including “The EU’s Neighborhood Policy towards the South Caucasus – Expanding the European Security Community” by Licínia Simão; “Non-Traditional Threats and Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus”, edited by Mustafa Aydın; “Friends and Foes in the South Caucasus: Sources of Divergent Security Policies and Alliances in the Region” by Azad Garibov; “Identity Politics: Exploring Georgian Foreign Policy Behavior” by Kornely Kakachia; “Foreign Policies of the States of the Caucasus: Evolution in the Post-Soviet Period” by Brenda Shaffer; “Europe, Russia, or both? Popular perspectives on overlapping regionalism in the Southern Caucasus” by Aron Buzogány; and many others.

At the same time, there is a lack of proper literature on the possible basis for cooperation between the belligerent nations, such as the factors uniting them in the international arena, their cultural proximity and the potential of building a unique Caucasian identity from the perspective of the constructivism theory, as well as the chances of mutual assistance and cooperation in the exchange of natural resources from the perspective of the theory of functionalism. Some of the few monographs and research studies dedicated to this topic include “Networked Regionalism as Conflict

Management” by Anna Ohanyan; “The South Caucasus beyond Borders, Boundaries and Division Lines. Conflicts, Cooperation and Development”, edited by Mikko Palonkorpi; “Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Good Neighbors or Distant Relatives?” by Tracey German, among others.

1.4 Chapter Outline

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. The introduction discusses the research objectives, as well as the methodology and literature used during this study. It also analyzes the existing gap in the literature dedicated to the topic of regional fragmentation in the South Caucasus and provides input into the contribution this study might bring to academic discussion of the current situation in the region.

The second chapter introduces a constructivist theoretical framework with an in-depth discussion of national identity as a static and dynamic concept that can be influenced by historical developments, the policies of the states and different types of transactions between nations. It analyzes the positive and negative role of identity in the relations between states, on the one hand causing confrontation in interethnic conflicts, and on the other hand, keeping the potential to unite nations under a common umbrella of belongingness to one group or institution. At the same time, the chapter assesses the concept of ‘new regionalism’ and the understanding of the role of identity in the formation of a region. Finally, it broadly discusses the term ‘security community’ as an alliance of states characterized by a common identity; in this regard, this chapter presents the mechanisms and internal and external factors necessary for the formation of a common identity.

The third chapter focuses on the historical perspective of the formation of national identities in the South Caucasus, by discussing different attempts at regional integration projects and the reasons for their failure throughout the twentieth century. While the South Caucasus is often labeled as a fragmented, or “broken” region, this chapter defines the existing basis for a common “Caucasian” identity (such as common historical legacy, similarities in local culture and traditions, Russian language as a

lingua franca, etc.). It defines the role of identities and memory of the past in the mutual distrust and the growing cultural gap between nations that impedes the establishment of healthy cooperation in the region.

The fourth chapter explores the role of identities in the choices of domestic political, economic, and social policies of the states that have led to the failure of the three states to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts and pave the way for regional integration. It deliberates the local political regimes and their official policy on the current situation; explains why despite revolutions and the process of democratization, as well as the regional energy and transport projects, the states of the South Caucasus have failed to make any progress in the sphere of conflict resolution and regional economic integration. Finally, this chapter analyzes the efforts of public diplomacy and other types of communication, and discusses the reasons for their failure to bring about any progress in the negotiation process.

The fifth chapter examines the reasons behind the foreign policy choices of the three states of the region from the perspective of their choice of allies and enemies, plus differences in the perception of threat and its correlation with their national identities. The analysis of commonalities and differences in the national self-images might shed some light on the rationale of their international orientation preferences. Although this thesis does not focus on the foreign policy motives and methods of implementation of the regional and great powers involved in the South Caucasus, the chapter debates to what extent the general international situation contributes to or impedes the process of formation of a common identity in the region. Finally, it assesses to what extent an alternative understanding of common threats and expanding the concept of security from that of traditional state security to human security can serve as the first steps in the establishment of regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.

The sixth chapter analyzes the possibility of building a security community in the South Caucasus by reviewing the theoretical basis and factors necessary for the establishment of a security community analyzed in the second chapter, revising the historical background of the region in each of aspects necessary for the regional integration

discussed in third chapter, as well as applying these factors to the current situation in the region taking into account both domestic and foreign policies of the local states. It also discusses whether a constructivist approach to the theory of security communities can explain the reasons for the current fragmentation of the region

The conclusion summarizes the outcomes of the research and identifies the possibility of integration, taking into account the current level of regional development. It also concludes to what extent the reasons for the existent failure lie in the clash of national identities, as well as domestic, regional or international factors. Finally, the chapter makes final remarks on the question of whether constructivism can play a positive role in the transformation of societies and national identities and whether there is any chance for building stable peace and a security community in the South Caucasus.

2. NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SECURITY COMMUNITY: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The idea of building stable peace and cooperation between nations has been a topic of discourse of philosophers for centuries. In the modern world, the concept of stable peace was influenced by the constantly changing international situation in the twentieth century. The two main theories of neorealism and neoliberalism define the traditional understanding of the sources of security in terms of the rational foreign policy calculations of states and the concept of balance of power for the neorealist approach, as well as the domestic development and the establishment of democratic governance for the theory of neoliberalism. With the rise of a constructivist theoretical approach in international relations, the issue of national and common identity was reassessed in the discussion of security studies, most broadly in the works of Karl Deutsch, Peter Katzenstein, Alexander Wendt, and many others.

The first section of the chapter will discuss national identity and its role in the relations between nations; in this regard, it will introduce two concepts of national identity and analyze how different interpretations of identity can influence the foreign policy choices of states, and affect their relations in a positive or a negative way. While national identity can be the source of enmity in interethnic or interreligious conflicts, it can also serve as a basis for amity in different types of cooperation based on a common identity. The chapter will discuss the theory of constructivism and its understanding of a national identity, and analyze the role transactions and cooperation can play in the transformation of attitudes between nations. The second section of the chapter will introduce the concept of a security community as a war-free community of states with a common identity; it will also discuss the factors that impede (or can potentially contribute to) the formation of a security community, including those factors that build mutual trust and common identity. According to the security community theory, identities form or can be influenced by regional and supra-regional factors, such as common culture and values, an exchange of ideas, communication, economic

transactions and other non-political cooperation, development of trust and a common vision of the nations' past and future, common norms and regulations (regional or internal factors), in addition to the shared notion of common external threats and influence of international organizations or great powers as centers of integration (supra-regional, or external factors) (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Acharya, 2001; Tuscisny, 2007; Kupchan, 2010).

At the same time, this chapter will present two main critiques of the constructivist interpretation of the security community formation. For internal factors, it will evaluate the theory of security communities and the possibility of its implementation under conditions of long-lasting historical enmity of those societies whose conciliation will require a strong political will from the local governments. On the other hand, while discussing external factors, it will compare the theory of constructivism with its emphasis on identity and trust and the traditional realist explanation of balance of power, as well as the favorable (or unfavorable) conditions existing in the current world order for the establishment of security communities in different regions of the globe.

2.2 National Identity as a Static or Dynamic Concept

While traditional or rationalist theories explain security from the perspective of strategy, and answer questions on the necessity of cooperation or military actions, they say little about the reasons of choices and motivations of the actors. In contrast, the constructivist approach argues that how states see themselves and each other is central to understanding their motives and their interests in the international arena. The analysis of the little studied concept of national identity, its components and the process of its formation can give explanation on the reasons lying behind the success or failure of nations to find solutions to ethnic conflicts, build cooperation and establish regional integration projects.

National identity is a type of social self-definition based on the understanding of a collective as a "nation in terms of 'imagined community'" (Anderson, 1983). Individuals who belong to the same ethnic group may share traits such as a common language, race,

religion, customs and traditions, common history, along with a belief in common heritage, and is often encompassed by a given territory (Toft, 2003, p. 19). Notably, the understanding of territory as an important element of a national identity helps to explain the motives of states involved in ethnic conflicts over disputed territories. While the direct connections between territory and nation refer to the “national soil” as the area of land inhabited by the national community, in some cases, the territorial component of national identity refers not just to generic features, but also to the significance attached to particular places in national culture and history. In this regard, there are places “where battles were fought or places associated with other events of significance in the national imagination may take on a broader symbolic value. What can be termed “place myths” are propagated which serve to bolster the very idea of the nation and render it more concrete” (Storey, 2002, p. 110).

National identity is emotionally and cognitively significant to the individual and ascribed by the self and others. One of the most significant characteristics used to define belongingness to one or another community is ethnicity (belonging to one blood), in some cases accompanied with a myth of the common descent of the community. This kind of identity presents a nation as being threatened by other blood groups and invokes the separation of nations for the ‘survival’ of a particular blood community. Religion and ideology can be viewed as another important element of national identification: according to Rhodes (2012, p. 356), a group may define its belongingness to common identity by “religious or political practices and the affirmation of certain religious or political truths”. However, in the modern world, together with the transformation of the concept of a ‘nation’, the understanding of a national identity gradually transformed from one based on ethnicity and blood (ethnic identity) to one based on citizenship (civic identity). While there is a distinction between the internal and external aspects of a national identity, the distinction between the two is intended to show how different theories of national identity interpret the issues mentioned above (Kowert, 1998, p. 5). ‘Internal identity’ refers to the cohesion between the parts of one nation-state and the way such cohesion supports the feeling of belonging to the nation-state among its citizens. The relations between dominant and minority ethnic groups, as well as the preference for the concept of civic identity (based on belonging to one citizenship,

rather than ethnicity) play an important role in the understanding of internal identity. In contrast, 'external identity' refers to a nation-state's difference from other nation-states. As Kowert (1998, p. 5) puts it, having particular identity suggests that both that a group of people shares "certain qualities and also that these qualities somehow set them apart from others".

While at the core of the concept of national identity lies the juxtaposition of 'us' against 'others', historically identities defined the relations of nations with their neighbors. According to the constructivist approach, threat is a subjective matter closely related to the image of others, as the famous example of Alexander Wendt (1994, p. 389) on the American attitude to British nuclear capabilities obviously showed.¹ The correlation of the identity and image of others might be put in question, in terms of a narrow understanding of identity as one linked to culture and history, rather than a manufactured perception of others. Yet, while 'self' and 'others' are always practically and theoretically connected, there is little reason to treat the concept of 'self' separately from the concept of 'others', as "perceptions of 'others' reveal something about 'self' (Kowert 1998, p. 29). For example, different kinds of threats and images of others can lead to the internal cohesion of 'self' and the consolidation of different ethnic elements comprising one nation-state. In contrast, other threats may undermine the internal identity of nations and even lead to their fragmentation.

Different approaches to the concept of national identity can differently show the correlation of identity and threat perception with national security. Identity can serve both as a destructive or constructive element in the relations between ethnicities and nations. On the one hand, as a part of national identity, memory of the past and the negative experience of coexistence may have a crucial role in defining threat perceptions, and in structuring negative relations between nations and their neighbors. As Suny (2001, p. 864) puts it:

¹ In his work, Wendt illustrated the social construction of reality in an example of 500 British nuclear weapons that might look less threatening to the United States in comparison to five North Korean nuclear weapons. This example shows that the perception of threat is not caused by the weapons *per se* (the *material structure*) but by the meaning given to them (the *ideational structure*). Constructivists stress the role ideas and beliefs play in world politics; in this regard, while reality can be interpreted differently, in constructivist perspective it opens the prospect for change.

It is important to remember that nations are congealed histories. They are made up of stories that people tell about their past and thereby determine who they are. Histories in turn are based on memories organized into narratives. Whatever actually happened is far less important than how it is remembered. What is remembered, what has been forgotten or repressed, provides the template through which the world is understood.

The importance of identity can also be seen in conflict driven by grievance or security dilemma, where the absence of mutual hostilities in history can alleviate the confrontations between enemies (Abushov, 2020, p. 8). In ethnic wars driven by identity, the elements of group identity serve as a basis for national consolidation and are used to bolster negative or hostile attitudes towards the opposite side of the conflict. On the other hand, the definition of identity as the result of the political and economic interaction of states that are neither historically nor geographically inevitable, leads to a more flexible understanding of the consequences the elements of identity might bring to the relations between nations. Inspired by Mitrany's functionalist regionalism, this approach sees cooperation in the international arena and the perception of global threats (environmental, humanitarian, and others) as a basis for the construction of global identities and the reconciliation of nations at a regional level. This approach raises a question about how identities can be transformed and how they can lead to constructive cooperation. In this regard, a more detailed analysis of the different understandings of the concept of national identity, the origins and processes of its formation can suggest different visions on the role of societies and governments in identity-led decisions.

There are two main theoretical approaches analyzing the possibility of the transformation of national identities. On the one hand, primordialist authors such as Anthony Smith and others present a naturalized image of nations, and understand a nation as shaped from an ethnicity that existed before the process of formation of nation-states. Primordialism argues that ethnic identities are static and unchangeable, consisting of the elements of ethnicity (blood), religion and traditions; in other words, it implies that communities cannot actively choose their national identities. Additionally, primordialism sees identity as a concept fixed over time, where ethnic belonging can be an inherent source of animosity between two different camps of a conflict. The primordialist approach stands at the basis of an 'ancient hatred' hypothesis, according to which an ethnic conflict is presented as the result of historical rivalries and hatreds. Finally, according to this view, identity has a substantial influence on behavior, as

people “attribute an ineffable significance to their assumed kinship ties” (Bayar, 2009, p. 1643). On the other hand, the primordial approach cannot cover all the aspects of relations between hostile nations, as in most cases the ethnicities involved in a conflict have periods of relative peace and stability. It risks ignoring the fact that the elements of ethnic identity based on collective memory “are also subject to reinvention” (Gahramanova, 2006, p. 160). Also, this approach does not account for other factors of enmity that stand beyond the historical relations between nations, such as political and economic motivation of ethnic conflicts, the role of state policies, elite mobilizers, and opportune military strategies (Kuburas, 2011, p. 45).

The primordialist approach is traditionally used by political elites in order to explain the correlation of identity and ethnic conflict. According to Barry Posen (1993), political elites can use historical enmities between ethnic groups, leading to the growth of fear and insecurity for both of them and motivating an ethnic group to follow its own security interests. As a result, this strategy gradually evolves into a vicious circle of security competition. Similarly, according to Paul Roe (2005), ethnic groups, while having different ‘societal identities’, are securitized by political elites, while the policy of increasing security results with more insecurity and, as a result, leads to an ethnic conflict.

In contrast to primordialism, the constructivist approach is based on the understanding of importance of social interactions, transactions and communications. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 8), identity shows the “unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary ‘self’”. In this regard, constructivism does not see national identity as an unchangeable *concept*; it sees it as a “*process* of negotiation” between nations and groups that might change and, consequently, transform the attitude between nations if built properly (McSweeney, 1999, p. 73). According to this approach, the actors and their identities are socially constructed by nature, while the international political reality is shaped to a large extent by ideational, normative and discursive factors. The attitudes of nations towards each other are formed not only by fixed elements of identity, such as ethnic belonging, language or religion, but also by beliefs and perceptions, influenced by historical memory, local regimes and

their rhetoric, as well as by the actions of individuals and groups. From this perspective, national identity as the product of a historical process, is not created in social terms and can be changed under different processes of socialization. In other words, identity is a dynamic process that can be constructed and reconstructed again (Pashayeva, interview). Notably, since identities were once constructed in one particular format at some stage of historical development, they can also “be reconstructed again in a different format” (Abushov, 2020, p. 9). In this regard, constructivism emphasizes the role of ideational structures in the process of formation of identities and perceptions of social actors (Güleç, 2011, p. 13).

Unlike primordialism, constructivism is optimistic about the solutions to ethnic conflicts and the appeasement of hostile nations. According to this view, structures and institutions can shape the positive or negative attitude of nations by being used as a tool for the transformation of relations and the construction of trust between societies. Confidence-building measures, the reassessment of the role of the parties in conflicts, and social transactions can be steps in the resolution of conflicts, the transformation of societies and in some cases, the formation of a common identity. For these processes to happen, an understanding of the impact of identities on conflicts and the factors under which these identities are formed can be a good strategy in the long-term solution to ethnic conflicts. The work of Benedict Anderson (1983, p. 44) has a special place in the constructivist analysis of identities, arguing that nations are imagined communities shaped by the distribution of the printed word, through the popular press and the publication of books. In this regard, for the first time in history people who might never have met face-to-face could, nevertheless, identify themselves as people with one common identity (Westin, 2010, p. 15). While applying the same approach at the supra-national level, constructivism suggests that communication and the exchange of ideas, as well as the official position of governments, together with the involvement of mass media, educational policy and other information sources, can either contribute to the formation of a common identity or worsen the existing hostility between the parties of a conflict. In other words, the political elites have the potential of bringing both a positive and a negative impact to the development of relations between nations.

For example, the idea of the consolidation of public opinion against a common enemy can be traced in the critical theory of David Campbell (1998, p. 3), in which he notes that the rhetoric of others contributes to the formation of a state identity (juxtaposing ‘us’ versus ‘them’), while the importance of state security is understood through the representation of danger as an integral part of foreign policy. Notably, Campbell did not associate this conclusion only with authoritarian states; instead, he used the example of the United States of America consolidating around the struggle against communism during the Cold War. Nonetheless, as research shows, authoritarian regimes are more prone to create the “image of others” in their official rhetoric and national policy (Weeks, 2012, p. 331). Moreover, they tend to wage wars aimed at distracting the attention of society from the domestic problems of the country.

Another research study by Richard Jackson (2004) accentuates the importance of historical memory in constructing a culture of violence in which neighbors are stimulated to commit aggression against each other. According to Vanyan (interview), ethnic identity in weak states brings risks and obligations and limits the rights of ordinary people; instead, ideology can protect the citizens only in strong and mature states. Weak states with a high level of poverty and social division are also more prone to inter-communal and interethnic violence (Jackson, 2004). Nonetheless, as Gahramanova (2006, p. 161) notes, the concept of ‘weak states’ does not explain why there is ethnic unrest in strong states such as the United Kingdom or Spain:

The past the political elite in ethnic conflict appeal to is not any past but the past of the particular community with certain events and personages, which could be interpreted in various ways. Generally, the approach’s over-concentration on the elite manipulation of ‘the masse’ underestimates dynamics of mass mobilization to answer why people are so readily responsive to nationalist slogans.

These examples show that both elites and the masses are mutually triggered and play an equally important role in the development of ethnic conflict and the formation of the national identities of states.

Additionally, as discussed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000, p. 5), identity has many elements that can crystallize “from political fiction” into “powerful compelling reality”. Identity is not only a dynamic, but also a multi-faceted concept, and the analysis of

scholars should be aimed at explaining the processes and mechanisms through which some elements of identity gain weight or, vice versa, lose importance in the construction of national identities. Different elements of identity can coexist and intersect; in this regard, one can be Middle Eastern, Soviet, Caucasian and Turkic, depending on different contexts. As the analysis below will show, the flexible character of national identities and the heterogeneity of their structure can play a significant role in the construction of commonalities between different societies, leading to mutual interests in cooperation with each other. In this regard, while some elements stay latent, others can be active and valuable, depending on the policy of the government and other domestic political actors. The value and importance of some elements in comparison to others lead to the idea of the ‘hierarchy of belonging’ (Henderson, 2007) or ‘hierarchy of national identity elements’ (Pashayeva, interview).

While primordialism is criticized for difficulty in the explanation of change in national identification, constructivism does not explain why in some cases ethnic or national identities have endured for long periods of time without any instrumental support provided by a nation-state. According to Abushov (2020, p.9), although identity can be influenced by different factors, at some point after the development of unresolved conflict, ethnic identity can become primordial, thus “making its deconstruction very difficult and only possible in the long-run perspective”. Most importantly, once ethnic identity is tied to a disputed territory, its transformation becomes nearly impossible. Additionally, strict contradictions and clashes of national identity can affect governments’ decisions and make them hostages to public opinion. In particular, one should differentiate the case when a government uses the rhetoric of national identity for political reasons (*ex ante*) and when the national identity “threatens the maintenance of a government coalition (*ex post*)” (Freyburg and Richter, 2010, p. 269).

While this study will analyze the role of national identity in the failure of the South Caucasian states to cooperate, and its possible role in the solution to local ethnic conflicts, it will use the so-called “hybrid understanding of ethnic identity” introduced by Comaroff and Stern (1994, p. 39), as it is necessary to take into account both primordialist and constructivist approaches, in order to get a full picture of the origins of

national identity and their impact on the relations between the neighboring nations of the region.

2.3 Security Community and the Role of Identity in the Formation of a Region

The constructivist approach in the issue of identity formations raises a question about the power of ideas and attitudes through the interaction between nations at a regional level. Together with the theory of functionalism, it also led to the transformation of the very term of regionalism: while old regionalism interprets the definition of a region in physical, or static terms, for new regionalism the exchange of ideas, functionalist cooperation and the transformation of identities emphasize the ever-changing character of a region. This distinction between the two concepts can also be seen in Manuel Castells' terms of a "space of places" and a "space of flows". According to Castells (1996, pp. 412, 423), while a space of places is historically rooted and implies a territory whose "form, function and meaning" are restricted within physical boundaries, a space of flows is constantly changing through transactions and refers to the material organization of the "social practices that work through flows and networks".

The majority of international relations scholars define the geographical element to be fundamental in defining the concept of a region. Edward Mansfield and Helen Milner (1997) see geographical proximity as the key trait in the definition of a region. Indeed, territory and the interconnectedness of states are the most important factors in defining the countries' historical development; on the other hand, distance traditionally played one of the most significant roles in identifying security threats, as "among the cluster of threats most would be territorially based" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 44). Also, according to Buzan and Wæver (2003, p.22), a region is a geographical subsystem of states "distinctive in terms of its internal structure and process to be meaningfully differentiated from a wider international system or society of which it is part."

However, this concept fails to show a region as a common unit from the perspective of interaction and possible cooperation. The concepts of new regionalism present a different understanding, with a functionalist approach seeing regions as constantly

changing units, and the constructivist approach stressing how regions are formed by the redefinition of norms and identities at both state and societal level. Some scholars define a 'region' as an imagined community with states and peoples united under a common experience and identity, custom and practice. As Paul (2012, p. 4) puts it,

a region is a cluster of states that are proximate to each other and are interconnected in spatial, cultural and ideational terms in a significant and distinguishable manner... In other words, people and states in a region ought to perceive themselves as belonging to this entity, although they need some level of physical and cultural proximity to do so.

Amitav Acharya (2006) also emphasizes the importance of seeing regions not simply as a geographically- or culturally-given unit, because identity serves as an important factor in the decision-making of the local nations and ignoring this factor means neglect of long-term historical processes of the nation. According to Acharya (2006, p.103),

region-building is a social and political act; like nationalism and nation-states, regions may be 'imagined' and constructed. An identity-based perspective looks beyond physical or structural constraints on regional identity...[It is important to look] not just at what is common between and among its constituent units (the unity in diversity approach), but how the countries of the region, especially the elite, engaged in a process of socialization within an institutional context and in that process 'imagined' themselves to be part of a distinctive region.

From the constructivist point of view, regions with common identities can be formed under the influence of historical changes, social interactions and cooperation leading to the transformation of national identities and the building of mutual trust between nations. This approach can also find its reflection in the theory of functionalism in terms of the importance interstate and inter-social cooperation might have in the formation of a region. Here, levels of interdependence and linkages between different social groups should be taken into account, along with the existing identities influenced by the historical legacies of nations as well as the present regimes, whose domestic and foreign policies affect the current attitudes of nations towards each other.

The concept of regional transformation, influenced by the transformation of identities, was put at the basis of the theory of security communities. Developed in the circumstances of a rising antagonism between the two superpowers during the first decades of the Cold War, the concept of a security community was a revolutionary idea, though not gaining its considerable popularity until the late 1980s, when the

rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States, the ensuing collapse of the Eastern bloc and the end of the Cold War led to the dramatic transformation of international relations and the world in general.

Although Richard Van Wagenen initially presented the term of 'security community' in the early 1950s, Karl Deutsch is accepted as the father of the concept, having given the first detailed analysis of the security community theory in his "Political Community in the North Atlantic Area" in 1957. In Deutsch's (1957, p. 5) definition, a security community implies a community of states choosing "a resolution of social problems with institutionalized procedures without physical force". Characterized in the following years as a space where "large-scale use of violence is very unlikely" (Tusicsny, 2007, p. 425) and where "war becomes both structurally and conceptually impossible" (Smith and Timmins, 2000, p. 150), a security community is something more than simply an alliance of nations living in peace.

According to Deutsch (1961, p. 98), a security community is an integrated group, where integration is defined as the achievement of a sense of community and establishment of institutions or practices that are capable to ensure peaceful change among group members over a long period of time. Deutsch differentiated amalgamated communities emerging as the result of formal political merger of the participating units, and pluralistic communities, where the members preserve their sovereignty. He also accentuated the importance of integration, the assurance of peaceful change and the existence of a common identity, or the 'we-feeling' as depicting the formation of a sense of community. Adler and Barnett (1998, p. 34) in turn provided an explanation for the concept of 'peaceful change' as a situation where there is "neither the expectation of, nor the preparation for organized violence as a means to settle interstate disputes".

In comparison, other types of alliances and systems of relations can experience the absence of war, but the lack of a sense of community impedes the establishment of a long-lasting peace based on credible relations. For example, in the conditions of the so-called "negative peace" there is no military action between states (though there might be military actions inside the states), but the lack of interstate war does not make it a

peaceful region (Kacowicz, 1998, p. 8-11). Similarly, in alliances states unite to defend themselves against a common external enemy; in security communities, however, states join together to increase common welfare and support peaceful change by enhancing interdependence. While alliance states coordinate their actions to accomplish some purposes in the international arena, they lack the concept of a common identity, transparency and non-formal interactions between members. NATO is an example of a collective defense alliance, where the member states agree to protect each other from external attack (according to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty), however it is hard to talk about a common “Atlantic” identity uniting member states as distinct as Canada and Turkey. Usually, this type of relations emerges in a balance of power system where there is no trust and no common values between nations. In this regard, a community of states sharing common values and a “we-feeling” as well as mutual trust, has more chance of maintaining stable peace rather than states that share only an agreement on military alliance or non-aggression. Additionally, alliances can also be built among the members of a security community, indicating the establishment of “a mature security community with a fairly well-developed collective identity” (Acharya, 2001, p. 21).

Finally, not every community-region might become a security community, as the historical examples show, where the totalitarian ideologies in the Soviet Union or Europe controlled by Nazi Germany in 1940 do not provide the basis for trustworthy relations and long-lasting peace. Despite their official propaganda on the promotion of the “friendship of peoples”, the Soviet Union failed to create a “we-feeling” among its citizens; within the Nazi Germany dominated parts of Europe, similarly, relations between the Third Reich and its satellites were based on fear and did not provide an opportunity to build a community of equal partners. As Adler (1997, p. 257) argues, in communities where ideologies serve the state goals and justify every measures that can lead to the achievement of these goals, societies and states lack trust to each other and expect their fellow community members to “stab them in the back”, just as they themselves would do if they had a chance. Thus, Adler concludes, people may share common ideology, but it does not lead them to feel safe from organized violence, as they do not develop mutual trust. This is why a common identity, the feeling of being a part of a ‘big family’ together with mutual trust provides a basis for the expectation of a

peaceful solution to the possible future confrontations between states. In its turn, different components define the formation of a common identity, such as a shared interpretation of history, a similarity in culture, common values, goals and norms.

Different authors contributed to the discussion of the security community during the years of the Cold War. In his work titled “Stable Peace”, Boulding (1978, p. 13) was close to Deutsch in his definition of a security community, by stressing the importance of common values and “we-feeling”, as well as communication and mutual concessions in the maintenance of a stable peace. Steven Rock (1989, p. 8-12) in his “Why Peace Breaks Out” analyzed different examples of cooperation between states that brings them to a stable peace: in most cases, according to the author, complementary economies contributed to the rapprochement between states, while same-type economies led to rivalry and competition. He also emphasized the importance of similarity in political and ideological orientation that could be a good basis for the development of mutual trust between states; in this regard, his accent on ideology corresponded to the international context and the existing bipolarity of the Cold War world.

The rise of constructivism, with its emphasis on social and ideational factors in the early 1990s, gave a new impetus to the development of the security community theory. In their “Security Communities”, Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (1998, p. 31) to a large extent based their theory on the ideas of constructivism and, like Deutsch, emphasized the importance of the so-called ‘we-feeling’ between nations, while “security community members share a common identity, values and meanings, long-term interest and altruism”. According to the Adler and Barnett (1998), the feeling of membership leads to cooperation, as well as the creation of common duties and obligations. Here, two or more identities can peacefully coexist: the same people can call themselves Flemish (ethnic identity), Belgian (civic identity) and European (regional identity) at the same time. The borders of these communities fall where shared identities and understandings end, so when someone belongs to the same identity, he shares the same community, while beyond it there is another region. Noticeably, however, identity should not be limited to geographical limitations: in the so-called “cognitive region”, identities and common values are shared across the world and

sometimes can be opposite to the ones of geographically neighboring states (Adler, 1997, p. 254). Australia is an example of a state with a Western identity while neighboring the Southeast Asian region; Israel is another example of a state that is closer in terms of identity to Europe or America rather than to the neighboring Arab states. At the same time, coordinated work in terms of education and culture can also contribute to the establishment of a common identity and change the existing approach of the societies toward each other.

Adler and Barnett (1998, p. 54) accentuated the importance of the gradual transformation of societies: in the first stage, big events such as wars, economic or migration challenges lead to a rise in the exchange of communication and regular contacts. This, in its turn, becomes a healthy basis for “the mutual trust and understanding of each others’ interpretation of reality and intentions”. Finally, mutual trust creates mutual identity and shared knowledge creates common norms, under which a security community can function successfully.

Here, it would be apposite to mention that realists criticize the usage of the concept of identity in the theory of international relations because, as constructivists acknowledge, common identities can change in a negative way too: they can erode rapidly during an economic crisis that can lead to a clash of interests and the rise of xenophobia and chauvinism. This situation can bring adversarial policies back and raise the rhetoric and feeling of enmity between nations. This is why, according to realists, identity should not be the determining factor defining relations between states, as it is hard to be measured and does not stay unchanged; also, it does not provide states with the guarantees of security. Noticeably, the biggest criticism from realists on the constructivist vision of security communities is that it ignores the concepts of threat and instability in interstate relations (Väyrynen, 2000, p. 169).

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assert that the theory of security communities ignores the factor of threats and to consider it as a theory based exclusively on the ideas of constructivism. In fact, it uses many elements from a variety of paradigms, from neoliberalism to the English School and critical theory. As the discussion below will

show, the theory of security communities has similarities with neoliberalism and neoliberal institutionalism in recognizing the influence of international institutions and organizations in the establishment of shared norms and rules that contribute to the formation of peace and cooperation between nations. Similarly, as with the English School, the theory discusses the formation of a society of states aware of certain common interests, sharing common values and giving a basis to mature anarchy or a zone of peace. As with critical theory, the theory of security communities is not limited to the traditional actors of international relations such as states and international organizations; instead, it pays attention to the factors of individuals, groups and societies. Finally, as in the case of democratic peace theory, domestic preferences and regime type matter for most security community authors. In this regard, Koschut (2014, p. 528) calls security communities “a *via media*” in the theory of international relations for taking the middle ground between different strands of the discipline.

Still, the theory of security communities is based mostly on the theory of constructivism – in terms of the importance given to ideational and social concepts, such as ideas, identities, communication and trust. According to Adler (2002, p. 91), although Karl Deutsch was not a constructivist in traditional understanding and favored a positivist epistemology, his approach, which was emphasizing social interactions and transactions, had an undoubtful influence on the further developments in constructivism. In the following years, security community theorists paid even more attention to the factor of identity formation and argued that the “conditions of anarchy do not limit state actors to a self-help manner, as neorealists claim, but allow for other forms of behavior” based on the way actors perceive themselves and their social environment (Koschut, 2014, p. 525). However, while the constructivists refer to security using the inter-subjective terms of speech acts, communication, identity and trust, the realist authors claim that the focus on the use of inter-subjective terms does not make it possible to predict specific choices made by the actors (Väyrynen, 2000, p. 160). The international situation, the influence of the neighboring great powers and the existing balance of power in the region of the potential security community are not usually taken into account while discussing the theory of security communities. As Väyrynen (2000, p. 157) writes, the materialist and societal approaches to security can

be complementary and do not need to be opposed as the structure can be internalized.

2.4 Internal Factors and the Formation of a Common Identity

2.4.1 Trust and predictability

Most authors consider trust to be essential in the process of regionalization and the formation of a security community. Some recognize it as the glue for the formation of a common identity; according to Kegley and Raymond (1990, p. 258), over time, mutual confidence may develop into “a culture of trust” that would shape the behavior of actors in the future. Others acknowledge the influence of these two concepts as reciprocal: identity contributes to the development of trust between nations and trust deepens the common identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998). The commonality of cultures and common values, historical background and a traditional loyalty of relations between nations, together with the experience of a successful resolution of interstate conflicts create the basis for future cooperation between states. On the other hand, while trust can easily be built in relations between nations with similar identities, for those nations burdened with a long history of interethnic conflict, building trust might bear potential risks for the states involved.

Small steps of interaction and self-interest might serve as the most important motivation in the building of trust. If both parties choose the strategy of cooperation and do not undermine the trust of the other, the trust relationship itself eventually will become a shared interest for both sides due to the advantages trust brings to the relations between them. As Bilgic (2014, p. 44) puts it, parties trust each other the trust relationship becomes their self-interest:

By not harming others' interests with the expectation that others will not harm its interests, the actor learns that the promotion of self-interests is not necessarily a conflictive process, which is pursued in opposition to others' interests. As the actor adopts and protects others' interests as its own, it learns that others return its trust by protecting its interests.

Still, it would be a mistake to consider only the constructivist aspects of the formation of a common culture, values and common identity between nations; trust is also based

on the proper calculation of potential risks. Democratic governance and the system of checks and balances provide a normative basis for nations' predictability in foreign policy and can also contribute to the formation of trust and cooperation between nations. Additionally, trust and collective security alone might not be enough for the construction of security communities. Instead, they have to be bolstered by material conditions, such as a commonality of external threats and economic challenges that can motivate nations to cooperate. Also, while the main criticism of realists refers to the immeasurability of trust and identity, in order to prevent the potential risks of cooperation based only on common trust and identity, they accentuate the importance of norms as the safeguards of peace, as well as the commonality of interests between states facing common threats and a common direction in foreign policy, which can lead to integration that, in its turn, can be the basis for the formation of a common identity and security community.

2.4.2 Common values, culture and democratic governance

Many authors emphasize the importance of common values and democratic governance in the establishment of a security community. It is explained by the following three factors: liberal values of peace and cooperation, free exchange of people and ideas in civil society and a system of checks and balances making a policymaking process transparent and predictable.

First, it is traditionally recognized that liberal community regions have values of peaceful conflict resolution and a greater potential to become a security community. As Adler (1997, p. 259) suggests, "the democratic nature of a state becomes an indicator of its dovishness". The development of security communities implies the existence of civil societies and communication between the public. Secondly, in civil societies, the exchange and communication of people, goods and ideas takes place in a free manner, leading to the intentional choice of a peaceful solution to common problems. Finally, the existence of a system of checks and balances would prevent the immediate intervention and other unexpected actions from the forces opposed to it. According to Troitskiy (2013),

reassurances of benign behavior are only fully credible when each state has a transparent policymaking process. If reassurance mechanisms are firmly anchored in the domestic politics of security community members, they can work even in the absence of clear-cut common identities.

Indeed, states where no single government body or leader can make a unanimous decision reassure other members of a security community of its predictability and the transparency of decisions. In other words, these states are more credible than authoritarian regimes with their unpredictable and swift decisions made by a single person.

According to most authors, the security community theory interprets democratic governance as one of the defining factors necessary for the formation of a security community. This notion partially coincides with the traditional theory of democratic peace, described in many works, starting from the essays of philosophers and political theorists such as Immanuel Kant and Thomas Paine. According to the democratic peace theory, democratic nations are less prone to wage war due to normative and structural reasons: democracies act in their citizens' interests and encourage peaceful means of conflict resolution, while democratic institutions hold elected officials responsible to a wide electorate, thus making war an unattractive option for both the government and its citizens (Owen, 1994; Russett, 1993). The authors of the theory of security communities support this idea from a constructivist perspective: for them, the security dilemma between democracies is reduced due to the presence of mutual trust between liberal governments (Risse-Kappen, 1995).

However not all scholars share this view, as according to Acharya (2001, p. 32), common values, norms and identities that underpin a security community and build the basis for mutual trust do not need to be liberal or democratic, as shown in the case of the nascent security community of ASEAN². Indeed, history is replete with examples where governments conducted a peaceful foreign policy despite the authoritarianism of their

² ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional intergovernmental organization promoting economic, political and sociocultural integration among its ten countries/members since its establishment in 1967 (Acharya, 2001). Although it was built in this ethnically and religiously diverse region, the organization proved to be a successful example of cooperation between nations following its own "ASEAN way", an approach to solving issues based on the principles of "compromise, consensus and consultation in the informal decision-making process" (Masilamani and Peterson, 2014).

leadership: since the 1980s, China has been following the Deng Xiaoping strategy of economic growth and prosperity of the Chinese people with non-intervention in ongoing military actions in the international arena. On the contrary, President George Bush Jr. was free to start military actions in Iraq despite the resistance of the Congress and the existing system of checks and balances in the United States.

Despite its illiberal regimes, ASEAN has proved to be a community living in peace since its establishment in 1967. As Acharya (1998, p. 207) notes, its collective identity was formed through the process of elite socialization with the establishment of “norms, principles, and symbols aimed at the [...] development of substantive regional cooperation”. The formation of a shared ideology and a regional code of conduct, or the so-called “ASEAN way” contributed to this process. Acharya’s argument shows that although common values are important in the community building process, they do not have to be liberal. Similarly, Tuscicisny (2007, p. 441) in his analysis contradicts Adler’s theoretical claim, by showing that “liberal values are not a necessary condition of security community building, at least not at the societal level”. Mutually compatible societies are more open to integration and cooperation. The compatibility of societies includes factors such as the dissemination of power according to ethnicity or social criteria, economic and trade activity, as well as the rights of women and minorities.

Still, the establishment of liberal values and democratic governance is important for the intensification of trust and cooperation between nations in the long-term perspective. A similar argument is presented by Gonzalez and Haggard (1998, p. 295) in their evaluation of US-Mexico relations as a nascent security community that needs to achieve a “deeper regionalism” that might be impossible without a deeper democratization of the Mexican regime. In this regard, the formation of a civil society and the involvement of ordinary citizens in the integration processes in the region is inevitable for the creation of a strong bond of relations between states; in contrast, the top-down integration controlled by authoritarian regimes which impose the ideology of peace and cooperation without the public’s support and integration at a non-state level might be fragile and unreliable.

In addition, Acharya (2001, p. 41) argues that the democratization of an authoritarian region can have a negative impact on the nascent or ascendant security community; according to him, the newly-established democracies may export 'revolution' abroad by showing support for pro-democratic development in their neighborhood and making their authoritarian neighborhood reluctant and hostile. In other words, security community theorists point out the vulnerability of peace and the instability of those local regimes passing through the process of democratization. This is a conclusion similar to the theory of Mansfield and Snyder (1995) on the threat coming from democratizing states as the source of instability: the authors related the belligerence of these nations with the aggressiveness of the elites that are losing their legitimacy.

Finally, internal peace in the broad understanding of the word security (the security of individuals and groups in a society rather than the security of states) proves the importance of liberal values for the existence of security communities. According to Väyrynen (2000), a region can transform into a security community only if the local nations are living in peace at a national level and have a low probability of civil war. Consequently, interstate peace is not the only factor necessary for the establishment of a security community. In addition, as Väyrynen (2000, p. 171) notes, its members have to have reached peace at the national level so that "the domestic instability does not spill over to other countries of the region". Liberal values and the protection of human rights are critically important for the peaceful coexistence of national minorities and other groups, whose vulnerability can cause an internal conflict and, at a later stage, ignite the neighboring states into a regional conflict.

Cultural proximity is another factor significantly affecting the eagerness of societies to cooperate and integrate. One of the first examples of stable peace in modern history was built in the Anglo-Saxon world in the late 1890s, between the United States of America, Great Britain and its dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. However, one should not overestimate cultural proximity as an obligatory factor, as there are examples of societies that are different culturally but belong to the same security community, such as the G8 members Japan and the United Kingdom, living in a condition of stable peace

since the end of the Second World War and sharing common goals on the future of the world.

Finally, as Tuscisny (2007, p. 431) points out, the traditions and values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence with national minorities can be another guarantor for the improvement of interstate relations and be a basis for a nation's internal peace. However, the abovementioned values are not correlated with democratic governance alone; they require other elements such as a historical legacy of a lack of conflict and a high level of culture and openness in societies, a state policy on how this is reflected in education and the media, as well as economic prosperity and a low level of unemployment and social discontent. Finally, for former enemies, a discussion of their common past and the lessons of history, along with the acknowledgment and public apology for war crimes of the past can provide a sound basis for the establishment of strong trust and cooperation between nations in the future.

2.4.3 Transactions between nations: communications, economic and non-political cooperation

As a representative of the transactionists, Deutsch believed that common identities emerge as a result of intensive communication and exchange across a group of states and through intensive cooperation in economic and other non-political areas (some of these ideas were later used in the works of Ernst Haas (1958) and other neo-functionalists, including Schmitter (1969), Pierson (1996) and others). Deutsch compared international relations with inter-social relations: he believed that relations between societies emerge and develop through constant exchange. This exchange includes different types of activity such as communication, trade and other types of economic cooperation.

The transformation of social communication under the influence of modern technologies allows for discussion on the role of communications in the formation of a common identity at both regional and international levels. In the past, there was not much socialization between states, as they were living in a quite isolated world

economically and politically, while when they had stronger interaction this often led to conflict and war for their self-interest. Today with the big innovations in technology, not only states, but societies and ordinary people become more interrelated and form “epistemic communities”, or communities with meanings which influence the political and social life of the state (Haas, 1992, p. 3). As mentioned above, from the viewpoint of constructivists, communication between nations, the official propaganda of governments, and speech acts of state officials that form a nation’s visions of enemies and friends in the international arena are essential in the construction of national identities (Helbling, Reeskens and Wright, 2016). This is why a positive rhetoric and change of the neighbors’ image from being antagonistic to neutral and friendly can be the first step in rapprochement and the formation of good relations between hostile nations.

Deutsch also developed the idea of the importance of non-political cooperation and contributed to the formation of the neo-functionalism of Ernst Haas and others. The theory of security communities interprets close economic ties and international trade not only as tools to decrease the possibility of new conflicts from breaking out, but also to stimulate an atmosphere of trust and tolerance, which is necessary for the resolution of conflicts and facilitating further business activities. Primarily created from the initiative of the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Union (EU) became a good example of how antagonistic nations can cooperate with mutual profit and how cooperation in non-political spheres can create a foundation for the formation of a political alliance and a security community at the final stage. The experience of common challenges (from economic crisis to ecological threats and natural disasters) can become a good trigger for the launch of cooperation between hostile nations such as the exchange of knowledge and services, an increase in trade and financial flows and, as a result, can enhance rapprochement and the formation of a common identity between states and societies.

2.4.4 Institutionalization, norms and regulations

According to Deutsch, Adler and Barnett and other authors, integration and institutionalization are essential for the establishment and expansion of security communities. Here, elites, core powers and institutions sustain integration and minimize the side effects and negative impacts of the rise of exchange and transactions. However, unlike the theorists of the English School and neoliberal institutionalism accentuate the importance of norms and regulations in supporting stable peace and security between states, the authors of security community theory see norms and institutions not as instruments to regulate state behavior, but as instruments to redefine state interests and establish state identities, including the “development of collective identities” (Acharya, 2001, p. 4). This shows that the main difference of a security community from a system of collective security is the lack of a mechanism of enforcement in the structure of the security community. By following the same norms, states acknowledge their common identity and that the violation of the norms might undermine the trust and image of the state in the community. In this regard, the criticism of realists on the immeasurable character of trust is opposed by its institutionalization in order to build social order. As Williams (1997, p. 294) notes, institutions of a stable society can also define “who can and cannot be trusted” and thus can be included to the club or should be excluded from it.

2.5 International Factors and the Formation of a Common Identity in Security Communities

2.5.1 Common perception of threats versus common real threats

Most authors agree that, in order to build a security community, its members need to have a common vision of threat as well as to be ready to coordinate their diplomatic actions. The issue of the foreign policy of the members of security communities raises the question of correlation between the effectiveness of the community and the commonality of positions in the foreign policy of the member states. Bellamy (2004, p. 10) formulated this question as follows: “Do the interests, and production of common

identities project themselves beyond the borders of the community or do they provoke a withdrawal from engagement with outsiders?”. Troitskiy (2013) found the answer in the conclusion that the disagreements over the source of threat and which states could be “considered adversaries can weaken a security community”. Adler and Barnett (1998, p. 57) saw a common threat as one of the basic factors in the development of cooperation and integration between states, leading to the formation of a security community in the future. They delineated the three stages of the formation of a security community. In the first stage, a *nascent* security community, states unite in order to resist a common security threat; as these actions develop, the cooperation between the nations deepens, leading to the formation of the second stage, or *ascendant* security communities. In this type of community, transactions between the states intensify and lead to the formation of institutions and organizations. Finally, in *mature* security communities, the connections between the states come to an advanced level leading to the formation of mutual trust and a common identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p. 50-55).

In his work titled “How Enemies Become Friends”, Charles Kupchan (2010, p. 17) also presented different stages of the formation of a security community: in the first stage, a state facing a number of external threats is interested in decreasing them and chooses a policy of diplomatic concessions toward one of its threatening counterparts. These concessions mean sacrifice for the sake of peace and can signal good intentions on its part. In the second stage, mutual restraint and a gradual exchange of concessions decrease enmity in relations between the states. In the third stage, the integration of states and their cultural proximity leads to the development of relations and trust between societies, both at state and interpersonal levels. Stakeholders interested in further integration invest in the initiatives of deepening of relations between nations, and work on the removal of political and economic barriers, thus leading to deeper integration and rapprochement between states. In the fourth and final stage, new identities emerge; mass culture and new symbols provide an impetus for a new internal discourse and create a basis for a new common identity.

History contains a number of examples of states that primarily did not have a common identity but did share common threats that forced them to cooperate in the international

arena; as a result, this cooperation led to the establishment of a security community. The European Economic Community was built in 1957, to some extent in order to resist the biggest threat of the Cold War era, i.e. the Soviet Union and the communist movement. Another example is the ASEAN countries that united in times of the active involvement of the Soviet Union and the United States in the region's development; the creation of ASEAN was an effort to collectively resist the superpower games and maintain a policy of independence. Today, with the end of the Cold War, ASEAN's importance has still not diminished as all of its member states work on keeping their independence in decision-making from Beijing and the other great powers, even though some of its members see China as a direct threat to their security, while others are less concerned.

As Väyrynen (2000, p. 181) argues, the Baltic States are another example of a region that primarily did not have a common identity (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) had different identities despite the similarity in their culture and common historical background); however the existence of a common Russian threat was the initial factor that caused the coordination of diplomatic actions, a pro-European orientation of their foreign policies and the subsequent measures taken to democratize their political regimes in order to join NATO and the EU. Here, the author claims, the integration of the states into the existing security community preceded the formation of a common identity between the Baltic nations.

Although many authors discuss the importance of threat in the formation of the security community, it is important to note that the very concept of 'threat' is perceived by most security community theorists differently from traditional (rationalist) theories like realism or liberalism: in security community theory, the concept of threat is based on the constructivist approach of the *vision*, or *perception* of threat, assuming that a threat is constructed by many factors such as ideology, the rhetoric of state officials, historical background, culture, etc. (Ulusoy, 2003, p. 10). In contrast, in the traditional theories, threats exist in conditions of anarchy and balance of power and cannot be influenced by the vision of the international actors. This contradiction creates a theoretical clash between the two approaches: while constructivists emphasize the importance of an epistemological approach in the definition of threat, realists criticize the constructivists

for ignoring the factors of a real threat and the anarchy existing in the international system. These two approaches should be seen as complementary in order to understand the concept more comprehensively (Väyrynen, 2003, p. 35-38).

Additionally, the analysis of geography of currently existing security communities shows that, in most cases, security communities are formed in regions that remain in the zone of interest of one big power, which is interested in the formation of stable peace in their region. For example, the European Economic Community was established in a region that was protected by an American economic (Marshall) plan and military (NATO) assistance. In the following years, the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to the EU took place at a time of weak Russian influence in the region. Some authors claim that a security community can coexist with a system, which has a balance of power; in this regard, the question is whether a security community can emerge and function in complicated regions with the strong influence of big powers that are not interested in the formation of a stable peace. On the other hand, one has to remember that membership of a security community does not mean that states will reject their own national interests in the event that their domestic or international situation raises new challenges to their security. This is why there is always a threat that a security community will disassemble in the circumstances of changes on the international arena as well as internal transformations of the local societies. At the same time, as Adler and Greve (2009) point out, although states can unite into security communities, they still integrate into other security arrangements that exist within the international system: for example, the Eastern European countries can be members of the European security community, but still face the threat from Russia and act in accordance with the regional balance of power.

2.5.2 International organizations and great powers at the center of building a security community

According to Deutsch (1957) and other authors, while international organizations and institutions can emerge as a manifestation of existing common identities, they can also be the drivers leading to the formation of a new identity lying at the basis of an

emerging security community as well. One can see the proof of this theory in the transformations that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War, driven by their aspiration for EU and NATO membership (Mouritzen, 2001, p. 305). Here, the efforts of regional actors to meet the institutions' requirements led to the spread of norms and the transformation of national domestic and foreign policies, affecting the region's economic relations and social ties and identity. This process implies that the implementation of the following conditions create the groundwork for the integration of new regions into the existing security communities. Organizations incite regional actors to start the process of change in different sectors of political and economic life, develop communication between nations, and work on joint projects in sectors such as the economy, the environment, etc. Additionally, continual activity in the direction of foreign policy, the promotion of a shared definition of security, as well as a favorable domestic and international situation will contribute to the development of trust between nations and development common identities with those "who were once on the other side of cognitive divides" (Adler and Barnett, 1998, p. 29). Today, after their success in Central and Eastern Europe, the European Union and NATO have been strong facilitators in the Western Balkans, by taking measures to decrease the hostility between the nations of the region and develop the communication and cooperation processes that can potentially eventually lead to the establishment of a common identity and security community.

Deutsch believed that powerful states could also be attractive for the creation of a security community. Significantly, strong states in the region (or great powers at a global level) turn into attractive political and economic centers for the surrounding states in the process of security community formation. According to Williams (2007, p. 13), in addition to the cultural reading of security, "material factors, such as financial assistance, economic development and physical security" can be provided by the core powers to outsiders bidding to join the community. At a later stage, regional powers define the future agenda and ideology of the security community. Here, the authors accentuate the differences between integration around strong actors or organizations and a traditional Gramscian understanding of hegemony. First, in the Gramscian interpretation, a hegemon and its followers do not share a common identity, while in

security communities they do (Böhm, 2018). In security communities, there is no language of dominance and inferiority, instead communication and interactions intensify mutual understanding and trust. Finally, instead of sanctions in the traditional Gramscian hegemony, in security communities, the reaction to wrong behavior might not appear at first, but the breaching of the rules of the community by some members undermines their identity and sense of belonging to the community.

2.6 Conclusion

National identity is an understudied concept, which nevertheless deserves more attention due to its importance in the understanding of domestic and foreign policy choices of states, the principles of regionalization and the establishment of stable peace between nations. While it is hard to measure national identities, there are different elements, which can define the understanding of a collective of people in terms of a nation. These elements include criteria such as, inter alia, common ethnic descent, language, religion, traditions and culture, history, ideology. It should also be noted that territory and cultural artefacts related to it might have a special value to an ethnic group due to the memory of a nation related to that particular place; in terms of international relations theory, this aspect is important to be remembered due to the existing intransigent positions of many nations in the world fighting for a particular piece of land which has some element of symbolism in its national identity. One can mention Jerusalem, Kashmir, Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh as the examples of territories valuable both historically and culturally for the communities struggling for them. In this regard, nations might have emotional bonds connecting them to particular territories and making them intransigent to any kind of compromise with regard to the issues related to them.

Two theoretical approaches interpret national identities from different perspectives. On the one hand, according to primordialists, a nation is shaped before the process of the formation of nation-states and its main elements such as language, religion and ethnic belonging are unchangeable. In this regard, primordialism suggests identity is fixed over time and cannot be transformed. On the other hand, constructivism sees identity as an

unstable and dynamic process constantly changing under the influence of domestic and international factors. Constructivists see the solution to the ethnic conflicts in the transformation of identities and the deconstruction of myths and perceptions; these processes can take place with dialogue and the exchange of ideas that can bring people to the reassessment of their vision of the past. Constructivism stresses the role of ideologies, state policies, the political will of state leaders and decision-makers and other domestic and international factors affecting national identities. While both approaches have their own strong and weak points, this thesis uses a hybrid interpretation of identity taking into account both the nearly unchangeable character of some of the identity elements and the dynamic and easily convertible character of others. For example, while it is almost impossible to envision any modern nation to convert to another religion; nevertheless, it is possible to increase or decrease the level of religiosity or secularity by applying relevant policies affecting this element of national identity. Notably, this understanding shows that while identities are not monolithic, they consist of a variety of identity elements settled in the so-called hierarchy of elements, some of which might play a more important role in the national consciousness while others have less value due to different reasons.

While national identities are traditionally perceived as those related to ethnic belonging, there is a growing understanding of the priority of civic belonging based on the common citizenship of people in the interpretation of national identity in the modern world. Moreover, regions with a developed level of integration could reach a common understanding of belonging to a regional identity. This concept is placed at the basis of the theory of security communities, according to which a group of states with a shared identity solves social and interstate problems without resorting to physical force. The analysis of existing examples of security communities such as the EU, ASEAN, NAFTA and others shows many commonalities uniting these regions: most of the authors note the existence of some level of integration between states and a common identity shared by societies. At the same time, authors present different interpretations on the priority of factors necessary for the construction of a stable peace in the region.

Both internal (regional) and international factors play an important role in the construction of common identities that serve as a basis for the establishment of security communities. Internal factors cover different issues, such as a commonality of values, transactions between societies, including economic cooperation and social communication, the existence of trust at both individual and state levels between nations and the institutionalization of this cooperation at the level of integration with norms and regulations that would define the security of the states involved. While there is a discussion whether democracy and liberal values matter, different authors interpret this issue differently and suggest that the norms and regulations of institutions can guarantee peace even if the member states do not share common liberal values. At the international level, these factors include a common perception of threats among the member states of security communities, membership in international organizations and/or the hegemony of great powers as the centers of communities with a shared identity. The analysis of history of regionalism in the South Caucasus and the current level of relations from the aspect of the aforementioned factors can shed some light on the reasons behind the failure of integration and stable peace in the region.

3. HISTORY OF REGIONAL FRAGMENTATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

3.1 Introduction

As most of the studies on the theory of a security community show, a security community as a territory free of war is impossible without the establishment of a deep-rooted trust, extended cooperation and a common identity. Meanwhile, for the South Caucasus, it is hard to imagine peace in a region where each of the states is involved in a weary and enduring ethnic conflict with its neighbors while being intransigent to any kind of compromise. Today, taking into account their historical rivalries, it is hardly possible to even think of a common regional identity that would unite the independent states of the South Caucasus (Kuchins and Mankoff, 2016, p. 3). Despite the commonalities in history and culture of the region, existing problems affect relations and erase regional similarities between the peoples of the region (Çelikpala, interview). The nations are not taking any steps to find regional solutions to common challenges or develop any economic cooperation on a regional rather than a bilateral level of relations. Although most scholars support the idea that common identity can develop at a later stage after a security community is formed, the situation in the region shows that the lack of a common identity and deadlock in the peace settlement have created a vicious circle that might be hard to ever break.

Despite the existing contradictions between the societies, there are elements that can serve as the basis for cooperation in the South Caucasus. These elements include the commonality of “Caucasian” culture, the potential complementarity of local economies, as well as some positive examples of common postcolonial legacy that are still present (although decreasing) in the local societies, such as the traditions of secularism, the usage of Russian as a *lingua franca*, memory of peaceful coexistence under the Soviets, inter alia. In other words, great potential for the formation of a common regional identity exists, but the current situation with the unresolved status of the interethnic conflicts keeps the states apart and their national identities hostile to each other.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a region consists of three components, including geographical, cultural and ideational elements differentiating the territory from the neighboring states. This chapter will analyze the three components of a region with an analysis of identity as a missing element in the current system of relations between the nations of the South Caucasus. In this regard, it will discuss the history of regional integration projects and the reasons for their failure in different periods of the twentieth century; it will also define the role of identities and memory of the past in the mutual distrust and the growing cultural gap between the nations that impedes the establishment of deeper cooperation in the region. The analysis of these issues and the lessons of history might shed some light on the factors that affect regional fragmentation and can contribute to the formation of peace and a common identity in the future.

3.2 The South Caucasus as a Broken Region

Today the very understanding of the South Caucasus as a region is a relatively disputable concept. Indeed, despite their geographical proximity and common historical and cultural background, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia do not act or perceive themselves as part of a common region. The South Caucasus has clearly distinctive geographical borders, which separate it from the rest of the world, with the Black Sea in the west, the Caspian Sea in the east, the Great Caucasus range in the north and the Araxes river in the south. This geography and historical developments became the most significant reasons in differentiating the South Caucasus from the North Caucasus. The Russian term of '*Zakavkazye*' ("territory beyond the Caucasus"), Ottoman '*Mavera-yi Kafkas*' and British '*Transcaucasia*' refer to the territories of modern Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia as a separate region, while historically this notion was largely a "construct of the late Russian and Soviet supremacy in the region, reflecting St. Petersburg's and Moscow's perception of it" (Kemoklidze et al., 2012, p. 1613). Both during Tsarist and Soviet times, the South Caucasus was perceived as a part of the Greater Caucasus (Çelikpala, interview) with the common identity built around the cultural similarities of the local nations.

However, the lack of appropriate roads to connect the mountain range between the North and South placed a big obstacle in the communication between them in different periods of their history. At a later stage, the introduction of administrative borders passing along the mountain range between the republics of the North and the South during the Russian and Soviet periods promoted the further stratification of the political, historical and cultural developments of the two parts of the Greater Caucasus. Finally, the short period of independence in 1918-1920 and the post-Soviet independence of the South Caucasian states fixed its political differentiation from the Russia-controlled North Caucasus. Since then, the old term of 'Transcaucasia' was replaced with the politically neutral 'South Caucasus', even though the region continues to be called 'Transcaucasia' in the official documents of the Russian political establishment (Mansurov, interview).

For each part of the South Caucasus, the natural framework of the seas and mountains makes the countries of the region tightly interconnected. This specificity of the region plays a dubious role, as although it can make the local states codependent on each other in terms of the complementarity of their economies, it also affects the states in a negative way. For example, during the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the blockade of Georgia affected the Armenian and Azerbaijani economies, and the potential war in Nagorno-Karabakh might affect the whole region, as it would involve the territories where the main regional projects of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines pass. The unresolved status of this conflict keeps the Azerbaijani-Armenian and Turkish-Armenian borders closed, putting the main obstacle to both regional economic cooperation and the prosperity of the whole region that would follow the normalization of economic links (Mankoff, 2012, p. 2).

Another aspect of the geography is related to the population inhabiting the region, and here it is important to delineate the outer borders of the region according to the political, but not the ethnic, borders of the states, as the territories inhabited by the ethnic Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Dagestan, Turkey or Iran might misleadingly expand the geography of the South Caucasus to the north, west and south (German, 2012a, p. 138). In comparison, the Kars region of the Ottoman Empire was considered

as a component of Transcaucasia at the end of the nineteenth century, when it was occupied by the Russian army; however after Russia lost Kars, Ardahan and Bayazet, they ceased to be considered as Caucasian (Ismailov, 2006, p. 10). The last time when the regional term was applied to this territory after the Russian army left the provinces, was when the provisional government in Kars declared the independence of the Southwestern Caucasian Democratic Republic (SCDR) in November 1918³.

Some authors consider the South Caucasus as a part of the Middle East, due to the population of ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians inhabiting the territory of modern Turkey and Iran. According to Bishku (2015, p. 90-91), the political connections between the regional states and the Middle East have been restored since the 1990s, while their historical and cultural ties are undeniably strong, with the sizeable ethnic minorities of Azerbaijanis living in Turkey and Iran and Armenians living in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Lebanon. However, one should not forget that the Russian, and particularly the Soviet period of history with its closed borders and strict methods of secularization and persecution of any type of nationalism, had a significant impact on the social and cultural structure of the region. As Thomas de Waal (2012, p. 1711) puts it, “the post-Soviet Azerbaijanis in their secularized way of life have more in common with the post-Soviet Armenians than they do with either Turks or even Iranian Azerbaijanis”.

The common habitat and socio-cultural space, as well as the common destiny of the local nations to a large extent were influenced by the geopolitical location of the region and its relations with the external world (Damenia, 2002, p. 18). At the same time, according to Vanyan (interview), while the national identities of the local states were partially influenced by historical threats and risks, this element became a part of a common regional identity as well. As part of their common colonial legacy, the local nations learned how to adapt to the new empires while protecting their ethnic ties; in this regard, cooperation with each other was an important element of national culture throughout the history of colonial influence over the region. As a result, despite the cultural and religious differences between the Muslim Azerbaijanis, as well as the

³ For more information on SCDR, or Cenûb-i Garbî Kafkas Hükûmeti, see e.g. Bülent Tanör, *Türkiye’de Kongre İktidarları (1918-1920)*, Istanbul, 1998.

Georgians and Armenians belonging to different branches of Christianity, the region had traditions of alliances and cooperation between the local nations. In particular, there is little evidence of clashes between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians before the formation of the two nations in the late nineteenth century; on the contrary, historians record several notable examples of good relations and cooperation between them expressed at state and social levels. Shah Ismail Hatai, the leader of the Turkic *kzylybash* tribe and the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, gave Armenian traders exclusive rights to silk in the early sixteenth century (Shafiyev, 2007b, p. 61). In 1724, the Armenian lords (*meliks*) of Karabakh and the Azerbaijani khans of Ganja signed a treaty to cooperate against foreign invasion (De Waal, 2020). A famous Armenian poet of the eighteenth century, Sayat Nova, wrote most of his poems in Azerbaijani (De Waal, 2003, p. 282).

After the Russian occupation of the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the tsarist regime and, after a minor interval, Soviet rule brought new changes to the political and social development of the region. The Russian administration imposed a certain standardization and secularization on the lifestyle in the Caucasus, while the Russian language played a significant role, serving as the region's *lingua franca* (Smith, 2015, p. 3). One can see both positive and negative commonalities uniting the region just as in most of the post-Soviet societies: for instance, one can posit the secularism and bilingualism of the people at the social level, and having authoritarian regimes, corruption and human rights violations at the state level. The cultural similarities between these local nations and the influence of the secularization policy can also explain why Huntington's discourse of "the clash of civilizations" did not apply to the local conflicts and could not explain the origins of confrontation between the Muslim and Christian nations of the region (Cornell, 2001, p. 43). At the same time, the formation of the modern Caucasian nations, together with the rise of national identities since the late nineteenth century, became a turning point that led to the fragmentation of the region.

Today the third, ideational element of the South Caucasus is lacking, as it is hard to imagine the existence of any common identity among the three states of the region, two

of which are involved in an ethnic conflict with each other. Despite their similarity in culture and a common legacy of the past, today the region is divided politically, with each country having different security priorities without any interest in regional integration and de-securitization. As a result, many local experts agree that the region exists only in the eyes of outside observers, witnessing similarities that remain unnoticed by the three nations themselves (Asatiani, 2007; Alizade, interview)

The current situation underpins the claims of the authors who do not consider the South Caucasus as one region that might have any potential to be united under one common identity. According to Mamradze (interview), the differences between the three states are so wide that the only commonality they share is geography. Mammadov and Garibov (2018, p.111) see the only element uniting the three states to be the region's postcolonial legacy, while the culture and identity of each state have different roots and traditions. Indeed, the countries of the region historically developed under the influence of the Persian, Ottoman and Russian empires, but pursued different interests and searched for different allies. In particular, the Russian empire, and, subsequently, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in the formation of the three nations and their national identities. However, both during the times of the Russian Empire and the Soviet period, the center was trying to integrate the regional states within the framework of the wider empire, instead on within the regional framework; additionally, it used artificial top-down methods, without any bottom-up initiatives. The result was counterproductive: as Mkrtchyan and Petrosyan (2009, p. 67) note, although Soviet ideology formed a degree of "artificial homogeneity and a superficial Caucasian identity", it could not remove the ethnic differences between the nations. During the years of independence in 1918-1920/1921 and later, since the period of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* ("openness") and the restoration of independence in the late 1980s-early 1990s, historical enmity has expressed itself in the most tragic way. This postcolonial trend is comparable to the one that took place in the Balkans, as the system of hub-and-spoke relations created by the center contributed to the consolidation of existing conflict structures (Ohanyan, 2015, p. 162).

On the other hand, despite the differences in language and religion, cultural proximity unites the three states of the region, as the three peoples were historically separated from the rest of the world and thus developed in their own way. Authors such as Thomas de Waal (2010, p. 5), underline the strong cultural ties between the nations and patterns of economic collaboration that persist despite the closed borders. The Caucasian traditions and their cultural specificity, such as local hospitality and family relations, music and cuisine are especially evident to visitors and foreign experts. According to Chikovani (2005, p. 62), the commonality of Caucasian culture should be understood in terms of a “common cultural space”: the Caucasian nations belong to different civilizations and cultures, however common destiny, geography, the history of coexistence and “naturally unconscious or quite conscious imitation” between the nations of one region, have led to the adaptation of different elements of culture and the creation of a new common culture. On the other hand, Gadzhiyev (2001, p. 41) accentuates the existence of a cultural commonality consisting of a variety of mutually dependent and, in some cases, clashing subcultures; these subcultures are shaped by the predominance of conflicting elements causing the fragmentation of the region.

An analysis of the interviews conducted for this study shows that some respondents see the South Caucasus as one region only in historical and geographical terms (Aliyeva, German, Kakachia, interviews). Although those from the local nations acknowledge their similarity with other “Caucasians”, unlike other inhabitants of the Russian and Soviet Empire, they still clearly understand the differences between each country (Iskandaryan, interview). In this regard, despite the existing cultural affinity, the region failed to develop its common Caucasian identity in political terms (Kakachia, interview). Several reasons account for this failure, including cultural and religious differences (German, interview), as well as interethnic problems that historically continued to grow without ever being resolved (Çelikpala, interview).

At the same time, the Russian and Soviet periods of history did little for the integration and intensification of relations between the local nations: due to the national policy of the Soviet Union, the lack of sufficient interaction between the three nations impeded the construction of a common identity (Aliyeva, interview). Additionally, the fragility

of the Soviet economy in turn weakened the economic links between the nations (Alizade, interview). Instead, the policy of the center was aimed at the construction of a common civic (Russian, or Soviet) identity and the gradual “russification” of the region, even though it did not bring about any tangible results in the South Caucasus (Japaridze, interview). In cultural terms, Moscow did not differentiate the South Caucasus, or “Transcaucasia” from the North Caucasus, as both were parts of one political unit under the Soviets (Aliyeva, Çelikpala, Gamaghelyan, Mamradze, Mansurov, interviews). Additionally, the center’s ambiguous policy on national minorities exacerbated existing tensions in the region. As a result, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the absence of viable political and economic institutions, as well as the lack of a common identity discourse that could hold them together, the “South Caucasus” became a predictably weak commonality in the following period (Gamaghelyan, interview). In summary, both the historical and current policies of the great and regional powers brought confrontation and had a big impact on the process of the regional fragmentation of the South Caucasus (Çelikpala, German, interviews).

Today people perceive themselves as Caucasians, but in political terms this identity loses its importance and value due to the growing differences between the nations, as the consequences of the ethnic conflicts have played an important role in the ideational fragmentation of the region. Azerbaijan and Armenia distance themselves from the Caucasian identity due to the legacy of the Karabakh War, occupation of the Azerbaijani lands by the Armenian forces and the existing level of relations with each other; as a result, today Caucasian identity holds one of the last places in the "hierarchy" of identities for the Azerbaijanis (Pashayeva, interview). Instead, Azerbaijan emphasizes its belonging to the Caspian region in order to show its significance as a geopolitical pivot and a place rich in the vast oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea basin (Kakachia, interview). In contrast, Georgia aspires to present itself as a part of the Black Sea and East European regions, due to the negative image of the Caucasus torn apart by wars and frozen conflicts (Kakachia, interview). In this regard, the analysis of the history of the regionalization of the South Caucasus, as well as the role of Russian and Soviet policy in the failure of regional integration, can serve as a starting point for

the reevaluation of the place of national self-image in the configuration of a common regional identity.

3.3 The Failed Attempts at Integration Initiatives in the South Caucasus

Being squeezed between different empires throughout their history, the nations of the region were formed under the impact of different cultures, religions and traditions. Since the period of Russian advancement into the region in the eighteenth century, cultural and ethnic differences between the ethnicities had started to play a defining role in the region's fragmentation. Significantly, the search for protection by the Christian Armenians and Georgians from the rulers of the Ottoman and Persian empires played a major role in the process of consolidation and, in the final stage, occupation of the region by the Russian army in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries. While under the control of one center, the region came together both in its administrative unity and in other ways such as in the usage of Russian as a common language, the development of transport networks and the standardization of the social structure of the region (Smith, 2015, p. 3).

On the other hand, the specifics of the regional administrative borders left out the seeds of ethnic conflicts that exploded later with the rise of nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Each of the nations was separated into different administrative provinces, or *oblasts* (see table D.1, D.2). The ambiguous policy of the Russian government, its support for some of the local ethnic groups and discriminative measures against the others deepened the confrontation between the region's nations. The promise of Russian assistance to the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire brought the local ethnic differences into an international context. The first clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians were recorded after the establishment of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), or *Dashnaktsutyun* in 1890, while the main goal of the party was the establishment of an independent Armenian state in the territories of Eastern Anatolia and the South-Western Caucasus (Shafiyev, 2007a, p. 17). The claim for Ottoman lands made this conflict interregional and, to a large extent, led to the reassessment of a national identity among the Azerbaijani intellectuals, associating themselves with the linguistically close

Ottoman Turks rather than the religiously close Iranians. This process reached its peak with the onset of the First World War and the dissolution of the Russian Empire in 1917, causing tragic events that were placed at the core of the national memories and the national perceptions of threat in the local societies.

With the Bolshevik Revolution and the involvement of the region in the First World War, the international situation forced the leaders of the three nations to build a united political and military front in order to resist hostile foreign forces. The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR) was created in April 1918, in response to the Ottoman pressure to represent Transcaucasia as an independent unit at the Trabzon conference of 1918 (Bagirova, 2007, p. 105). This was notable, as it was the only serious initiative toward integration that came from within the region (Smith, 2015, p. 3). Named as a “transitional bridge from the imperial past to an independent present”, the TDFR lasted for only a month and collapsed because of the ethnic conflicts within the South Caucasus, the nationalist policy of the ruling elites, contradictory views on the future of the region and a lack of internal consensus to fight against a common enemy (Brisku and Blauvelt, 2020). Importantly, different reactions to the advance of the Ottoman forces (the Azerbaijanis welcomed the Turks, while the Armenians and Georgians stood against their invasion) split the federation apart (MacDougall, 2009, p. 108); as a result, the antagonisms between the three nations led the Georgians to seek German assistance and the Azerbaijanis to seek Turkish support. This example shows that during World War I, this integration project was too premature as for a region faced with external threats coming from neighboring big powers, a small state was looking for the support not of other small states, “but of another big power” (Smith, 2015, p. 4). The unexpected assistance of Germany stimulated Georgia to declare independence on May 26, 1918, while the Armenian leadership did not welcome this decision, as it preferred “some kind of relationship” with Russia or neighboring Azerbaijan and Georgia rather than declare independence themselves, because they would be left alone to face the Turkish threat (Geukjian, 2012, p. 86). Two days later, on May 28, 1918, Azerbaijan and Armenia followed the example of Georgia and declared independence. The ensuing months were characterized by an active search for international allies

caused by real and imagined threats emanating from the Russian, Ottoman, German and British empires.

While the process of nation building was not complete for the states of the region, the territorial disputes and the unresolved status of national borders led to the failure of the *de jure* recognition of both Armenia and Azerbaijan at the Paris Peace Conference before the Russian occupation; additionally, although Georgia was recognized *de jure* at the conference in January 1921, its independence lasted for less than a month (Hille, 2010, p. 92). The rise of nationalism caused a series of interethnic wars, including the Armenian-Georgian War of 1918, the Armenian-Azerbaijani War of 1918-1920 and the Armenian-Turkish War of 1920. Azerbaijan and Georgia were able to settle their territorial dispute, due to their joint economic interests and the growing threat of Russian invasion, when in June 1919 they signed a treaty for the joint protection of their national borders (Bagirova, 2007, p. 107). Armenia, however, refused to join this anti-Russian alliance, while their war with Azerbaijan continued until the Russian occupation of the region. However, it is notable that despite the ongoing war between the two countries, both Azerbaijan and Armenia had representatives of national minorities in their parliaments, with twenty-one Armenian deputies in the Azerbaijani National Assembly and three Azerbaijani deputies in the Armenian Parliament (De Waal, 2014, p. 75; Zardabli, 2014, p. 425). Still, the ethnic contradictions and involvement of the Azerbaijani army at the Nagorno-Karabakh frontier, were among the main reasons that led to the easy conquest of Baku by the Bolshevik Army in April 1920. The occupation of Armenia and Georgia in the following months completed the process and put an end to the short-lived independence of the three states. As a result, different international orientations and the unresolved territorial disputes of the three nations had contributed to the failure of both the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation and the independent states in the region.

The next attempt at integration, the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (TSFSR) of 1922-1936, remained rather an artificial unit created by the center in order to prevent the region's fragmentation. Indeed, in the first years after the establishment of the Soviet government, there was a risk of new clashes between the three states,

taking into account the region's isolation from Russia as well as the territorial disputes and a high level of bloodshed between the local nations. In this regard, the TSFSR was functioning only as an "interim mechanism ensuring more efficient governance by the center of a turbulent region" (Ismailov, 2006, p. 6). According to Forestier-Peyrat (2017, p. 533), regional integration at the Transcaucasian level was the result of unsatisfactory relations between Russia and the conquered republics as well as the conflicts among these nations that lasted for more than three years before the establishment of the TSFSR in 1922. Despite several successful projects of the federative republic, including those aimed at cultural and social modernization, the artificial character and dependence of the system on particular personalities made it gradually less viable. The process accelerated with the appointment of the TSFSR's main supporter Sergo Orjonikidze to Moscow and the subsequent rise in influence of its opponent Lavrenti Beria, who quietly abolished the Transcaucasian republic in 1936. As a result, together with the dissolution of the TSFSR, the republic's leaders lost any kind of formal institutions in which they could coordinate their regional policy; instead the system of "hub-and-spoke" relations was developed, where the local elites were maintaining closer ties with Moscow rather than with their neighbors. Consequently, this led to a competitive rivalry, which became especially obvious after Stalin's death.

Despite Soviet occupation and remaining politically fragmented, the three republics of the South Caucasus experienced some kind of regional integration through the implementation of the direct influence of Moscow. The ideology of the center was constructing a common Soviet identity in the whole of the USSR, with elements of common culture and lifestyle that was later described in the Western literature as the identity of a "*homo Sovieticus*" (Morgan, 1989). In 1971 Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev announced that after 50 years of Soviet rule, a new community of people, the Soviet people (*sovetskii narod*) was united "in monolithic solidarity by ideology and common experience" (Geukjian, 2012, p. 96). At the same time, the promotion of a Caucasian identity (together with the people of the North Caucasus) as a part of a larger Soviet identity was chosen as a priority for Moscow (Gamaghelyan, interview). In this regard, the center was building the image of friendship between the Caucasians, and it became mandatory to use terms such as "brotherly Georgians/Azerbaijanis/Armenians"

in the daily language, while literature, movies and popular culture were used to stress the link between the three nations (Asatiani, 2007). Despite many nuances and restrictions, Soviet policy had some achievements in the building of a regional friendship and popular support among the ordinary people. The similarity of culture and music preferences made Azerbaijani singers extremely popular in Armenia, and vice versa. Also, despite the negative cases of plagiarism and “song disputes”, Azerbaijani-Armenian musical traditions had a history of creative links between Armenian and Azerbaijani musicians both during the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods (De Waal, 2010a; Babayan, 2019). The example of Baku as one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Soviet Union proved that ethnic differences could be overcome with the proper government policy. As Rumyantsev and Huseynova (2018, p. 908) note, Baku succeeded to build a supranational community where “cosmopolitan” character of city identity was more important than nationality, religion or different cultural traditions.

Although Soviet ideology was building a common Soviet and Caucasian identity among the nations of the region, these commonalities started to lose their significance with the rising national identities soon after the softening in Moscow’s national policy during the “Khrushchev thaw” of the 1960s. This process was inevitable as the Soviet occupation of the Caucasian states in 1920-1921 also interrupted the natural process of national formation, by freezing the discourse of nationalism at a given level of development (Suleymanov, 2004, p. 11). The softening of the center’s policy led to the restoration of the forbidden national traditions thereby enhancing national identity. The opening of the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex dedicated to the victims of the 1915 events in Yerevan, in 1967, the first such occasion since the occupation by the Soviets, and public celebration of the Novruz holiday in Azerbaijan the same year, as well as the liberalization of the national policy of the Soviets, with the restoration of national traditions and culture, a more liberal position on the coverage of national history and heroes in the local media, movies, literature and music – all of these steps contributed to the formation of sub-federation nationalism under the Soviets in the late 1960s-mid 1980s (Cheterian, 2008). Gradually, the national identities of the Union’s republics overcame the supranational Soviet identity (Çelikpala, interview).

The failure of the Soviet project and the rise in ethnic conflicts during the years of the Gorbachev reforms raise the question of the origins of regional fragmentation and whether existing ethnic clashes or wrong policy choices by the Kremlin played a significant role in the outcome of the Soviet project. The analysis below will discuss the main arguments supporting each of these views and detect the differences (if any) between the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict on the one hand and the conflict of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other.

3.3.1 Ethnic differences

While the Soviet propaganda promoted the ideology of the “friendship of peoples”, in reality the South Caucasian nations had quite strained relations with each other. It was especially obvious in the context of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, where memory of the conflicts of the 1900-1920s, along with myths and perceptions prevailed in both societies throughout the twentieth century, despite the period of stability during the Soviet occupation. Hence, according to Thomas de Waal (2003, p. 272), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should not be considered from the perspective of political or socioeconomic problems alone, as both Armenians and Azerbaijanis “were driven to act by passionately held ideas about history, identity, and rights.”

Indeed, identity-based conflict between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians is caused by mutual mistrust, hostile memories and different interpretations of history. Above all, Armenians refuse to acknowledge Azerbaijanis as a distinct ethnic group and identify the Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis as Turks (Gamaghelyan, 2010, p. 37). Moreover, in the Armenian interpretation of history, the Azerbaijani Turks were identified as a part of a big picture of ethnic confrontation with the Ottoman Turks with a significant influence in the 1915 events and mass deportation and killings of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia. In this regard, although the history of relations between the two communities started to worsen since the rise of national identity in the late nineteenth century and formation of first nationalist parties in both societies resulting in the 1905-1907

Armenian-Tatar⁴ massacre, the following events of the First World War significantly aggravated the image of each community in the eyes of the other. As the result, this perception shaped the attitude of the Armenian community towards the Azerbaijanis during the rise of the conflict in the 1980s. According to Cheterian (2018, p. 887), both the political elite and public opinion of Armenia felt “there was a strong link between the unrecognized genocide of 1915 and events such as the 1988 Sumgait pogrom in Azerbaijan”. In this regard, Nagorno-Karabakh was perceived as “the symbol of survival and revenge after the first mass-scale killings of 1915” (Trupia, 2017, p. 34-35).

For the Azerbaijanis, conversely, Armenians have played a destructive role in the history of the region, being perceived as the newcomers that were resettled in the South Caucasus as the result of the divisive policy of the tsarist regime (Ghamagelyan, 2010, p. 38). In addition, the Armenians were traditionally remembered through the image of the Dashnak terrorist groups who consistently participated in the terrorizing, deporting and killing of the Azerbaijani minority in the territory of modern Armenia. Mass deportations of the Azerbaijanis from Armenia continued throughout the twentieth century; the most notable one took place after the Armenian government pushed through the adoption of a special decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on the “resettlement of collective farmers and other members of the Azerbaijani population” from Armenia to the lowlands districts of Azerbaijan. The decree was adopted in 1947, on the rise of Stalin’s plan to initiate the war against Turkey, however as the archive documents show, the appeal to resettle the Azerbaijanis came from the Armenian leadership (Shafiyev, 2019, p. 187). The memory of losses and the outcomes of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh makes the Azerbaijani society reluctant to accept any kind of concessions in the conflict as some 14 percent of their country was occupied by Armenian forces and around 750,000 refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) were left without their homes (De Waal, 2003, pp. 240, 285-286).

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh became the main reason for enmity between the two neighbors. Indeed, this land has an important place in the identities of the two nations,

⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century Azerbaijanis of the Russian empire were referred as “Caucasian Tatars” or “Azerbaijani Tatars”.

due to its exclusive role in the history and culture of both Azerbaijanis and Armenians. In this regard, territory is a crucial element of national identity, and it can bear sacred symbolism in the history and self-image of nations (Iskandaryan, interview). According to Shafiyev (2007b, p. 61), territory bears many categories implicated in ethnonationalism, including “ancestral graveyards and religious rituals”. The attachment to territory is also expressed in books, songs and other cultural elements in order to reify the old borders of the settlement (Gamaghelyan, interview). This is why the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was to a large extent the outcome of clash of perceptions of two nations about this land, and its escalation was caused by the Armenian interpretation of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh as the result of historic injustice rather than the consequence of socio-economic grievances in the region (Abushov, 2019, p. 350). In this regard, according to Broers (2015, p. 563), systemic factors of Soviet mismanagement were “enabling, rather than determining the Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry”.

Despite the internationalist character of the Soviet totalitarian regime and the consequences that any kind of national dissent in the republics could lead to, the local leaders were openly expressing their nationalist position on Nagorno-Karabakh, which stood against the official line of Moscow in the region. For example, since the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in 1923, the Armenian population of the *oblast* (province) had appealed to Moscow several times throughout the years of Soviet occupation for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Significantly, one of those appeals took place in 1945 under Stalin’s rule, soon after the end of the Second World War. The appeal was rejected, as the Azerbaijani side responded with a counter-argument for reciprocal transferring regions of Armenia, Georgia and Dagestan populated predominantly by Azerbaijanis into the Azerbaijani SSR, showing that the territorial changes in one area “could open a Pandora’s box of redrawing borders” among other Soviet ethnic groups (Shafiyev, 2019, p. 183).

The question of the legal right over the status of the NKAO reflected deep contradictions between the two societies, as well as revealing biased perceptions of each

other as a source of their main national threat. For example, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh were provided with many privileges of autonomy, such as Armenian schools, churches, radio broadcasting and all their official writings being conducted in the Armenian language (Geukjian, 2012, p. 74); moreover, their social status and living standards were higher than that of the Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan outside the enclave (Yamskov, 1991). Finally, neither the Armenians of Javakheti in Georgia, nor the Azerbaijanis of Zangezour in Armenia, nor other national minorities in Azerbaijan enjoyed any kind of autonomy, despite their compact settlement and the high percentage of the population living in these areas. In this regard, while Nagorno-Karabakh did not carry any economic importance due to its lack of natural resources, it was crucial due to the cultural and historical importance of the place for both societies. This fact also explains why in the final stage of the secession in the late 1980s, the region could not be appeased despite the donations and other type of economic assistance coming from Moscow, as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh had ideological, rather than economic importance for the local community.

Despite the official propaganda of the “friendship of peoples”, the local leaderships succeeded in their nationalistic strategies expressed via the policies of assimilation, deportation and the forceful movement of populations. The policy of assimilation changed the ethnic diversity of Tbilisi: while in 1921, the percentage of Armenians living in the city was as high as the percentage of Georgians, by 1991 it had become an overwhelmingly Georgian city (table D.4). In Azerbaijan, the same policy led to the decline in the Armenian population to 1% in Nakhchivan. Meanwhile, several waves of mass deportations of the Azerbaijanis from Armenia throughout the twentieth century made this country the most homogeneous republic of the Soviet Union: while according to the Russian census of 1897, 43% of the population of the Erivan governate was Armenian and 42% was Azerbaijani, by 1989 the Azerbaijanis made up only 2% of the population of Armenia; after the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh no citizen of Azerbaijani origin was left in the country (table D.2).

Finally, the last decades of the Soviet Union were characterized by the rise in relative independence of the local leadership, expressed in policy choices based on ethnic

nationalism. For example, in the 1970s, Heydar Aliyev, the then-first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan lobbied for the construction of a federal highway across the Armenian province of Meghri to the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan, but his Armenian counterpart Karen Demirchian blocked the project despite the obvious benefits it could bring to both republics (De Waal, 2003, p. 135). One of the reasons behind this rivalry lay in minimal regional economic cooperation due to the absurdity of central planning, when the government-controlled factories were linked to the factories located far away from the region in order to keep the economy of all the Soviet republics interdependent. Still, to a great extent, it was caused by ethnic animosity and the deep-rooted perceptions of enmity existing in the memories of the nations.

While relations between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians were traditionally hostile, it was to a lesser extent the case for the relations of Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians. Although these were far from ideal, with the Ossetians traditionally perceived as “guests” and seasonal workers in Georgian territory, they only worsened later, after the rise in national movements in different parts of the Soviet Union (De Waal, 2010b; Mansurov, 2014, p. 10). In fact, both in South Ossetia, and Abkhazia communications between the communities were sustained after the onset of the conflicts; additionally, although the number of Georgians has dramatically decreased in both regions since the 1990s, today Georgians still comprise around 20% of the population in Abkhazia and 7% of the population in South Ossetia (table D.5, D.6). In contrast, in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the Azerbaijani population was totally evicted, down to the very last citizen, not only from Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, but also from the surrounding seven districts of Azerbaijan, where they used to comprise an absolute majority (table D.1, D.2). Similarly, no more than a handful of Armenians was left in Baku after their forceful eviction in 1990, as a consequence of the arrival of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and the development of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (table D.3). In this regard, the total ethnic cleansing resulting in over a million refugees and IDPs made the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict more appalling and ethnic-oriented.

In contrast, the confrontation between Georgians, Ossetians and Abkhazians is characterized with less enmity between the nations and more opportunities for

appeasement. At the same time, one can claim that these conflicts were caused primarily by the policy of Moscow in the region, as well as the political mistakes by the Georgian government during the first years of independence. In this regard, analysis of the drawbacks of the Soviet system can shed some light on the political origins of the local ethnic conflicts and the impact of Moscow's decisions on the development of relations between the nations.

3.3.2 Political reasons for the fragmentation and the Soviet specificities of governance

While some of the literature supports the argument of ethnic differences and clashes of identities as the main reasons for the conflicts in the region, still many authors stress political and economic circumstances, as well as the role of external factors and Soviet policy in the fragmentation of the region. Some authors accentuate the lack of ethnic clashes before the 1980s, and suggest that the rise in conflicts was caused by political and territorial factors (Mansurov, interview). According to Özkan (2008, p. 578), the term of “ethnicised conflict” better explains the situation, where political actors instrumentalized ethnicity as a powerful tool to implement their political ambitions. This is why although ethnic conflicts became an inseparable part of the national identities of the region after more than twenty-five years of ceasefire, one should not justify the rise in clashes and the failure to find a solution due to the ethnic differences between nations (Alizade, Pashayeva, Vanyan, interviews); in most cases these differences were artificially exaggerated, while the initiators of the conflicts were pursuing their own practical political interests.

In an analysis of the origins of the clashes, it is hard to overestimate the role of the Russian and Soviet policies in the region, as “conflicting seeds” were fully and masterfully exploited by the center (Japaridze, interview). Indeed, starting from the early nineteenth century, the policy of deportation and resettlement of the population served Russian interests, with the artificial transformation of the ethnographic map of the region. The mass eviction of Abkhazians from their lands in the mid-nineteenth century, the division of the lands of the Ossetians between Georgia and the North

Caucasus, as well as the resettlement of the Armenian population of the Ottoman and Persian empires in the territories of modern Armenia and Karabakh, are among several examples of artificially created “powder kegs” that exploded in the late 1890s and reached their peak during the Armenian-Azerbaijani War of 1918-1920 and the Georgian-Ossetian War of 1918-1921 (Yeşilot, 2008; Trupia, 2017, p. 33). In addition, after the occupation of the region, the Soviets applied questionable demarcation lines, thus creating the potential for conflict on each side of the intra-regional border and leaving at jeopardy the Azerbaijani and Armenian populations in the districts of Kartli and Javakheti respectively in Georgia, Azerbaijanis in Zangezur in Armenia, the Georgian monastery of David Gareji in Azerbaijan, and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

The origins of the conflicts lie in the establishment of ethno-centric autonomies in multiethnic states such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, where the autonomies turned into “focal points of identity politics” and the whole ethno-territorial administrative system created a wide range of opportunities for “ethnic entrepreneurship” (Suleymanov, 2004, p. 12). Indeed, the analysis of ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space shows that they all emerged in autonomies granting a wide range of rights to the minority population. In comparison, those minorities that did not have any autonomous unit of governance did not possess a mechanism to raise protests against the center. Among those minorities that attempted to secede, neither the Armenians of Georgia, nor the Lezgins or the Talyshs of Azerbaijan succeeded, mostly due to the lack of administrative cohesion and tradition of self-governance in the region. This fact also explains why the Caucasus with a larger number of autonomies was more torn by ethnic conflicts than Central Asia (Cornell, 2001, p. 30). The autonomous republics in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh could appeal directly to Moscow above and beyond Tbilisi or Baku, although this was a temporary measure to keep the region under control without solving the contradictions between the nations and creating an ambiguous status for the national minorities in the region.

The Soviet decision to keep minority districts as autonomous republics under Azerbaijani and Georgian control can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it

can be described through the prism of a “divide and rule” policy, as it did not solve the territorial disputes but left the seeds of confrontation that re-emerged into open ethnic conflicts in the late 1980s (Cornell, 2001, p. 28). On the other hand, the decision of the Soviet government could have been motivated by economic factors as in terms of infrastructure and communications, Nagorno-Karabakh was more connected to the surrounding Azerbaijani towns than to Armenia, and South Ossetia could benefit more by remaining a part of the more developed Georgian economy.⁵ This policy could be interpreted as a tactical measure aimed at finding immediate, although temporary solutions to the existing ethnic clashes between the local nations. As a result, although few were satisfied with the decision of granting autonomy to the local minorities, it still delayed the onset of an open conflict for seventy years.

Despite its official policy of condemning nationalism, the Soviet system lacked the democratic principles of equality and the protection of national minorities. Instead, it was built on the principle of the dominance of the Russian nation in relations between the center and the peripheries, while also giving a basis for the dominance of titular nations (for the South Caucasus: Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians) in their relations with national minorities, thereby allowing for their consequent discrimination in each ethno-national republic (Gamaghelyan, interview). The situation was exacerbated by the relatively little control of the regional centers over their districts and the bureaucratic system of governance, which complicated the position of ethnic minorities on the outskirts of the Soviet Union (Iskandaryan, 2000, p. 173). Additionally, the central government placed quotas on the ethnic representations in employment and education; for that reason, after 1974 information on nationality was compulsorily to be noted in Article 5 of the Soviet passport. These issues together with the ethnic connotation of the word “nation” in the Russian language created the perception of a nation-state based on an ethnic rather than a civic notion.

⁵ As for Abkhazia, the advantageous location of the region could provide it with economic independence; however, although Abkhazia was granted the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic united with Georgia “on the basis of a special union treaty” according to the 1925 Constitution, after the intervention of Stalin and Beria in 1931 Abkhazia was degraded to the status of autonomous republic under Georgian rule (Cornell, 2002, p. 175).

The Soviet Union was an example of an “affirmative action empire” that promoted the establishment of national elites and ethnic specificities closely related with the local language, culture and territory (Martin, 2001). Since the first years after the occupation, the Soviets had applied the policy of *korenizatsiia* (literally “putting down roots”), implying the practice of bringing a new generation of political and technocratic cadres from the local population into the governments of their specific soviet republics aimed at bolstering the position of the center on the peripheries. In the ensuing years, the model of ethnic federalism that was practiced in the Soviet Union led to the development of ethnic institutions that together with the policy of cultural nationalism formed the basis for the onset of national movements on the Soviet periphery (Shcherbak, 2015, p. 867). The process was catalyzed with the *glasnost* policy of the late 1980s, which revealed the truths of the crimes committed by the former leaders and discredited the Soviet government in the eyes of its citizens. As Boškowska and Perović (2018, p. 856) note, the local political elites discovered that historical narratives could be a useful resource for the mobilization of people and the promotion of their political interests; here, “the reference to historical wrongs – real or imagined – played an important role” in this context. While the main conflict started between the Soviet center and its non-Russian periphery, it also spread within the periphery, between the titular nations and the national minorities. Markedly, these movements used different interpretations of history and past events to obtain the support of wider groups and had the most support in those societies where historical cruelties and injustices were present in people’s collective memories. For the South Caucasus, the rise of nationalism had the most negative consequences, as ethnic differences and clashing interpretations of history led to the rise in confrontation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, followed by the rise in clashes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia that led to the destabilization of the whole region.

While the artificial policy of internationalization and Russian/Soviet dominance slowed down the process of nation formation in the Union’s republics, the policy of *glasnost* and democratization opened Pandora’s box in the discussion of minority rights on the Soviet periphery, paved the way for the rise of national movements and, as a result, led to the announcement of the independence of the national republics in 1991. The

explosion of the national movement, chaos and instability in the newly established states, as well as an absence of democratic traditions with no mechanisms of protection for national minorities, caused a spike in violence and the secession of territories on the former Soviet periphery in the first years of independence (Cornell, 2001). The paused process of nation formation during the Soviet period led to a situation where after gaining independence, the states of the region still have not passed the stage of overcoming imperial paradigms, by building national identities and nation-states on an ethno-cultural basis; that is to say, the process referred to in Western European history in the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries, or in Central European history during the early twentieth century (Iskandaryan, interview).

The above-mentioned reasons, together with the systemic problems of a sclerotic command economy, exacerbated by low oil prices in the late 1980s, led to protests in different parts of the Soviet Union. The ideology of the “friendship of peoples” showed its failure with the rise of ethnic conflicts, while the political and economic problems of the Soviet Union reflected the failure of the political project of communism. This failure, in turn, led to the actualization and recreation of the pre-Soviet projects – the 1918-1920 democratic republics of the South Caucasus (Aliyeva, 2006, p. 11).

3.4 Independence and the Rise of Fragmentation between National Identities

After decades of lost national identity, the events of the late 1980s-early 1990s became an inevitable wave of outburst for suppressed nationalist sentiments (Suleymanov, 2004, p. 15) Although primarily, the policy of *glasnost* gave rise to the first initiatives of democratization and the establishment of the first liberal movements in different parts of the Soviet Union, these initiatives were gradually replaced by more radical and nationalist parties. For example, the initial pro-democracy and liberal agenda of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) (primarily called as “the Popular Front in Support of Perestroika”, see De Waal, 2003, p. 82) was replaced with a more assertively rightist current, to a large extent caused by the news of the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis in Armenia (Alizade, 2006). The rise of nationalist parties in multiethnic states such as Azerbaijan and Georgia were too divisive and destructive for the local societies, causing

the rise of separatist movements in minority regions of both states in the late 1980s and a mass emigration of the Russian-speaking population of Baku and Tbilisi in the early 1990s. Especially in Georgia, the rise of a national movement and the subsequent announcement of the “restoration” of independence had an immediate impact on the relations between Tbilisi and South Ossetia. The idea of the sequence of Georgian statehood and the restoration of national independence missed out the important issue of the protection of the population of South Ossetia, as the 1921 constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia granted a degree of autonomy to Abkhazia, Adjara and Zagatala, but did not provide South Ossetia with the same status (Papuashvili, 2012, p. 48). In Armenia, the popularity of the “Karabakh Committee” and the claim for the unification of the region with Armenia, or *miatsum*, caused a rise in ethnic hatred, and led to the deportation of the last Azerbaijanis from Armenia. These actions had a “domino effect”, as the deportation of refugees from Armenia instigated similar actions in Azerbaijan and, as a result, by the end of 1991, the main national minorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan had been almost totally evicted from their homes (tables D.1, D.2, D.3).

Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, at the peak of the nationalist sentiments in the local societies, the communist regimes were replaced with popular nationalist parties in all of the South Caucasian republics. In Armenia, the “Karabakh Committee” grew into a dominant political force with the election of the leader of the Armenian National Movement (ANM), Levon Ter-Petrosyan in 1991; in Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the head of the bloc of parties “Round Table – Free Georgia” won the elections the same year; and in Azerbaijan, APF became the ruling party after the election of its leader, Abulfaz Elchibey in 1992 (De Waal, 2010a). Their radical regimes did not remain long in power, as the understanding of the negative effect of ethnocentrism consolidated the local political forces of Azerbaijan and Georgia around the former Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Heydar Aliyev, and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Eduard Shevardnadze, both experienced politicians that could conciliate the opposing powers within societies and lead a more balanced and well-calculated foreign policy (Cornell, 2011). As for the Armenian leadership, although Ter-Petrosyan stayed in power until 1998, his efforts to

build pragmatic relations with Turkey and search for a compromise with Azerbaijan led to his resignation and the rise of the former leader of the Karabakh separatists, Robert Kocharyan. The 1999 assassination of leading political opponents left no alternative to the Kocharyan regime and played a huge role in the structure of the Azerbaijani-Armenian negotiation process for the next twenty years.

Today, the South Caucasus is a broken region with few network ties and clashing national identities. Zero-sum thinking is prevailing in society and the state leadership, most acutely in the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where deep-rooted distrust blocks any attempts at compromise, despite the challenges this intransigence causes for each country (De Waal, 2009). Georgia's position of maintaining friendly relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia might be an exception, but as it does not solve the fundamental contradictions of this fragmentation process, it also fails to promise stable regional cooperation over the long-term. Georgia's relations either with Azerbaijan or with Armenia, despite the absence of any open conflict, have not led to a healthy integration, although the energy and infrastructure projects implemented in the 2000s were crucial for both Azerbaijan and Georgia. After the end of the war, each of the countries was interested in its own development by making use of the competing region-building projects built jointly with the outsiders, in some cases former colonial hegemony (Broers, 2019b). In terms of security, each of the states is seeking alliances with international actors, whose political interests in the region do not always overlap. Due to different perceptions of threat and a lack of vital challenges that could have united the three states, the region is destined to stay fragmented.

While the Soviet legacy did allow for sustainable regional economic integration, it created some co-dependence in the local economies with the building of infrastructure such as railroads, pipelines and factories. Most of the local factories were built in codependence with other factories located in different regions of the USSR, in that the republics of the Union (e.g. Azerbaijan and Belarus) were interrelated to a larger extent than the neighboring states (e.g. Azerbaijan and Georgia) (De Waal, 2003, p. 135). For this reason, the leftovers of the Soviet infrastructure could not serve as a good starting point for this initiative. In addition, the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict has remained the main obstacle to cooperation between the two nations. Most of the regional infrastructure connecting Azerbaijan and Armenia such as roads and railways was destroyed during the war of 1992-1994. Today, despite the regional energy and transport projects uniting the economies of Azerbaijan and Georgia, the two economies are not integrated, as these projects do not extend to non-state cooperation. As for Armenian-Georgian economic relations, despite the lack of an open conflict between the two states, the disparities in their international political orientation has contributed to the failure to convert their interstate cooperation into a more integrative project.

Today, the potential exists for complementary economic cooperation between the three nations, as each can bring a significant contribution to the development of the whole region: Azerbaijani energy resources, the investments of the Armenian diaspora and the influence of the Armenian lobby in the Western governments that might be helpful in the promotion of regional projects, which together with Georgian access to the Black Sea and international markets can be advantageous to all. However, the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and a general lack of unity and region-oriented projects impede the conversion of this potential into reality. The situation is exacerbated by a high level of corruption, impeding the formation of stable and healthy economies in the three states of the region. The local economies are weak and fragmented, while the economic potential of the region remains unrealized. The three longest borders of the region, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey, and between Georgia and Russia, continue to be either totally or partially closed, while corruption and bureaucracy makes “even the nominally open borders closed to free trade” (De Waal, 2010b).

Despite the conflicts tearing apart the region, the idea of building a “Caucasian Home” was raised several times, mostly in the 1990s when the influence of Russia in the region was relatively weak, while interest in the new models of cooperation was quite strong. During this period, different models of integration with the participation of different actors from the region were presented at a state level: from the model of the three South Caucasian states (the so-called United States of the Caucasus) to the model of a

common platform built jointly with the nations of the North Caucasus (Free Caucasus), to the 3+1 model proposed by Russia at the 1996 Kislovodsk summit, to the 3+3+2 project (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Armenia + Russia-Turkey-Iran + USA-European Union), discussed at the OSCE Istanbul summit in 1999 (Ismailov, 2006, p. 8-9).

One of the first ideas of forming an integration project in the region came from Zviad Gamsakhurdia, jointly with the first President of Chechnya Dzhokhar Dudayev. As the aforementioned project was initiated at a time of the rising secessionist movement in the North Caucasus, its anti-Russian orientation led to its rejection by Russia's main allies in the region, namely the Armenians and the Ossetians. In 1992, the "Confederation of the Caucasian Peoples" was proposed, with the participation of Georgia, Azerbaijan and a number of parties from the North Caucasus. Eduard Shevardnadze and the third President of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, discussed the establishment of an Organization for Security and Cooperation of the Caucasus with the foundation of a united Caucasian Parliament. Finally, in 1996, the presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan signed the joint Declaration on Peace, Stability and Security in the Caucasian region (Tbilisi Accord) based on the idea of a Peaceful Caucasus announced by President Shevardnadze the same year (Mamradze, interview). Neither of these projects was successful enough to proceed from an abstract discussion to any concrete measures; the reasons for this failure lay partially in the geopolitical situation, as well as the high level of distrust and enmity between the conflicting nations of the region. Additionally, all of these initiatives were declarative in their character and could not overcome the main obstacle to integration, namely the interethnic conflicts in the region (Mkrtchyan and Petrosyan, 2009, p. 62).

Hence, in the ensuing years no similar initiative emanated from the Caucasian republics, although there were two projects suggested by the Turkish leaders, namely the Caucasus Stability Platform proposed by President Süleyman Demirel in 2000, and the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) presented by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2008. In his speech at the UN General Assembly in 2010, the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili (2010) suggested a new approach to the issue of Caucasian integration, when he talked about "the necessity of promotion of a vision for a free,

stable and united Caucasus” that had to start from the projects in energy, education and cultural fields. The emphasis on education and culture implied the initiation of projects that would stimulate communication between the countries, change the attitude of the local societies toward each other, and, as a final goal, overcome the differences that had evolved during the twenty-eight years of independence and create the basis for the formation of a new “Caucasian identity”. Instead, the identities of the local states are still in the process of formation, to a large extent influenced by their historical legacy and threat perceptions, and as the time frame from the demise of the Soviet Union to the present day grows, the cultural and ideational gap between the societies widens as well.

In addition to the above-mentioned projects initiated by the leaders of the local states, different models of integration have been suggested by a series of experts and academics, including the “Caucasus Stability Pact” (Emerson, Tocci and Prokhorova, 2000), the Organization of Security and Cooperation in the Caucasus (Galtung, 1997), the South Caucasian Union (Masimov, Mchedlidze and Ohanesyan, 2014), and others. For example, Galtung’s model was based on the existence of ethnic diversity in the region and implied the establishment of a common parliament that would represent the interests of the main nationalities, as well as the numerous national minorities of the region; additionally, he suggested a system of dual citizenship that could provide national minorities with citizenship based on the criteria of territory (the state in which a person lives) and origin (the state of the nation with which s/he identifies). Although all these proposals present some rational arguments, they remain largely abstract in their character, due to an incomplete conceptualization of the problems impeding, as well as mechanisms and basic motives necessary for the implementation Caucasian integration (Ismailov and Papava 2008, p. 287).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the elements of a common Soviet identity have been gradually fading, while the new identities of the three nations have not been totally formed yet (Mansurov, 2014, p. 412; Vanyan, interview). At the same time, the memory of the recent wars and ethnic cleansings of the late twentieth century comprise an important element in the national identities of the regional states and contribute significantly to the ideological differentiation within the region. In this regard, the

region's conflicts became a part of the process of creating new political identities in the South Caucasus, while further contributing to its fragmentation (Iskandaryan, interview). According to Galtung (1997, p. 82-85), the three mentalities (a warrior, a chief, or *sheikh* and a victim) shape the culture of the region and impede the peace process in the Caucasus.⁶ Similarly, according to Agadzhanian (2017, p. 339), each of the countries has an element of victimhood in its identity influenced by the memory of the 1915 events in the Ottoman Empire for the Armenians, the history of the suffering of the Georgians during the times of the Russian Empire, the memory of mass evictions from Armenia and Karabakh for the Azerbaijanis, the memory of war atrocities and killings for Abkhazians and Ossetians. As a result, the memory of the past impedes the formation of trust and blocks initiatives for dialogue, while the lack of communication creates a vicious circle by bolstering negative attitudes towards each other. In this regard, an analysis of the basic elements of the national identities is important for an understanding of the reasons for the current mutual distrust.

This analysis of the identities of each of the nations can shed some light on the missing elements behind the disintegration of the Soviet project and the origins of the ethnic conflicts that reemerged in the late 1980s. Although the Soviet system had many drawbacks, the fact that the South Caucasus became the most fragmented region with the highest number of ethnic conflicts raises, a question about the domestic reasons for the ethnic animosity between these nations. An understanding of disputed lands from the perspective of their sacred meaning for their national identities can significantly contribute to analysis of the onset of the conflicts and the reasons for the intransigence of the nations in the negotiation process.

⁶ In Galtung's interpretation, the three elements of the Caucasian mentality impede the solution to the ethnic conflicts in the following way. The traditional Caucasian image of a warrior as a hero of the nation transforms a conflict into a duel, or a battle aimed at winning, but not solving the issue. The *sheikh* tradition limits the understanding of the role of societies in the conflict management, as according to it, decisions about war and peace and foreign policy "are taken by those high up", or in other words, "civil society may (...) propose, but [it is] the chief [who] disposes". Finally, each group supports its image of a victim, demands individual attention and focus on its own trauma, however it is unwilling to grant this attention to others; as a result "a dialogue easily takes the form of parallel monologues" between the nations, creating a "perfect recipe for the preservation of the status quo" (Galtung, 1997, p. 82-85).

3.4.1 Armenian identity: “One Nation, One Culture”

The Armenian national self-image is built around its ancient history and the uniqueness of its culture. Armenia is considered to have been the first nation in the world that adopted Christianity as a state religion; its church is one of the oldest established churches in the world, and its alphabet was invented in the 5th century A.D. The Armenians traditionally believe that they have a special historical role to play, as their origins go back to the semi-mythical hero Hayk, a descendant of the prophet Noah (Sunny, 1993, pp. 6-7). At the same time, the history of the Armenian nation is the source of its pride and grief, and while playing a defining role in Armenia’s national identity, it continues to influence its modern political and social life.

As Thomas de Waal (2010a, p. 28) puts it, “the fact that an Armenian state is situated in the South Caucasus – or exists at all – is a matter of historical contingency”. This is why the Armenians only partially perceive themselves as members of the South Caucasus; instead, the nationalist concept of the “reconstruction of Greater Armenia” is being promoted, with the vision of Western Armenia (territory of modern Eastern Turkey) as the center of Armenian civilization (Alizade, interview). One of the centers of Armenian culture, the kingdom of Cilicia, fell in the late fourteenth century and, as a result, Armenia lost its independence and came under the rule of great empires. While under the control of the Ottoman and Persian empires, the Armenians consolidated around the Apostolic church, which became a crucial factor in the preservation of the Armenian identity (Ter-Gabrielian and Nedolian 1997, p. 95). The split of the nation also led to the creation of two centers for the Armenian Church, both in Etchmiadzin and Cilicia; later, the split in the future of Armenian statehood deepened between the Ottoman Armenians and their brethren in the Russian Empire. With the creation of *Dashnaktsutyun* in 1890, the leaders of the national movement had a preference for the method of national revolt; hence, all who chose to stay accommodated were perceived as betrayers (De Waal, 2010a, p. 30). The struggle for independence led to catastrophic consequences, when the collaboration of the Dashnaks with the Russian army during World War I led to the mass deportation and killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The events of 1915 left deep wounds in the Armenian identity, played a crucial

role in the history of the development of the Armenian state and diaspora, and continue to affect the international orientation and perception of threat in modern Armenia (Sunny, 2001, p. 891).

The memory of World War I and the mass killings raised the historical fear of extermination and formed the perception of “patriotism built on victimhood” and “survival” as important elements of the Armenian self-image (King, 2008, p. 226). According to a recent poll, 90 percent of Armenians believe that memory of the genocide consists an important element of Armenian national identity along with their language, culture and history (Gamaghelyan, 2005, p. 2). This factor played a significant role in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in particular. Although clashes between the two South Caucasian nations started before the 1915 events, there was a correlation between the trauma of the Armenian genocide and the intensity of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, both in 1918-1920 and 1988-1994. In 1918 the joint Bolshevick-Dashnak troops initiated the massacre of Azerbaijanis in Baku, and the factor of “shared memories [...] of Ottoman violence” against Armenians in 1915 played an important role in the reasons of Dashnak violence against the Muslims during the so-called “March events” (Smith, 2014, p. 205). In 1988 the protests in support of unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia attracted thousands of people in Yerevan and other districts, and those who had little knowledge about the political and economic situation in the NKAO still joined the demonstrations as they felt that “they could identify with the cause of Armenians encircled by “Turks” (De Waal, 2003, p. 22). The situation was exacerbated by the fact that everyday Armenian discourse failed to “distinguish between Azerbaijanis and Turks”, while the ethnonym of “Turk” continues to carry a negative stereotypical connotation (Oskanian, 2013, p. 95). This attitude continued throughout the Soviet period, when despite being the most homogeneous of the Soviet republics, with the absolute ethnic dominance in its own country, Armenia was “plagued by a sense of national danger” (Sunny, 2001, p. 884).

At the same time, while relations with the Azerbaijanis had an element of prejudice, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh started due to the historical importance of the province

for the Armenian identity. In contrast, although Armenia waged war with Georgia over the territory of Javakheti in 1918, the Armenians never perceived the Georgians as a “national enemy”, partially due to the fact that, while Javakheti’s role in Armenian history has largely been peripheral, Nagorno-Karabakh was a territory of crucial national importance. Although Nagorno-Karabakh is situated far from the heartlands of historical Armenia, including the area around Lake Van and the Ararat valley, its importance is caused by the history of the region, where the relative autonomy of *meliks*, or governors of Karabakh was secured when the core lands were under the control of the Ottoman and Persian Empires. Thus, the Karabakhi Armenians became the last line of defense against the Muslim East, which never was the case for the Javakheti Armenians (Kopeček, 2020).

The consequences of the events of the First World War also echo in the voices of the Armenian diaspora, whose influence on post-independence Armenian politics is hard to overestimate. As the descendants of the victims of 1915, the representatives of the Armenian diaspora are very sensitive in any kind of compromise in relations both with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Today, more than twice as many Armenians live outside the country (eight million Armenian diaspora representatives versus three million Armenian citizens), and their financial assistance and public donations to an Armenia that is under economic blockade by its eastern and western neighbors leaves the country no option but to follow the strategy of intransigence and non-appeasement. Under these circumstances, the role of the diaspora in the development of Armenia is ambiguous, as it serves as a magnet for Armenians dissatisfied with life in the homeland, leading to mass emigration and a “brain drain” from the country. Since independence, the population of Armenia has dropped significantly, as hundreds of thousands have left for Russia, Europe, and the United States (De Waal, 2010a, p. 31).

For Armenia, its attitude towards its neighbors, as well as the memory of the past became one of the main drivers of the homogenization of the Armenian population and the gradual eviction of the Azerbaijani minority from the country. The ideology of modern Armenia is based on its national motto, “One nation, one culture”, implying the attraction of ethnic Armenians from around the world to obtain Armenian citizenship

(The Armenian Reporter, 2020). In particular, after becoming a mono-ethnic nation since the late 1980s, modern Armenians lack a civic understanding of a nation as a political term; this fact is of concern for Azerbaijan, as granting independence to Nagorno-Karabakh would leave little possibility for the ethnic Azerbaijani refugees to return to their homes and be treated fairly in their homelands (Shafiyev, 2007b, p. 69). According to Alizade (interview), as the experience of the formation of a mono-ethnic state indicates, Armenian nationalists would not care for the non-Armenian residents after the occupation of their new lands. Indeed, as the 2004 survey held by the Armenian Center for National and International Studies showed, only 14% of the respondents supported the return of the refugees from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh to their homelands (Regnum, 2004).

Today, the national identity of the Armenians is shaped not only by the memory of the “victimhood” of the early twentieth century, but also by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the symbol of victory in the late twentieth century (De Waal, 2003, p. 140). Still, the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan is crucial for the healthy development of Armenia, and it inevitably requires some compromise from the Armenian side. Moreover, isolated in the region and kept away from all major regional projects, Armenia has the most to gain from regional integration projects. Getting involved in various regional projects, gaining political, economic and security balances, and reducing its overwhelming dependence on Russia are all vital factors for Armenia. This is why tough and comprehensive work is required in order to break the existing impasse.

3.4.2 Azerbaijani identity: “Turkify, Islamize, Modernize”

The evolution of the Azerbaijani ethnicity into a conscious national identity was formed under both natural and situational circumstances. While geographical, linguistic and religious specifics were crucial in the definition of the national self-image, political, ideological and historical factors had a substantial importance for the political orientation of the nation and the reevaluation of its role as a political and social unit. At the same time, although cultural and linguistic affinity with Turkey and a historical and

religious background influenced by Iran differentiate the Azerbaijanis from their South Caucasian neighbors, the modern Azerbaijani identity to a large extent is defined by their history of wars and the revolutionary processes of the recent history of the twentieth century. Above all, the developments of the first years of independence raised the subject of political discourse into an ideational choice of the Azerbaijani nation between the ideology of Turkism and “Azerbaijanism” (Tokluoglu, 2005, p. 725). The origins of this quest for national identity lie at the core of the modern formation of the Azerbaijani nation.

Despite the long history of the statehood of the Azerbaijani Turks, reaching its peak during the ascendancy of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 in Iran, the ensuing decline of Turkic influence on the Persian Empire led to the separation of the Azerbaijani provinces by the late eighteenth century. As the result of the Russo-Persian War of 1804-1813, the Azerbaijani Turks were divided between the two empires, with the majority of the ethnos left in Iran’s northern provinces. While the Azerbaijanis of Iran continued to associate themselves with the Iranian statehood and the Shiite religion (Souleimanov, 2011, p. 77), for the Azerbaijanis inhabiting the territories occupied by the Russian Empire, the influence of the Western-model administrative and education system formed a new type of identity based on a mixture of European and Oriental cultures. Although traditionally the Azerbaijanis were referred to as “Caucasian Tatars” or “Muslims”, due to the dominance of religious over ethnic self-consciousness, the rise in revolutionary processes in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century gave rise to the notion of an Azerbaijani identity in a new socio-political context (Simão, 2018, p 190). The Azerbaijani nationalism of that period was influenced by the policy of “russification” and oppression of national minorities imposed by the center, and it was expressed in the claims for cultural and political autonomy (Najafov, 2008). Additionally, the first clashes with the Armenians in 1905 caused by the socio-economic reasons and underrepresentation of Azerbaijanis in the city parliament led to the consolidation of the national intellectual elite, with demands for equal opportunities for the Muslim population of the country. The rise in national self-consciousness paved the way for the achievements of “the first in the Orient” sentiment that to a large extent became the source of national pride, such as the

establishment of the first theater, the creation of the first opera, ballet, the satirical magazine “Molla Nasreddin”, the first secular school for Muslim girls, and finally the first Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR) granting suffrage to women for the first time in the Muslim world.

Ironically, it was the Russian influence of secular traditions, as well as the interethnic conflict with neighboring Armenia that led to the growth in consciousness of a long-forgotten ethnic kinship between the Azerbaijani and Anatolian Turks and the overcoming of the confessional contradictions between the Shiite Azerbaijanis and Sunni Ottomans (De Waal, 2010a). This trend developed under the influence of the Young Turkish revolution, when the understanding of ethnic kinship with Turkey began to “acquire the coloring of a political orientation toward the Ottoman state” (Swietochowski, 1980, p. 13). In 1891, the concept of self-identification as an “Azerbaijani Turk” first appeared in the newspaper *Keshkul* (Cornell, 2011, p. 14). However, during Soviet rule, the consolidation of Azerbaijani identity in the Turkic context was accepted with suspicion by the Soviet leadership, thus leading to amendments in the 1936 Constitution, where the official language and ethnicity were renamed from Turkic/Turk to Azerbaijani, and the Latin script of the Azerbaijani Turkic was replaced with the Cyrillic alphabet (Yılmaz, 2013).

After the restoration of independence in 1991, the ideology of the first democratic republic was placed at the core of the modern Azerbaijani national identity. Expressed in the slogan of Azerbaijani intellectual Alibey Huseynzade, “Turkify, Islamize, Modernize”⁷, the Azerbaijani identity is based on the balance of three main pillars, also illustrated in the colors of the Azerbaijani flag: the Turkic (blue) element stands for the national language, the Iranian/Muslim (green) element refers to Azerbaijan’s religious background, and the European/modern (red) element defines the secular statehood of the modern republic (Swietochowski, 1980, p. 12). It is noticeable that the history of the

⁷ While the Caucasian intelligentsia of the late 19th-early 20th centuries was heavily influenced by the Russian intellectual life, this slogan, together with the one of the Georgian intellectuals (“Fatherland, Language, Christianity”) could be inspired by the Russian triad of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality” («Православие, самодержавие, народность») proposed by Sergey Uvarov, Russian Minister of Education, in 1833. Similarly to the Russian slogan, the Georgian and Azerbaijani triads had an element of ethnicity, religion and statehood as the three core pillars of a nation.

first years of independence showed that any deviation from this balance might cause problems for the ruling regime and the country in general. The last secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, Abdurrahman Vezirov, was a typical example of a Soviet official, weak in his knowledge of Azerbaijani and mainly perceived as not nationalistic enough during the times when nationalism reached its peak in the society. The pan-Turkic president, Abulfaz Elchibey, stressed the affinity of the Azerbaijani Turks with the Turks of Anatolia and the Azerbaijani Turks of Iran, but these populist statements led Azerbaijan to the brink of war with Iran, and caused the emigration of thousands of representatives of national minorities from Azerbaijan, as well as the rise of national movements of local people, namely the Lezgins and Talyshs in the north and south of the country. Finally, the threat of religious extremism during the two Chechen wars, as well as Iranian efforts to increase the influence of religion in the country, motivated Baku to pursue a more cautious religious policy based on respect for all the beliefs and confessions of faith in the country.

An understanding of the necessity of balance between these three elements led to the gradual formation of a fourth national element, based on the specifics of the modern history of Azerbaijan, its culture and ethnic diversity (Moreno, 2005, p. 9). As a country of multicultural ethnic and religious composition, Azerbaijan has a flexible and inclusive identity, reflecting the dynamism of society and comprising all the elements of its cultural diversity (Suleymanov, 2001). As a result, the ideology of “Azerbaijanism” was developed around the consolidation of the society by uniting the representatives of different minorities under the roof of a common civic identity (Mammadov, 2017). The implementation of this concept was deemed as vitally important for the protection of national security, given that national minorities comprise around 10% of the population, as well as due to the trauma left from the history of the ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Indeed, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had a special impact on national self-consciousness, both from the perspective of the historical and cultural importance of the territory, as well as the memory of the conflict and its role in the formation of the modern state. The territory of *Qarabağ* (comprising both Mountainous, or Nagorno-

Karabakh and Lower Karabakh, including the territory of the seven districts occupied by Armenia) has a unique place in the memory of the Azerbaijani people; traditionally called “the conservatoire of the Caucasus”, it is the cradle of Azerbaijani culture and the birthplace of many Azerbaijani writers, composers, intellectuals, and founders of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic. The special place of Shusha, the historical capital of Karabakh, in the memory of both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, has led to it being called the “Jerusalem” of the South Caucasus, making the future status of the city one of the thorniest issues in the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal, 2010a, 103-104).

The historical value of the region, along with the memory of the mass evictions of the Azerbaijanis from Armenia throughout the twentieth century, became one of the main reasons why the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the possibility of compromise are so sensitive for Azerbaijani society. The conflict became a source of national consolidation due to the “shared sense of injustice at the occupation of the Azerbaijani land” by the Armenians (De Waal, 2019b). The map with the borders of the state officially recognized by the international community is another symbol of unity being depicted on the national coins (De Waal, 2010a, p. 28). Here, the conflict is more than just a dimension of ethnic confrontation; it also represents a political claim to the territory, which if used as a precedent might put under threat the “fragile stability of the young and multi-ethnic state” (Suleymanov, 2001). At the same time, as Mamedov (2017, p. 36) puts it,

Azerbaijan’s attitude in some ways mirrors the process of Armenian identity building after the Armenian genocide of 1915. The memory of the genocide and anti-Turkish grievances formed the foundations of Armenian nationhood in the twentieth century. Armenians only felt confirmed in their nationhood when they defeated the Azerbaijanis, whom they erroneously but understandably consider the same as the Turks, in Nagorno-Karabakh.

As a result, despite the established traditions of tolerance in relations with the other ethnic minorities of Azerbaijan, the perspective of cohabitation with the Armenians is accepted very skeptically among the Azerbaijani public. Additionally, the current state of hostile relations with Armenia inevitably distances Azerbaijan from the region of the South Caucasus, as well as decreases the priority of a Caucasian identity in the national mindset (Pashayeva, interview).

3.4.3 Georgian identity: “Fatherland, Language, Christianity”

Georgia is the most “Caucasian” of the three states of the South Caucasus. Unlike the Armenians who consider Eastern Anatolia as the center of their motherland, and the Azerbaijanis being divided between modern Azerbaijan and Iran, the Georgians historically inhabit the area around the Caucasian mountains (De Waal 2010a, p. 31). Their language belongs to the unique Kartvelian language family, also known as South Caucasian. Additionally, Georgia has the longest border and deepest cultural ties with the republics of the North Caucasus, while its secessionist minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia consider themselves as a part of the North Caucasian region, with the South Ossetians professing unification with their compatriots in North Ossetia.

As Georgia was historically squeezed between different empires, its identity was formed under the influence of the country’s efforts to preserve its territory and cultural uniqueness. Importantly, while being conquered by different Muslim empires, “religion became the major marker of Georgian identity” (Kakachia and Minesashvili, 2015, p. 173). Religion was also the major factor that caused Georgian leaders to appeal to the Russian tsar for the protection of Orthodox Christian Georgia from Muslim domination in the late eighteenth century. History left its legacy in the division of the Georgian territory between the Persian and Ottoman empires (figure A.2); it was only after the Russian occupation in the early nineteenth century that the different parts of the country were united under one rule, and the construction of a railroad across the Surami highlands provided a transport route across the whole territory. Georgia continues to be a place of separate districts with its national identity being both a very ancient and a relatively new phenomenon (De Waal, 2010a, pp. 32, 36). This fact raises a challenge to the forging of a Georgian national identity without the threat of “suppressing the country’s natural diversity” (De Waal, 2010a, p. 36).

Similarly to the concept of ‘Azerbaijanism’, in Georgia the formation of a national identity was shaped around the concept of ‘*Kartveloba*’ (‘Georgianness’) first proposed by the Georgian intellectual Ilia Chavchavadze in the late nineteenth century. This concept, based on the three pillars of “Fatherland, Language and Christianity”, implied

an important breakthrough for the unification of the historically divided Georgians. By presenting the idea of one nation, Chavchavadze anticipated the collapse of the Russian empire and wanted to put the basis for the future struggle for independence in the Georgian nation (Gamkrelidze, 2019, p. 354). Most notably, while Chavchavadze highlighted Christianity as one of defining elements of Georgian culture, at a later stage he changed his position by claiming that a common history is more important than religion in order to prevent the alienation of Muslim population of Adjara from the national project (Gamkrelidze, 2019, p. 355).

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian- and Western-educated intelligentsia of Georgia played a key role in the country's search for modern and progressive ideas and restructuring the vision of national threat and national values, by promoting the notion of "returning to Europe" during the years of the first Georgian republic in the early twentieth century. This process continued during the Soviet occupation and was most notably reflected in the resistance of the Georgian public to the official policy of the "russification" of society. Indeed, unlike the Armenians, whose religion was not absorbed by the Russian Orthodox Church, for the Georgians it was not the church, but the language that became a main focus of self-identification among intellectuals (De Waal, 2010a, p. 34). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Western/European orientation of the Georgian national identity acquired a new impetus with the rise in ethnic conflicts and the ensuing anti-Russian sentiments.

Ironically, although the contemporary Georgians view Russia as an opponent to Europe and the period of Russian occupation as detrimental to Georgia, it is to a large extent thanks to Russia that Georgia "came into contact with Europe" (Beacháin and Coene, 2014, p. 927). For instance, some of Georgia's main cultural sites such as the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Tbilisi were constructed on the orders of the Russian governor during the tsarist period; Georgian intellectuals studied in Russian universities and learned about Europe from Russian literature and culture. However, as Kakachia and Minesashvili (2015, p. 174) note, although the Russian occupation of the late eighteenth century freed the country from the constant confrontation between the Persian and Ottoman empires over the region, it still limited the development of the nation as a fully

European state. The occupation of the country without the granting of any status of autonomy and the autocratic traditions of the tsarist regime played a negative role in this process, although Russia still remained a channel for Western ideas and the Western style of education. After the Bolshevik Revolution and the following changes in the political development of the region, Russia no longer was accepted as a source of progress and enlightenment among the Georgian intellectual elite and political leadership; in the post-Soviet period this perception led to the Georgian search for integration into European political structures (Jones, 2004, p. 92). Similarly to juxtaposing itself as Christian versus the Muslim world during the Ottoman and Persian occupations, during the Soviet period, Georgia perceived itself as a European nation standing as a bulwark to resist the backwardness of communism (Jones, 2004, p. 88). Finally, while the period of the Soviet occupation changed the image of Russia in the eyes of ordinary Georgians, open Russian support for the secessionist republics in the years that followed independence was decisive in the dramatic deterioration of this image.

The two interethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to a large extent, defined the national identity of modern Georgia, as the two large-scale military conflicts (1991-1993, 2008) deprived the country of 20% of its territory, and caused two waves of mass evictions of the local Georgian population from the area, thus creating one of the biggest collective traumas in the country's modern history (Tabeshadze, 2019, p. 199). This fact also explains the persistence of extensive anti-Russian sentiments within the society, as any kind of concession to Moscow's policy can be interpreted as humiliating to Georgia's national dignity. In June 2019, the provocative behavior of a Russian lawmaker in the parliament of Georgia led to the resignation of Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, after thousands protested against the government's perceived lenient approach towards Russia (Radio Free Europe, 2019). Also, the common Russian threat and similarity in the unresolved status of the occupied territories, as well as the Western orientation of the local governments and common values of democratization, made Ukraine Georgia's closest ally.

As for the regional neighbors, despite their cultural proximity, Georgia's pro-Western orientation distanced it from Armenia, Russia's traditional ally and Azerbaijan, with its support for a non-alignment policy. It is true that, according to the Caucasus Barometer survey (figures C.1, C.2), the largest group of respondents in Georgia and Armenia considers the South Caucasus to be closest in terms of traditions or contemporary culture (27% and 36%, respectively)⁸. In comparison, only 6% of the respondents perceive the West (including Western and Eastern Europe and the USA) to be closest to Georgian or Armenian traditions and contemporary culture. However, in its foreign policy choices, Georgia stays apart "from the problematic region of the South Caucasus" (Mkrtchyan and Petrosyan, 2009, p. 68), while according to high ranking Georgian officials, the country should establish partnerships with more developed countries and should integrate in the area of global progress (the West), not to "peripheral areas, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)" (Kakachia and Minesashvili, 2015, p. 177). Despite close cooperation with Azerbaijan in several vitally important fields, such as energy and infrastructure projects, these relations have remained predominantly at state-level and have never translated into tangible benefits for the ordinary people (De Waal, 2009). The territories populated by the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities in Georgia, together with the dispute over the David Gareji monastery, demonstrate the vulnerability of peaceful relations between Tbilisi and its regional neighbors.

Georgia has to choose a very cautious policy path regarding the rights of national minorities, as its ethnic Georgian population comprises 86% of all citizens, while the survey showed the prevalence of an ethnic over a civic identity both among the Georgians and the country's minority representatives (Darchiashvili, 2011, p. 61). In this regard, relations with the ethnic minorities of Azerbaijanis and Armenians can also be affected by future changes in the demographic structure of the region. According to UN estimates, the population of Georgia will decrease from 4.3 million to 3.5 million people by 2050; among the reasons for such a steep demographic decline, experts note the high level of poverty, and an increase in emigration, as well as economic and political problems. In contrast, according to UN statistics, the population of Azerbaijan

⁸ Azerbaijani respondents did not participate in the survey.

will increase by 30% and Armenia's by 7% (Lomidze, 2014). As Mamradze (interview) notes, these processes might drastically change the future of the South Caucasus, and might be counted not only as a demographic, but also as a political issue.

3.4.4 The gap in mutual distrust

In the post-Soviet history of the region, the conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have played a significant, if not a defining role in the formation of the national identities of the three states. Indeed, while the above-mentioned territories form an important element in the identities of the nations, the development of the conflicts left their own trace in their national memories, fostering a social and cultural gap between the hostile nations. Although the conflicts were not new and had a century-long history, the roots of hatred and distrust reemerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reevaluation of the historical legacy. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians have diametrically opposite views on the understanding of justice in the conflict. As Antimonov (2018) notes, in Armenia, victory in Nagorno-Karabakh means a counter-narrative to the national victimhood after the events of 1915 and the restoration of historical justice, which poses the biggest obstacle to the ability of the local society to accept a compromise. For the Azerbaijanis, justice can only be achieved if Azerbaijani territorial integrity is restored and the occupied lands of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts are back under Azerbaijani jurisdiction (Hajiyev, 2018). Despite widespread recognition around the globe of the violations of international law, with the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions and other international organizations⁹, the negotiation process has reached an impasse, raising concerns about the likelihood of military conflict.

With the Gorbachev reforms and the policy of *glasnost*, the outset of national movements and the new understanding of the 'we versus others' discourse raised

⁹ Today the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is recognized by the international community, while the necessity of the withdrawal of the Armenian troops is noted in the documents of different international organizations, including UN Security Council (1993) resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884 calling for the "immediate complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces" from Kalbajar, Agdam, Zangelan and other Azerbaijani districts, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly resolution 1416 (2005), Organization of the Islamic Conference resolution 10/11 (2008) and NATO Lisbon Summit Declaration (2010).

questions about the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The consequent violence, starting from the ethnic cleansing of the last Azerbaijanis from their homelands in Armenia in late 1987-1988 to the Sumgait and Baku pogroms against the Armenians of Azerbaijan in 1988 and 1990 had a snowball effect, which made the war over Nagorno-Karabakh inevitable. The last chance of appeasement was lost during the tragedy of the Spitak earthquake in December 1988. While governmental institutions in Soviet Azerbaijan collected money and sent trucks of humanitarian aid to Armenia, a pamphlet of the “Karabakh Committee”¹⁰ demanded an end to the exaggerated news “about help from Azerbaijan” and did not allow the aid from Azerbaijan to cross the border (Doose, 2018, p. 929). Neither was news of the Azerbaijani aid ever reported in the Armenian media, nor was there an investigation on the causes of the crash or shooting down of the plane with Azerbaijani rescuers on board in December 1988¹¹ (Ahmadbayli, 2018). The aforementioned events show how public opinion was being controlled at the very dawn of the conflict, and how the opportunity to cooperate during the disaster was lost due to the extreme level of nationalism and ethnic enmity pervading both societies since the late 1980s. After that, when the conflict was at its peak, the atrocities on the frontier, the 1992 Khojaly massacre and the subsequent occupation of the seven districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh led to the eviction of refugees and IDPs, and dramatically reinforced the image of Armenians as occupants in the eyes of the Azerbaijani society (Goltz, 1998).

In contrast, the onset of ethnic clashes in the Georgian conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia occurred due to political mistakes by the leadership rather than identity- or ethnicity-related issues. Indeed, unlike the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the deep-rooted Armenian-Azerbaijani enmity, there is little proof of ethnic hostility in either Georgian-Ossetian or Georgian-Abkhazian relations. On the contrary,

¹⁰ The “Karabakh Committee” was a group of Armenian intellectuals formed in 1988 with the stated objective of the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. The pamphlet published in December 1988 caused the arrest of the committee members on charges of obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid from Azerbaijan. In the following years, the members of the committee played a significant role in the political life of the country; its leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan became the first president of independent Armenia (De Waal, 2003, pp. 55-65).

¹¹ After the Spitak earthquake of December 1988, numerous states sent planes to Armenia with humanitarian aid and professional rescuers, however two of them crashed: a military plane “IL-76” with 69 Azerbaijani rescuers from Baku, as well as a Yugoslavian military plane. While the Armenian and international media broadly covered the accident of the Yugoslavian plane, little information was provided on the crash of “IL-76”.

the nations were more interconnected: for example, the number of Georgian-Ossetian intermarriages was one of the highest in the Soviet Union (Bruder and Burke Bruder, 2017, p. 91). The rise in national movements and the discourse of the local intellectuals and political leaders with the widely used slogan of “Georgia for the Georgians” raised concerns among the national minorities of the multiethnic country. Hence, the unfavorable situation in Georgia was characterized by political turmoil, and the collapse of the local economy led to the dissolution of the country in the early 1990s. The issue was aggravated by Russia’s dubious role as a peacekeeping force in the 1990s and as a “protector” of the minorities in the 2000s (Japaridze, interview).

The atrocities committed during the conflicts, as well as the ensuing intransigence of the opposing parties, demonstrated the failure of Soviet efforts in building the “friendship of peoples” and cultural commonalities between nations. Principally, the national intelligentsia, including the most respected academics and artists stood at the avant-garde of the ethnic nationalism, in most cases maintaining a most severe and unyielding position in the growing ethnic conflict from the late 1980s. Thomas de Waal (2003, p. 142) provides the example of the Armenian writer Zori Balayan and the Azerbaijani historian Ziya Bunyadov, who denigrated the opposite side in their articles and works and enflamed the two societies into a deeper confrontation. According to Vanyan (interview), as the intelligentsia and the cultural elite of the nations of the region were formed apart from the national culture (under the influence of Russian cultural centers, or in case of the Armenian diaspora, the Western world), it is difficult to overestimate the role they played in the destiny of the region. The ideas promoted by local historians did not take into account the traditions of peaceful coexistence between the nations, neither did they care about the lives of ordinary people who had to suffer hardship and atrocities subsequently. As the analysis of the development of civil societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan showed, even to this day, the representatives of the intelligentsia propound a most determined national self-consciousness with the highest level of hostility towards their historical enemies (Pleydell-Bouverie, 2013, p. 26).

As the memory of previous decades gradually dissipates, the facts and events that contradict the modern perception of who is an enemy become a “blind spot” in the

collective memory of nations (Shafiyev, 2007b, p. 62). The phenomenon of “selective memory” creates misperceptions of historical facts where an act of violence committed by the other side becomes the reason for hatred, while one’s own actions are overlooked. Different interpretations of the past deepen the precipice between nations and diminish the chances of future peaceful coexistence. The mass media and national education systems play a significant role in this context. For the latter, an analysis of history textbooks shows that while in Georgia neutral language is used in the narrative of the history of the region, this is not the case for Armenian and Azerbaijani textbooks (Veselý, 2008).

Today, the lost lands and the frozen conflicts of the South Caucasus are inseparable parts of the national identities of local societies (Çelikpala, interview). Indeed, according to a survey by International Alert (2018), a majority of Armenians and Azerbaijanis recognize the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a part of their national identities. The memory of the conflict and the attitude towards the other side is exacerbated by the fact that during the past thirty years since the onset of the conflicts, a new generation has been raised with no experience of peaceful coexistence and no understanding of the necessity of restoration of relations between the two countries and nations in a future perspective. Notably, as the youth comprises the majority of the population in the three South Caucasian states, its role in political and social life cannot be overestimated. An analysis of the position of youth regarding the resolution of the conflict shows that they represent the most intransigent segment of the local societies (Caucasus Edition, 2012).

According to the Caucasus Barometer survey (figure C.3), almost 99% of Azerbaijanis disapproved of any notion of doing business with Armenians. Although 32% of Armenians said they would do business with Azerbaijanis, as Thomas de Waal (2013) notes, this can be explained by them taking the position of the winning side in the conflict, which is “ready to have friendly relations with Azerbaijan but without giving up a single inch of Azerbaijani land that they claim as their own”. Still, by 2017, this number had decreased to 16%, thereby demonstrating that this gap has been closing as non-compromising attitudes are becoming mainstream in Armenia (Kucera, 2018;

figure C.4) Another survey held in 2004 showed the intransigence of both nations towards any kind of compromise: in Azerbaijan, the majority wanted the return of Nagorno-Karabakh and to deprive it of any kind of autonomy, while for Armenians, the majority opposed the return of the occupied seven districts around Nagorno-Karabakh which were historically populated by Azerbaijanis (Yeni Nesil, 2004, p. 58). Significantly, this research was held before the intensification of the militaristic rhetoric by the governments, or the active use of negative images of the other side in the local media both in Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time, according to the survey held by Yerevan Press Club (2019), the majority of respondents from Azerbaijan were in favor of granting greater autonomy within the Azerbaijani borders, while the answers of the Armenian respondents showed “the tendency of toughening positions of almost all segments of the society” (Yerevan Press Club, 2019, p. 27).

In 2003, during his election campaign, the former President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, issued a statement on the “ethnic incompatibility of the Azerbaijani and Armenian people” (Radio Azatutyun, 2003). Still, reality shows that ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians, as well as Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians can overcome ethnic hostility in their daily life, and this trend can be most evidently traced to their cooperation outside of their national borders. A large number of representatives of the South Caucasian nations build up joint businesses in different parts of the former Soviet Union (Ohanyan, 2015, p. 159). Azerbaijani and Armenian migrants notably cooperate in market business while being labeled under the pejorative tag of “persons of Caucasian nationality” in Russia¹² (Institute for War and Peace, 2005). Thomas de Waal (2015, p. 135) considers Azerbaijanis and Armenians to have more in common than Palestinians and Israelis and, thus, have more chance to find a path to reconciliation. Still, authors such as Laurence Broers (2019a, p. 308) compare the Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry with Arab-Israeli and India-Pakistani rivalries featuring territorial contestation, nation- and state-building processes under conditions of long-term militarization, and other factors. In this regard, while mutual trust between nations is

¹² Since the mid-1990s the conflict in Chechnya has worsened the attitude of Russian society towards people from the Caucasus; as a result, harassment and racial attacks on southerners have become ordinary, forcing many representatives of the region to cooperate while facing a common threat of xenophobic attacks.

broken and impedes the process of reconciliation, this reflects the immaturity of security relations and puts the region under the threat of future conflicts and military confrontations (Eyvazov, 2016, p. 48).

3.4.5 Linguistic gap

As the national identity of each of the states in the South Caucasus developed, the influence of the postcolonial (Russian and Soviet) legacy on the political and social life of the region decreased. The totalitarian methods of the Soviet regime failed to impose a total “russification” on the population and could not overcome the national and cultural differences between the nations. It is true that elements of Soviet culture, most obviously seen in the usage of Russian and a secular lifestyle can still be traced in the modern societies of the South Caucasus, however some of these elements are fading both due to the influence of the factor of time as well as the prevalent nationalist ideology in the local societies. While the Soviet legacy is not limited only to language and religion related issues, both the aforementioned factors played a significant role in the temporary success of the official policy of the “friendship of peoples” and, thus, need to be analyzed in detail.

As the languages of the region belong to different language families and have three different alphabets, the knowledge of one common foreign language is a necessary condition for the three nations of the South Caucasus to be able to communicate with each other. In comparison, citizens of countries in regions with successful cooperation projects know foreign languages well (as in the case of the European Union) or speak similar languages or different dialects of one language (for example, the Scandinavian countries or the republics of the former Yugoslavia). In the circumstances where English or other foreign languages are not widely used in the region (figure C. 6), Russian can be used as a language of communication in the South Caucasus, as was the case during the times of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Before the Russians occupied the South Caucasus in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century, Azerbaijani was used as the *lingua franca* of the region (De Waal, 2003, p.

282). In the ensuing years, with the occupation of the Caucasus, the knowledge of Russian became obligatory for state correspondence and study in local schools; with the establishment of the Soviet national republics in 1920-1921, the dominance of Russian in the region persisted as well. Nevertheless, during the Soviet regime, the rise in national self-consciousness was quite reactive on the issue of language, particularly in Georgia, for instance when the 1978 protests in Tbilisi prevented a constitutional amendment that would have elevated Russian to the status of a state language as was the case with Georgian. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian language lost its former status and the national languages of the three states became their only official languages. This decision was motivated, in part, by the small community of ethnic Russians present in the countries, compared to other post-Soviet countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states, where Russian has a status of a state or official language. Still, Russian is the language used in interethnic communication in the multinational areas of the South Caucasus.

Presently, the usage of Russian is constantly decreasing in the region due to the political factor, as well as pragmatic considerations. In Azerbaijan, the proportion of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people has significantly diminished due to their emigration in the early 1990s. According to the Caucasus Barometer survey, in 2013 almost two thirds of Azerbaijanis possessed only basic knowledge of Russian (figure C. 5). This can be explained by the growing popularity of Turkish as a foreign language and the wide-ranging access to Turkish TV media and information sources in the country; whereby, different elements of Turkish culture became a powerful instrument of “soft power” (Sancak, 2019). Nevertheless, Russian is widespread as a mother tongue among ethnic minority representatives, including Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Ashkenazi Jews, and other minorities living predominantly in Baku, as well as a segment of ethnic Azerbaijanis, who are graduates of Russian-language schools. Today, there are 340 schools teaching Russian as a mother tongue, and more than three thousand schools teaching Russian as a foreign language in Azerbaijan (Aliyev, 2018b).

In Armenia, the mono-ethnic character of the country leaves little motivation for the use of Russian as a language of communication. Since independence in 1991, the Armenian

authorities undertook measures on the “de-russification” of the local education system: today only eight Russian language schools operate in Armenia, including three schools of the Russian Federation Army Garrison and one of the Russian Embassy in Yerevan (Pavlenko, 2008, p 68). Russian is taught as an obligatory foreign language in most of the local schools. Russian media, cinema and music are still popular in the country, while around two-thirds of the population know Russian at an intermediate level (figure C.5). The high level of knowledge of Russian, in spite of the small amount of Russian schools in the country can be explained by the close economic cooperation and a high level of migration from Armenia to Russia, which currently hosts the largest Armenian diaspora in the world (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 70).

As for Georgia, according to the constitution of the country, Georgian is the only state language, with Abkhazian recognized as the second official language on the territory of Abkhazia. After the 2003 Rose Revolution, the status of Russian was changed from a mandatory language to an elective one taught from the seventh grade, while English became compulsory and was taught from first grade (Blauvelt, 2013, p. 3). The Georgian governments that came to power after the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War developed this policy due to rising anti-Russian sentiments in the society. Nevertheless, today 38% of the Georgian population uses Russian actively, and most of the surveys show a high proficiency in Russian by some 70% of the population, which is approximately the same level of knowledge of Russian reported in the last census in 1989 across the Soviet Union (Blauvelt, 2013, p. 3). Additionally, Russian remains the language of oral and written communication between Georgians and the local minorities, in particular the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, as both sides may be more fluent in Russian than in Georgian, Armenian or Azerbaijani (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 69).

To sum up, due to the differences in the national languages of the South Caucasus, the region needs a common language as a tool for communication between the nations. Although Russian used to be the region’s *lingua franca* for almost two hundred years since the occupation of the South Caucasus in the early nineteenth century, its usage is decreasing in the region due to a number of factors such as the political and economic

orientation of the region's countries, the pro-Russian or anti-Russian sentiments of the local societies, the influence of Russian on the other national minorities, as well as the usage of other languages as a foreign language (in particular, Turkish). It is important to point out that while Turkish is popular in Azerbaijan due to its affinity with Azerbaijani, it is hard to expect the usage of Turkish in other parts of the region at the level of the usage of Russian. As for English as a language of international communication, although it is taught in most of the schools of the region either as a mandatory or a selective course, it will take decades until it overcomes the legacy and popularity of the Russian language.

3.4.6 Religious gap

The South Caucasus is fragmented in terms of religion as well, as the three nations of the region belong to different confessions: Shia Islam for Azerbaijan, Orthodox Christianity for Georgia and Apostolic Christianity for Armenia. Although there are examples of security communities with diverse religious identities in its member states (e.g. ASEAN), an adherence to different religions and a high level of religiosity by their societies can pose a threat to regional peace by leading to discrimination against religious minorities, as the example in the Azerbaijani and Armenian villages of Georgia will show below. At the same time, despite the difference in the confessions of the three main nations of the South Caucasus, religion does not play a significant role in the political decisions taken at either regional or international levels. Independently of the level of religiosity by the local societies, the principle of pragmatism prevails in the process of political decision-making and foreign policy choices. Still, although the conflicts of the South Caucasus have an ethnic rather than a religious context, the adherence to a particular religion has played a significant role in the “construction of the self and the act of distancing oneself from the enemy” (Motika, 2004, p. 269).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, religion gained an influence both in Georgia and Armenia. According to the Pew Research Center (2018), Georgia is recognized as one of two countries in the world (together with Ghana), where older adults are less likely to consider religion “very important” as opposed to younger adults. Similarly, according to

the same report, Armenia is one of three countries (together with Rwanda and Liberia), where older adults are less likely to attend weekly prayer services in contrast to younger adults. This can be explained by the historical fact of the liberation of the societies from the old Soviet restrictions on religion, which affected the older generations, while the youth, in their search to discover their national identity, view religion as a significant part of the process. In Georgia, the rise in religiosity in the society and its support by the government led to the rise of discrimination toward the national minorities, namely the Azerbaijani living in Kvemo-Kartli and the Armenians living in Samtskhe-Javaheti. The installation of crosses in the Azerbaijani villages led to a protest in Kvemo-Kartli in 2009; in the subsequent years, a group of Orthodox monks protested against the restoration of the mosque dating from 1905 in the village of Bolnisi in Fakhraly, and the local community faced problems when they sought to build mosques in two more villages in the district (Guliyev, 2012, p. 24). A similar situation can be traced in the clash of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Orthodox Church of Georgia over the Norashen Church in Tbilisi and other Armenian temples in Georgia, while the Christian-Democratic Movement of Georgia demands the return of several Georgian churches in the north of Armenia (Guliyev, 2012, p. 24). Religion is also a tool used by the government in its efforts to change the demography of minority districts, as, for example, new orthodox churches were opened and Georgians were settled in Samtshe-Javaheti, in order to decrease the percentage of the Armenian population in the district (Ramishvili, 2007).

While for the Georgians, the role of church started to grow after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for Armenia, religion and the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) did not lose its importance and influence even during Soviet times (Geukjian, 2012, p. 116). The AAC is one of the oldest churches in the world, and Armenia is proud to have been the first state that adopted Christianity as an official religion. The Armenian Constitution recognizes the exclusive mission of the AAC in the “development of Armenian culture and the preservation of its national identity” (Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, 2015, Article 18.1). Today, the role of the church is increasing in the country: in 2005, the compulsory course of History of the Armenian Church was added to the curriculum of secondary schools; while in 2009, the government granted

graduates from religious schools the option to defer military service. Although Armenia is a mono-ethnic state with a small percentage of national and religious minorities, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (2016, p. 18) issued a report with the recommendation to eradicate discrimination against other beliefs and religions in Armenia.

As the church has always been a part of Armenian identity, the AAC played a crucial role during the first years of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the beginning of the conflict, Armenians used the rhetoric of the protection of Christianity at the edge of the Muslim world. On February 25, 1988, the Catholicos of all Armenians sent a letter to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Mikhail Gorbachev, calling for the recognition of the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. In 1990, when six temples in the protesting district were transferred to the Karabakh Armenians, and two were removed from the list upon the decision of the Council of Religious Affairs under the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, the Armenians claimed that this was a war against Christianity (Guliyev, 2012, p. 21). In this regard, although religion was not the source of the conflict, it provided additional momentum toward the rise of nationalism and antagonism between the two sides. Later, when Armenia chose Iran as its strategic partner and strengthened its cooperation with the Arab world, the rhetoric regarding the Christian-Muslim confrontation was reduced to a minimum.

In contrast, although Islam is deeply connected with the Turkic and national identity in Azerbaijan, it did not become an obvious source of ethno-national consolidation, in comparison to the role Christianity played in Georgia and Armenia (Agadzhanian, 2017, p. 343). In Azerbaijan, Islam is not referred to constitutional or other official documents as a “national religion”. Moreover, according to a Gallup International (2014) survey, Azerbaijan was recognized as the least religious Muslim nation in the world, with 34% of people feeling themselves religious (in comparison, in Armenia and Georgia the percentage of people who considered themselves religious was 93%). To a large extent, this self-perception was influenced by the tsarist policy of secularization and the Soviet policy that aimed at eradicating the national and religious differences

between the nations, when many mosques and churches were closed and any kind of religious self-expression was prohibited by the government. With the Gorbachev reforms and after the demise of the Soviet Union, restrictions on religious self-expression were lifted; however religion did not gain popularity either during the Azerbaijani independence movement, or since.

While most Azerbaijanis regard Islam as a part of their cultural identity, most reject any intermingling of religion with the political sphere (Motika, 2001, p. 2). As Shia Islam is associated with the influence of the Iranian religious leadership, the significance of religion decreases in the national identity of Azerbaijan. In addition, the multiethnic and multi-confessional character of the modern Azerbaijani society compels the government to choose a secular policy with respect to each minority. For this purpose, a number of measures have been taken in recent years, such as the prohibition of the hijab in schools, the closure of several mosques and the prohibition of gathering in mosques. Still, the geographical proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the Damocles sword for the Azerbaijani government and society, due to its potential to destabilize the situation in the country and raise a new kind of interreligious or interethnic confrontation and xenophobia. Moreover, the rise of ISIS and other terrorist groups in the neighboring Middle East requires attention and a proper reaction by the government.

To conclude, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the role of religion and religious differences started to grow in the three states of the South Caucasus. While for Azerbaijan, religion is perceived as a source of potential problems and is kept under control, for Georgia and Armenia, the growth of religious influence gave rise to small clashes that might lead to interethnic clashes and confrontations in the future. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of religion in the local societies it is hard to define a commonality of religious views between the region's nations and this might create problems for the construction of a common Caucasian identity. However, the protection of the religious and ethnic rights of national minorities and the involvement of the governments in this issue might be a big step forward for the prevention of potential interreligious conflicts in the region.

3.5 Conclusion

Despite their geographical proximity, common historical legacy and cultural ties, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia do not perceive themselves as members of one common unit and fail to provide the South Caucasus with the third, ideational component of a region. Although several attempts were made to initiate integration, mostly during the Russian occupation or in an effort to prevent it, all failed due to the deep-rooted historical enmity, differences and the clash of national interests, the artificial character of the Russian-controlled integration and different visions of threat among the states of the region, either during the first attempt at independence in 1918-1920 or in the present. The basis of this historical failure lies in the differences in national identities caused by the distinctive ethnic and religious origins of the nations (Çelikpala, interview), as well as in the singular historical role they played during the occupation of the region by the Persian, Ottoman and Russian empires.

As a result, the factor of clashing identities, exacerbated by the mistakes of the center and the immature perception of the nation as an ethnic rather than civic concept, led to the rise of aggressive nationalism in the last years of Soviet rule, thereby resulting in the onset of interethnic conflicts in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political, economic and social life of the three South Caucasian states became deeply divided due to the rising cultural gap between the nations, as well as the lack of trust caused by the memory of recent history and the territorial and human losses of each of the nations. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of communication between the nations, as well as the emergence of a new generation born during the period of independence.

Still, the commonality of some aspects of culture among the three nations shows that there is a basis that can contribute to the restoration of trust and the establishment of cooperation in the region. However, this factor is not sufficient due to the ethnic and religious diversity of the region, as well as the distorted images of the others prevailing in local societies. At the same time, while the South Caucasus have experienced several periods of military conflicts and interethnic enmity that put under threat the very

existence of the regional states, the understanding of the necessity for dialogue, the respect for and protection of cultural diversity and the promotion of a common regional identity can help prevent future confrontations between the region's nations. Indeed, this condition is vitally important for the South Caucasus, as it is home to twenty-eight nationalities of different ethnic, religious and cultural origin (Bolshakov and Mansurov, 2013, p. 6). In this regard, a series of steps aimed at the reconstruction of trust could help in overcoming the negative consequences of the existing conflicts. The following chapters will analyze the influence of the national identities of the three states on domestic and international contexts, and define to what extent the memory of recent history and other aspects of identity impede regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.



4. IDENTITY VERSUS DOMESTIC ASPECTS OF FRAGMENTATION

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, despite the distinct geographical borders and the commonality of culture and historical legacy, the South Caucasus remains a fragmented region, with the reasons for this fragmentation lying in the interethnic conflicts and the differences in political and international orientation of the states of the region. Today, Nagorno-Karabakh and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia keep the region's borders closed and the potential for regional cooperation unimplemented. At the same time, despite the current fragmented character of the region, it stands a chance of building a complementary economy that could provide a good start in the development of integration in many directions. The region has a potential advantage of being transformed into a transport hub; this is why peaceful coexistence and cooperation are vitally important for the successful implementation of this idea (De Waal, 2019a). However, despite all its potential in terms of political, economic and cultural cooperation, the current situation in the region impedes the construction of a regional integration project. Today, not only are relations aggravated by ethnic conflicts, but even the neutral and friendly relations in the Armenian-Georgian and Azerbaijani-Georgian dyads do not share any common values, as the security community theory predisposes.

While international factors and the regional neighbors play an important role in the regional fragmentation, to a large extent, the origins of the conflicts and difference of political orientation lie in the domestic differences caused by political, economic and social factors. The authors of the theory of security communities note the importance of democratic governance, economic interdependence and projects that can serve as a "spillover" in the process of regional integration, as well as transactions and communications that can assist in the promotion of peace and a common identity in regions (Deutsch, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998). However, for the South Caucasus, despite high expectations, neither the democratic revolutions in Georgia and Armenia,

nor economic cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan, nor the efforts of improving communications between the nations could bring any tangible outcomes in the development of regional cooperation. Today, the difference in the chosen political courses (in relations between Armenia or Azerbaijan with Georgia), coupled with the intransigence to concessions by the local governments and societies (in relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan) continues to keep the region divided.

There is no doubt that the unfinished process of democratic development and economic cooperation have played a significant role in the failure of the three states to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts and pave the way for regional integration; indeed, the political systems of the states still lack mature levels of democracy, while the regional energy and transport projects have never spilled over into other sectors of the economy. In this regard, an analysis of each of the factors might shed some light on the origins of this failure, lying in the clashing national identities (with reference to the hostile relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia), differences in self-image (with reference to the neutral relations of Azerbaijan or Armenia with Georgia) and the vision of the future (for the entire region). This chapter will focus on the role of identity in the choice of internal political, economic and social policies of the states of the region, as well as comparing the influence of different domestic factors on their bilateral relations, such as democratic development, public opinion, and economic interdependence, among others.

4.2 Common Trends in the Domestic Development of the Region

The ethnic conflicts of the South Caucasus have played a defining role in the fragmentation of the region from the first years of independence since 1991. Despite the differences in the specifics of the three regional conflicts, they also share some similarities: despite the frozen character of the conflicts, they can “melt” at any moment, as the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2016 “Four-day war” in Nagorno-Karabakh have shown. The so-called conditions of a “dynamic *status quo*”, the term introduced by Sergey Markedonov (2017), create instability and cause concerns over the future security of the region. The three states of the region assume predominantly zero-sum thinking in conflict resolution and stay intransigent to any

compromise and concessions. Their inability to overcome this way of thinking is caused by the immaturity of the local states and societies, the traumas of the recent conflicts, as well as other specifics pertaining to their domestic development.

Indeed, none of the parties in the South Caucasus considers a negotiated agreement as the best option: despite the economic blockade of Armenia, both Yerevan and the separatists of Nagorno-Karabakh receive financial support from the Armenian diaspora, while Azerbaijan builds its strategy around developing its economy, for which the transportation of its energy resources requires stability and peace in the region. The revenues from the oil and gas exports are spent on increases in the military budget and the purchase of modern weapons, as well as the resettlement of the Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs. While Azerbaijan's military buildup might threaten Armenia, Yerevan follows the strategy of "facts on the ground" by establishing state institutions that will be difficult to dislodge by force, settling ethnic Armenians from Syria (Babajanyan, 2017) and other parts of the world in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding districts, and by destroying historical and cultural Azerbaijani monuments in Armenia and the occupied territories (Bruder and Burke Bruder, 2017, p. 95). As for the relations of Georgia with its secessionist regions, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have strengthened their positions since 2008, after the official recognition of their independence by Russia and a few other states, while Georgia has realized that military actions could not succeed as a result of Russian involvement in the conflicts (Bruder and Burke Bruder, 2017, p. 89). While many theorists find the source of the existing conflicts in their external causes, the local political, economic and social specifics of the region have significantly influenced the origins of the conflicts and the failure of their resolution, throughout the more than two decades of their "frozen" phase.

Although the liberal reforms of the late 1980s stimulated changes aimed at increasing openness and transparency in Soviet government institutions, the process of democratization in the Soviet Union required a deep transformation of society, while the course and speed of reforms created an ideological vacuum, political chaos and the rise in nationalism both in Russia's center and on the national peripheries. As a result, the lack of traditions of democracy in the local states, coupled with the rising conflicts and

economic crises led to the radicalization of the initially liberal political parties and the upswing of violence in the societies. As Iskandaryan (interview) notes, when societies are more radical than their leaders, the element of “*demos*”(“people”) involved in politics makes politics more radical, too. In this regard, the most disastrous consequences of the rise of national movements took place in Georgia and Azerbaijan, where the separatist territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh announced their independence by capitalizing on the political chaos fueled by the nationalistic rhetoric of political leaders; in the months that followed, the internal political struggle between local political elites only deteriorated the positions of Baku and Tbilisi on the frontline.

At the same time, while Gorbachev’s reforms and the process of democratization led to the rise in national movements and revived interethnic conflicts, this process had a double-sided effect, as conflicts and foreign policy decisions impacted on the domestic situation, ultimately leading to the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia in the mid-1990s. Indeed, the post-independence period of the history of the region was characterized by the unfinished character of the nation-building process (particularly in Azerbaijan and Georgia) due to the fragility of the borders and unsecured or violated territorial integrity of the states (Ergun, 2010, p. 72). In all three states, their societies were disenchanted with the democratizing governments that either led the states into the conditions of social chaos and lost territories (as in the cases of Georgia and Azerbaijan in 1992 and 1993 respectively) or the search for a compromise and dialogue (as in the case of Armenia in 1998). As a result, the new authoritarian regimes aimed to consolidate domestic power for the formation of the national state; as Heydar Aliyev said to US State Department official Paul Goble, “in order to build a democratic state it is important to build a state first” (Haqqin, 2014). For a while, the process of democratization was slowed down, while the conflicts entered their “frozen” phase.

The history of the authoritarian regimes in the South Caucasus has generated a wide discussion on the factor of democracy as a compulsory prerequisite for peace-building initiatives and conflict resolution in the region. Traditionally, the supporters of the

democratic peace theory suggest that democratic governance and liberal values could avert societies from waging war and potentially be a reason for peaceful conflict resolution. The most commonly discussed arguments are based on normative and structural reasons and include a) the character of the democratic regime, implying the involvement of society and the free exchange of people and ideas between nations; b) the refusal of authoritarian methods of consolidating society against the enemy by creating the so-called “image of others”; c) liberal values, human security and rejection of war as an act of violence; d) a system of checks and balances with no monopoly of one branch of government in the negotiation process; and e) respect for human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance guaranteed by the government (Doyle, 1983; Russett, 1993). On the other hand, democratic dyads rarely face conflicts, such as those over the delineation of common borders, due to the settlement of these territorial issues before both dyad members become democratic (Gibler, 2012; Vanyan, interview). Instead, domestic political centralization is likely to occur as a by-product of the states facing the problem of a territorial dispute and unresolved borders, thereby creating a vicious circle of interdependence between democracy and conflict.

Despite the process of democratization that started after the revolutions in Georgia and Armenia, none of the states of the region reached the level of a consolidated, or mature level of democracy (Alizade, Çelikpala, Gamaghelyan, Iskandaryan, Kakachia, Mansurov, interviews). The random efforts to impose democratic values were not always successful, reminiscent rather of an “attempt to build a pyramid from the top” (Japaridze, interview). According to Markedonov (2007, p. 333-339), by the late 2000s the South Caucasus had elements of “both an archaic and a modern political system”, since despite the modern and secular character of the regimes, the system of clans, nepotism and patron-client relationship was predominant to a more or less extent in all three states of the region. While in the following decade Georgia had significant progress in the series of reforms, the other two states of the region are still influenced by the abovementioned elements. The lack of traditions of democracy is exacerbated by the Soviet legacy of corruption, censorship and police control. There is no understanding of democracy as a culture of social consensus and no cultural accumulation of democracy in the region to date (Çelikpala, interview). The current situation can partially be

explained by the fact that, despite the ancient history of the states of the region, none possessed traditions of statehood; moreover, the short experience of the independent democratic republics of 1918-1921 was replaced with the Soviet traditions of authoritarianism (Bolshakov and Mansurov, 2013, p. 12). In this regard, the national and state identities of the region are still in the process of construction.

Today, the three states of the South Caucasus cannot develop in a completely democratic manner, in large part due to the shadow of the unresolved conflicts. The deep roots of public distrust and ethnic hatred as inseparable parts of their national identities define the unyielding position of the states in the negotiation process and impede the democratic development of the local governments. For instance, while the change of government in Armenia after the 2018 Velvet Revolution raised some hopes regarding the possibility of peaceful resolution of the conflict, and even led to the promising statements on the necessity to “prepare the populations for peace” in January 2019, the ensuing rise of nationalist rhetoric reversed the negotiation process in the opposite direction. While the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh remains central to the post-Soviet identities of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, their elites are the captives of their societies, and thus, they are not “capable of shaping the narratives and concomitant attitudes within their societies at will” (Oskanian, 2019). This example shows that the intransigent positions of the governments and societies have deep rooted causes and cannot change immediately with a change of leadership. The conflicts remain an issue of national identity, as the societies perceive them through the prism of violation (or restoration) of historical justice, while any efforts at compromise are considered as the betrayal of national interests.

The explanation for the current positions of the states, with their dependence on clashing identities, is based on the primordialist understanding of identity as a static element that leaves no hope for the transformation of societies and their perception of their neighbors. This issue can be seen most obviously in the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of fundamentally opposite “definitions of statehood, history and territoriality prevalent within both societies” (Oskanian, 2013, p. 93). However, while the governments are

influenced by their societies in terms of clashing elements of national identities and past traumas, the governments also play an important role in the formation of identities and control over these traumas (Trupia, 2017, p. 31). Their position can be expressed in public statements and official propaganda, with the image of the enemy shaped by the local educational system and local media, etc. Thus, the understanding of a national identity as a dynamic concept can significantly contribute to the negotiation process through the transformation of images and perceptions dominating local societies. At the same time, the resolution of the existing conflicts within the framework of international law accompanied with the deoccupation of the lands and fair involvement of international community that would guarantee the rights of all sides of the conflict could significantly contribute to the transformation of local identities and reconstruction of trust between nations.

As for the perceptions and images that are popular in the local societies, today the ideas of nationalism and irredentism prevail. The political elite places the issue of territory at the heart of their rhetoric, either in terms of reclaiming lost territory or protecting the rights of those living there (German, interview). According to Demoyan (2005), the “imagined and real historical borders of Great Armenia, Great Georgia and Great Azerbaijan are still dominant in mass consciousness of the region”, while references to historical geography became an inseparable part of national mythology. For Georgians, the territories of Abkhazia, Sochi and the Black Sea coast of Turkey belonged to Georgia from prehistoric times, while the Abkhazians and Ossetians came to the Georgian territory as seasonal workers two or three centuries ago (Mamradze, interview). In Armenia, people dream of restoring Greater Armenia, with control over the eastern part of Turkey and Mount Ararat. Finally, in Azerbaijan, the idea of the restoration of control over Yerevan is being discussed in the public rhetoric. Consequently, today irredentist rhetoric is actively used in the mass media, the local educational systems, and via other methods of political control over public opinion (International Alert, 2013). As the analysis below will show, an alternative approach standing against the existing nationalist trend requires political will and might have negative consequences for the political leadership itself, leading to diminished public support and even the eventual loss of power, as it happened in Armenia in 1998. The

policy of governments and the existing trends of nationalism are mutually interdependent, where the process of gradual democratization will bring new ideas to the societies, but these changes will take place only when the societies are ready for this transformation.

While the states of the South Caucasus have not reached mature democracy, the current level of state development can be interpreted as the initial efforts toward building democratic governance in the region. In this understanding, democracy can mitigate obstacles preventing the solutions to conflicts, but it cannot solve them (Kakachia, interview). However, democratization is a long and hard process that would require deep transformation of the political institutions, as well as the liberalization of minds and existing ideology (Aliyeva, interview). For the construction of a true democracy, the societies should be ready for concessions and the establishment of peace (Alizade, Mansurov, interviews). In the long-term perspective, a comprehensive series of measures include the establishment of communications between nations, the development of an open and corruption-free economy; as well as education systems that promote inclusivity instead of ethnic superiority (Gamaghelyan, interview). The system should also provide unconditional norms and regulations (Iskandaryan, interview) that would guarantee, *inter alia*, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities and displaced people (Gamaghelyan, interview).

Apart from the democratic aspect of cooperation between the nations, a number of other aspects of the security community theory feed into an interpretation of the failure of the South Caucasus to function as a united region. While according to the authors of the theory, the complementarity of the economies of regional states can stimulate cooperation between them, even though the states of the South Caucasus are economically interdependent, they have failed to build any kind of economic integration in the region. The local economies are too weak and small to be interested in cooperation, searching instead for access to the bigger markets of Russia, Turkey, and the West (Iskandaryan, Mansurov, interviews). At the same time, as Ohanyan (2015, p. 159) notes, the current “poor levels of economic integration in the region are more a reflection of their underdeveloped business culture than of their divergent economic

interests.” As the discussion below will show, the neo-functionalist approach of the so-called “spillover” in the process of integration have failed to be implemented in the case of Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation in the energy and transport sectors, mostly due to the particularities of the local economies characterized by the substantive influences of state monopolies, as well as the weakness of inter-social relations between the states. The limitations of economic cooperation restricted to the existing energy and transport spheres are partially caused by the growing difference in the foreign policy choices of the two states, most obviously evidenced after the Azerbaijani-Russian rapprochement was perceived negatively for the anti-Russian position of Tbilisi, as well as the change in foreign policy of Azerbaijan’s main ally, Turkey, in its relations with the West (Mansurov, interview; Petersen, 2012, p. 16). The same can be applied to Armenian-Georgian relations, exacerbated by the difference in international orientations of the two states, as Georgia built its identity as an independent state in opposition to Russia and seeks to integrate with the EU, while Armenia relies on cooperation with Russia (Çelikpala, Gamaghelyan, Kakachia, Vanyan, interviews).

Another example of how in the South Caucasus many factors supersede economic integration or cooperation is the 1995 peace pipeline project proposed by Western diplomats to the local leadership in order to contribute to the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Maresca, 1995). According to the plan, the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline was suggested to pass through the territory of Armenia and appease the two confronting sides; however, these negotiations did not bring any positive results. In this context, as Kakachia (2011, p. 195) notes, it is impossible to bring economic cooperation without resolving the political and ethnic conflicts. Instead, in order to guarantee economic cooperation and integration in the region, a holistic approach should be applied, with solution to the interethnic conflicts, the development of democratic institutions, the establishment of an economic base and a normative framework that would provide increased transparency, attract foreign investors and eliminate possible corruption (Güney and Özdemir, 2011, p. 144). Economic cooperation can be strong motivation for the states of the region, as it will not only stimulate the new economic opportunities and bring about prosperity for the local populations; it will also strengthen the local states and guarantee peaceful relations between them.

Finally, according to the theory of security communities, communication and social and cultural transactions between nations play an important role in the formation of a common regional identity. While this issue is weakly implemented even at the level of non-conflictual dyads such as Armenia and Georgia or Azerbaijan and Georgia, the main obstacle to the construction of a regional communication network and the development of a common regional identity lies in the relationship between hostile nations, particularly between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as, to a lesser extent, relations between Georgia and the secessionist nations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Today, there are no Azerbaijanis remaining in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and barely any Armenians left in Azerbaijan (tables C.1, C.2, C.3); a similar situation can be witnessed in South Ossetia, where the number of citizens of Georgian origin significantly decreased from 20% to 7% after the August War of 2008 (table C.6). While the nations gradually forget the experience of coexistence, the memory of conflict and lack of trust toward each other block any grassroots initiatives and efforts to enhance long lasting communication between them.

Although the 1990s were characterized by a series of grassroots projects and dialogue-building initiatives, authoritarian regimes, security concerns, a lack of proper public support and the influence of the great powers affected the positions of the non-state actors in the peace-building process in the region (Çelikpala, interview). Most of these initiatives did not bring much achievement due to their weak influence over local states and societies (Iskandaryan, Mamradze, interview) impeded by historical legacies and the outcomes of the conflicts (German, interview). Meanwhile, despite the almost thirty years of history of the conflicts, the position of the states did not change, while the lack of communication exacerbated the attitude of the societies towards each other.

While the local societies maintain an unyielding position toward the conflicts, non-governmental actors are limited in their capacity to shape regionalism in the South Caucasus (Pashayeva, interview). The few dialogue-building initiatives have been ineffective, as they do not represent the position of majority in any of the three countries of the region (Kakachia, interview). Intelligentsia representatives also did little to

change the narrative of the conflict in terms of the possibility of peace and compromise in their societies. At the same time, the activity of civil society and non-governmental organizations is particularly important for the peace-building process, as they promote democratic development, shape identity and, in some cases, continue to be the only platforms for a dialogue (Aliyeva, Alizade, Mansurov, interviews). The analysis below will show how domestic issues, including democratic development, economic interdependence and some civil society initiatives have had different impacts on the different dyads of relations in the South Caucasus.

4.3 Azerbaijani-Armenian Relations

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Azerbaijani-Armenian territorial dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh is a century-long conflict with deep roots of ethnic enmity and the province has great historical and cultural importance to the self-images of both nations. With the *glasnost* policy and the ensuing rise of nationalism in the region, the idea of the “restoration of historical injustice” became the basis for the mass evictions of civilians and the onset of a full-scale war in 1988-1994. The recent memory of atrocities, with more than twenty-five thousand people killed and one million refugees, sparked off a high level of mutual hatred, effectively blocking any initiatives of appeasement and compromise at the negotiation table. Today, the unresolved status of the territory and the deadlock in the negotiations put in question the very possibility of the establishment of peace in the region as well as relations based on cooperation in a future perspective. Still, many historical examples such as the French-German, German-Polish or South Korean-Japanese rapprochements depict successful scenarios of stable peace and cooperation between historical enemies (Wu and Yang, 2016). The examples of these conciliations raise the question of the conditions necessary both for the formation of a security community as a final stage of integration, as well as the conflict resolution and the building of trust between nations as immediate measures for public reconciliation.

While the negotiation process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained in a diplomatic impasse for over twenty-five years, the reasons for this stalemate, to a large

extent, lie in the domestic problems of both states. In this regard, a weak level of democratic development, and a lack of bilateral economic ties and communication aggravates the situation and leads to the failure of the two parties to reconcile. Moreover, mutual enmity and the unyielding positions of their societies block any initiatives by the government and non-government actors toward showing the level of mutual dependency between national identity and political, economic and social factors of domestic policy. In this regard, the section below will analyze the correlation between these elements and the level of influence of each on the process of reconciliation between the hostile nations.

4.3.1 Political factors and the nexus of democracy and peace

Both in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the late 1980s was inseparably related to the rise in national independence movements initially and the process of state formation in the years after the announcement of independence in 1991. In Azerbaijan, this process developed most painfully due to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding districts, and the ensuing eviction of refugees and IDPs from Armenia and the occupied territories. Due to the political and economic chaos, as well as the struggle for power between different political elites, the loss of territories became the main reason for the resignation of presidents Ayaz Mutalibov and Abulfaz Elchibey (Altstadt, 2017; De Waal, 2003). The consequences of the conflict left a deep trauma in the national self-consciousness and defined the future position of Presidents Heydar and Ilham Aliyevs at the negotiation table in the years to come.

In Armenia, the consequences of occupation raised questions about the rationale of the unyielding position of the Armenian government. Intransigence to compromise had emerged since the country's first democratic government of Levon Ter-Petrosyan was formed in 1991 around the "Karabakh Committee", and was, primarily, based on the ideas of nationalism and the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia (Rutland, 1994). After the occupation of Kelbajar in April 1993 and closure of the borders imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan that dramatically deteriorated the economic situation in the country, President Ter-Petrosyan realized the necessity for concessions

for the sake of the successful development of the state. The change in his rhetoric from extremely nationalist to pragmatically moderate was aimed at finding a solution to the political and economic impasse. However, these ideas were too premature for the Armenian public of the mid-1990s: rising nationalism and the euphoria of recent victory had a big impact on the political processes, while the efforts of the president were perceived as “defeatist” and “collaborationist”. Additionally, while the Armenian elites were ready for concessions, the position of the leadership of the Nagorno-Karabakh separatists played a critical role, resulting in the collapse of the negotiations in 1996 (Ziyadov, 2010, p. 129). In a November 1997 article, Ter-Petrosyan (1997) addressed the Armenian public with an analysis of the international situation and the position of Armenia in the negotiation process; in his opinion, Yerevan would sooner or later have to compromise due to Azerbaijan’s growing oil wealth and changing geopolitical climate.

In February 1998, the social protests and the discontent of some of the governing elites led to his resignation. After resigning, Ter-Petrosyan warned that the “party of peace” was being replaced by the “party of war” (Mkrtchyan, 2007, p. 86). Although the elections of 1998 were more democratic, the new government of Robert Kocharyan, the former president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic assumed a much harsher position in the negotiation process. While Ter-Petrosyan was oriented towards economic development and a balanced policy, the Karabakh-native Kocharyan chose the strategy supported by the Armenian diaspora and local nationalist parties aimed at the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state or achieving its unification with Armenia (Yunusov, 2007, p. 20). The domestic policy and the ideology of the state were also influenced by the nationalist rhetoric of the government; most notably, whereas the nationalist *Dashnaktsutyun* (ARF) party was banned under Ter-Petrosyan, Kocharyan lifted the ban on the activity of ARF and appointed one of its leaders as an advisor (Cornell, 2001, p. 295).

From the outset of the conflict, the developments in Nagorno-Karabakh affected the national self-consciousness and democratization processes, both in Azerbaijan and Armenia. In both countries, power was assumed by political elites that were

representing the interests of groups of society with the most antagonistic attitude toward the other side. In Azerbaijan, since 1993, the government has been controlled by the Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) led by the political elite of Nakhchivanis and the Azerbaijanis from Armenia that had a more direct negative experience of the conflict, due to their historical background of forceful deportations and discrimination by the Armenians (Trupia, 2017, p. 39). As for Armenia, for twenty years (1998-2018) the Armenian leadership was represented by the clan of Karabakh Armenians, as Robert Kocharyan was the President of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in 1994-1997 and Serzh Sargsyan, also born in Stepanakert, NKAO's administrative center, was the Minister of Defense of the unrecognized republic in 1993-1995. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani political elites reflected the ideology and interests of their nations, as they were more consolidated and nationalist in times when the level of nationalism was extremely high in the region. This change paved the way for the rise of authoritarian regimes both in Armenia and Azerbaijan and, to a significant extent, defined the following years of the negotiation process.

Due to the weak traditions of democratic systems of governance both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the two states failed to create proper conditions for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By limiting the activity of non-state actors and the independent media, the states significantly influenced the opinions of their societies through official propaganda and the imposed "image of the other". For example, starting from the first years of negotiations, the local governments were reluctant to share any kind of information about the negotiation process with the public. Robert Kocharyan explained it as an effort not to raise the expectations of the Armenians without being "sure that the conflict will definitely be resolved". This approach can be interpreted as if the people of Armenia had no place in the peace process (Caucasus Edition, 2010). Additionally, although there were efforts for building platforms of communication, both governments abstained from supporting a dialogue between their respective civil societies, although this step could contribute both to the development of nascent though as yet weak civil societies, as well as help find a solution to the conflict in the broader context.

At the same time, the positions of the societies caused by the deep traumas of the recent conflicts had a significant impact on the policies of the governments. In this regard, while mature democracies imply respect for the human rights of every individual, regardless of his/her ethnic origin, both at state and social level, the societies of the two nations were not ready to accept each other as citizens of one state or agree to any kind of concessions. In most cases, civil society representatives held a more hardline position on the issue than that of their governments (Pleydell-Bouverie, 2013, p. 26). Thus, it would be wrong to expect the immediate appeasement between the nations without a deep transformation of their societies. Consequently, while democratic governance and liberal traditions could significantly contribute to the resolution of the conflict, the current ethnic enmity dominant in both societies plays a defining role in the existing intransigence of both states. Finally, the examples of liberal governments of Spain, Canada and the United Kingdom intermittently experiencing several waves of secessionism from their national minorities, show the limits of explanation of these movements in terms of their dependence on the character of regime; instead, in some cases, identity-driven protests might develop in democratic and well established states, too.

Ironically, both the authoritarian regimes of Aliyev in Azerbaijan and Kocharyan/Sargsyan in Armenia were more moderate in their positions compared to the radical positions of their societies and were ready for compromise during different periods of their governance (De Waal, 2003; Musabayov, 2005). For Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev had significant public support and was ready to impose unpopular decisions that would have been a “hard pill to swallow” for the Azerbaijani society. However, this strategy had no chance of success without fundamental changes in public opinion, thus forcing the President to inconsistent actions of proposing generous concessions at the negotiation table “while publicly promising his population total military victory” (Caucasus Edition, 2010). In 1999, a plan for a territorial swap was put forward during the negotiations on the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia through the Lachin corridor, in exchange for some territories of the Meghri district of Armenia that would connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan (figure A.4). Once proposed by US State Department official Paul Goble, this plan implied both

some difficulties and some gains for the two sides of the conflict. While Kocharyan supported the plan with some reservations, Aliyev was faced with the negative reaction of his advisors, who resigned over this issue in October 1999 (De Waal, 2003, p. 264). As a result, the negotiations failed, and the sides went back to the diplomatic impasse. This example reflects the futility of individual decisions and the limits of the political will of leaders as a defining factor in the negotiation process, since without a deep transformation of their societies and the reassessment of the history of bilateral relations, any top-down decisions would cause public discontent and political turmoil.

The unyielding position of the political elites and society in general became obvious during the discussion of the OSCE Minsk Group proposals presented by President Heydar Aliyev to the Azerbaijani parliament in February 2001. In his speech, President Aliyev (2001) criticized the supporters of limiting the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh to cultural autonomy and called upon them to present their proposals. Aliyev's decision to openly discuss the OSCE Minsk Group proposals was driven by public criticism of the confidential character of the negotiations and the government's monopoly on the decision-making process. However, as the debate in the parliament showed, the government's position was justified by the lack of constructive proposals from the representatives of the opposition parties. While many members of parliament expressed their support for the position of the president, the opposition parties, such as The APF and Musavat did not join the debate, interpreting it "as a political maneuver to offset public discontent with the lack of progress in the negotiation process" (Musabayov, 2005, p. 62). General position of the parliament to the leaked proposals showed the necessity for the search of a new format for negotiations.

Later in 2001, the negotiations in Key West led to the rise of discontent with the position of the government among the representatives of civil society. A group of politicians and well-known intellectuals, including former Foreign Minister Tofiq Zulfugarov, the former Head of the Presidential Secretariat Eldar Namazov, the former Head of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) Sabit Bagirov and economist Nazim Imanov presented a new initiative that became known as the "Charter of Four" (Kommersant, 2001). In this initiative, the group outlined an approach they believed the

Azerbaijani government should have pursued in attempting to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, namely, to refuse unilateral concessions and choose a phased approach, in order to guarantee the return of the occupied Azerbaijani territories around Nagorno-Karabakh. The project also implied the possibility of using military force if the negotiations were to fail. This charter gained wide support with the signatures of over twenty parties and hundreds of public figures and representatives of the intelligentsia, and became a kind of “mini-referendum” on the government’s Karabakh policy. Although the document was actively discussed by the Armenian public, its main addressee was the Azerbaijani government: as one of the authors of the initiative, Tofiq Zulfugarov (2005, p. 41) noted, the Charter put forward “the framework for the current and future authorities in the negotiation process”. In the following years, the Azerbaijani government used the “Charter of Four” as a proof of the Azerbaijani public’s intransigence to concessions. However, the Charter had a significant impact on the future of the negotiation process, as the Azerbaijani government defended the position of a phased approach, which was chosen as a precondition for the Basic (Madrid) Principles. Ironically, the principle of a phased approach based on the return of the occupied adjacent districts, before the solution to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, became one of the main reasons for deadlock in the negotiations with the Armenian side, as Yerevan insisted on guarantees for the status of the self-proclaimed republic while keeping the adjacent districts as a bargain tool.

Similarly to the situation in Azerbaijan, there were periods in the modern history of Armenia when the authoritarian regime of Sargsyan chose a more moderate policy regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh issue compared with the country’s other political parties. In 2010 and in 2013, the members of the Armenian National Assembly from the “Heritage” opposition party called for a parliamentary vote on the official recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence. Sargsyan’s coalition abstained from the vote, while the President declared that Armenia would recognize Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence if Azerbaijan threatened to restart hostilities (Asbarez, 2013). With this decision, Armenia’s former government showed its interest in preventing an escalation of the conflict.

These examples show that the traditional understanding of the correlation between democracy and peace is complicated by the intransigent position of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies and has to take into account some specific nuances. For example, none of the opposition parties, whether in Azerbaijan or in Armenia, was defending the ideas of concessions and compromise with the opposite side during the two decades after the ceasefire agreement was signed. Those supporting alternative solutions were perceived as traitors and collaborationists and, thus, to a large extent, were marginalized. In Armenia, the opposition leaders blamed the government for the socio-economic problems and emigration, but very few accepted the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh as the main source of these problems; moreover, most of the parties were frustrated with the willingness of the Sargsyan government to cede land. The only exception in the position of the Armenian National Congress was based on the recognition of the Madrid Principles elaborated by the OSCE Minsk Group, while its leader, the first President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, qualified those who said “not an inch of land” as “the grave-diggers of this nation” (Galstyan, 2017). The popularity of the National Congress has been in continuous decline in recent years, and its unpopular position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has exacerbated the situation (Galstyan, 2017). In contrast, the traditional parties such as *Dashnaktsutyun* and *Zharangutyun* (“Heritage”) have maintained the most unyielding position on the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiation process. In comparison, the party of the authoritarian governments of Kocharyan/Sargsyan has held a relatively moderate stance on this issue.

Similarly, the main opposition parties of Azerbaijan, *Musavat* and the APF, exploit anti-Armenian sentiments in order to attract public attention to the mistakes of the current government. According to a survey by Aslanov and Samedzade (2017, p. 66-67), all reviewed parties unequivocally believe that Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity should be guaranteed, with the oppositional “National Council” claiming that Nagorno-Karabakh should not have any autonomy, while other parties see it as a part of Azerbaijan only in terms of cultural autonomy. On the other hand, the incumbent government of the YAP offers the highest degree of autonomy, claiming that it will be “less than independence, but more than autonomy”. In 2016, during the “Four-day war”, the opposition leaders accepted the ceasefire agreement with skepticism and criticized the defensiveness and

unwillingness of the government to continue the war. In this regard, the opposition parties of Azerbaijan take a more belligerent stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, and there is little possibility that they can potentially bring any contribution to the negotiation process.

The aforementioned examples reflect that the harsh statements by President Aliyev on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue are, in large part, defined by the general dissent within society toward the lack of any tangible achievements from the current format of negotiations. The readiness to restore the territorial integrity “by any means” has been repeatedly stated by the President and other public officials (Aliyev, 2018a), while many voices in Azerbaijani society assert that if the negotiation process does not lead to any progress, Azerbaijan has the political and legal right to restore its control over the occupied territory, as the international community recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts to be a part of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the criticism of the harsh statements by the Azerbaijani president in comparison to the rhetoric of the Armenian leadership can be explained by the Armenian position and interest in maintaining the *status quo* in the conflict. In contrast, the Azerbaijani side is traumatized by their consequences in the Karabakh war and searches for options to restore the territorial integrity of the country (Trupia, 2017, p. 40).

As a result, starting from the 2000s, both the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments chose the strategy of intensive militarization with huge investments and increases in their military budgets. In 2011, the Azerbaijani military budget surpassed the entire budget of Armenia: according to the Stockholm International and Peace Research Institute (2019), Azerbaijan’s military spending totaled almost \$24 billion between 2009 and 2018, while Armenia spent around \$4 billion in the same period. The rise in militaristic rhetoric and preparation for war raises another question about the role of regimes in the understanding of the security of their citizens. According to the democratic peace theory, liberal regimes do not choose war as a method of conflict resolution due to the responsibility of leaderships in front of their societies, as well as public unwillingness for any kind of violence and human losses as the inevitable consequences of war (Doyle, 1986; Owen, 1994, p. 123). Additionally, democratic

governments act according to liberal values with respect to human life and human dignity (Doyle, 1983, p. 227) and prioritize a broad understanding of security as including the security of every individual and citizen (human security) from economic, environmental, political and other types of threats over a traditional, or a narrow understanding of national security as the security of a state from military threat (King and Murray, 2001). At the same time, while democratic peace theory can be applied to the relations of peaceful nations, it fails to explain the cases where antagonism between societies prevails over other aspects of national security.

The Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the onset of the democratization processes in Armenia brought some hope and optimism in Azerbaijan, as Pashinyan was considered to be representing a new political elite that would be ready for better regional engagement and a more rational foreign policy, in order to improve the social-economic situation in Armenia (Shiriyev, 2018, p. 127). Additionally, while Kocharyan and Sargsyan were interested in maintaining the *status quo*, there was an assumption in Azerbaijani society that Pashinyan, as the representative of the liberal wing, was ready for a dialogue, which could finally bring about a long-awaited peace between the nations. The Azerbaijani leadership remained noticeably very silent during the days of the rallies in Armenia; moreover, the hopes for a new impetus to the talks brought about a significant decrease in violations on the Line of Contact. Finally, the success of the revolution in Armenia and the Azerbaijani authorities' positive spin on it led to a growing openness among the Azerbaijan public toward a diplomatic solution (Shiriyev, 2019a).

Indeed, the first year of Pashinyan's tenure revitalized the negotiations, when in January 2019 temporary progress was achieved with an unprecedented statement by the foreign ministers of the two states, wherein the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan would take particular measures to "prepare the populations for peace" (Conciliation Resources, 2019). However, unyielding positions on the main principles left this statement without further development. Azerbaijani expert Rauf Mirgadirov evaluated the statement as "an attempt to create an illusion of breakthrough, as [...] if the sides have not yet agreed to

some elements of a peace agreement, then there is nothing to tell people” (Ekho Kavkaza, 2019).

The primary expectations of the first months of Pashinyan’s tenure failed to bring about positive changes. In August 2019, the statement made by the Armenian Prime Minister in Stepanakert, claiming the unification of Karabakh with Armenia, brought the negotiation process back to a deadlock (Open Caucasus Media, 2019a; De Waal 2019b). Importantly, with this statement, Pashinyan recognized Yerevan’s control over the self-proclaimed republic and the surrounding territories (V. Huseynov, 2019). It is obvious that this rhetoric was motivated by an attempt to assert Pashinyan’s national security credentials and consolidate power after the twenty-year rule of the Karabakh clan, by corresponding with the interests of society and gaining public support. The statement resonates with the warning by Thomas de Waal (2018) on the danger of the assertion of sovereignty of the Armenian leadership over Nagorno-Karabakh and the consequences it can bring, as there will be “nothing left to negotiate about with Baku” and the two sides will be back on the road to war.

The position of the new government confirms the idea that the source of national intransigence to compromise lies not in the government in power, but in the position of society and its dissent toward any kind of concessions. According to Shahin Hajiyev, the chief editor of the “Turan” information agency, who visited Yerevan in 2019 and became the first Azerbaijani journalist to visit Armenia for the last fifteen years, the Azerbaijani perception that the new government in Armenia was ready for positive changes in the negotiation process was wrong, as the core of the problem lies in the radical position of Armenian society that rejects any kind of compromise and claims that any “attempt of concession of any government would lead to its deposition” (Azadlıq Radiosu, 2019). Additionally, Armenian society recognized the source of domestic problems, such as low standards of living, corruption and the violation of human rights in the authoritarian regime of the Republican Party of Armenia led by Sargsyan, while nobody perceived the consequences of the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the country’s regional isolation as a source of its political and economic

challenges. In this regard, Pashinyan represents the interests of the radical majority and, hence, might cause problems to the negotiation process in the future.

From the perspective of the democratization theory, implying the rise in violence and possibility of war during the period of reformation of the political system, the Velvet Revolution might open Pandora's box, as the search for the support of the local clans and efforts to consolidate political power in Armenia caused its leadership to make unconstructive statements that might lead to the escalation of the conflict between the two states. In this regard, the calculations of a real threat and security dilemma play a more important role in the decision-making process of the country instead of its democratic level of development and the promotion of global values. According to de Waal (2019b), the situation is at risk of reverting to aggressive rhetoric, diplomatic impasse and the danger of new violations of the 1994 cease-fire. Finally, Pashinyan's statement led to an open discussion in Azerbaijani society, where a majority of voices claimed the necessity to stop any kind of negotiations due to the officially announced aggression by the Armenian side and the lack of reaction by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs (Voice of America, 2019).

This analysis of the democratic and social factors affecting the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict shows to what extent the position of the states in the negotiation process depend on the perception of the enemy in their societies and the deep roots of enmity in people's memory. The two sides perceive the current situation as a "prisoner's dilemma", where while one side could take the first step, there is no political will for such efforts (Çelikpala, interview). At the same time, while societies remain belligerent and not eager to compromise, the leadership does not possess a broad space for negotiations. Any concession on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue might be interpreted as an act of betrayal and potentially political suicide for the executors of the negotiation plan. While some authors note the importance of the political will of the local leaders in conflict resolution, the factor of individual decisions should not be overestimated, as they cannot bring peace without the readiness of the local societies, who are weary of the conditions of war and the consequences caused by it, as well as the reevaluation of

the common past and the prospects for future coexistence in the region (Caspersen, 2017, p. 181; Zourabian, 2006).

4.3.2 The failed efforts of building economic relations

While the theories of security communities and neofunctionalism interpret the economy as a binding factor in the process of rapprochement between hostile nations, it has failed to bring any progress in the Armenian-Azerbaijani interethnic conflict. Since the outset of the conflict, there have been efforts to use the potential of the complementarity of the local economies to attract the interests of Armenia. The first measures to use economic incentives for the appeasement of the local population of Nagorno-Karabakh were taken by the Soviet government in 1988. Despite an economic crisis and the general chaos during the last years of the Soviet Union, Moscow was ready to assign a budget that was expected to revitalize the region's economy and moderate the local protests; however, by then, the level of nationalism was too strong to revert the process (Shafiyev, 2007b, p. 62). The development of the conflict forced the Soviet Azerbaijani leadership to impose energy and transportation embargoes on Armenia in 1989 (Tchantouridze, 1997, p. 86). In the period since Azerbaijan and Armenia gained their independence, Azerbaijani officials were trying to use oil and gas resources as a cooperation tool to solve the conflict. In 1993, the head of SOCAR Sabit Baghirov, proposed cooperation in the energy sector and investments into the Armenian economy if Armenia were to recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The Armenian government rejected this offer, claiming that it "would not sell Nagorno-Karabakh for oil" (Aliyeva, 2011, p. 201).

In the years that followed, Western diplomats submitted the so-called "peace pipeline" project. According to the 1995 American plan of reconciliation, a pipeline connecting the Azerbaijani oilfields with Turkish ports was planned to pass through the shortest route on Armenian territory; in exchange for revenues from the transit of oil, Baku would have secured the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territories, while "Azerbaijan's dependence on Armenian goodwill would have allowed Yerevan to hold Baku to its promises of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh" (Croissant, 1998, p.

132). Despite the economic advantages of the Armenian pipeline route, Baku put agreement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a precondition to its implementation, while pragmatic foreign investors were reluctant to invest in the risky project without any constant guarantees regarding the security of the pipeline. In addition, Baku understood the necessity to pass through the Armenian territory with Russian-based military forces, thus being able to lead an independent, Western-oriented foreign policy (Karagiannis, 2002, p. 45). As a result, the decision on the construction of an energy pipeline of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipelines passing through Georgian territory was highly politicized, both because of the hostile relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the involvement of Russia as the third remote actor in the region. In subsequent years, when Azerbaijan became one of the major investors in the regional energy projects, it also refused the involvement of Armenia in both the “Nabucco” and Southern Gas Corridor projects. For Azerbaijan, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stood as the main prerequisite to unfreeze relations in the energy sector. In other words, as Brenda Shaffer (2014) puts it, “energy trade reflects existing peaceful relations; it does not create them”. On the other hand, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 reflected the vulnerability of the geography of the BTC/BTE pipelines and once again brought into the limelight the diversification of energy corridors from Azerbaijan to Europe.

Another economic cooperation initiative was propounded by a group of Azerbaijani economists in the first years after the war, seeking the creation of a free economic zone for the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan (Pashayeva, 2012). As the talks did not progress, the idea of economic advantages and mutually profitable cooperation as a tool of conflict resolution was eventually forgotten. In the following years, Baku refused to cooperate when Armenia suggested exchanging energy with the neighboring Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan. These examples show that, at different stages of the conflict, both nations turned down pragmatic and economically profitable offers due to their inflexible positions on the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. To some extent, the two states’ intransigent positions in the conflict won over pragmatism in their economic choices. These examples demonstrate that despite the advantages of

cooperation, economic activity cannot contribute without the resolution of ethnic conflicts (German, interview).

This failure was caused by the specifics of the economic development of the two states, as both have alternative sources of income that lessens the necessity to compromise on economic cooperation. Azerbaijan does not suffer from the closed border with Armenia due to its advantageous export of oil and gas and the usage of Georgian territory as the main transport route for its energy resources, while Armenia gets support from the donations from the Armenian diaspora. Indeed, the country survived, to a large extent, due to the support from different diaspora groups in the West, as well as high-level officials, businessmen and guest workers of Armenian origin living in Russia. Still, as experts note, although the Armenian diaspora injected significant financial resources into the local economy, the capital was transferred in the form of private remittances rather than economic investments. As a result, it led to the high dependence of the local economy on external financing instead of establishing domestic basis for further economic development (Compass Center, 2017). Clearly, the diaspora remittances played a significant role in the economic security of Armenia, and defined its intransigent position at the negotiation table. This shows that while both economies have alternative sources of revenue in order to overcome the negative consequences of economic blockade, the top-down character of the revenue dissemination impedes the healthy development of the local economies.

However, apart from at state level, economic cooperation had a chance of influencing and transforming the negative attitude of the nations in their interactions on neutral territory, namely in Georgia. The market of Sadakhlo, that used to function on the border with Azerbaijan and Armenia, was a unique case of cooperation by thousands of Armenian and Azerbaijani farmers and villagers (International Alert, 2004). The market where thousands of people of the two hostile nations were buying and selling goods to each other was functioning despite the official propaganda and the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The activity of the market could be explained due to the pragmatic economic interests and mutual advantages of trading between farmers representing the poorest segment of the population of both countries. Unfortunately, this

market, together with the market in Ergneti in South Ossetia, was closed during the time of the Saakashvili government as a result of his policy of combatting smuggling.

Still, in the circumstances where Armenian and Azerbaijani businesspeople are working well together in Russia and Georgia, there is a possibility in greater engagement of the business community that could contribute to the peace process as well (Ohanyan, 2015, p. 159). In this regard, the reopening of the borders and initiatives such as that of Sadakhlo market in Georgia could both develop communication and trust between the two nations, as well as contribute to the transformation of their economies, with the involvement of ordinary citizens, as well as agricultural and small business initiatives. In the opinion of many experts, economic cooperation can be one of the main platforms for the reconstruction of trust and restoration of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Alizade, Gamaghelyan, Mansurov, Vanyan, interviews). The opening of borders and common transport infrastructure projects could potentially restore economic and cultural ties in the region (Vanyan, interview). At the same time, integration projects initiated by international organizations, such as the EU or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could help in the establishment of economic links, trade and cooperation in the region: here transactions could establish a mutual interest in political and economic gains and create alternative visions of the neighbors (Mansurov, interview). However, the current domestic and international situation shows that economic cooperation can succeed only after the resolution of the conflict with the guaranteed implementation of territorial integrity and the return of IDPs (Çelikpala, interview). In the unstable situation of the existing *status quo* and the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh all the measures of economic cooperation would bring temporary progress without contributing to the final resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

4.3.3 The lack of communication and its impact on the negotiation process

In the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the lack of communication between the nations and the very weak involvement of civil society substantially impeded the negotiation process. Ironically, in the first years after the explosion of the conflict in 1988, there

were more efforts to build a dialogue process in comparison to the present days. The most active period of communication between the nations took place during the Soviet presence in the region in 1988-1991 and included the exchange of ideas and public appeals from both parties inviting both sides to consider appeasement. The initiatives of a dialogue which continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union, even though the period of the first years of independence was characterized with the most atrocious memories of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, defined the ensuing disappointments in the negotiation process and led to the drastic decrease in the public initiatives of building a dialogue with the other side. After a series of terrorist attacks in 1990-1994, including the bombing of a Moscow-Baku passenger train in 1991 and the Baku underground in 1994, allegedly organized by the Armenian intelligence and Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), Azerbaijan denied the entrance of Armenian citizens to the country (Gunn, 2018).

On the other hand, despite the consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War on the political, economic and social life of both countries, the 2000s were characterized by a general revival of the local media, and included many positive attempts at communication. One of the most marked examples was the 1998-2003 TV-bridge of “*Perekrestok*” (“Crossroads”) organized by the joint efforts of Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian journalists, which “although held in the mode of ideological wrestling” created the opportunity for the Azerbaijani and Armenian public to learn about the lives of their neighbors (Yerevan Press Club 2019, p. 11). The program was dedicated to the discussion of common problems and similarities in the local societies with their post-Soviet contexts, and was received with interest for several reasons. First, it was the desire of the local states (together with Georgia) to fulfill certain obligations towards their membership in the Council of Europe. Additionally, with the abolition of censorship, coupled with economic growth, the independent media business began to develop (Yerevan Press Club 2019, p. 11). As a result, the newly gained freedom of expression together with changes in the international arena led to new opportunities for information exchange.

In the early 2000s, new efforts in public diplomacy were implemented, with the

representatives of the intelligentsia of both nations visiting Yerevan, Baku and the occupied territories, but this initiative had no significant effect on the negotiation process in general, and the attitude of the local societies in particular. Starting from the mid-2000s, the deadlock in the negotiation process led to a decline in public efforts at outreach and communication as well (Yerevan Press Club, 2019). Still, the development of technologies and social media gave a new impetus to the independent communication between the societies. While it brought some hope, with the establishment of the first online Armenian-Azerbaijani platforms, it also depicted a high level of negativity inside both societies, with social media becoming a medium full of hate speech and mutual accusations. As in real life, the representatives of the civil societies and pacifist groups, as well as ordinary individuals representing alternative perspectives were marginalized online. The situation was exacerbated by the “Four-day war” of 2016, when the search for mediation and trust building reached its lowest ebb in Armenia. In contrast, in Azerbaijan, the war brought about a new wave of nationalism, with many of the famous activists calling for the continuation of military operations.

The current situation shows that the policy of the governments, the lack of alternative opinion among opposition and intelligentsia representatives, the weakness of the traditions of civil society, the negative position of the media, as well as a general deep-rooted public distrust, contribute to the obstacles to the immediate transformation of local societies, which makes one wonder about their preparedness for peace in the future. On the one hand, for the last two decades, the regimes in Armenia and Azerbaijan were not eager to compromise and, as a result, they blocked any efforts by civil society to search for alternative sources of peace building. In this regard, the weakness of the civil society with the lack of traditions of democracy and the legacy of the Soviet system played a damaging role in this process (Ohanyan, 2015, p. 154). While the activity of civil society and a free media is limited in both countries, the societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan lack a platform for dialogue that could contribute to a change in attitude and the development of mutual trust.

Today, both countries instigate mutual hatred by supporting the image of the enemy in the official statements, media and education systems. The joint work of the Yerevan

Press Club and the “Yeni Nesil” Journalists’ Union of Azerbaijan dedicated to the analysis of language used in local media, has shown a variety of clichés, stereotypes and inaccurate information that play a significant role in the preservation of this distorted image (Yerevan Press Club, 2008-2013). In both states, the official rhetoric is defined by the negative image of the enemy, an idealized image of self and a refusal to accept the crimes committed in the past, together with a lack of discussion on the advantages of peace. It is evident that distrust in the issues regarding Nagorno-Karabakh defines the character of relations not only between the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, but also within each one of them. In this regard, any kind of initiatives alternative to the official position of the government, such as joint peace-making statements of public figures “often lead to discrediting their initiators in the eyes of the public, or at best are ignored by the latter” (Yerevan Press Club, 2013). As a result, these initiatives remain little known to the public, while little interest and public support for this kind of activity limits the initiatives that could significantly contribute to the peace process.

In 2019 for the first time in decades, mutual trips for journalists were organized, in order to provide them access to the opinions of ordinary people. The first visit in fifteen years of Azerbaijani journalist Shahin Hajiyeu to Yerevan in February 2019 provided a new impetus to the revival of mutual interest in informal communication. In the following months, the exchange of Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists in November 2019 contributed to this new vision of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and the understanding of the necessity for a dialogue (Kucera, 2019). On the other hand, the conclusions reached by the journalists showed that as long as they reflect the unyielding positions of both societies these attempts at communication will not lead to a dialogue and will fail to bring about change (Open Caucasus Media, 2019b). In this regard, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach depending, to a large extent, on the steps to be committed by the government – otherwise these initiatives will be forgotten again for the indefinite future, as it happened in the 2000s.

While each of the conflicting parties used avoidance strategies to buy time, this policy failed to provide any positive results, increasing militarization and polarization between the societies (Huseynov, 2010, p. 11). The situation has deteriorated, with the isolation

of the two societies, as the communities do not have the chance to understand the vision and perception of each other through daily communication; in this regard, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations lag far behind the situations following the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, where despite the large influx of Georgian refugees in the early 1990s and after the August 2008 war, the two communities continue to live side by side. While collective memory, national myths and historical narratives shape national identities (German, interview), “mistrust, one-sided accusations of guilt, and an equally one-sided adoption of the role of the victim” impede the process of finding a resolution to the conflict to this day (Dehdashti-Rasmussen, 2007, p. 192). According to Aliyeva (interview), while Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is rather a political conflict, still it continues to manipulate the identity issues. As a result, the most significant barrier to peace lies in the constructed image of the “other” as a source of threat for both nations. Different discourse sites and institutions including the mass media, education, art and religious institutions continue to propagate clichéd narratives. In contrast, neither side is engaged in the understanding and discussion of its role in the dynamics of the conflict (Gahramanova, 2010, p. 150).

In these conditions, there is no immediate solution for the reconstruction of trust between the nations (Mansurov, interview). The societies should learn to listen to each other, and they need to be “healed” and reject the mythical illusions regarding the exclusivity of one nation and its mission of being the “chosen” one (Alizade, interview). Measures aimed at the transformation of attitudes such as cultural interactions and the exchange of opinions should be reestablished to reopen dialogue (Özkan, 2008, p. 594). While the atrocities and past crimes of the conflict had deep implications for the national identities of both sides, the reevaluation of history, mutual apologies, the opening of archives and the punishment of the perpetrators of these crimes can be a big step forward in the restoration of trust between peoples (Gamaghelyan, interview). The recognition of the historical presence and the protection of the cultural legacy of the evicted nations is another important factor that can contribute to the development of a positive image in the eyes of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The efforts to build bridges such as communications between journalists and economic cooperation cannot bring about positive results without the comprehensive involvement of the societies.

The search for peace and compromise imply that the people of the region will join the discussion and work on the implementation of a settlement. This condition is necessary and needs to provide the involvement of the populations; otherwise peace will remain elusive (Caucasus Edition, 2010). This is why the work needs to be done in a comprehensive way and focus on the construction of bridges and reconstruction of trust between nations (Ohanyan, 2015; Wheeler, 2018, p. 121-122). Nevertheless, the public dialogue alone will bring little to the transformation of the local societies, as the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will continue putting under threat the security at the front line and will undermine the stability and effectiveness of such initiatives. In this regard, the political will and decision on the resolution of the conflict should go in parallel with the gradual restoration of trust and dialogue between the nations in order to guarantee the protection of the interests of both sides within the framework of international law.

4.4 Azerbaijani-Georgian Relations

The Azerbaijani-Georgian relations reflect the only successful example of cooperation in the South Caucasus. Starting from the mid-1990s, the trilateral relations between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey developed into integration in the energy and transport sectors. At the basis of this cooperation stands a natural economic complementarity of the three states where each possesses a resource that the other two lack on their own. Azerbaijan is rich in energy resources but lacks an advantageous geographical location; thus, naturally it is in search of a profitable transport route to world markets; in its turn, Georgia provides a safe transport corridor, while Turkey is connected to global markets and possesses strong relations with international donor countries and financial institutions (Petersen, 2012, p. 10-11). The launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and the Trans-Anatolian (TANAP) pipelines, as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, played a significant role in the political and economic development of the states involved (figure A.3). At the same time, although Azerbaijan and Georgia consider each other as strategic allies and close economic partners, some issues such as the claims to the David Gareji monastery, the unresolved status of the interstate border, as well as the rights of Azerbaijani and Georgian ethnic minorities

might erode the relations between the two states and lead to unwanted consequences. In addition, the achievements of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations show that, despite many positive aspects of cooperation, the joint projects have had an element of top-down rather than a bottom-up cooperation limited to the energy and transport sectors, with a very narrow interconnection between the local societies. The lack of common values, social and cultural differences and the different international orientations of the two states impeded the intensification of regional integration. This section will analyze the role of identities and other domestic factors in the failure of the two states to build integration at a deep level with the involvement of broad parts of society.

Since their first years of independence, Azerbaijan and Georgia have enjoyed friendly relations based on common interests that were triggered by the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The most significant issue for Tbilisi and Baku was the recognition of their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity by neighboring states (Çelikpala and Veliyev, 2015, p. 4). While both countries faced the secessionist wars of their Abkhaz, Ossetian and Armenian minorities, their weak economies and the search for international partners pushed them to cooperate and use their comparative advantages in order to restore their political and economic strength. The initiation of a series of projects of international importance through the energy potential of Azerbaijan as the major driver for the future cooperation, together with transport and security projects, were chosen as the main directions of bilateral collaboration.

To a large extent, the core of this cooperation lies in the pragmatic policies and personal friendship of presidents Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev (Kakachia, interview). The two former Soviet leaders of their respective countries were assigned to positions in the Kremlin in the 1980s and came back to Tbilisi and Baku after losing their offices there - the first for being too liberal and the second for being too conservative (Libaridian, 2012, p. 246). The Shevardnadze-Aliyev tandem was the most successful in the whole post-Soviet history of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations, and was mainly the result of their common *nomenklatura* background and similar vision on the future role of the region that formed the basis of bilateral cooperation. The Rose Revolution of 2003 did not affect the level of Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation; it was

during the tenure of presidents Mikheil Saakashvili and Ilham Aliyev that the energy pipelines, initiated by their predecessors in the 1990s, were constructed and, as a result, succeeded in changing the geopolitical situation in the whole region. The projects, vitally important for both countries, of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, not only contributed to the economic prosperity of Georgia and Azerbaijan, but also created the conditions for the interdependency of the local economies that served as a guarantee of security and decreased bilateral tensions over a series of issues. The projects “advanced their sense of common destiny” and helped build networks and mechanisms for a peaceful and rapid resolution of occasional disagreements (Cornell, Tsereteli and Socor, 2005, p. 24).

In addition to the factor of personal friendship between the presidents, the commonality of foreign policy goals and the pragmatism of their choices played an important role in the formation of the benevolent character of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations starting from the first years of independence. As both Azerbaijan and Georgia suffered from the violation of their territorial integrity, both were in need of international recognition as well as economic and military support. Russia’s ambiguous role in the ethnic conflicts of Georgia and Azerbaijan, its open support for the separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its military assistance to Armenia, led to the balancing of the foreign policy of the two states (Abushov, 2010; Sonnleitner, 2016). While the international aspect of this choice will be discussed in the next chapter, it is important to mention here that at the basis of this policy lay the concept of territorial integrity as the basic element of the identities of the two South Caucasian nations. The factor of mutual support in the international arena was more than just a pragmatic choice by the two leaders: the concept of “hierarchy” in identity elements explains this choice from the perspective of the priority of territorial integrity and resolution of the ethnic conflicts over other issues of the foreign policy of the two states (Garibov, 2019). As a result, Muslim Azerbaijan and Christian Georgia succeeded in better cooperation in comparison to other neighbors of the region with similar creeds, such as Armenia (in the context of Armenian-Georgian relations) and Iran (in the context of Azerbaijani-Iranian relations).

It is hard to overestimate the political and economic significance of the energy pipelines for the two states. The pipelines strengthened both Baku's and Tbilisi's independence; they also strengthened a regional affiliation with the Euro-Atlantic space and consolidated the Baku-Tbilisi-Ankara axis (Shiriyev, 2013, p. 159). Geographical interdependence and the geopolitical aspirations of each of the states was put at the core of these projects: while Azerbaijan was looking for a route to deliver its energy resources to Western markets, Georgia wanted to build a transport hub and become a natural bridge between East and West, while Turkey formulated its policy around the idea of becoming an energy hub in the region (German, interview). The projects paved the way for Western investments and stimulated the development of other economic sectors of the two states. Over time, Azerbaijan became one of the top investors in the Georgian economy leading to the intensification of mutual cooperation. Moreover, the oil and gas pipelines provided Georgia with the requisite energy security during its evolving confrontation with Moscow. The gas embargo by the Russian government on Georgia in 2005 and the August War of 2008 inflicted significant damage to the Georgian economy; during that period, Azerbaijani gas rescued the country from "freezing", while leaving around 60% of its own population without heating (1TV Georgia, 2019). Today, the fact that Georgia is more dependent on Azerbaijan rather than Russia in terms of energy resources frees Tbilisi's international policy choices (Mansurov, interview). The energy pipelines and the newly built Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad led to the tight interconnection of the two economies and increased their mutual interest in strengthening Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation (Alizade, interview). Indeed, there was a need for these projects both in Azerbaijan and Georgia for security reasons in order to reduce other factors, such as Russian energy and economic leverage, that were traditionally perceived as a source of threats (Çelikpala, interview).

Today, the bilateral cooperation between the two states can be defined as a strategic partnership of two nations in a difficult and unstable neighborhood surrounded with regional tensions and conflicts (Tsereteli, 2013, p. 50). According to the latest version of the National Security Concept of Georgia (2012, p. 18), "Georgia's relationship with Azerbaijan has developed into a strategic partnership", while joint energy, transport, and communications projects play a significant role in the stability and the well-being of

both nations. Similarly, Azerbaijan's National Security Concept (2007, p. 13) stresses the importance of the promotion of comprehensive partnership with Georgia, as the implementation of regional energy and transportation projects will continue developing bilateral strategic cooperation.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations face some unresolved issues that require appropriate management, such as the rights of a large ethnic minority of Azerbaijanis in Georgia and a comparatively smaller Georgian population in Azerbaijan, as well as the demarcation of the border between the two states with special attention to the cultural legacy of Georgia, namely the David Gareji complex, with some of its monasteries located on Azerbaijani territory (Tsereteli, 2013, p. 50). According to an informal agreement of the 1990s, tourists and pilgrims are allowed to freely visit the site from Georgia. Although about one third of the Azerbaijani-Georgian border is not officially demarcated, this never was a priority for either Baku or Tbilisi, as both states have been dealing with separatist conflicts and preferred to refrain from the emergence of another potential clash with their neighbor. Definitively, the warm relations between the political leaders of Georgia and Azerbaijan have also contributed to minimizing the urgency of its resolution (Cornell, 2019).

Nevertheless, while the Georgians see David Gareji as an inseparable symbol of Georgia's Christian culture, some take a radical position on this issue and believe that the monastery should belong to Georgia by rights. On the other hand, according to Azerbaijani officials, "cultural, religious and other, non-legally binding documents cannot serve as a basis for delimiting borders" (Lomsadze, 2019b). Although the Saakashvili government elaborated a project of border demarcation, the two sides still failed to reach an agreement on this issue. In April 2019, a statement by Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili calling for progress in the border delimitation talks and the necessity of swift demarcation of the area ignited widespread discontent in Azerbaijan and raised tensions between Baku and Tbilisi (Lomsadze, 2019a). The Azerbaijani border was closed for several days and this caused an immediate reaction among Georgian nationalists. The visit of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia to Baku in October 2019 reduced tensions, however the David Gareji issue and the demarcation of

the border still are awaiting their final resolution. Independently of the regime in power, neither Azerbaijan nor Georgia can afford any deterioration of their bilateral relations. According to Miro Popkhadze (2019), a serious breakup with Azerbaijani could have disastrous political and economic consequences for Georgia, due to the unresolved issue of the frozen conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and a fragile domestic political climate. Similarly, for Azerbaijan, sustaining cooperation and friendly relations with Georgia is crucial due to its access route to Turkey, the Black Sea and Europe.

The David Gareji crisis demonstrated the existing risks in the relations between the two societies of Azerbaijan and Georgia and the dependence for future relations on the personal friendship between the officials at the top level. Although the crisis could be defused after the involvement of the leaders of the two states, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations remain very fragile and vulnerable to the provocations of nationalists and pseudo-patriots (Japaridze, Mamradze, interviews). According to Svante Cornell (2019), the tension between Baku and Tbilisi over David Gareji did not endanger the strategic relationship between the two states, however it showed the vulnerability of this cooperation “to populist forces and external manipulation”. Indeed, the crisis revealed the threat of a growing level of populism, religious tensions and a tendency to focus on differences rather than similarities between the two countries (Çelikpala, interview). The crisis also showed the dominance of the irrational interpretation of national interests over common rational economic interests (Pashayeva, interview). While politicians are actively exploiting nationalist feelings in their identity politics (Aliyeva, interview), a change in the national rhetoric and the promotion of wide-ranging economic cooperation could prevent the emergence of such clashes in the future.

Finally, it is important to note that for these two nations facing war and separatist movements on their territories, the issue of territorial integrity should be treated very delicately, as any concession in this topic is perceived as a matter of national betrayal in both societies. Different models applied around the world, such as the models of joint heritage, can serve as a basis for the solution to the problem, but they should be applied when the relations between the two states improve and when the sensitive topic of

territorial integrity loses its acuteness in Azerbaijani society, which is directly related to the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Kakachia, interview).

The issue of national minorities is another factor that requires cautious steps by both governments, in order to prevent the rise in tensions. The Azerbaijanis form the biggest national minority in Georgia, comprising some 6% of the total population. Unlike many other ethnic communities, they have succeeded in preserving their ethnic identity and have not been touched by ethnic or linguistic assimilation. A large part of the community, as well as the historically restricted geographical area of its settlement, which played an important role have contributed to this context. Today, the local Azerbaijanis are living tightly together in the region of Kvemo-Kartli, including the administrative districts of Bolnisi, Marneuli and Gardabani. The reclusiveness of the group might cause a potential problem, as most of the Azerbaijanis from the region do not speak Georgian, and the usage of Russian as a language of communication is also gradually decreasing. The Azerbaijani population enjoys cultural and religious freedom and continues to be the main supplier of agricultural products for Tbilisi (Tsereteli 2013, p. 54). Due to the weak knowledge of Georgian among the population of the aforementioned districts, the region suffers from a relatively high level of unemployment; nevertheless, despite the economic and social problems of the region, the local population has never wavered in its commitment and loyalty to the Georgian state. Moreover, the Azerbaijani government contributed to keeping the Azerbaijani population in Georgia loyal to the government, starting with Heydar Aliyev's support of Shevardnadze (Cornell, 2002, p. 212). This strategy has also continued under Ilham Aliyev's presidency.

Compared to the sizable Azerbaijani community in Georgia of around 230,000 (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2014), the Georgian population of Azerbaijan is relatively small (numbering about 10,000, or 0.1% of the entire population of Azerbaijan). Comparably to the situation of the Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, the Georgian minority of Azerbaijan lives in a close-packed situation in the districts of Gakh, Zagatala and Balaken; it has access to education in its native language, yet due to the weak knowledge of Azerbaijani, unemployment is high within the community.

However, to date neither the status of the Azerbaijani minority of Georgia, nor the status of the Georgian minority of Azerbaijan has had any negative effect on bilateral relations.

Finally, despite the significance of energy projects, the role of economic interdependence between the states is gradually decreasing. Although a substantial range of projects and cooperation was implemented in the energy and transport sectors between Azerbaijan and Georgia, their economies remain disintegrated. To a large extent, the cooperation between the countries is defined by energy and transport priorities without being transformed into a comprehensive integrative project. On the one hand, Azerbaijan is the largest foreign direct investor in the Georgian economy; in 2018, 19% of foreign investments in Georgia came from Azerbaijan (Kazimbeyli, 2019). Azerbaijani economic involvement can partially be explained by its geopolitical interests, as the economic prosperity and national security of Georgia are crucial for the protection of Azerbaijan's energy and transport projects. In 2013, Azerbaijan's Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev announced that, at the time, about seven thousand jobs had been created in Georgia by Azerbaijani companies and entrepreneurs, while 150 Georgian companies were operating in Azerbaijan (Jafarova, 2013). Most of the jobs mentioned by the minister were related to the activities of SOCAR and other state companies, while there was no interconnection and no set of regulations to stimulate the economic cooperation between the two nations at the non-state level. As for the existing cooperation, it is rather one-sided, with an emphasis on the energy pipelines and limited joint enterprises. The failure of integration, apart from the energy and transport sectors of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, contradicts the traditional neo-functional concept of "spillover", according to which integration in one regulatory sphere would stimulate integration in other related spheres. Petersen (2012, p. 7) explains the reasons for this failure as "in the character of the projects as the two sectors appeared to be treated autonomously and separately from other forms of policymaking, which blunted the broader consequences of their emerging integrative tendencies".

The Azerbaijani-Georgian relations signify an example of mutually advantageous cooperation based on common interests and pragmatic calculation. At the same time,

there is a significant influence of the consequences of conflicts and geographical complementarity in the strategic choices of the two states. Although Azerbaijan and Georgia are not very close culturally, identity does not create tensions as in the case of the Azerbaijani-Armenian ethnic conflict; moreover, the element of territory and the aspiration of the two nations regarding the recognition of their territorial integrity has played a defining role in their close cooperation since the first years of independence. However, there were other factors, such as the role of personalities, their geographical location and the favorable international situation that had their impact on bilateral relations both at the beginning of cooperation in the 1990s and since then. While the international aspect of this issue, including the perception of foreign threats and lessons learned from the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 will be discussed in the next chapter, it is important to mention that western interest in the region and the relative weakness of Russia in the 1990s, contributed to the launch of strategically important energy projects that defined the architecture of relations between Baku and Tbilisi. In the ensuing years, changes in the international arena and Russia's growing influence in the region have led to the transformation of political views and re-orientations by the local states.

Today, in order to prevent future provocations and strengthen the current level of cooperation, the involvement of grassroots initiatives as a basis for a future bottom-up integration needs to be guaranteed. For the development of inter-social communication and the strengthening of civil societies, substantial reforms are required. These reforms should be held in conditions of a gradual and linear democratization process, in order to prevent any escalation of potential conflicts between the two sides. In this regard, the status and protection of national minorities is an important factor defining bilateral relations that can be solved with the gradual transformation of the local political systems. Additionally, social projects and the maintenance of communication between the societies can build a foundation for real integration that would not be limited to state-controlled energy and transport projects, but would involve the interests of ordinary people and help in the construction of a common identity between the two nations.

4.5 Armenian-Georgian Relations

Unlike Azerbaijani-Georgian relations that have succeeded in achieving some degree of economic integration in the energy and transport fields, the relations between Armenia and Georgia have never reached full-scale or even partial integration, mostly due to the different choices of the two countries in terms of their political and economic relations with third actors (Minasyan, 2015, p. 4). These demonstrate one of the most obvious paradoxes in regional political preferences: despite strong cultural and social ties, these two Christian nations in the region have failed to develop the level of interaction that was achieved between Georgia and a culturally more distant Muslim Azerbaijan. Instead, the choices of the allies have been based on their common positions regarding international conflicts and the interests of the two states.

As a result of different political trajectories and different national perceptions of foreign threats (Çelikpala, Japaridze, interviews), these two states of the South Caucasus have been searching for different international protectors and trade partners since gaining independence in the early 1990s. In this regard, the two different vectors of development chosen by Yerevan and Tbilisi were defined by their choice of international partners, rather than domestic factors such as the level of democratic development or cultural differences between the nations. Indeed, the pro-western policy of the former Soviet *apparatchik* Shevardnadze and the pro-Russian orientation of Armenian democrat Ter-Petrosyan were not influenced by the values chosen by their domestic regimes, but were the result of a pragmatic calculation determined by the outcomes of the conflicts their countries were involved in.

The interethnic conflicts of the early 1990s not only defined the international orientation and choice of international “protectors” of the two nations; they also directly affected their interstate relations in a series of issues. One is the different position of the two states regarding the settlement of regional ethnic conflicts: Georgia advocates the principle of territorial integrity with regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Armenia supports the principle of self-determination with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, Armenia abstained from recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and

South Ossetia in 2008, despite the pro-Russian position of its government, while Georgia has held a predominantly neutral position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Minasyan, 2013, p. 2).

The economic consequences of the conflict affected the relations between the two states, due to the closure of the borders imposed by Ankara and Baku on Armenia in 1993. The blockade had a substantial influence on the region's infrastructure projects: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines were constructed through the most secure territory, while the "peace pipeline" project once suggested by the Azerbaijani and western officials remained stillborn. As a result, officially Yerevan was isolated from the regional projects while its economy became extremely dependent on Russia and Iran, particularly in terms of oil and gas imports. Also, after the closure of the Turkish and Azerbaijani borders, the existing Tbilisi-Gyumri-Kars railway was closed and the new railway of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars intensified Armenia's isolation.

Some experts claim that the blockade brought political and economic advantages to Georgia as the only possible transfer route for Azerbaijani hydrocarbons; in this regard, the Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish reconciliation processes, if they were to take place, could have brought a genuine change to the situation in the region and made Georgia "a potential loser from this development" (Iskandaryan and Minasyan, 2011, p. 97). However, this opinion is only partially true, as although Georgia's exclusive location brought Azerbaijani investments to the Georgian economy, Armenian isolation cannot serve Georgian interests over a long-term perspective, as it increases Armenia's dependence on Russia; in contrast, the reopening of the borders could "reduce Russian military and political presence in the entire South Caucasus, which would be in Georgia's interests too" (Iskandaryan and Minasyan, 2011, p. 97).

Additionally, despite the lack of any open conflict between the two states, they have very limited economic cooperation. The membership of the two states in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other similarities in the development of the local economies have hardly contributed to the intensification of economic exchanges between them. The economic relations between any two states are subject, to a large

extent, by the international orientation of the local states, as the local economies are not big and strong enough for regional integration and require the financial support of more powerful states (Mansurov, interview). On the other hand, as Azerbaijan is one of the leading investors in the Georgian economy, any rapprochement between Georgia and Armenia or efforts to build common integration projects would affect the Azerbaijani position in Georgia's investment climate. At the same time, while Azerbaijan's GDP comprises 61% of the whole GDP of the South Caucasus (World Bank, 2018), the economic cooperation of Armenia and Georgia would not be profitable without the involvement of the Azerbaijani side. There are not many joint economic projects between the two countries, with the exception of the import of electricity from Armenia to Georgia and the transit of Armenian cargo through Georgian ports (Nalbandov, 2013, p.183). Low levels of economic activity and the general weakness of the local economies, characterized by unsolved problems of corruption, small markets and a similarity in export productions, leave no motivation for the states to integrate economically; instead, both Armenia and Georgia are trying to find their place in the European and Russian markets (Iskandaryan, Mamradze interviews). Meanwhile, the consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War, in terms of the existing closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey, lead to the extreme dependence of Armenia on the Georgian territory in its search for access to global markets and most importantly, to Russia and the West.

The dependence of the Armenian economy on Georgia raises the issue of the geostrategic interests of Yerevan in its relations with the Armenian minority of Georgia in Javakheti. The existing blockade of Armenia's eastern and western borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey is one of the main reasons why Armenia maintains a cautious position regarding the ethnic minority of 200,000 Armenians living in the Samtskhe-Javakheti district of Georgia. Historically, this territory once became the reason for a military conflict between the two nations in 1918. Today, although the issue of Samtskhe-Javakheti is not widely discussed in the literature, it has a major importance for Georgia's security and the future of Armenian-Georgian relations, due to the potential of transforming into a larger conflict, as the events of the late 1980s-early 1990s showed. Much like the situation in other national regions during the years of

glasnost, the rise in national movements among the Armenian population of Javakheti led to the creation of *Javakhk*, an organization aimed at the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage and the achievement of the status of autonomy for Javakheti or unification with Armenia (Cornell, 2002, p. 201).

In 1991, after the decision of President Gamsakhurdia to appoint prefects as the heads of Georgian districts, the Armenian community demanded that the prefect should be an ethnic Armenian and rejected the appointed head of district. As a result, Javakheti chose the self-proclaimed Council of Representatives, with the ruling body composed of seven people; in November 1991, the council was self-dissolved after an appropriate candidate was sent from Tbilisi. Although the council raised the issue of declaring independence, it failed to reach a majority vote. According to Cornell (2002, p. 204), while the idea of the unification of Javakheti with Armenia was only one step below the idea of unification with Karabakh on the schedule of *reconquista* of the Armenian nationalists, the very involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh caused Armenian moderation in Javakheti.

An analysis of the demographic and geographical specifics of the Javakheti district shows striking similarities with the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, that could explode into another ethnic conflict on the territory of Georgia. Moreover, on some issues the Javakhetians had more reasons to secede. At the beginning of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenians comprised 75% of the total population of the autonomous region; in comparison, the ratio of Armenians living in Javakheti in 1989 was more than 91%. According to the USSR population census of 1989, the population of Javakheti was bigger than the one of Nagorno-Karabakh: 200,000 in the Georgian district (Ramishvili, 2007, p. 16) versus 145,000 in the Azerbaijani autonomous oblast (Rowland, 2008, p. 108). Additionally, unlike Nagorno-Karabakh before the onset of the conflict, the district of Javakheti had a direct border with Armenia and was economically more connected to Armenia than Georgia. This was not the case for pre-war Nagorno-Karabakh, which was well interlinked with other districts of Azerbaijan in terms of infrastructure, trade and other economic transactions. Finally, the minority rights of the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh were better protected due to the autonomous status of the oblast compared to the Armenians of Javakheti. As Javakheti

had never possessed the traditions of autonomy, the *Javakhk* movement lacked the political institutions, finances and experience to promote an Armenian ethnic agenda. As Cornell (2002, p. 204) notes, it was the existing institution of autonomy, as well as the higher level of enmity for Azerbaijan rather than Georgia that was definitive in the choice of the Armenian nationalists.

In 1992, after the onset of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian government sent an envoy to Javakheti in order to prevent the escalation of the crisis that could bring Armenia into two-front military actions. After the 1993 closure of the Armenian-Turkish border, the moderate position of Yerevan on the status of the Javakhetian Armenians was dictated by geopolitical realities due to the economic isolation of the country and its high dependence on the stability of the Georgian border. Today, both the Armenian government and the national minority of Armenians in Javakheti understand the risks attached to a spike in the conflict in the district, as due to the consequences of the closed border any separatist claims by the Armenian-populated territory would leave Armenia virtually blockaded (Lohm, 2007, p. 14).

Still, the varying efforts to strengthen the central control over the district made by different political leaders of Georgia affected the development of Armenian-Georgian relations on the issue of Javakheti. During Shevardnadze's presidency, a decision on the merger of Javakheti with Meskheta, and the creation of the district of Samtskhe-Javakheti in 1994, led to protests among the Armenian population of the district, as it viewed this decision as an attempt to decrease the percentage of Armenians in the new administrative unit. Nevertheless, despite the protests in Akhalkalaki, the center of Javakheti, Yerevan did not intervene in Georgia's internal affairs. In the following years, tensions in the district have been high at various times, mostly due to the deficient economic development of the region caused by its geographical isolation and the weak knowledge of Georgian by the local population (Cornell, 2001, p. 168).

The reforms of President Saakashvili were aimed at the centralization of the government, as well as the integration of national minorities, including the Armenian minority of Samtskhe-Javakheti, into the political and social life of the country. As a

result, greater emphasis was given on teaching Georgian in schools in the regions predominantly populated by national minorities; infrastructure, including the roads linking Akhalkalaki to other parts of Georgia was improved; and a school of public administration aimed at recruiting representatives of national minorities to be involved in the civil service was established (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 12). As with the Shevardnadze government, Saakashvili's government continued the strategy of co-opting local leaders and well-known local power brokers or clans by offering them jobs to ensure their loyalty (International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 5). Saakashvili's policy, which aimed at eliminating Russian influence in the country, led to the closure of a Russian military base in 2007, a move that he thought would lead to a new opportunity for the central government to become the key powerbroker in the region (Mateu, 2016, p. 7). The base was one of the main sources of employment for the local population, and was regarded as a security guarantee against the perceived threat from Turkey (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 11); as a result, its closure created a further sense of distrust between the government and the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

One of the recent escalations of nationalism causing a clash with the Georgian leadership occurred after the August 2008 war, when Moscow imposed restrictions on the entry of Georgian citizens into Russia; while the majority of Javakheti Armenians worked in Russia and sent back remittances as the most important source of the district's income, they faced visa challenges with the northern neighbor after the war. At the same time, in 2006 Armenia introduced dual citizenship to strengthen its links with diaspora Armenians. Consequently, many of the Javakheti Armenians applied for dual citizenship, and while these actions were forbidden according to Georgian legislation, around 20,000 Armenians reneged their Georgian citizenship, thus raising fears among the Georgian government about the uncoordinated actions of the Armenian leadership (Radio Azatutyun, 2012). In 2018, the Georgian citizenship law was amended, and citizens were allowed to retain their citizenship if they became naturalized citizens of another country (Shevel, 2019, p. 5). Despite the democratic character of this decision, it might create problems, as the precedent of dual citizenship given to the ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians in South Ossetia shows the risk of the involvement of third parties in Georgian domestic issues.

Today, the issue of Armenian minority rights in Georgia is focused on the restoration of Armenian churches and the protection of the Armenian language in the education and the administrative systems in the district. Much progress on this issue was achieved during the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, when, in 2011, the amendment to the civil code was approved, granting five minority religious groups, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, the status of “legal entities of public law” (Radio Free Europe, 2011). However, the anti-corruption campaign held by the Saakashvili government led to discrimination against groups with poor knowledge of the Georgian language, including the Armenian minority of Javakheti. As a part of the 2000s reforms of state building, the structure of central government institutions was strengthened, giving more power to the president and decreasing the influence of local and regional institutions of the national minorities (George, 2008, p. 1173).

To conclude, the relations between Armenia and Georgia are defined by their different positions on regional security, as well as the dissimilar consequences of the interethnic conflicts on their respective domestic and foreign policies. The principle of the recognition of territorial integrity defines both the regional and international choices of the two states. At the same time, the issue of the Armenian minority living in Javakheti raises concerns about the future of Armenian-Georgian relations. Although as things stand today, the chances of an open conflict in Javakheti are minimal, this could change in the case of a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and if the borders with Armenia’s eastern and western neighbors are opened. Finally, the role of specificities of the local economies should be taken into account, as both countries have no motivation for economic integration; instead, they seek to work with the bigger and more advantageous markets of Russia and the West. Taking into account the current regional and international situation, there is little potential for the establishment of any kind of integration project between the two nations; however, the solution to the conflicts, the establishment of communication at a regional level, and economic projects with the involvement of all the three regional states, could enhance long-term cooperation profitable to the whole region.

4.6 The Role of Domestic Factors in the Georgian Ethnic Conflicts

In the analysis of the Georgian conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, one can see many analogies with the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as some particularities that differentiate these conflicts from each other. One of the main differences lies in the open support of the Russian government in the Georgian conflicts, while in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian involvement was never openly recognized, although it had a big impact on the turning point of the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 1992-1994. The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia would not have taken place without the support of the Russian leadership, while experts still debate whether the August War of 2008 was initiated by the Georgian or the Russian government (Cheterian, 2009; Gordadze, 2011; Tsyganok, 2011). While the international aspect of the conflicts will be discussed in the next chapter, with the emphasis on the local perceptions of international threats, here the focus is on the role of domestic factors and how the process of democratization in Georgia affected the situation in the region in the early 1990s and in the years since.

The Georgian conflicts had many similarities with the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. Much like the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflict between the Georgian government and the seceding regions emerged in the early twentieth century, soon after the announcement of the independence of Georgia in 1918. The conflicts were temporarily resolved with the annexation of the region by the Bolshevik Red Army in 1921. Akin to Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia had the status of an autonomous oblast, while Abkhazia's status was that of an autonomous republic; accordingly, both regions could coordinate their policy directly with Moscow, surpassing the administrative center in Tbilisi (Cornell, 2001). Finally, just as in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the ethnic conflicts of Georgian national minorities reemerged with the democratization and *glasnost* policy announced by Moscow in the late 1980s. The Georgian conflicts were based on the weakness of the notion of citizenship in the USSR, which was common for all the post-Soviet conflicts; as a result, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the national movements on the Soviet periphery were based on the "primordialist" ethnic concept of the nation rather than a civic

understanding of the term that could unite all the ethnicities of the national republics (Wheatley, 2009b, p. 121).

Growing ethnic nationalism both among the Georgians and the national minorities led to a spike in confrontation; in this regard, it is hard to overestimate the role of the nationalist leaders, their statements and the lack of strategic vision of the Georgian government on the future of the country's ethnicities, leading to a stiffening of their position and the subsequent reaction by the Georgian government and society. While before the escalation of the conflict South Ossetia had demanded the status of an autonomous republic, and Abkhazia was clamoring for the restoration of its status of Union republic¹³ abolished under Stalin (both demands were rejected by the Georgian government), with the escalation of the conflict, the two secessionist regions changed their rhetoric and began demanding independence. Like the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, the political emancipation of the late 1980s-early 1990s erupted into nationalist movements, causing political turmoil and the failure of the institutions to keep the situation under control in the protesting regions. A big role in the escalation of the two conflicts belongs to the first president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his chauvinistic statements that led to protests among the country's non-Georgian population. One of the most contradictory statements of the new leader of Georgia referred to their national minorities as "guests" who could stay in the country if they "behaved properly" (Nodia, 2005, p. 46).

The dramatic changes in the political scene were exacerbated by the lack of adequate institutions and the legacy of the Soviet political system in the region: electoral rules banned the participation of regionally-based parties at the national parliamentary elections of 1990, thus blocking the representation of ethnic minorities in the new democratic parliament. As a result, the elections produced a new regime through the nationalist party union "Round Table – Free Georgia" (Apharidze and Siroky, 2010, p. 128). The lack of civil society traditions affected the formation of the first political parties as well: most of them were divided due to ethnic and other belongings (such as

¹³ The Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia existed in 1921-1931 and had a status with many elements of the autonomous Soviet republics; at the same time, it retained nominal independence from Georgia by being given certain features of the Union republics, such as their own military units (Blauvelt, 2007).

the supporters of Gamsakhurdia versus his opposition). As a result, the country was engaged in a civil war, where the opposition parties managed to organize themselves into military wings fighting against the central government. In these circumstances, the rise of a national revolt in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was only a matter of time. The process of democratization, with the newly obtained freedom of gatherings, led to the emergence of discourse on the national identity among ethnic minorities, while the actions of the fledgling government provoked the mobilization of these identities against a perceived Georgian threat. This perception was supported by the real action of the abolition of South Ossetian autonomy as a reaction to the requirements for the change of its status from autonomous oblast (province) to autonomous republic. Consequently, the first ethnic clashes followed, rising into an open conflict that lasted until the new President Eduard Shevardnadze was able to reach a Russian-Georgian-Ossetian agreement signed in Dagomys in May 1992 (Apharidze and Siroky, 2010, p. 129).

In Abkhazia, the situation was more complex than in the case of South Ossetia. Despite an absolute majority of Georgians in the local population (45% compared to 17% of ethnic Abkhazians, table C.5), “chaos and bad luck” made the political crisis transform into a violent war in August 1992” (De Waal, 2010a, p. 147). Indeed, while the nationalist rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia primarily ignited the crisis in Abkhazia, the first president understood the threat of a war on two frontiers and adopted a conciliatory approach to relations with Abkhazia. Correspondingly, the Abkhaz leadership was ready to negotiate, and suggested a plan of a federative or confederative solution to the crisis, which was rejected by the Georgian leadership. In the ensuing months, the political crisis caused by the election of Shevardnadze and the confrontation between different political clans led to the rebellion of the “Zviadists” (the supporters of the first president) in western Georgia, with the Abkhazian leadership seizing the opportunity to declare independence. The war started as a result of an unauthorized intervention of the Georgian army in Abkhazia in order to suppress the “Zviadists” and ended with the defeat of the central government, allegedly due to the military support of neighboring Russia to Abkhazia (Cornell, 2001, p. 159).

Although Shevardnadze failed to restore authority over the secessionist regions, in the following months he could consolidate power and concentrated on the domestic problems of the country, by focusing on the revitalization of the national economy, the search for international investors and the country's involvement in regional cooperation projects. Shevardnadze's policy of balancing between different regions, political parties and local groups in his domestic policy, as well as between Russia and the West in his foreign policy, provided for some stability, although it slowed down the process of the state formation of Georgia (Apharidze and Siroky, 2010, p. 129).

With the Rose Revolution and the victory of the United National Movement (UNM) led by Western-educated Mikheil Saakashvili in 2003, Georgia entered into a new phase of development, with the introduction of a new system of governance with free elections and a struggle against corruption, and the requisite transformation of the political, economic and social life of the country. The tenure of President Saakashvili played an important role in the reassessment of relations between Tbilisi and its ethnic minorities, and the promotion of the ideology of inclusionary nationalism with the involvement of citizens of different nationalities in the work of the Georgian government. This policy was implemented in the adoption of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Council of Europe in 2005 and the Conception for Tolerance and Civic Integration in 2009. These documents provided the adoption of the program aimed at the civic integration of Georgia and paved the way to the development of new legislation in the educational sphere, as well as the support of minority cultural life through various activities (Matsaberidze, 2014, p. 9). At the same time, despite the efforts to bridge ethnic distinctions, the Saakashvili government tightened control over the minority regions, with the centralization of the government and the suppression of the emerging secessionist movement of Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic in 2004, as well as increasing state presence in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

In May 2004, bolstered by his success in Adjara, Saakashvili called for the creation of a federation and granting Abkhazia and South Ossetia "special status" within Georgia. While this offer was rejected in Tskhinvali and Sukhumi, the Georgian President

focused on seeking a resolution to the dispute with South Ossetia, as it was perceived to be more willing to compromise with Tbilisi. Additionally, the region was smaller, and Georgians were still living there, unlike the situation in Abkhazia where the majority had fled (German, 2006, p. 8; table C.5, C.6). The UNM government used the strategy of promoting social program incentives to the local population aggrieved by the militaristic rhetoric of threatening local elites (Aphrasidze and Siroky, 2010, p. 132).

Another example of cooperation in the fragmented region was the market in Ergneti serving as a platform of cooperation between the Georgians and the South Ossetians. Ergneti market was functioning as a smugglers' market, with large volumes of contraband from petroleum to other products imported from Russia. Despite its negative effect of stimulating corruption, while its sellers did not pay customs duties, this experience significantly contributed to the establishment of mutually beneficial relations between the two nations (Tsereteli, 2013, p. 208). According to International Alert (2004, p. 135), the market created personal ties and close economic links between the conflicting sides. When it was closed down, in June 2004, due to the unregulated status of the market, "the countdown to war in South Ossetia began" (De Waal, 2009). While Saakashvili's government took this decision in order to fight corruption and the smuggler economy, it dramatically affected the economies of Georgia and South Ossetia and removed an opportunity for personal relations between people on both sides, while delaying the reconstruction of trust between the societies.

President Saakashvili's promise to restore Georgian territorial integrity predetermined his political destiny in 2008, when the conflict in Ossetia rose into the Russo-Georgian War (Aphrasidze and Siroky, 2010, p. 132). The war of August 2008 changed the trajectory of the development of relations between the center and the secessionist regions. It also raised a series of questions on the influence of the democratic regime at the onset, and the development of war and to what extent the war was influenced by the Russian presence in the separatist regions and its dubious role in the negotiation process. Despite the democratic character of the Saakashvili government, state institutions could not prevent the onset of devastating military expedition against South Ossetia (Caucasus Edition, 2010). The war revealed the shortcomings of Georgian democracy, including the weakness of participatory institutions and the marginalization

of the political opposition. At the same time, the ruling elite succeeded in strengthening the country's administrative institutions that helped in containing internal crisis and prevented the onset of a civil war, as had occurred during the crisis of the early 1990s.

After the war, together with the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia and a few Latin American states, relations between Tbilisi and the secessionists changed. On the one hand, the war led to a situation similar to the one in Nagorno-Karabakh, in terms of the isolation between the confronting nations, as most remaining Georgians fled South Ossetia and their return was denied. On the other hand, after the failure of the Georgian government to solve the conflicts militarily, Tbilisi officially chose the strategy of "strategic patience" and soft power. As a result, despite the occupation of almost one-fifth of the territory of Georgia, Tbilisi stresses the importance of consolidating its power domestically and the development of the economy, coupled with political and social reforms that would raise the standard of living of ordinary Georgians, attract the secessionists to cooperate and, at a final stage, lead to the restoration of the country's territorial integrity (Government of Georgia, 2010).

The process of democratization of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, as well as the events of the first years of independence, had detrimental consequences for the territorial integrity of the Georgian state. Both in the first years of independence, with the rise of ethnic nationalism under President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as well as in the 2000s during the centralization reforms of President Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia faced an unprecedented level of violence and existential threat, that reached its peak during the 2008 August war when Russian troops were only sixty kilometers away from Tbilisi. The war, the unresolved status of the secessionist regions and Saakashvili's efforts to increase the state's influence characterized by the policy of centralization, showed the limits of democracy in a state suffering from unresolved national borders and the violation of its territorial integrity.

4.7 Conclusion

This analysis of the domestic developments and relations between the three states of the South Caucasus shows that ethnic conflicts and the weakness of the local states lie at the core of the region's fragmentation, while clashes in the positions of their societies greatly impact the situation, resulting in the failure to find a solution to the current diplomatic impasse between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Primarily clashing identities and the immaturity of these societies have caused the onset of ethnic conflicts; however, over the years, they have influenced other aspects of regional development by putting an obstacle in the path of the democratic development of the region, the establishment of healthy economic cooperation and communication between the nations. In this regard, as Ohanyan (2015, p. 158) notes, "the reasons for poor regional integration are misunderstood in their complexity and are overshadowed by the visibility of unresolved conflicts". While many factors, such as democratic development, economic interdependence and the level of communications between the nations could contribute to regional transformation, the failure in each of these directions has been caused by many factors, such as the weakness of the local states and shallow democracy in the region, underdevelopment of the business culture, and the structure of local economies dependent on oil and gas revenues as well as external remittances, among others (Broers, 2019a, p. 311). At the same time, deep grievances and traumas of the past, the unresolved status of the conflicts leaving some sides of these conflicts discriminated and ignored complicates the situation, as it is not only governments, but also societies that would not accept any possibility of regional integration without fair solution of the existing frozen conflicts.

Democratic development is an important factor for the construction of a stable and long-term relationship of trust and cooperation between nations. To date, none of the states of the South Caucasus has reached the level of mature democracy that could create a real basis for regional integration. Despite the process of democratization in some of the states during some periods after gaining independence, neither the governments, nor the societies of the region are ready to recognize the liberal values and the rights of ethnic minorities, as a democratic system would imply. This process requires actions to be

mirrored from the opposite side of the negotiation table, as well as the gradual reconstruction of trust between local societies, over a period of years and possible decades. Democratization would imply not only reaching progress in fair elections and providing for majority rule, but also acquiring liberal values based on the rule of law and the respect and protection of each individual, including representatives of national and religious minorities, as well as those citizens who were evicted from their homelands. In this regard, it is not “democratization, but liberalization of minds” that can contribute to the resolution of ethnic conflicts (Aliyeva, interview). At this stage, while Georgia was heading in this direction by applying the elements of inclusionary nationalism in its official doctrines and education materials, the societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan did not reach that level of liberal understanding necessary for the resolution of the conflict.

Today, the intransigent positions are accumulating in local societies, while the ideology of nationalism and irredentism threatens the deterioration of the situation, not only in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, but also in the relatively friendly Azerbaijani-Georgian and Armenian-Georgian relations. In this regard, the democratization of the region is inevitable and mandatory in order to build strong connections that will not break with a change of regime as happened in the cases of the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the South Caucasus. Although authoritative measures can create temporary conditions for appeasement and cooperation between nations, the policy of governments should also bring about deep transformations and reforms in order to lead to long-lasting stability and peace. Another aspect of the democratization process is the risk of violence and the escalation of conflicts that might be caused by changes in the political establishment. This is why in order to prevent future conflicts and guarantee the success of reforms this process has to be linear and consecutive, and might take decades for tangible outcomes to appear (Mkrtchyan 2007, p. 88).

Apart from democratic development, many authors, including Deutsch (1957), Rock (1989), Acharya (2001) and others accentuate the importance of economic interconnectedness and cultural and social communication between nations, that can serve as a basis for cooperation and the formation of a common identity. The South

Caucasus has the potential for this type of cooperation due to the complementarity of the local economies. However, this factor of the economy did not bring any progress to regional integration either in the example of Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation over energy and transport, or in the efforts to use the potential of the complementary economies of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Here one can mention the observation of Charles Kupchan (2010, p. 399) as he notes the little effect of “economic integration during the early phases of stable peace”: according to his analysis, only one out of twenty cases of conflict resolution led to a peace process based on economic integration.¹⁴ As a result, the states of the region suffer from the regional fragmentation of their economies, but continue to maintain unyielding positions in the negotiation process. If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved, it will open the shortest route to connecting up the region, which might significantly contribute to its economic development. The opening of borders would mean the attraction of foreign investments, the development of small businesses and a decrease in regional unemployment and poverty levels. Additionally, the development of relations between ordinary people can contribute to the establishment of regional economic integration that is more effective than the top-level projects currently being implemented well away from the rest of society. The successful examples of the Sadakhlo and Ergneti markets show how relations between people can build mutual trust, as opposed to the communication between technicians and members of government administrations, as in the case of the BTC and other state-led initiatives (Mamradze, interview).

Today one of the main sources of the current intransigence of the countries of the region lies in their deep social distrust and mutual enmity; moreover, these notions build the basis of the national identities in the three states, thus limiting their chances of instant transformations. Instead these changes can evolve through communication channels and the exchange of ideas between the communities (Alizade, interview), bolstered with new platforms for transactions and cooperation to be established at the state and

¹⁴ According to Kupchan (2010, pp. 399-400), only in the example of German unification between 1815 and 1871 economic integration played a valuable role “in clearing the way for reconciliation and political integration”. In this case, local leadership used economic interests for its political goals; as a result the customs union between different German states led to the unification of Germany. In other cases examined by the author the practice of reciprocal restraint preceded economic integration.

grassroots levels. As the successful example of the European region shows, integration and the formation of a security community requires some level of maturity in nations both in terms of statehood and social development (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Trenin, 2013; Troitskiy, 2013). In the context of the South Caucasus, the implementation of these measures would inevitably require the democratization of the local political systems and the formation of a strong statehood based on the principles of the rule of law and mutual respect between nations, the establishment of norms and regulations that should not to be violated under any circumstances (Iskandaryan, interview), as well as a gradual refusal of ethnic in favor of civil and regional nationalism, implying the construction of a common regional identity as the final goal of the integration project.



5. IDENTITY VERSUS INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF FRAGMENTATION

5.1 Introduction

While domestic factors have had a major impact on the failure of the South Caucasus to integrate, international aspects of their relations, their differences in international orientation and the different perceptions of threat in the three nations are other important reasons for the regional fragmentation of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. There are many examples in the world where common threats, common international positions and a vision of the future have played a defining role in the consolidation of regions, leading to the formation of common identities that at the final stage have institutionalized into integration projects and security communities. These examples include the cases of the European Economic Community of the late 1950s, established in response to the rising influence of the Soviet Union, as well as that of the Baltic states of the early 2000s joining the EU club partially under the influence of the Russian threat (Browning and Joenniemi, 2004).

In some cases, the commonality of threats was the only factor affecting the formation of a security community: in South-Eastern Asia, the rule of authoritarian regimes together with differences in religion, language and national identities did not impede the establishment of ASEAN, as the threat of Chinese domination compelled the countries of the region to cooperate (Narine, 1998). Significantly, the choice of threats was not always pragmatic and realistic; instead, it was based on the perceptions of threat and formed under the influence of history, traditions, culture and national identity. In this regard, similarly to the role different international orientations play in failure to build a common identity, the clash of national identities might also lead to different and, in most cases, contrasting perceptions of threat leading to the fragmentation of a region.

In the South Caucasus, the foreign policy of the local states is traditionally interpreted as one based on a neorealist approach and on the balance of power. Many authors accentuate a pragmatic and geopolitical rationale in the choice of international partners,

as the international choices of the states is based on their national interests and the recognition of the territorial integrity or self-determination of the states (Shaffer, 2010; Kakachia, 2015). For the three states, the resolution of territorial disputes has a specific ideational aspect at its core, due to the memory of conflict as a part of each nation's history, as well as the symbolism of specific territories in the culture of the nations that, in most cases, stands above other elements of national self-consciousness.

This chapter will analyze the reasons behind the foreign policy choices of the three South Caucasian states from the perspective of their current perception of threat and its correlation to their national identities. The discussion of similarities and differences in the self-conceptualization of the three nations might shed some light on the rationale of their international orientation preferences. Additionally, while this thesis does not focus on the foreign policy motives and methods of implementation of the regional great powers involved in the South Caucasus, the chapter will discuss to what extent the general international situation contributes to or impedes the process of the formation of a common identity in the region. Finally, it will analyze to what extent alternative understandings of common threats and expanding the concept of security might induce mutual interest in cooperation between the nations.

5.2 Three Different Identities, Three Different Orientations

One of the aspects defining the fragmented nature of the South Caucasus is the difference in the foreign policy choices of the three regional states (Iskandaryan, interview). Despite their shared geographical location and inherited post-Soviet legacies, these states do not share a common vision of the future and, as a result, choose three different international orientations (Shaffer, 2010, p. 55). The recent developments in the region, where Armenia signed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) treaty, Georgia signed the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, and Azerbaijan joined the Non-Aligned Movement, demonstrate that the region is now officially fragmented¹⁵ (Kakachia, interview). While the international situation and

¹⁵ Armenia has been a member of the CSTO since 1992; Azerbaijan joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011, and Georgia signed the Association Agreement in 2014.

the policy of the great powers plays a significant role in the foreign policy choices of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan, one of the defining reasons for their difference in international orientations might be caused by the disparity and, in some cases, the clash of identities, the historical legacy, and the memory of the past. In turn, this creates a vicious circle of regional fragmentation caused by different aspirations and perceptions of security threat, which, in turn, is influenced by the traditions and history of the nations in terms of their relations with their neighbors.

Many authors note an extensively pragmatic foreign policy orientation in the states of the South Caucasus. Indeed, a primary analysis of the established regional alliances shows that each of the countries has chosen the strategy of finding a balance aimed at the effective implementation of their foreign policy goals. According to Brenda Shaffer (2010, p. 64), “historical legacies and identity ties have had little impact on the policies of the states” in relating to main national interests, when they contradicted the material interests of the state. Similarly, according to Yakobashvili (2013, p. 7), in the case of Azerbaijan’s international orientation, history and faith “serve as useful tools for definition of its self-identity but have no influence on foreign policy priorities”. Indeed, the regional states show successful examples of cooperation between nations of different confessions, although religion is traditionally seen as playing a strong part in the cultural and national identity of states in the region. As Kakachia (2015, p. 175) puts it,

Muslim Azerbaijan cooperates closely with Christian Georgia and the two countries have successfully built a strategic partnership in the energy field. Christian Armenia has lucratively broadened its energy, trade and economic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and in recent years the two neighbors have developed mutually beneficial projects. Thus, neither religious nor political factors but economic ones appear to be predominant in these ties.

Similarly, one can see several other examples, such as the irrelevance of a common religion in the international policy choices of Orthodox Christian Georgia and its hostile perception of Russia, or the irrelevance of historical perspectives that could project Georgia into negative attitude against Turkey, factors, which do not reflect the reality (Garibov 2019, p. 5).

However, as the analysis of the foreign policy choices to follow will show, these preferences also had an element of national self-image at their basis. In this regard, while a national identity is not homogeneous and consists of different elements, or different levels, these elements (or levels) can influence the foreign policy decisions of the regional governments in a different way (Iskandaryan, interview). Indeed, for Azerbaijan religious affinity with its southern neighbor is not perceived as of primary importance, partially due to the weak influence of religion in the political and social life of the state, while, in comparison, their linguistic and secular affinity with Turkey plays a much more important role in the process of foreign policy decision-making. This fact can also be interpreted in terms of the existence of the so-called “hierarchy of identity elements” (Pashayeva, interview) where the ethnic and secular belonging of a nation can be considered as a more important element of self-conceptualization in comparison to religious leaning.

The issue of ethnic conflicts raises the question of the notion of territory as one of the basic elements of identity, along with culture, history, religion, language and other inseparable parts of the national mentality. As discussed in the previous chapters, the identity of the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians is formed not only by the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, its place in the history and culture of the two nations, but also by the memory of the conflict lasting for more than thirty years and the consequences it had on the development of both states. The same correlation between conflict and identity can be applied to the Georgian conflicts as well, as both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were traditionally perceived as inseparable parts of Georgian history; it was most painfully felt with regard to Abkhazia, where at the beginning of the conflict Georgians comprised the majority of the population. Hence, this explains the entire foreign policy of the three states, built around the efforts to obtain international recognition of their territorial integrity (in the cases of Azerbaijan and Georgia) or the right to self-determination (in the case of Armenia).

The memory of the past, the interpretation of recent history that remains in the national self-consciousness, as well as the dominant ideology of the political elites are other factors affecting the choices of the international orientations of the local states. As the

analysis below will show, the legacy of the Ottoman history of the early twentieth century, as well as the dubious role of Russian support to Georgian separatists before the 2008 war, had a defining role in the political choices and the formation of the threat perception for Armenia and Georgia, respectively. According to a study by Abbasov and Siroky (2018), the choices of alliances in Georgian and Armenian societies are caused by the dominant amity and enmity perceptions. Another study by Gvalia *et al* (2013, p. 109) shows that political elites make their foreign policy preferences according to the main ideology, as “variations in an external threat environment are filtered through elite ideas”.

While the self-image of elites and societies define the foreign policy orientation of states, the international context and real threats can also affect and even transform national identities and ideologies (Kakachia, 2011). This explains why, despite their religious and cultural affinity, Georgia and Armenia have failed to build any kind of regional cooperation. The reason for this failure lies in the extensive influence of the Kremlin over Armenian foreign policy (Kakachia, Mamradze, interviews). Tbilisi’s aspiration to join the EU is juxtaposed by the membership of Armenia in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (Gamaghelyan, interview); as a result, potential differences trigger mutual distrust in the region (Çelikpala, interview). In this regard, the failure to build a common Caucasian identity is defined by the international situation through the deteriorating relations between Russia and Europe, as well as the negative image of Russia in Georgia, influenced by its policy of support to the separatist regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Indeed, many experts stress the effect of foreign influence on the existing situation in the South Caucasus (Alizade, Çelikpala, German, interviews). The existing enmities in the region and the inherent weakness of the local states pave the way to great power penetration (Garibov, 2019, p. 11). The traditional influencers such as Russia, Turkey and Iran, with their legacies of empires, have exploited their political and cultural links in the region (German, interview). Also, the fact that these states are not democratic either only exacerbates the situation (Çelikpala, interview). At the same time, international actors have been using the existing conflicts and the contradictions

between the local societies for the advancement of their own interests. According to Alizade (interview), the ethnic conflicts remain unresolved because of the involvement of the great powers that make use of the existing “clash of identities” as a tool for the implementation of their political goals, while the local states do not have enough political, military or economic resources to sustain their military rhetoric. Russia is a good example of how great powers exercise their policy choices in maintaining control over the region: as an ally and guarantor of security for Armenia, a major provider of weaponry for Azerbaijan, and a conflicting party in Georgia.

On the other hand, local state or sub-state groups search for foreign allies to take the advantage in the conflicts. The so-called strategy of “asymmetrical security” lies at the basis of the foreign policy choices, as the local governments search for alliances with a rival great power to survive (De Waal, 2012, p. 1719). Although none of the alliances guarantee the national security of the three states, nevertheless Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan continue to rely on international alliances instead of agreeing on mutual concessions for the sake of regional cooperation. Indeed, Armenia, the member of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), cannot be sure whether Russia would join military operations in any escalation over Nagorno-Karabakh, just as Azerbaijan cannot be sure if Ankara intervenes in the conflict with Armenia. Similarly, Georgia announced on its aspiration to join NATO, but has not received, to date, any official invitation to full membership (Boonstra, 2015, p. 9).

Today, the alliances of the local states with great powers shape the security architecture of the South Caucasus. Ohanyan (2015, p. 169) interprets this fact from the perspective of the weakness of the local states, as “the patron-client relationships that are so characteristic of internal state-society relations in all the three countries are being replicated at the foreign policy level” as well. The vagueness and uncertainty of the future of the states deprives them of the chance to build fully-fledged relations with their neighbors; as a result, dependence on the imperial center was not overcome with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Vanyan, interview). To a large extent, the basis of these relations is in the outcomes of the conflicts and the leverages Russia and other regional powers exercise over the region. Indeed, while the unresolved conflicts

continue to be controlled by the Kremlin, Georgia cannot rid itself of the Russian influence (Vanyan, interview); this situation coerces it to search for the support of other external great powers in order to balance Russia's influence (Nixey, 2010, p. 135). Similarly, as Nagorno-Karabakh remains a tool in the hands of Moscow to control the foreign policy of Armenia and Azerbaijan, these states are limited in their choices, and this has little to do with their ideational aspirations. As Çelikpala (interview) notes, the states are using the discourse of supra-national (e.g. European or Turkic) identity in order to obtain foreign support for the protection of their national interests. At the same time, if we are to consider conflicts as an important part of national identities, these choices can be interpreted as ideational as well.

The issue of the choice of international allies raises the question of the dominance of the neorealist approach in the process of regional decision-making. However, while most existing studies interpret the current situation in the region from this approach, a more detailed analysis provides examples contradicting the logic of neorealist pragmatism. For example, according to the neorealist perspective, as the most powerful state neighboring the region Russia should be the object of balance alliances or policy of bandwagoning, nevertheless all the three states of the South Caucasus show a different approach to Russia (Garibov, 2019, p. 5). Most notably, this difference can be seen in the positions of Azerbaijan and Georgia, as since the 2000s, they have chosen different strategies and different allies in the international arena despite facing similar challenges regarding the violation of their territorial integrity. While there were many factors affecting their choices, this difference became especially obvious after the growing usage of different leverage tools by the Russian government against Tbilisi, reaching its apex in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. As a result, Georgia made its choice in favor of European integration, aimed at the attraction of the separatist regimes with visa-free travel and other advantages stemming from cooperation with the EU. This choice was also partially defined by the growing adoption of a European identity among the Georgian public and the political elites, as well as the alienation from Russia with the rise in antagonism against Kremlin policy in the region (Gvalia *et al.*, 2013). Azerbaijan derived different lessons from the 2008 war, preferring a more balanced policy both due to the lack of a strong European identity within the society, as well as a more moderate

attitude towards its northern neighbor. This is one of the examples where a constructivist approach might provide a necessary explanation for the current security dynamics and motives of alliance formation in the South Caucasus.

In this regard, the analysis below will define whether neorealist or constructivist theory can better explain the motives of the states in their foreign policy choices. At the same time, while the particulars of history and culture, the memory of the imperial past, as well as the fear of the proximity of regional and great powers continue to be dominant in the national thinking of the three countries, the analysis will also discuss to what extent different elements of national identity shape their international orientation and their respective threat perceptions.

5.2.1 Armenian foreign policy and the memory of the past

Armenia can be called a nation with the highest level of self-consciousness among the three states of the South Caucasus. Its identity is based on an ancient history, being a unique branch of Christianity, the memory of the past and the struggle against the Ottoman and Persian Empires. According to Ter-Gabrielian and Nedolian (1997, p. 94), Armenian national self-image historically had a foreign policy dimension at its core. Religion played one of the most important roles in the process of self-preservation of the national culture, as it was traditionally used as a tool of differentiation for the Armenians from the dominant power of the Ottoman and Persian Empires. In the ensuing years, the Apostolic Church, as a national version of Christianity, became the defining factor in the protection of the national identity when, unlike the Georgian clergy, the Armenians refused to integrate with the Russian Orthodox Church (Ter-Gabrielian and Nedolian, 1997, p. 95).

At the same time, starting from the early eighteenth century, Christian Russia was perceived as holding the legacy of the Armenian culture in the region when both political and religious leaders of Armenia were searching for the protection of the Russian tsars during the Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman wars. This cooperation served Russian interests and was one of the factors that led to the successful conquest of

the South Caucasus during the Russo-Persian War in the early nineteenth century. As a result, the Armenians were allowed to resettle from different regions of Persia in the newly occupied territory, leading to a substantial increase in the Armenian population in the South Caucasus and a change in the regional ethnic map (tables D.1, D.2); this fact affected the attitude of the Azerbaijanis toward Russia as the initiator of the “divide and rule” policy that destabilized their position in the region.

The Russian conquest of the region and the implementation of its policies motivated the rise of the independence movement among the Ottoman Armenians, leading to one of the most tragic events in Armenia’s modern history. After the establishment of the Armenian Revolution Federation (ARF) in 1890, the struggle for Armenian independence and the promise of Russian support during the First World War, led to clashes between the local Armenian and Muslim (Turkish and Kurdish) population on the Ottoman-Russian border, culminating in the disastrous decision of the Ottoman leadership regarding the deportation of the Armenians, accompanied by mass atrocities and killings. Remembered in Armenian national history as the days of the “great catastrophe”, these events destroyed the long traditions of Armenian-Turkic ties in the region and led to distrust and mutual accusations lasting for over a century (De Waal, 2014). As many experts note, the deep-rooted fear of extermination became the main driver of Armenian domestic and foreign policy and, to a large extent, defined modern relations with their immediate neighbors in the region (Simão, 2018, p. 149).

While today 66% of the Armenian population sees Azerbaijan as the main enemy posing a threat to the country’s national security, Turkey comes in second place (28%) as it is perceived to be the main supporter of Azerbaijani policy in the region (figure C.7). In one of his recent speeches, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, defined Turkey “as the main security concern of Armenia” (Asekose News, 2019). In this regard, while the perception of the Azerbaijani threat has its fundamental basis in the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh, regarding Turkey, the position of official Yerevan is based predominantly on the memory of the events of the early twentieth century, rather than a real current threat coming from its western neighbor. Indeed, even during the most intense phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in

the early 1990s, Turkey adopted a pragmatic strategy and did not get involved in the military actions, despite Russia's weak position in the international arena and western support for Ankara's pan-Turkic projects in the former Soviet Union. According to Cornell (1998, p. 66), this decision was partially influenced by Turkish fear of the reaction of the Armenian diaspora that could depict Ankara as planning new atrocities against the Armenians.

Turkey was the second nation (after the United States) to recognize the newly independent Republic of Armenia in December 1991 (Hill, Kirişçi and Moffatt, 2015a, p. 132); a year later, Ankara invited Armenia to join the newly established organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). This policy received a positive reaction from the Armenian leadership, as according to the advisor of Armenian president Girard Libaridian (2012, p. 247), president Ter-Petrosyan tried to break the myth of Turkey being an eternal enemy and was looking for some compromise in Armenia's relations with Ankara and Baku. In 1992, the president dismissed foreign minister Raffi Ovanesyan for his anti-Turkish speech at the Council of Europe (Gültekin, 2005, p. 41). As a result of this policy, throughout 1992, Turkey provided Armenia with humanitarian aid that was perceived negatively in Azerbaijan, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was reaching the hot phase (Görgülü, 2008, 144).

In April 1993, Turkey closed its border due to the Armenian occupation of the adjacent districts of Azerbaijan around Nagorno-Karabakh. Since that time, the Turkish government put three basic conditions for the establishment of interstate relations and the re-opening of the land border: first, Yerevan had to abandon territorial claims from Turkey and officially recognize the current border delineated by the treaties of Moscow and Kars; second, it had to put an end to its global campaign to have the 1915 massacres of the Ottoman Armenian minority recognized as a genocide; and finally, the Armenian forces had to withdraw from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (Jafarova, 2014, p. 146). In response, Armenia insisted on the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of borders without preconditions. Ankara's position was based on a policy of solidarity with its Turkic brethren; instead, Armenia's isolation pushed the country into a political alliance with Russia and Iran. The policy of the Armenian president, Levon

Ter-Petrosyan, to seek a compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in order to restore relations between Yerevan and Ankara, was accepted as too revolutionary within the country; as a result, it was harshly received by Armenian society and the diaspora, and was one of the reasons that led to Ter-Petrosyan's resignation in 1998.

A special role in Armenia's foreign policy belongs to the strict position of the Armenian diaspora, whose "trauma of the genocide became a defining element in diaspora identity" (Cooper and Akcam, 2005, p. 83). According to Terzyan (2018, p. 159), the diaspora's mounting influence over Armenia, as well as its sensitivity to Armenian-Turkish relations, has placed severe constraints on Armenia's policy towards Turkey since the first years of independence. Above all, some of the diaspora groups announced their wish to regain what they consider to be historical Armenian lands from Turkey (Simão, 2018, p. 156). The Armenian diaspora representatives also played a crucial role in the recognition of the First World War massacre as the Armenian genocide by a number of the legislatures around the world. The issue of the genocide was also the reason for the dissent of the diaspora with the policy of Ter-Petrosyan, who was criticized for his 'soft' policy on the issue of the Turkish recognition of the 1915 events as genocide: according to the opposition, his goodwill did not lead to the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. The next president, Robert Kocharyan, chose the opposite stance, by introducing the issue of the recognition of the genocide as a priority on Armenia's foreign policy agenda (Terzyan, 2016, p. 149).

The year 2007 was a turning point in the Armenian and Turkish national perception, when Hrant Dink, a prominent Turkish journalist of Armenian descent was assassinated in Istanbul, with his death giving rise to the "We are all Armenians" campaign in Turkey, thereby leading to public debates on the necessity for a dialogue between the two nations. The rhetoric about the necessity for dialogue also corresponded with the "zero problems" policy of former Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, aimed at appeasement and the establishment of good relations with Turkey's neighbors (Çelikpala, 2013, p. 134). In July 2008, the Armenian government invited Turkish President Abdullah Gül to a football match in Yerevan; this was followed by the next meeting of the two presidents at a football match in Sivas. This so-called "football

diplomacy” led to a series of steps aimed at the restoration of relations and the resolution of the existing problems between Ankara and Yerevan.

The invitations were the result of several years of behind-the-scenes Armenian-Turkish negotiations, supported by the United States and European states, with Moscow’s approval. In April 2009, the process reached its culmination with the signing of the Zurich protocols between the two countries. According to the protocols, Armenia recognized the current border, while an intergovernmental commission would be dealing with all interstate issues (Oskanian, 2011, p. 25). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not discussed during the negotiations and was left out of the scope of the protocols.

As a result, these steps were harshly received in Baku, as they were taken without any coordination with the Azerbaijani government, while the longstanding Turkish support for Baku against the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani land was historically perceived as the act of a strong brotherly alliance. On the other hand, its violation was seen as a betrayal by the local society (Kirişçi and Moffatt, 2015, p. 77). Officially Yerevan insisted that its relations with Turkey should be differentiated from the relations with Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Gökçe, 2011, p. 1120); however, as Baku was stressing, in the early 1990s, the Armenian rhetoric was based on the opposite argument connecting the occupation of Azerbaijani territory with the history of the Armenian-Turkish clashes (Aliyeva, 2011, p. 205). This negative reaction, together with the dissent of both the Armenian and Turkish public demonstrated that the efforts made to normalize Armenian-Turkish relations were premature, as they needed a comprehensive approach with the consideration of the steps that would be needed to bring about a change in the public opinion of both states, as well as progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While some Turkish analysts argue that the change in Turkey’s Armenia policy “was not to delink Turkish-Armenian normalization from the Karabakh conflict but to start negotiations” (Welt, 2013, p. 210) that could lead the way to eventual progress on Nagorno-Karabakh, this process, nevertheless, could only provide results with the participation of all sides to the conflict as well as the transformation of public opinion in all the states involved, namely

Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Additionally, this line of reasoning failed to explain “why Armenia would find it in its interest to compromise on Karabakh once it improved its relations with Turkey” (Cornell, 2011, p. 385).

In Armenia, the negative public reaction and the severe opposition by some of the members of the Armenian diaspora led to the decision of President Sargsyan not to submit the Zurich Protocols for ratification by the Armenian parliament. The Armenian position, to a great extent, was stuck on the issue of the acceptance of the Turkish offer to convene a joint academic commission to investigate the 1915 massacre: for a majority of public opinion, this concession was perceived as a betrayal that put in doubt the very status of *mets yeghern* (or the “great catastrophe”, as the events of 1915 are remembered in Armenia). Finally, the representatives of the diaspora overtly opposed Yerevan’s recognition of the border with Turkey; according to the statement of the Armenian National Committee of America, the recognition of the border would constitute “renouncing of the rightful return of Armenian lands” (Cornell, 2011, p. 385).

The Armenian perception of the Turkish threat, together with the pragmatic calculation of military resistance to the prospect of Azerbaijani retaliation in the regional balance of power, became one of the reasons why Yerevan chose Russia as its main strategic partner (Terzyan, 2018, p. 162). The perception of Russia as the protector of the Armenian population has historical antecedents from the time when Russia played a big role in the protection of the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire. In 1918, the Armenian delegates of the Transcaucasian Sejm¹⁶ stood against the breakup of the Russian empire due to the fear of Turkish aggression and voted against the independence of the South Caucasus (Mkrtchyan and Petrosyan, 2009, p. 60). The fear of the Turkish threat was also the main reason why Armenians supported the occupation of the country by the Red Army in 1920 (Geukjian, 2012, p. 115). In the ensuing years, the memory of the past continued to influence the Armenian national discourse, even during the Soviet period, as the Armenians did not back down from their claims on

¹⁶ The Transcaucasian Sejm was a general assembly of the temporary semi-independent government of the Transcaucasian Commissariat functioning in January-April of 1918.

Nagorno-Karabakh, they organized the commemoration of the 1915 events at a national level, and stayed connected with the Armenian diaspora around the world.

Relations between Yerevan and Moscow deteriorated in the 1980s, after the decision of the central government to support the existing borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to prevent a precedent that could lead to the explosion of nationalism in other parts of the Soviet Union with a mixed population, or in other autonomous republics and *oblasts*, such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and others. The negative image of the center was exacerbated by the general situation in the country, with the ailing economy of the late 1980s and the *glasnost* policy leading to a disappointment in the Soviet regime among the population. At the same time, the Armenian opposition leaders united around the idea of the so-called liberation of Karabakh, and the evolving conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh gave an impetus to the fight for independence and “consolidated the Armenian identity around a new cause, for which it was worth fighting” (Simão, 2018, p. 153).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the change of political leadership in Moscow, Armenia made a very clear choice in favor of Russia. For the first decade of independence, it could be partially explained by the anti-Russian position of Azerbaijan’s leadership under Elchibey in the early 1990s, and the personal distrust between President Yeltsin and Aliyev Sr. during 1993-1999. Although Russia never recognized its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the help of the Russian army and the Russian leadership was mentioned in several statements of the Armenian leadership, as well as by the representatives of the self-proclaimed regime in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to de Waal (2003, p. 199), Russian military assistance in August 1992-June 1994, and the decision by the Yeltsin government to “keep the balance of power” and provide the Armenian side with military equipment, played a crucial role in the failure of the Azerbaijani counter-attack in the defining months of the war. In this regard, although it was never openly admitted either by the Armenian or by the Russian side, this assistance by the Kremlin defined the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. While discussion of the impact of external actors on the conflicts in the South Caucasus

lies outside the scope of this study, this example demonstrates how the influence of the great powers, namely Russia, affected the foreign policy choices of the local states.

According to the National Security Strategy of Armenia (2007),

The importance of Russia's role for the security of Armenia, the traditional friendly links between the two nations, the level of trade and economic relations, Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh mediation effort, as well as the presence of a significant Armenian community in Russia, all contribute to a strategic partnership.

Today, Armenia is politically, economically and militarily closely connected to Russia. The country is 80% dependent on Russian gas and energy; its economy significantly depends on the remittances of the guest workers of Armenian origin in Russia. However, neither of these facts casts a doubt on the choice of the country's international orientation by the Armenian government.

Armenia is also the main Russian ally in the South Caucasus, with the Russian military base in Gyumri having the right to operate at least until 2044. According to the regulations of the CSTO, Russia and other members of the treaty have the obligation to assist Armenia in case of a military threat against Yerevan (CSTO Charter, 1992). In this regard, although Azerbaijan possesses the biggest military budget in the region, it is not guaranteed that it can defeat Armenia, because of Yerevan's membership in the CSTO, the presence of Russian military bases on Armenian territory and the protection of Armenian airspace by the Russian forces. At the same time, there is growing concern in Armenia about substantive Russian weapon deliveries to Azerbaijan. In 2016, the outcome of the "Four-day War" led to a rise in anti-Russian sentiments among Armenian society: several protests took place in Yerevan during the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in April and President Vladimir Putin in October 2016. These sentiments reflected public concern over the one-sided nature of Armenian foreign policy, Armenia's "deep dependence on Moscow and growing public doubts about Russian intentions" (Stronski, 2016, p. 9). Yet, Yerevan's international orientation did not change with the Velvet Revolution: according to Iskandaryan (2019, p. 4), only one of the smaller parties continues to criticize the cooperation with Russia, in favor of a strong pro-western direction.

Armenia's policy in the region is supported by its pragmatic relations with Iran. Despite

the short border and the political isolation of its southern neighbor, the connections with Iran are vitally important for isolated Armenia, most obviously expressed during the 2008 war in Georgia. Indeed, due to the closure of the Armenian border with Turkey, relations between Yerevan and Tehran are a prime example of Armenia's pragmatic foreign policy "being driven by strategic necessity", as one of Armenia's main transit routes passes through Iran (German, 2012c, p. 220). Additionally, Armenia has diversified its energy sources via cooperation with its southern neighbor. According to a 2007 agreement, Armenia and Iran announced on the jointly building of a hydroelectric power station. While the cooperation between the two states is influenced by Iranian-Azerbaijani antagonism and the existence of a large Azerbaijani ethnic minority in Iran, the relationship is also partly motivated by a strong Armenian diaspora in Iran (Kraus and Souleimanov, 2016, p. 456). Despite being one of the biggest and oldest Armenian communities in the world, the Armenian minority in Iran is much smaller compared to the Azerbaijani community and does not pose a threat to Tehran.

Finally, since the first years of independence, Armenia's Western policy has been considered from the perspective of the influence of the Armenian lobby and the promotion of Armenian interests, mostly the recognition of the 1915 events as a genocide and efforts aimed at the international acceptance of the self-proclaimed government of Nagorno-Karabakh. Hence, there is not much differentiation between the American and European vectors of Armenian diplomacy: both are home to the strongest Armenian communities in the world, with the biggest part of the diaspora living in the United States and France. The Armenian diaspora used its influence in the West during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when it lobbied for the adoption of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act by the American Congress in 1992. This section banned any kind of direct American aid to the Azerbaijani government, making Azerbaijan the only state in the post-Soviet space, which was denied direct governmental aid from the United States (Ismailzade, 2004, p. 2).

On the other hand, despite its openly pro-Russian position, Armenia has never faced significant resistance and isolation either from the United States, or from Europe. Although a member of the CSTO, official Yerevan has been able to maintain balance in

a tense environment; for example, despite being a member of the Russia-backed Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU. According to Iskandaryan (2019, p. 2), Armenian foreign policy is defined as under the pressure of geographical constraints regardless of domestic political developments. This corresponds with the policy of complementarity, announced by Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian in the late 1990s, implying a pragmatic policy based on three principles, namely the mutuality of interests with external actors, the integrity of national interests, and the unforced choice between partners. According to Oskanian, it should be differentiated from the policy of balance, as Armenia could deepen closer relations with any external actor, as long as its national needs are achieved (Simão, 2018, p. 160).

Still, although Armenia has succeeded in the ratification of several agreements with the EU and continues to cooperate with NATO in a series of projects, it is hard to anticipate the Armenian-European relations being set at the same level as those with Russia. The support of the Russian government limits the Armenian perspective in the Western and, particularly European, orientation of the country. Being dependent on Russian energy resources and building the system of state security around its membership in CSTO, Armenia cannot afford to maintain a pro-Western policy. Unlike Georgia, Armenia has never openly made a statement on its interest to join the EU and the government's official policy does not accentuate its European identity either. The attraction of Western investments can motivate the Armenian government to support EU-backed programs promoting regional cooperation in the South Caucasus; however the existing internal problems of the EU, such as the consequences of Brexit and the refugee crisis, as well as the strained relations of Brussels with Moscow, decrease the chances of such projects succeeding. In addition, as Simão (2018, p. 174) notes, as long as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved and Armenia occupies Azerbaijani territory, Azerbaijan will impede any regional cooperation initiative with the participation of Armenia, as during the 2009 initiative on the normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara.

It is hard to talk about a fully independent foreign policy in the circumstances of the existing Russian military presence on the Armenian soil, as well as its dependence on Russian support in the economic and energy fields. The potential to decrease Russian influence and the dependence of Armenia on the remittances of the Armenian diaspora could have been achieved if the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani borders had been opened. This would have brought many advantages to the Armenian economy and guaranteed its involvement in regional projects of strategic importance. However, as Alizade (interview) notes, the choice of the Armenian leadership was made in favor of continuing “territorial expansion [...] and remaining to be the outpost of the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus”. As a result, the current diplomatic impasse over Nagorno-Karabakh impedes the potential for regional cooperation while magnifying the perceptions of threat.

At the same time, the current international context does not contribute to the progress of the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh. For example, the change in Turkey’s international orientation, its political transformation as well as its potential membership of the EU could help reduce the tensions between Armenia and Turkey. In 2006, Vartan Oskanian stated that: “If Turkey becomes *de facto* a EU member and does all the reforms, and not just *de jure*, this will bring stability to the region” (Simão, 2018, p. 167). However, the current state of relations between Ankara and Moscow, with some elements of rapprochement, decreases the factor of European influence in the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, while, at the same time, allows for new perspectives regarding alternative solutions.

Another factor is the shifting orientation of Azerbaijan and its developing relations with Moscow that might change the balance of power in the region. Although it is hard to expect Armenia to leave the CSTO in the foreseeable future, any progress in the Azerbaijani-Russian cooperation might affect Armenian public opinion and lead to the search for alternative alliances with the West, or bring the two sides together and obtain concessions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict both from the Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership. Nevertheless, despite Armenia’s deep political and economic dependence on Russia, history shows that, like in the late 1980s, Yerevan would prefer to choose a

position antagonistic to Moscow's if the latter requires concessions on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

5.2.2 Azerbaijan's multi-faceted identity and balanced foreign policy

In a region of substantive geopolitical challenges, Azerbaijan is known for traditionally choosing a strategy of balancing and pragmatism. While initial analysis of its international orientation shows that its foreign policy seems to be the least ideational of the three states of the region, more detailed research explains the Azerbaijani strategic choices from the perspective of a multifaceted and sophisticated national identity. Indeed, the Azerbaijani self-conceptualization consists of a number of aspects and cannot be characterized by only one term. It includes the triad of Western secularism, Turkic ethnic component, and Muslim culture, and a balance of these three elements should be guaranteed in the conduct of a successful domestic and foreign policy (Moreno, 2005). As the history of the first years of independence shows, any violation of this balance can be catastrophic to the interests of Azerbaijani statehood.

Neither the last secretary of the Communist party of Azerbaijan, Abdurrahman Vezirov, nor the first president Ayaz Mutalibov were accepted as national enough during the period of the rise of the national movement in the country; their pro-Russian orientation was perceived as a betrayal of national interests, and the two tragedies of January 1990 and the Khojaly massacre of February 1992, respectively, led to their resignation and escape to Moscow. The second president, Abulfaz Elchibey, also lacked the strategic thinking that was vitally important in the circumstances of the enduring military conflict and economic crisis. His policy of "Turkic unity" led to the fragmentation of Azerbaijani society from within, leaving the non-Turkic minorities of the country discriminated, while contributing to increased confrontation with neighboring Iran and Russia (Ibrahimov, 2011, p. 15). Instead, the strategy of Heydar Aliyev in the 1990s, followed by the policies of his son, Ilham, in the 2000s, was based on a balance between the leading powers of the region and called on the uniting of different elements of the Azerbaijani nation that would also contribute to the interests of the state. The adopted ideology of "Azerbaijanism" deemphasized the Turkic element and comprised all the

aspects of the national self-image, with respect to the country's national minorities and neighboring regional powers (Tokluoglu, 2005).

At the same time, it is important to remember that Nagorno-Karabakh, as one of the key defining elements of Azerbaijani national identity, demarcates the choice of allies and partners for the country in the international arena. Indeed, the restoration of territorial integrity is listed in the National Security Concept of Azerbaijan (2007, p. 4) as the first goal of its national security policy. While developing relations with other countries, official Baku often views them through the prism of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Moreover, while the history of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations is perceived by the Azerbaijanis from the perspective of an existential threat and the memory of the century-long eviction of refugees from their homelands, the position of the neighboring powers throughout this history of relations has been defining in the foreign policy orientation of independent Azerbaijan since gaining independence in 1991. In this regard, while the policy of the Western actors was new and unpredictable, the other three, namely Russia, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Iran were perceived through the prism of their traditional policy in the region, as well as their historical role in the development of the conflict.

In the context of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations, the ethno-linguistic kinship, cultural similarity, as well as the high level of secularization of both societies, provided the basis for their enduring mutual interest and political alliance. According to the 2013 survey of the Caucasus Barometer, 91% of the Azerbaijanis identified Turkey as their main friend in the international arena (figure C.8). This attitude is defined by the history of bilateral relations since the early twentieth century and the role of Turkey in the restoration of Azerbaijani control over its territory in 1918. The ethnic Turkic identity of modern Azerbaijan was formed in the late nineteenth century, mostly due to the policy of secularism imposed by the Russian Empire, which separated the Azerbaijanis from their historical religious kinship with Shia Iran. With the establishment of the independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in 1918, and the important role of the Turkish army in the liberation of Baku from the Bolshevik-Dashnak forces, relations with Turkey were influenced by the memory of historical protection and ethnic kinship. Later, with the

occupation of Azerbaijan by the Red Army in April 1920 and the emigration of the ADR government, Azerbaijani intellectuals played a significant role in the formation of the Turkish Republic in the 1920-1930s (Aydın, 2011, p. 118).

After the restoration of independence in 1991, Turkey was the first country that recognized Azerbaijan. The APF government of Elchibey in Azerbaijan had a clear pan-Turkic orientation and was believed to be “closely associated with extreme right-wing nationalists in Turkey and their leader, Alparslan Türkeş” (Peimani, 1998, p. 49). At the same time, with the exception of humanitarian aid to Armenia in 1992, Turkey unanimously supported Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, and closed its border with Armenia in reaction to the latter’s occupation of Kalbajar and other Azerbaijani districts after April 1993. However, to the chagrin of the Azerbaijani leadership, Turkey abstained from active involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh War due to the reasons mentioned above.

In the years that followed, Turkey provided military assistance to Azerbaijan by sending advisors and providing training to Azerbaijani soldiers, within the framework of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Additionally, in 2010 the strategic partnership agreement was signed between the two states, allowing Turkey to take “all possible measures” to help Azerbaijan in case of attack by a third party. However, as Çelikpala and Erşen (2018, p. 78) note, “this clause is too vague to indicate a genuine alliance between Ankara and Baku”. Today it remains unlikely that after the major power balance shift in the region, Turkey would actually get involved in Russia’s strategic space by directly intervening in a renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and CSTO member Armenia, or by building bases on Azerbaijani territory (Oskanian, 2011, p. 26). Nevertheless, the current situation might change in case if there is a major regional transformation or change in the relations between Turkey and Russia, that would possibly bring Turkey to get more actively involved in the South Caucasus.

With the political coup of June 1993, the extreme Turkic nationalism of the early 1990s was replaced with a more pragmatic and multifaceted policy of Heydar Aliyev. In

response to concerns in the Turkish government regarding the new Azerbaijani policy, Aliyev Sr. did his best to convince his Ankara counterparts in his friendly intentions that would not violate Turkish interests in the region. The political motto of “one nation, two states” announced by President Aliyev, henceforth defined years of cooperation between the two countries. In the 1990s, Turkey was one of the leading lobbyists in the Western establishment for financial assistance to the strategically important regional energy and transport projects (Bruno, 2008); it also supported the interests of Azerbaijan and Georgia in international fora, such as NATO and the OSCE.

Since the early 2000s, the governance of Erdoğan and Aliyev Jr. have introduced new perspectives into the economies of the two states, with the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in 2006, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline (also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline) in 2007, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad in 2017 and the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) in 2018 (figure A.3). The projects became important in terms of the diversification of the energy resources coming to the West, while serving the interests of both states: while Baku succeeded in delivering its oil and gas to Western markets, Ankara took a big step forward in the implementation of its strategic goal of becoming a regional energy hub (Çelikpala and Veliyev, 2015, p. 3). All of these measures led to the formation of a deep-rooted trust and cooperation between the two nations.

Besides the pragmatic interest and mutual advantages of economic cooperation, Azerbaijani-Turkish relations have strong public support based on the ethnic and linguistic affinity between the two nations. Although relations between the two countries were nonexistent during the Soviet period, the opening of the border in the late 1980s facilitated the quick diffusion of Turkish culture in Azerbaijan and vice versa (Balçı and Liles, 2019). In terms of religious affiliation, the two nations adhere to different branches of Islam; however, religion is not an obstacle due to the secular character of both states. Moreover, the example of Turkey as a secular and modern Muslim state has been seen as a role model for the newly established Azerbaijani government since 1991. Today, elements of Turkish soft power are winning the hearts and minds of the Azerbaijani public through Turkish TV channels and popular culture.

The so-called “Turkish lyceums” sponsored by Fethullah Gülen were functioning in Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan until they were closed as an act of solidarity with the position of the Turkish government after the failed coup of July 2016 (F. Aliyev, 2017, p. 143).

The relations between the two nations faced a big challenge during the attempt at Armenian-Turkish rapprochement without preliminary consultation with Baku in 2008. This example proves that territorial integrity and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh remain of primary concern for the national interests and national identity of the country and might cause a strain in relations with even a close ally such as Turkey, despite the latter’s popularity within Azerbaijani society. Even before the crisis of 2008-2009, several attempts by the Turkish government to restore economic ties with Armenia prior to the liberation of the occupied Azerbaijani territories were perceived as an act of treason in Baku (Ismailzade, 2006, p. 7). In 2008, the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement was viewed negatively both within the government and Azerbaijani society in general, even though some supported the Turkish initiative, viewing it as an opportunity to decrease Russian influence in the region (Azerbaijan in the world, 2009).

The diplomatic crisis started when President Ilham Aliyev cancelled his trip to Istanbul for the Alliance of Civilizations Summit in April 2009, putting Turkey in a quandary as to whether to backpedal or continue its rapprochement with Armenia: the latter could have caused strong domestic reverberations and be “the final straw that could push Baku into Moscow’s orbit” (Cornell, 2009). Indeed, President Aliyev threatened to stop selling Azerbaijani gas to Turkey at one-third of the market prices (Whitmore, 2009). The crisis was settled with the official visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan to Baku in May 2009, as well as the failure of the ratification of the Zurich Protocols in the Turkish and Armenian parliaments. As Shiryev and Davies (2013, p. 201) put it, “the brief taste of animosity had been sufficiently unpleasant to scare the two states back into friendship”. At the same time, the “football diplomacy” crisis demonstrated all the complexity of the Azerbaijani-Armenian-Turkish relations, showing that the rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan cannot be resolved only within the framework of bilateral

relations; rather it necessitates a broader approach with the consideration of those steps that would involve progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Iran is another traditional regional actor playing an important role in the political developments in the region. For official Baku, several factors define Azerbaijani foreign policy and public opinion regarding its southern neighbor, such as Tehran's religious influence threatening the secular status of the Azerbaijani statehood, and the presence of a large community of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran. Although cautious relations with Iran can be interpreted as standing against the principles of Muslim unity and brotherhood, they can also be explained from the viewpoint of national identity, as according to the Azerbaijani perspective, any spread of religious propaganda is perceived as a threat to its national security, as the country's secular traditions trump religious affinity. Indeed, during the first years of independence, Iran used its influence in the region by promoting and financing Islamic parties in Azerbaijan, as well as supporting the separatist movement of the Talyshs, an ethnic minority in Azerbaijan's south with a strong Persian identity (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2008, p. 4). As the separatist movement was quelled, the Islamic factor in Iran's policy continued to threaten Azerbaijani statehood. According to a former Azerbaijani official, "Iran "exports Islam" in the very same manner that the Soviet Union "used to export communism" (Souleimanov and Ditarych, 2007, p. 107).

The second factor of the presence of a substantial ethnic Azerbaijani minority in Iran coupled with the history of the violation of their minority rights¹⁷ affects the attitude of Azerbaijani society toward Iran, although this is not expressed in the current position of official Baku. During the first years of independence, this factor significantly affected the deterioration of Azerbaijani-Iranian relations, with disastrous consequences for Baku during the Nagorno-Karabakh war. The idealistic approach of President Abulfaz Elchibey was expressed in his claims for the protection of the cultural and language rights of his ethnic brethren, and the promotion of the liberation of "Southern

¹⁷ This issue is not affiliated with any specific regime in Iran, as both the Shah regime of the Pahlavi dynasty and the post-revolution clerical regime treated the Azerbaijanis similarly, by prohibiting education in Azerbaijani and limiting the number of media outlets (for more information see e.g. Bijan Baharan, *The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination Against Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, Paris: International Federation for Human Rights, 2010).

Azerbaijan” was viewed with great concern in Tehran. As a result, the perception of the “Azerbaijani threat” led to Iranian support for Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Iranian assistance included the supply of food and fuel and the provision of a conduit through its territory for other states’ supplies to Armenia, thereby having a big impact on the outcome of the war (Shaffer, 2012, p. 76).

The lesson of the early 1990s defined the foreign policy of the ensuing years, when starting from the presidency of Heydar Aliyev and subsequently that of his son Ilham, Azerbaijan refused to grant citizenship to ethnic Azerbaijanis living outside Azerbaijan, including Iranian Azerbaijanis (Shaffer, 2012, p. 79). Today, the foreign policy of Azerbaijan prioritizes the interests of the state over ethnicity, as Azerbaijan understands the importance of Iran’s neutral position and the leverages it can use in case of the deterioration of relations between the two countries. One of the leverages of the Iranian government against Baku can be found in the vulnerable position of the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan, which is totally dependent on Iranian natural gas in the circumstances of the blocked border with Armenia and the lack of territorial connection with the rest of Azerbaijan.

As a part of Azerbaijan’s pragmatic policy, Baku supports Tehran’s right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology; additionally, the two countries have signed an agreement banning the use of their respective territories for the launching of an attack on each other (Balla, 2013, p. 2). Azerbaijan also invests in economic cooperation with its southern neighbor through the promotion of a special economic zone on the border with Iran and the renting of an Iranian railroad and electric station since 2017. Since 2019, it has lifted the visa regime for Iranian citizens in Nakhchivan. Still, the relations between the two states have remained quite guarded. Iran continues to support Armenia with the supply of gas through the gas pipeline since 2009. In contrast, Azerbaijan’s strategic cooperation with Israel, primarily developed in response to the active Armenian-Iranian cooperation, is perceived with caution in Tehran. These relations with Israel are based on the traditions of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between the Jewish minority and Azerbaijanis while, at the same time, they are important for Azerbaijan in its search for a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, due to the powerful Jewish lobby that

can serve as a counter-balance to the Armenian lobby in the West. Although Azerbaijan has expressed its neutrality toward the relations of Iran with Israel and its ally the United States, the potential spike in confrontation between Tehran and Washington might turn into a big challenge for the Azerbaijani foreign policy.

The factor of the neighborhood of Russia has a special place both in the Azerbaijani national identity and in the international orientation of the country. Today, Azerbaijan's foreign policy is shaped both by pragmatic calculations and the traditions of bilateral relations with its northern neighbor. Russia played an important role in the formation of the national identity of the country: the Russian presence in the region for almost two hundred years has influenced the level of secularity and cultural development, while also leaving behind the traditions of the Soviet statehood with its advantages and drawbacks. Azerbaijan is homeland to the biggest community of ethnic Russians in the South Caucasus; the Russian language is still in usage and Russian culture has, much as in the case of Turkey, soft power mechanisms applied mainly through the Russian media, Russian schools and Russian cultural centers. In this regard, the Russian government uses its soft power mechanisms in Azerbaijan as in other states of the South Caucasus, by portraying its southern neighbors as united by common "civilizational ties [...] and reactivating Soviet mythology" (Kornilov and Makarychev, 2014, p. 250).

Yet, Russia's image is mixed in Azerbaijani society, due to the memory of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the role the Russian leadership played throughout the history of its presence and control over the region. There is a strong perception of the influence of Russian and Soviet machinations on the conflict, which "downplayed Armenia's culpability" and put under question independence of its decisions in the conflict (Radnitz, 2019, p. 65). The Russian impact on the relations between the nations of the region, expressed in their support for the Armenians during their resettlement from Persia to Karabakh and modern Armenia throughout the nineteenth century, is widely discussed in the Azerbaijani historiography. This argument was notably used in the second half of the 1980s, when the Azerbaijani democrats tried to deliver to the Armenians the idea that the conflict was backed by Moscow in order to prevent the unification of the region and distract the local states from the struggle against the real

enemy (Aliyeva, 2011, p. 199). Russia, indeed, played an ambiguous role in the Nagorno-Karabakh War, both at the level of military groups left in the region after the collapse of the USSR and, later, at state level during the Yeltsin presidency (Souleimanov and Evoyan, 2012). As a result, the participation of the 366th Russian infantry division in the perpetration of the Khojaly massacre in February 1992 had a devastating effect on the Russian image in Azerbaijani society (Cornell, 1999). In the ensuing months, the openly anti-Russian policy of Elchibey and his decision not to have Azerbaijan join the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) resulted in the assistance of the Yeltsin government to the Armenian military forces, thereby dramatically worsening the position of the Azerbaijani army.

Heydar Aliyev chose a more pragmatic approach in the country's relations with Russia by joining the CIS and the CSTO (Azerbaijani membership in this organization lasted until 1999). At the same time, Azerbaijan intensified its balanced position in the international arena by joining GUAM, a geopolitical project of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova based on the commonality of foreign policy goals of the four post-Soviet states, including the protection of territorial integrity and the establishment of their own system of security. In addition, Moscow's weak international standing in the 1990s, its enduring economic crisis and the war in Chechnya allowed for the attraction of Western capital to Azerbaijan through a series of contracts signed with Western oil companies. Yet, according to the "Contract of the Century" signed in September 1994 and regulating the shares of international oil companies in the development of the Azerbaijani oil fields of "Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli", the Russian company Lukoil was allocated ten percent of the shares (Aslanli, 2010, p. 141).

While, in the 1990s, Azerbaijani-Russian relations were strained, partially due to the personal cold relations between Yeltsin and Aliyev, the presidency of Vladimir Putin reinvigorated the relations between the two states. In 2001, for the first time since independence, a Russian President made an official visit to Baku. A year later, during Aliyev's visit to Moscow, an agreement on political and economic cooperation was signed. As a result, Aliyev Sr. and Putin managed to eliminate a number of impediments that had been accumulating in the countries' relations (Valiyev and

Mamishova, 2019, p. 6). President Ilham Aliyev continued his father's policy of balance in the context of a growing global antagonism between Russia and the Western powers. By the second half of the 2000s, Russian political ascendancy and economic growth caused by high oil prices and a resolution of many of its domestic problems, provided the Kremlin with an opportunity to re-establish its influence in the post-Soviet countries. Although Russia could not apply its energy leverage in its relations with Azerbaijan, as it did with other states of the region (including Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia), it nevertheless used many other levers of influence perceived as a threat to the national interests of Azerbaijan. These tools include the status of the illegal migrant workers of Azerbaijani origin working in Russia, the Lezgi population inhabiting both the northern territories of Azerbaijan and Dagestan, and, most importantly, its joint membership in the CSTO with Armenia, allowing Moscow to intervene in the conflict in the case of its escalation.

An understanding of the Russian threat became especially obvious after the August War of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Indeed, the Russo-Georgian War provided a big message to other countries of the region, as it forced Georgia, its South Caucasus neighbors, and the other outside powers to reevaluate their regional priorities (Mankoff, 2012, p. 8). Additionally, the inability of the Western powers to counter the Russian aggression undermined Western credibility, leaving doubts on its future involvement in the protection of territorial integrity of the states in the region (Ismayilov, 2019, p. 244). As the result of these changes, one of the most significant developments of recent years has been the rapprochement between Moscow and Baku (Shiriyev, 2019b). This is most clearly expressed in the political cooperation and mutual recognition of the existing regimes, the development of economic cooperation and the purchase of Russian weaponry by the Azerbaijani government, causing dissent by Russia's counterparts in Armenia. Additionally, as Ismayilov (2019, p. 250) notes, Turkey's rapprochement with Moscow in the second half of the 2010s created a situation in which Azerbaijani national interests "have become more securely aligned with those of Russia".

Today, the general deterioration of relations between Baku and the West can also be explained in the broken expectations of the Western assistance in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this regard, “the tiptoeing politics of the EU over conflicts in the South Caucasus and its refusal to engage in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mediation have emphasized Russia’s military dominance” in the region (Babayan, 2014, p. 61). The lack of a conflict resolution strategy for the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as well as differences in the policy used against the occupying states caused a wave of criticism from the Azerbaijani government for the application of double standards by the European Union. According to President Ilham Aliyev (2017), while Russia was sanctioned for its actions in Ukraine, nevertheless “Armenia was not sanctioned for what happened in Nagorno-Karabakh; this double standard approach must be eliminated”. In this regard, both the government and society expect the EU to treat the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the same way as it does other countries with frozen conflicts (European Parliament, 2017, p. 23).

The European neutrality towards Yerevan can be interpreted from the aspect of the existing efforts of Brussels to integrate Armenia into the European institutions and not separate it from other countries of the EaP; however, it distances Baku from the European initiatives. Another example of the EU’s dubious position can be found in the official documents of the European Commission: while the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) action plan for Azerbaijan recognizes the territorial integrity of the Azerbaijani state, the same plan for Armenia recognizes the right to self-determination of the Armenians (European Commission and Government of Azerbaijan, 2006; European Commission and Government of Armenia, 2006). Although Brussels uses the language of recommendation and expresses full support for the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs in their work to facilitate a lasting settlement (European Commission, 2014, p. 3-4), it fails to bring tangible changes to the negotiation process and, thus, does not have a mechanism to induce official Baku to deepen the existing level of cooperation with its European partners.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, there are other elements of internal issues affecting the current level of relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union. The

criticism of their authoritarian methods of governance is received negatively in Baku, while there is little ideological or economic motivation to follow the pro-European line in its foreign policy. Indeed, unlike Georgia or Armenia, oil-rich Azerbaijan sees no proper “carrot” that could lead to the implementation of the recommendations of Brussels. As a result, in 2016 Azerbaijan turned down an offer to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, which was aimed to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) agreement of 1999. While Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine signed the agreement in 2017, Azerbaijan’s refusal to join revealed its geopolitical and civilizational choice (Ismayilov, 2019, p.248). The recent statements of President Ilham Aliyev show the skepticism of the Azerbaijani government about the EU’s impartiality in its relations with Eastern partners, showing it to be a Christian club, which is following an islamophobic policy (Aliyev, 2019) reluctant to accept non-Christian members (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019). The lack of trust in the European and Western institutions in their capability and willingness to assist in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the lack of economic motivation and differences in the specifics of identities, all leave no interest for official Baku to integrate with the European institutions.

Similarly, the friendly relations and active support for American foreign policy in the region did not bring about any positive developments in the negotiation process over Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan was one of the first post-Soviet states to join NATO’s PfP program in 1994, as well as NATO’s Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2005. Although Azerbaijan never expressed openly its intention to become a member, it still became one of the most celebrated partners of the Alliance (Ismayilov, 2014, p. 84). After the 11 September 2001 attacks, Azerbaijan was one of the first states to announce its full support for the United States by offering its airspace for the joint struggle against terrorism. Additionally, Baku participated in a series of NATO missions and operations by sending its troops to Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan.

When in March 2008 the United States voted against UN General Assembly Resolution 10693 on the necessity of withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, it was an important message for the Azerbaijani leadership, bolstered by

the events, which ensued in Georgia in August the same year. This shift continued under the Obama administration with the American refusal to sponsor the BTK railroad project, the promotion of the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and active criticism of the Azerbaijani regime. According to Ismayilov (2014, p. 90-91),

For Azerbaijan's political elite, Western democratic knowledge (discourse), akin to Russian neo-imperialism, has come to be seen as directly threatening regime stability on the one hand, and constraining the Azerbaijani state in its ability to exercise 'full' sovereignty and enjoy autonomy in its domestic and foreign policies on the other: the two objectives behind Baku's pipeline diplomacy and its exclusive Western orientation in the 1990s.

By becoming a member of the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011, Azerbaijan officially chose to refrain from any military alliances. This choice can be interpreted as a signal to the West of its disappointment in Western policy due to the lack of its support for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to "reassure Moscow of its lack of ambitions for NATO membership" (Strakes, 2015, p. 3) Similarly, while Azerbaijan has the economic capacity for an independent policy, it also rejected invitations to join economic alliances, such as that of the EEU initiated by Russia, as well as the Association Agreement with the EU. Instead, the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stands at the basis of the Azerbaijani foreign policy choice, and any shift in the position of one of the great powers on this issue will immediately lead to a change in the international orientation of the political leadership in Baku.

To conclude, the multifaceted national identity of Azerbaijan involves many elements reflecting the multiethnic character of its population and the history of Turkic, Iranian and Russian influence over the region. Today, these elements express themselves in the secular regime respecting its Muslim traditions and bearing the burden of the Soviet legacy with little experience of democratic governance. As for Azerbaijani foreign policy, the balanced choice of international orientation can be partially explained in the diversity of its identity elements, however the priority of its foreign policy choices is set around the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which stands above all other issues in the hierarchy of national identity elements. In other words, the foreign policy vector of official Baku is defined in the capacity and willingness of international actors to assist in the resolution of the conflict, and it is expected that this trend will continue to define the international orientation of the country in the future.

5.2.3 Georgia's European identity and Western aspirations

Compared to the other two states of the South Caucasus, Georgia is a unique example of a state prioritizing values over national interests in its foreign policy orientations. Despite having some elements of balance in its examples of cooperation with the international actors, to a large extent the policy of official Tbilisi remains ideational and uncompromising. Throughout the history of the country's independence since 1991, Georgian foreign policy priorities have rarely been driven pragmatism or balance of power; instead, today, in many cases, the foreign policy priorities are built around the European identity of the Georgian society and political elite (Kakachia, 2012, p. 12). As the main priority in Georgian foreign policy, the policy on the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country has some elements of protection of the national interest (realist approach) and the national identity (constructivist approach) as well.

The priority of this issue in foreign policy orientation can be most obviously seen in Georgia's relations with Russia. Importantly, the role of Moscow in the support of the secessionist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to Georgia's deeper alienation from its northern neighbor. Additionally, as a multinational state with the precedents of two secessionist regions and the existence of ethnic minorities that live compactly and do not assimilate with the rest of the population, Georgia saw Russia's support for the country's ethnic minorities as another source of threat leading to the rise in tension between Tbilisi and Moscow, until some of the autonomies were dissolved and others lost the influence of Russia with the removal of the Russian military base, as in the case of Adjara and Javakheti, respectively (Øverland, 2009). Finally, the process of democratization in the country that started with the aspiration of joining the European institutions, to a large extent, took place in antagonism toward the memory of the Soviet past and current Russian support for the authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet space. In this regard, Georgian national identity juxtaposes the negative role of Russian involvement in the development of Georgia throughout its history, together with Moscow's current role in its support for secessionists, with the positive role of the West and Europe, in particular in the way it can transform the drawbacks of the Georgian political system and assist in the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country.

The Georgian perception of the Russian threat is based on the active involvement of Moscow in the ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since their onset in the early 1990s. Russian support for the separatists in Georgia's two seceding regions was expressed in military and financial assistance to the local regimes, which substantially contributed to their successful resistance to Georgian efforts to restore its control over the territory. The situation was exacerbated by the absolute monopoly of the Russian army over the territory. In 1993, speaking at the UN General Assembly, the Foreign Minister of Russia, Andrey Kozyrev, stated that Russians "are the only people who can restore peace in this specific post-Soviet space" (Gordadze, 2011, p. 13). This Russian pressure led the Georgian agreement to join the Russian-led blocs of CIS and CSTO, as well as the allocation of Russian troops to four military bases in Georgia. In 1994, Moscow's peace agreement with Abkhazia promised to bring back 250,000 Georgian IDPs; however this plan was never implemented. The Russian policy aimed to sustain the *status quo*, without changes in progress in the negotiation process, played a crucial role in the subsequent decisions made by the Georgian government to decrease Russian influence in the country and search for Western support for the restoration of its territorial integrity. In 1999, Georgia left the CSTO and announced its decision to close the Russian military bases. In response, the Russian government imposed visa regulations on Georgians, but left a visa-free regime in place for the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It was the first step in the fragmentation of the country when several years later Moscow provided the residents of the secessionist republics with Russian citizenship.

After almost a decade of strained relations, with a series of measures implemented by the Russian government such as wine and mineral water embargos and a flight and postal boycott, Moscow succeeded in building up its negative image in the eyes of the Georgian society. The crisis in relations reached its climax in the August war of 2008, when Russian troops were just sixty kilometers from Tbilisi; although Moscow declared that they did not intend to reach the Georgian capital, in Tbilisi this message was accepted as an existential threat to Georgian statehood. The war defined the future

international orientation of the country, as, according to the National Security Concept (2012, p. 3),

the large-scale military aggression committed by the Russian Federation against Georgia [...] made it clear that, for certain countries, open military aggression is still a tool they are willing to employ in order to accomplish their political goals in today's world.

Russian recognition and active support for the self-proclaimed regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to a rise in anti-Russian sentiments and confronted Georgian society and political elites against the country's northern neighbor. According to a survey held by the International Republican Institute (figure C.9), 87% of the Georgian population characterized relations with Russia as bad. With the majority of the population seeing Russia as the main enemy, the Georgian government forged its foreign policy in antagonism to Moscow's policy in the region. It resulted in the breakup of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Georgia's decision to leave the CIS and the intensification of its policy aimed at European integration.

This trend was no exception for the government of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream Party and a Georgian-Russian businessman, who is argued to have political connections and the support of Moscow. Indeed, while the United National Movement (UNM) of President Saakashvili was considered as a "Westernizing" force, the Georgian Dream Party can be called a "balancer" in its foreign policy choices aimed at the normalization of Georgian-Russian relations (Buzogány, 2019, p. 98). Still, despite the steps taken, two red lines put an obstacle in the path of full-scale rapprochement between Georgia and Russia. The first red line refers to Georgia's pro-European orientation, undermining Russia's policy built around the consolidation of Moscow's control over the post-Soviet space. The second red line is Russian support for and recognition of the self-proclaimed independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, contradicting Georgia's understanding of its sovereignty and territorial integrity (Merabishvili, 2015-2016, p. 162).

Another issue refers to Russian support for other ethnic minorities, the factor that on numerous occasions has destabilized the situation in Georgia throughout the history of its independence. One of the most notable examples was the autonomous region of Adjara and its leader Aslan Abashidze, who had support from the Kremlin until his

dismissal by the Saakashvili government in 2004. Similarly populated by ethnic Armenians, the region of Javakheti could have been transformed into another secessionist region, and although it did not have the open support of the Russian government, still the location of a Russian military base there and the pro-Russian orientation of the local population was another destabilizing factor in the country. With the removal of the military base in 2007, the district lost its main source of work places, which led to protests and demonstrations. Generally, the central government's policy of centralization led to the rise in tensions between Tbilisi and the periphery, deepening the contradiction between the "security perceptions of the central government in Tbilisi on the one hand, and the regional government on the other" (Begoyan, 2006, p. 294).

After the presidency of Shevardnadze, there was a strong belief in the Georgian government that the support and assistance of the Western allies might contribute to the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity, as well as diminishing Russian influence over the region, and over Georgia in particular. As a former minister of foreign affairs of the USSR who had contributed to the unification of Germany and the end of the Cold War, Shevardnadze used his popularity in the West to get financial and military support from the United States and Europe. As a result, in the 1990s Georgia became one of the world's largest per capita recipients of American financial help, with around a billion dollars granted during the eleven years of Shevardnadze's presidency (King, 2008, p. 230). However, there was little achievement in the resolution of the ethnic conflicts that had forced Tbilisi to join the CIS and CSTO in 1993 and agree to the opening of four Russian military bases in the country in 1995. When this policy did not produce any tangible results either, Shevardnadze tilted back towards the West (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 173).

Although the next president Mikheil Saakashvili made his first official visit to Moscow and was willing to build friendly relations with Russia, relations deteriorated, and the Georgian alienation from its northern neighbor continued with a much more obvious tendency. In the 2000s, the Georgian leadership announced its prioritization to be NATO membership, as the best way of achieving security in the unstable region. Additionally, during the Saakashvili presidency, Georgia contributed the highest

number of soldiers among NATO non-member states to the International Security Assistance Force^[11] (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan (Merabishvili, 2015-2016, p. 161). However, the following years revealed Russian interests and its potential unwillingness to see a new NATO member in its immediate neighborhood.

All of these measures led to the escalation of tensions between Georgia and Russia, but failed to provide Georgia with the real military and financial support of the Western actors, and particularly the United States and NATO during the August War. Georgian-American security cooperation demonstrated America's cautious approach to balancing its relationship with Georgia due to the sensitivities of Russia in the area of sub-regional security. Significantly, the United States did not accede to Georgian requests for assistance in rearmament (notably anti-aircraft and antitank systems) (Khelashvili and Macfarlane, 2010, p. 121). As for the EU, the initiative of President Sarkozy in the organization of the negotiation process was a big step forward, but it was not the reaction that had been expected by the Georgian leadership during the military crisis. These events strengthened the positions of NATO skeptics and anti-Westerners in the country, stigmatizing liberal democracy and the West as "alien" and "unreliable" (Aprasidze, 2009, p. 71). Still, in the following years, cooperation with the EU reached its greatest achievement when in June 2014 Georgia signed the Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), allowing the Georgians to travel visa-free in Europe's Schengen zone. Tbilisi believes that these measures, together with economic prosperity, the rule of law and future membership of Georgia in the EU can potentially encourage its *de jure* citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to reintegrate with Georgia (Simão, 2018).

Nevertheless, Georgia's pro-European orientation is not built only around pragmatic calculation in response to Russian aggression. Its interest is related with the vision of Georgia as a part of European and Christian civilization and the restoration of historical links with the West that were cut after Georgia's occupation by the Ottoman and Persian empires. In this regard, narratives of European identity in Georgia have often linked "Europe" to the overall modernization of the Georgian state and society (Buzogány, 2019, p. 97). European values of democracy and justice serve as a role

model in the mindset of Georgians who want to associate themselves with the Western lifestyle (Nodia, 2010, p. 94). A famous declaration of Zurab Zhvania, Georgian Prime Minister on Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, "I am Georgian, therefore I am European", became a part of the national idea that united the nation in the subsequent years and became especially popular after the rise in tensions with Russia in the late 2000s. According to the National Security Concept of Georgia (2012, p. 15), "as a Black Sea and Southeast European country, Georgia is part of Europe geographically, politically and culturally; yet it was cut off from its natural course of development by historical cataclysms."

As a result, Georgia's pro-Western orientation was defined by its European identity, as the European traditions of democracy and equality became the paragon for Georgia's political development both during the period of the first independent republic of 1918-1921 as well as after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Nodia, 2010, p. 94). Although there are also material aspects to joining European institutions such as the economic benefits of EU integration, still the ideological aspect played a crucial role in the international orientation of the country, as, in the words of former president Saakashvili, Europeanness to Georgians means "freedom, democracy, independence and peace" (Simão, 2018, p. 225). Indeed, although Shevardnadze was the initiator of the pro-Western policy starting from the early 1990s, it was during Saakashvili's tenure when the government made a significant investment "in the political identity of Georgia through the project of Europe" (Gamkrelidze, 2019, p. 366). The European identity was expressed at different levels through the national policy of eradication of the Soviet legacy, a struggle with corruption, a pro-European foreign policy and a new "European" national flag.

Today, this European orientation defines the foreign policy of Tbilisi and the choice of its international partners. Most notably, Ukraine is perceived as Georgia's closest ally, due to the similarity in many aspects of the political development of the two countries, such as the problem of the restoration of territorial integrity and open confrontation with Russia, the process of democratization, an understanding of the necessity for reforms aimed at eliminating the legacy of the Soviet past, a search for cooperation with the

democratic regimes of the region, a pro-Western foreign policy orientation, and a strategy aimed at Euro-integration and NATO membership. Georgia and Ukraine became regional leaders in “advocating for a shift towards democracy throughout the post-Soviet space” (Simão, 2018, p. 236). According to a survey held by the International Republican Institute (figure C.9), Georgian society perceived Ukraine as a closer friend than its immediate neighbors in the region: 90% of Georgians defined their relations with Ukraine as good, while the relations with neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan were evaluated similarly only by 68% and 63% of the population, respectively (in 2019 the attitude towards Baku deteriorated particularly due to the David Gareji crisis). Kakachia (interview) sees the origins of Georgia’s search for alliance with Ukraine in the traditional image of a “Christian protector” in the Georgian history of statehood. Today, the two states have an extensive series of cooperation projects under the aegis of the BSEC sharing a common feeling of belonging to the region of the Black Sea.

Georgia and Ukraine already have the traditions of cooperation within the framework of GUAM since 1997, which still operates, but requires a substantial structural reorder, as the initial goals of the organization do not fit the current situation in the international arena. Established by the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, GUAM was a good example of a geopolitical alliance between states sharing similar security concerns. Although Ukraine did not face the violation of its territorial integrity until 2014, since the late 1990s it had been searching for an alternative union that would decrease Russian influence in the region. Still, as the former minister of foreign affairs of Georgia Tedo Japaridze (2008, p. 77) notes, GUAM is misleadingly labeled as an “anti-CIS alliance”, while its establishment took place due to the existence of certain strategic vectors in the greater region of the former Soviet Union and due to the experience of dealing with the ineffective structures of the CIS, especially those trying to cope with unresolved conflicts and other security issues.

The Rose Revolution in Georgia and Orange Revolution in Ukraine led to the differentiation of these two states and their more active involvement in the EU integration process. In the following years, when the international climate and position

of the four states of the organization started to change, the format of GUAM lost its former importance. While Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU, Azerbaijan officially refused to do so by announcing its disappointment with the policy of the EU in the region. According to Kakachia (interview), Azerbaijan has different approach towards values and its identity is different in terms of Europe, it does not fit in the value-based project Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova aspire to. As a result, GUAM fails to unite its members under common values or with a common vision of the future, raising the probability of the establishment of a new project that would better reflect transformations in the international arena and the new positions of the states of the region.

While discussing the relations of Georgia with its neighbors, it would also be important to mention the place of Turkey in the Georgian vision of its regional allies. Georgian cooperation with Turkey in energy and transport projects is an example of pragmatic foreign policy, where national identity plays the least important role in political decision-making. Still, the Turkish factor could play a different role in Georgian foreign policy if Ankara were to continue its traditional policy of cooperation with the West and to work on the implementation of the requirements necessary for obtaining EU membership. Moreover, the possibility of Turkey's cooperation with Russia distances the country from Tbilisi, despite the recognition of Turkey as one of Georgia's strategic partners in the region. As Petersen (2012, p. 16) notes, the differences between the relations of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the Kremlin and the EU has led to the failure of these three states to develop and diversify their projects of cooperation. The situation is exacerbated by the illiberal character of the two regimes, which means that Georgia's increased reliance on them would undermine "its ability to adhere to declared principles" of democracy (German, interview). The advantageous location and geopolitical importance of Turkey might bring the two states together, as the development of the TRACECA Eurasian transport corridor is the major instrument that would connect the future of Georgia to Europe, and Turkey in particular (Jones, 2004, p. 93). Long-term cooperation with Turkey might reinforce the role of the missing link in the new Silk Road linking the Caspian to the Black Sea (Simão, 2018, p. 220).

Today, despite many initiatives organized by the Georgian state and NGOs on the construction of a common Caucasian region, according to Kakachia (interview), the country is not willing to be labeled as a post-Soviet state, or to be identified with the fragmented Caucasus region. Today Georgia's political elites believe that Georgia should form partnerships with more progressive countries, not with peripheral areas (such as the CIS or post-Soviet space), because none of these alternatives to the West can satisfy Georgia's economic and security needs (Kakachia and Minesashvili, 2015, p. 177).

This is the reason why today Georgia associates itself with the region of the Black Sea and has the potential for a successful development of this concept in the framework of cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and other countries of Eastern Europe sharing the same post-Communist legacy and European identity. Still, differentiation in the definition of the region Georgia and Ukraine belong to in the EU's official documents ("Eastern European" for Georgia versus "European" for Ukraine) raises concerns on the future strategy of the EU in the region (Kakachia, interview). Indeed, the fact that Georgia is recognized as an Eastern European country in the AA puts some shadow on whether the EU will ever open its door to Georgia (Paul, 2015, p. 33). The real geopolitical situation, constantly deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, together with the experience of the August War and Russian proximity leave little hope for the access of Georgia to the Western integration projects, while the perception of a European identity might mislead the Georgians about their real situation and potentially more advantageous foreign policy (Alizade, interview). Additionally, this ideology ignores the possibility of changes, and there is no clear answer regarding the reaction of the public if the current orientation does not bring progress toward Georgia's EU membership and if relations with Russia improve (Mansurov, interview).

Georgia's historical choice of democratization after the Rose Revolution and the progress in democratic development, although with slight nuances, gives Tbilisi the right to make a case for joining Western integration projects, such as the EU and NATO. However, it is hard to predict any progress in the foreseeable future, as the European policy in the region is limited due to the current geopolitical situation, the

EU's uneasy relations with Russia and other internal issues of higher importance, such as Brexit, the issue of refugees and the upcoming consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the success of Georgia in this context could be crucial not only for the country, but for the whole South Caucasus, as Georgia could be a role model on how adopting key reforms can lead to greater prosperity and motivate other states of the region to adopt further reforms (Paul, 2015, p. 41).

5.3 The International Situation and the Potential Vision of Common Threats

While the region's clashing identities raise its vulnerability, the unresolved status of the "frozen" conflicts provides the basis for the involvement of foreign actors, notably Russia, in the stability and security of the region. In this regard, the realist approach should not be underestimated in the analysis of the situation in the South Caucasus, as the situation in the region's neighborhood hardly helps in resolving the existing contradictions and overcoming the ideational clashes, unlike other successful examples implemented in other regions of the globe. The current world order and growing confrontation between Russia and the West raises the question of the "role of geography" coined by Tedo Japaridze, or Lilia Shevtsova's "hostage to geography" and limits the integration capacities of the South Caucasus, leaving the states of the region with no choice but to play off Russia and the West (Triantaphyllou, 2014, p. 288). In contrast, the experience of the Western Balkans shows the importance of neighborhood and peace-building strategy by world powers, where the active involvement of the European Union in the region and the aspiration of the local states to get EU membership motivate them to cooperate, overcome historical enmity and build a common regional identity (Kakachia, interview). In this regard, although identities are formed by memories of the past and internal factors, they can also be influenced in a positive way by external factors such as attractive integration projects or other external motivation that could stimulate regional cooperation.

As for the South Caucasus, since the end of the Cold War the European Union has never reached the level of influence here that it had in other parts of Eastern Europe. The opportunity was lost in the 1990s, when Russia's dominance over the region declined

due to domestic political weakness and economic problems, exacerbated by internal power struggles and the war in Chechnya (Aydin, 2001, p. 184). It was also the period when the South Caucasus attracted the attention of traditional powers in the region such as Turkey and Iran, as well as new international players, particularly the United States and the EU. From the influx of foreign investments to the decision of building energy infrastructure that would surpass Russia and decrease Western dependence on Russian oil and gas, to the newly opened Turkish schools and universities – the region was open to new opportunities and succeeded in leading a relatively independent foreign policy.

Still, Russia has been able to keep control of the region in the local ethnic conflicts that became the main leverage of the former center in the following years until today. Moscow saw the Caucasus as a playground of the Great Game, or in Dugin's (2000) words, the global geopolitical dualism in the confrontation of the geopolitical interests of Russia and the West. As a result, Russia remains the most significant player in the region, for its strong political, economic and social links left since the time of the Soviet influence. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003, p. 398), the CIS and the South Caucasus in particular is a centralised regional security complex with predominantly Russian influence. Today, Russia is present in the North Caucasus, which gives the country a huge strategic advantage in its physical proximity to its southern neighbors, while being a home to the national minorities inhabiting both Russian and South Caucasian territory. Russia also has a wide variety of leverages that can be used against each of the three states of the region.

The element of Russian influence is present in all of the conflicts of the South Caucasus, with its open support for the secessionists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its collateral support for the existing status quo, with military assistance for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 extended Russian influence in this territory to the level of that of the federal republics of the North Caucasus, leaving little hope for the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia in the foreseeable future. Also, while Russia is not directly involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, its support for Yerevan adds an additional obstacle to the resolution of the conflict. For example,

although oil-rich Azerbaijan invests huge sums in military weaponry and equipment, a CSTO member Armenia compensates for the gap in its defense system with armaments purchased from Russia at subsidized prices (Kucera, 2015). Ironically, while up to 85% of the weaponry purchased by Azerbaijan comes from Russia, this makes the latter the source of armaments for both sides of the conflict, providing them with weaponry under the pretext of maintaining balance in their relative military capabilities (Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2016, p. 156). The situation is aggravated by the current deterioration of Russian-Western relations and the precedents of the violation of international law in the conflicts in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine raising the possibility of a new tension in the region.

The Russian-Western confrontation also explains why, despite the membership of the three states in several international organizations, it did not contribute to the establishment of a common identity in the region. Today, international organizations such as the UN and OSCE are paralyzed, due to the differences in the positions of Moscow and the West on most of the international issues. The negotiation mechanisms of the OSCE Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Geneva talks initiated by the EU over the Georgian conflicts did not bring any tangible results. One of the few exceptions for a productive dialogue can be found in the membership of the conflicting states in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). This platform has an underestimated potential for bringing Azerbaijan and Armenia to cooperate under one umbrella, and the EU could give more support to such formats in order to help transform the region from a conflict-prone area to a peaceful neighborhood (Aydın, 2005, p. 263). The EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly, the parliamentary component of the Eastern Partnership, is another rare example where the politicians of the three states have a chance to come together for the elaboration of joint projects. As for the institutions under Russian hegemony, they are perceived with skepticism due to the image of Russia in the region, while the existing political blocs are dividing, rather than uniting the region (Huseynov, 2016, p. 35). Indeed, after the August 2008 War, Georgia left the CIS and declared its aspiration to join the EU and NATO, whereas Armenia continued to support the Russian bloc while being a member of the CSTO and EEU, and Azerbaijan chose the position of neutrality and non-alignment. As a result,

none of these organizations can be a good tool in the construction of a common identity, as the theory of security community suggests.

The traditional influence of Russia in the region is bolstered by the general international situation, including the new shift in Turkey's foreign policy and its strained relations with Europe, Iranian isolation and its coordinated policy with Russia in the region, the current American indifference to the region and the internal problems of the EU. Indeed, it is not clear how the future trajectory of Turkey's bilateral relationship with Russia will develop, and how this will influence the relations of each country of the region with Ankara and Moscow (Hill, Kirişçi and Moffatt, 2015b, p. 7). As for EU policy, today Brussels does not have enough "carrots and sticks" in order to promote cooperation in the South Caucasus. Although Georgia expresses an open interest in EU integration, its neighbors do not share this enthusiasm. Indeed, neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia has seen "Europeanization" as a proper "carrot" for the resolution of their security problems (De Waal and Matveeva, 2007; Broers, 2016). The reasons lie in the national interests of Armenia and Azerbaijan: Armenia sees Russia as the guarantor of its security, while Azerbaijan does not see Brussels and Washington as protectors of territorial integrity that might stand against Russian influence in the region. For both states, "Russia remains the sole external player with potentially decisive linkages and leverage" (Broers, 2016, p. 394).

At the same time, as de Waal (2010, p. 5) notes, Russia's "capacity to control events is smaller than it seems and its power is never fully consolidated". While Russia actively supported the process of secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, most obviously expressed in the official recognition of the two self-proclaimed republics in 2008, the Russian influence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not that defining today, although it did have a negative impact with its military assistance to the Armenian troops during the last years of the Karabakh war in 1993-1994. In later years, the Russian offer to have peace-building troops on the ground was unanimously rejected both by the Azerbaijani and Armenian leadership, as both sides understood the consequences that Russian military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh could have for the development of the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2019). At the same time, there

were periods, when both Russia and Turkey were eager to promote peace and contribute to the negotiation process. For example, Russian president Dmitriy Medvedev was advocating peace and organized several meetings with the participation of the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Kazan in 2011.

Another effort for peaceful resolution of the regional conflicts was made by the Turkish leadership in 2008, with the suggestion of building a Caucasus Security and Cooperation Platform (CSCP). The CSCP was aimed to contribute to the establishment of peace and stability through dialogue, with an emphasis on the development of economic and commercial relations in the region. If it had been implemented, this platform would have contributed to the economic cooperation within the region and with the rest of the world, by fostering free trade, supporting the private sector, promoting the usage of energy and transport lines in the region, and other issues. The project was supported by Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and each of the sides saw its potential for a solution to their issues of primary importance: finding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the participation of Turkey in the regional platform for Azerbaijan, opening the Turkish-Armenian border and the possibility to negotiate with its western neighbor for Armenia, and the exclusion of non-regional actors, and primarily the United States for Russia (Çelikpala, 2013, p.125-126). However, Georgia stood against the project, as the possibility of a settlement excluding the EU was viewed negatively in Tbilisi, and as a result, the proposal was never implemented. This is an example of the so-called “negative autonomy” of the region, where the policy of each of the countries remains predominantly independent, but as a result of this zero-sum approach it leads to destructive consequences for the whole region (Ohanyan, 2015, p. 169).

While the Caucasus is not the primary strategic security arena either for Russia or for Turkey, Iran and the Western powers, none of the international actors is interested in the escalation of a new conflict in the region, as all of these actors perceive the South Caucasus as a potential “powder keg” that might lead to destructive consequences for the region and its immediate neighbors. Due to the existing system of energy pipelines, the economic interests of the Western powers and Turkey in the region leave no choice

of support for military action, as was openly expressed during the August War of 2008. Similarly, while Russia might be interested in the status quo, still it would hardly support any long-term military actions on the border with its explosive region of the North Caucasus. At the same time, the existing international situation and influence of the different great powers in the region have a significant impact on the regional fragmentation; as a result, different foreign policy choices, a lack of common interests and different visions of the future define the current situation in the region (Kakachia, interview). While the South Caucasus does not have such an advantageous location and is geographically distanced from the European Union, it still has the potential of transformation in the event that the geopolitical situation in the wider region changes positively for the region. In this regard, the local states should prepare the local conditions for peace, to use them during the proper timing and with favorable changes in the international arena.

The existing realities require the revision of security perceptions and a shift from the traditional vision of security to a broad understanding that security can bring a new impetus to the development of cooperation in the region (Begoyan, 2006, p. 297). Indeed, the current regional problems lie in the traditional understanding of security as the security of states, rather than individuals. This trend is caused by several reasons, such as the enduring conditions of war and the unresolved status of ethnic conflicts, as well as the negative legacy of the Soviet system and the underdevelopment of democratic systems of governance in local states. While the states perceive each other as the main source of threat, this approach impedes the resolution of other issues of human security. As a result, the issues of broad security such as human security, economic and energy security, environmental and disaster security, and issues of migration, human trafficking, terrorism and transnational crime, remain to a large extent ignored by the local governments.

Today, the region faces a series of threats related with domestic and international challenges that require extensive cooperation and mutual assistance. The location of the region, surrounded by a number of low-security chains such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Chechnya and Central Asia, makes the South Caucasus one of the least stable

links on the globe (Cheterian, 2001, p. 4). As a result, the unstable neighborhood raises the threat of the spread of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and drug smuggling in the region. The joint efforts of the local states could significantly decrease the threat of penetration by radical elements, as well as the cases of human-, drugs- and weapons trafficking in the region. At the same time, the South Caucasus has a number of “black holes” that are eschewed by most regional initiatives in economy and environment (Wittich and Maas 2009, p. 16), where the activity of the unrecognized secessionist republics poses a big threat to the economic development and broad security of the region (Japaridze, Mansurov, interviews). The situation is exacerbated by the weakness of state institutions, corruption in local governments, low living standards and weak market economies (Pantev, 2005, p. 7).

Meanwhile, some internal threats to human security are caused by the existing local conflicts, due to the lack of international control in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Conflict zones directly become strongholds for terrorists and a refuge for drug traffickers, as well as places for laundering dirty money and human trafficking (Yazkova, 2005). Other threats have been related to the rights and protection of individuals directly aggrieved by the consequences of conflict, including more than one million people who lost their homes on both sides of the border. Moreover, in most cases, the conflicting states cannot reach agreement in the area of humanitarian cooperation, such as the exchange of hostages and prisoners of war between neighboring Russia and Ukraine. In particular, Azerbaijan has repeatedly offered to exchange prisoners of war on the “all for all” principle¹⁸, which could create positive changes for the preparation of peace in both societies (I. Huseynov, 2019, p. 20). Finally, the closed borders and lack of communications between nations might lead to the neglect of environmental issues, such as the degradation, depletion and mismanagement of natural resources, which can increase grievances within and between societies, weaken states and provide revenues for criminal groups.

¹⁸ According to Section C. of Practice relating to Rule 128. “Release and Return of Persons Deprived of Their Liberty” of International Committee of the Red Cross (2005), “all for all” principle implies the simultaneous release of prisoners by both parties without conditions, where “prisoners” are understood as persons deprived of their liberty, regardless of whether a criminal or other procedure has been opened against them, and regardless of the territory in which these persons are detained or the place where they were captured”.

Today, the most dangerous non-military threat to the whole region lies in the usage of the Metsamor atomic power station in Armenia. The two parts of the station were constructed in 1976 and 1980, but after the earthquake in Spitak in 1988, they were closed down due to the seismic location of the station. While Armenia was primarily able to get oil and gas from Russia and Turkmenistan for its thermal power plants, in the following years the transfer of Russian and Turkmen oil and gas was blocked due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Sahakyan, 2016). As a result, the economic blockade and shortage of electric energy compelled the Armenian government to reopen the atomic station in 1995. Today, 40% of Armenia's electricity is produced at the Metsamor station, however according to the opinion of experts its usage is extremely risky, due to the seismic location and the technical shortages of the station. Indeed, the station was built in an eight-point seismic zone, while its resistance is designed for earthquakes with a seven-point magnitude (Tomczyk, 2019). The European Union has repeatedly called for the closure of the Metsamor station, classifying its reactors as in the "oldest and least reliable" category of all the Soviet reactors built in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. In 2017, the joint agreement between Armenia and the EU called for the "safe decommissioning of Metsamor nuclear power plant", however it set no time frames for shutting down the station (Partnership Agreement between the EU and EAEC and Armenia, 2017). At the same time, in 2015, the parliament of Armenia approved the extension of Metsamor's activity until 2026, implying the construction of a new, third reactor with the financial and technical support of the Russian state nuclear company of Rosatom. The attractiveness of the Russian proposal lies in the fact that it would bring immediate results, and ensure Armenia's power supply even despite the fact that such help would continue to jeopardize regional security (Miholjic, 2018, p. 49).

Any serious accident at the Metsamor atomic power station might have disastrous consequences not only for Armenia, but also for all the states of the South Caucasus, as well as Iran, Turkey and other neighboring states of the greater region. It would badly affect Armenia and the neighboring territories in terms of severe health issues, agricultural productivity, polluted water and the socio-economic development of all the

regional countries (Lavelle and Garthwaite, 2011). However its current intransigent position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the predominance of national security over human security, as well as the geopolitical situation in the region with the weakness of European tools of leverage and vice versa with the strong influence of Russia – all of these reasons leave a very low probability of the shutdown of Metsamor in the near future. Today, the relevant pressure of public opinion can be the only viable voice that might force the Armenian government to take the decision to close the station. On the other hand, a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would positively affect the restoration of economic links between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and provide a basis for the discussion of alternative scenarios for the protection of the region's energy and environmental security.

Cooperation in one of the above-mentioned fields could significantly contribute to the reconstruction of trust and reconciliation between the hostile nations of the region. Understanding the advantages of potential cooperation and the futility of military actions can provide a big impetus to the new projects of cooperation that would involve not only state actors but ordinary people as well. It might require elements of creative diplomacy and alternative solutions that might lead to breakthrough in the negotiation process. However, today the factor of the immaturity of the regional actors plays a destructive role in the process of integration, where this immaturity implies the lack of trust as the “absence of shared interests and cooperative practice circumstances when the response of the opponents to any of the common problems is unpredictable” (Eyvazov, 2016, p. 47). Zero-sum thinking and the lack of trust between nations contribute to constant instability in the region, while exposing its population to the danger of military and alternative threats.

5.4 Conclusion

As the theory of security communities suggests, the understanding of a commonality of threats has a big impact on the construction of a common identity and the formation of a security community. An alliance of states united around the same threat can help to overcome national contradictions, but a clash of interests and national identities might

lead to the fragmentation of the region in the foreign policy and international orientation of its members. For the South Caucasus, the local identities are still in the process of formation influenced by the recent developments and the outcomes of ethnic conflicts. At the same time, while conflicts and territories remain an important element of national self-images, it is the political institutions that define the international orientation of states (Aliyeva, interview). As a result, the weakness of states caused by the immaturity of national identities forces the nations to search for international protectors (Bolshakov and Mansurov, 2013, p. 5). The constantly changing international situation, characterized by the rise in Russian-Western confrontation after a short break since the end of Cold War in the early 1990s, as well as by the shifting alliances of the regional and global powers, complicates the situation and requires balance in the international choices of the local states.

For two states of the South Caucasus, namely Azerbaijan and Georgia, the issue of territorial integrity remains the defining factor in their foreign policy; the involvement of Russia in the Abkhazian, South Ossetian and to a lesser extent Nagorno-Karabakh wars led to the rise of anti-Russian sentiments in the local societies and the search for Western support in the resolution of the conflicts. While Georgia's strategy was stimulated by its strong European identity and its willingness to join Western political, economic and military institutions, it failed to provide for the protection of its own citizens, as the open anti-Russian policy of the 2000s led to the August War of 2008 and Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nevertheless, the West and particularly the European Union remains the role model for the Georgian political elites in the process of the democratization of the state, and this fact significantly affects the current international orientation of Tbilisi.

In contrast, while Azerbaijan also had ideational choices in the first years of its independence, the lessons of the Nagorno-Karabakh War proved the importance of a pragmatic approach and the development of cautious relations with Russia and Iran. The outcome of the August War and the ensuing annexation of Crimea in 2014 raised skepticism about Western support, as well as the understanding of the seriousness of the Russian threat in the region, and led to the implementation of a balanced foreign policy

expressed in sustaining good relations with Russia and economic cooperation with Europe, without outstanding expectations about the Western protection of Azerbaijani interests in the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, while its Western partners are perceived with caution, due to the criticism of the Azerbaijani political system coming from Brussels and Washington, Baku also refrains from intensifying its relations with Moscow, mostly due to the economic interests of the West in the region.

Finally, Armenian foreign policy can be explained as pragmatic in its character, but ideational at its core. The policy of complementarity is based on the pragmatic choices corresponding to the interests and security threats of the nation; however, these choices are made due to the memory of the past and historical relations with its neighbors. Armenia perceives Turkey as one of its biggest security threats along with Azerbaijan, while Russia is viewed as the historical savior and protector of the Armenian nation (Trupia, 2017, p. 32). As a result, the extreme dependence of Armenian foreign policy on Russia places a limit on the capacity of Armenian diplomacy, as well as impeding the possibility of establishing close relations with Georgia while it also stalls the negotiation process with Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the strong support of the Armenian diaspora helps Yerevan in the protection of its national interests in the West, despite its open pro-Russian position and membership in the CSTO and the EEU.

Although based on differences in national interests and foreign policy goals, the multi-vector character of the region leads to a sustained status quo in the region, while the current international situation and the influence of the great and regional powers in the South Caucasus deteriorate the position of the local states. As the active presence of the great powers and, particularly, Russia in the South Caucasus partially defines the pragmatic approach of the foreign policy of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan, this policy affects official ideologies and as a result, public opinion and the national identities of the three states. Favorable changes in the international arena could bring about positive developments and progress in the situation in the region. Still, while the international situation remains unchanged, the states of the region could cooperate in the protection of different aspects of regional security. An alternative understanding of the existing challenges, as well as a broad vision of national threat (in an understanding beyond the

military threat to the states) in spheres that play a significant role, although ignored – such as the common ecological threat and that posed by the local atomic power station – all of these issues might bring these states together to an understanding of the necessity to cooperate.



6. SECURITY COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE “5TS”

6.1 Introduction

At first sight, the current situation of frozen conflicts and diplomatic impasse in the South Caucasus shows the impossibility of building a security community in the region. The historical legacy of deep interethnic enmity, together with the official propaganda calling for military action and a revanchist military action creates an atmosphere of instability in which these frozen conflicts can escalate into their “hot” phase at any moment. In addition, open support for the unrecognized republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia, as the strongest and the most destabilizing actor of the region, makes the situation even more complicated and unpredictable.

The theory of security communities interprets this situation from the perspective of the lack of a common identity and trust between the nations of the region. Despite the long-lasting cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia in wide-ranging projects covering different fields such as oil and gas, or trade and transport, the recent tension over the David Gareji monastery raised new questions on the strength and durability of the relations between the two nations. The measures taken for the creation of the cultural and normative “glue” of a common identity and trust can both appease the hostile relations of enemies and strengthen the unstable bonds between partners. Despite many commonalities in culture that can potentially contribute to the formation of a common identity, today both internal (intra-regional) and external (supra-regional) factors impede the long-awaited normalization and intensification of the relations between the three states. In this context, it is hard to define whether it is democracy, historical hatred, or geographical proximity of destabilizing neighbors that impedes this process to a larger extent. In order to understand it, one has to analyze each of the factors and the level of its influence on the current situation. At the same time, the experience of the existing security communities shows that stable peace can be established only when all of the factors work together to create a favorable basis for it. In the case of the European Union, it was the weariness of following wars, an understanding of the cultural

proximity of the European nations, cooperation between mutually complementary economies in terms of their coal and steel industries, the financial support of the Marshall Plan, and a common perception of a Soviet threat that all contributed to the establishment of one of the most successful security communities in the world history.

On the other hand, in the case of the South Caucasus, the situation has its own specifics that constitute criticism of the theory of security communities in its different aspects. In terms of internal factors, the democratization of a state and the advent of liberal values do not necessarily lead to appeasement and “dovishness” in its foreign policy. Additionally, the pace of reforms should be taken into account, as the history of democratization in the region in most cases had catastrophic consequences for its population, either during the Russian revolution, or *glasnost* of the 1980s, or the following period of the independence of the local states. As to external factors, the traditional works on the theory of security communities cover the regions of a developed world with the dominance of one geopolitical center, while the factor of “geography as a region’s destiny” torn between different great powers is underestimated in this theory and needs to be analyzed in detail. These assumptions proved their importance after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008, as officially Tbilisi cannot solve its conflict over the regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia without taking into consideration the factor of Russian influence over the unrecognized republics. In the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian influence is not that obvious, however the Kremlin has a variety of other leverages to use against the local governments. The criticism of the traditional theory of security communities shows that in addition to favorable internal conditions, there has to be a beneficial international environment and no confrontation between great powers over the region.

6.2 National identities of the South Caucasus and the theory of security communities

As the theory of security communities suggests, there are many elements at the national and international level of political development of a nation that can theoretically contribute to the transformation of its national identity. While the negative rhetoric and

ideology of the political leadership and other political, business or religious elites can worsen the attitude towards other nations, the establishment of democratic regimes and liberal values in societies, the development of the traditions of civil society, free media and communications between nations, as well as the establishment of cross-border economic ties and cooperation can contribute to the formation of a positive image of other nations and the transformation of national identities. According to Ohanyan (2015), the parallel implementation of all these elements of “networked regionalism” can bring the restoration of trust and cooperation between the nations. However, currently the local states did not reach fully democratic governance, their economies are not big enough to attract the interests of their neighbors and the existing propaganda and official rhetoric do not contribute to the formation of a regional identity. Additionally, the unresolved conflicts lasting for almost thirty years became a part of national identities of local states and there is little hope that governments can reach consensus and compromise in the conflict settlement without international involvement as peacemakers in these conflicts. In this regard, little interest of the world community to the region exacerbates the situation and gives little hope to the peaceful resolution of the existing local conflicts.

For the establishment of regional integration, there should be a strong motivation that will stimulate nations to cooperate: for example, it can be expressed in overlapping economic interests or political rationale (Pashayeva, interview). According to Japaridze (interview), regional states need to be focused not only on role models (“what we want”), but also on the states of the neighborhood (“where we are”) and be realistic and pragmatic in relations with them. Some of the interviewees accentuate the importance of establishing local political and economic cooperation without expectations of external assistance and financial investments; in this regard, little steps in finding the solutions to social, cultural and humanitarian questions can be the first measures in the reconstruction of trust and resolution of regional conflicts (Mansurov, interview).

Similarly to the domestic level of development, the foreign policy choices of states are also partially influenced by national identities and additionally these choices can lead to the transformation of national self-images, either in a positive or a negative way. In this

regard, the international aspect of national self-conceptualization can be expressed in different amity/enmity narratives, influenced by the memory of the past and the historical legacy of relations between nations. The understanding of a common threat (as in the case of the members of ASEAN) or a common interest to join an integration project (as in the case of the states of the Western Balkans aspiring to join the EU), or both (as in the case of the Eastern European and Baltic states both fearing the Russian threat and aspiring to join the EU in the late 1990s) can contribute to the formation of a common identity as well. For the South Caucasus, different national identities and different traumas over the history of relations with the neighboring states affect their perceptions of threat, which in its turn defines their relations with the regional and global powers and international orientations in general. In this term, as Yakobashvili (2013, p. 7) notes, while the three states do not share a common vision of their future, the South Caucasus remains a *neighborhood*, but not a *region*. The perception of a Russian threat to Georgia, a Turkish threat to Armenia and an Armenian threat supported by Russia to Azerbaijan define the foreign policies of the three states of the region, as well as their choices of strategic alliance and membership in military blocs. The international situation, expressed particularly in the deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, and the weak influence of the EU in the region, places an additional obstacle in the way of the resolution of the ethnic conflicts, as well as diminishing the chances of the South Caucasus joining the European Union as a security community model that could contribute to the transformation of local identities.

The expert interviews that were held for this research showed different visions of the causes of regional fragmentation, in addition to the origins and reasons lying behind the existing conflicts, and discussed the prospect of future relations in the South Caucasus; the last question in the interviews was dedicated to the chances of cooperation and the establishment of a security community in the region in the foreseeable future. Indeed, the establishment of a security community in the South Caucasus could be the best-case scenario for all the three states of the region, as it would strengthen their positions in the international arena and increase their resistance to their northern neighbor (Alizade interview). However, the absolute majority of the interviewees see such a scenario as utopian. Many experts explained it as the immaturity of local identities and the

weakness of the regional states (Alizade, German, Iskandaryan, interviews), as well as the dominance of the irrational interpretation of national interests over a rational conceptualization of them (Pashayeva, interview). As the system is based on insecurity (Çelikpala, interview), elites and the people are not ready for such changes (Alizade, Pashayeva, interviews). According to Alizade (interview), the problem lies in the political ignorance of the people, while the region is dominated by a “Middle Eastern, rather than European way of thinking” in terms of immaturity and the irrationality of thinking of the local nations. Finally, most of the experts see the reason for the regional fragmentation in the involvement of international actors (Çelikpala, German, Vanyan, interviews) and particularly the negative role of Russia in the region (Aliyeva, Alizade, Japaridze, Kakachia, Mamradze, interviews).

Still, the scenario does not look impossible to some other experts; however, for the successful implementation of this transformed scenario, several important conditions should be taken into account. According to Kakachia (interview), changes should take place in Russia, in order to decrease its influence over the region. On the other hand, changes might be caused by a new international context and the transformation of the existing balance of power, although this scenario is hardly deemed as possible in the foreseeable future (Japaridze, Mamradze, interviews). However, these developments can also be caused by the transformation of societies, for example if the younger generations get tired of the current situation in the future (German, interview), or if different elites do not perceive the existing problems so negatively (Mansurov, interview). Finally, some experts stress the importance of international pressure on the elites, so that they can be forced to sign peace treaties (Vanyan, interview).

6.3 Missing elements of the regional transformation

While the analysis of the situation in the South Caucasus shows that there is a big influence of national identities in the current fragmentation of the region, however, as the constructivist approach suggests, proper policies of the local states can significantly contribute to the transformation of national self-image and the attitudes of the nations toward their immediate neighbors. Notably, this process has to develop on a mutual

basis, otherwise one-sided change of policy might be perceived by societies as a betrayal of national interests and at the same time might lead to wrong expectations of the opposite side about one-sided concessions. This transformation requires a series of measures with the establishment of common goals that can provide obvious advantages to each of the regional states. This type of cooperation might provide a good basis for the creation of a regional society, where regional identities are considered to be complementary to each other, non-contradictory and mutually exclusive (Begoyan, 2006, p. 301). A formula of **5 “T’s”** could be a possible solution in this process, including such elements as a gradual liberal **transformation** of the system and societies, economic and social **transactions**, reconstruction of **trust**, perception of a common **threat** and proper **timing**. The sections below will present analysis of each of these elements by reviewing the findings of theorists of security communities, discussing the historical development of the South Caucasus from different angles, including political, economic and social development; it will also present the current situation regarding each of these elements and discuss which steps can be taken in order to apply them to the region.

6.3.1 Liberal transformation of systems and societies

As discussed in Chapter 2, different authors suggest different visions on the necessity of liberal governance for the establishment of a security community. Adler and Barnett (1998, p. 40) see democracy and liberalism as necessary preconditions for the formation of stable peace and sense of community between nations, as liberal ideas tend to create a shared civic culture, whose concepts on the “role of duty of citizens and the rule of law may shape the transnational identity of individuals of the community”. Democracies are also considered to create favorable prerequisites for long-lasting peace discussed widely in the “democratic peace theory”; some of these prerequisites include promotion of civil societies through the free exchange of people and ideas between democratic nations, the rejection of war as an act of violence, respect for human rights, the protection of religious, ethnic and other minorities, as well as an established system of “checks and balances” providing transparency of the decision-making process and

preventing unpredictability of authoritarian regimes relying exclusively on the decisions of a state leader (Doyle, 1983; Russett, 1993).

It is important to stress the existing debate in theory on the necessity of liberal values and democratic regimes for the establishment of a security community. As it was mentioned in Chapter 2, Acharya (1998, p. 207) gives an example of ASEAN as a community of non-liberal states, whose common identity was formed through a series of top-down measures with the process of elite socialization and establishment of norms and symbols necessary for stable regional cooperation. However, if considering a security community to be a war-free community of states choosing “a resolution of social problems with institutionalized procedures without physical force” (Deutsch, 1957, p. 5), implying the non-violent behavior both at national and inter-state level, this concept contradicts the recent developments in one of ASEAN members, Myanmar, where the genocide committed against Rohingya Muslims in 2017 undermined the status of a region as one that reached stable peace protecting each and every citizen of the community from violence and attack. In this regard, it proved once again the necessity of liberal values and democratic governance for the protection of all members of the security community regardless of their ethnic, religious or other belonging.

The history of political development of the South Caucasus throughout the twentieth century shows that despite some efforts to bring democratic methods of governance after the dissolution of Russian empire in 1918, these were insufficient to take roots in the local societies, as the following occupation of the region by the Red Army in 1920 put an end to the temporary period of democratization of the region. In the following years, the official Soviet ideology favored a sense of friendship and brotherhood between nations, while the Soviet leadership took a series of measures aimed at the eradication of religious and linguistic differences between local societies through the forceful policy of secularization and Russification. The accent given to a common ideological belonging was especially obvious during the Soviet policy under Stalin, while in the ensuing years gradual “softening” of state policy included changes in the Soviet national policy as well. As it was discussed in Chapter 3, the Soviet Union became an “affirmative action empire” promoting the establishment of national elites

and developing different elements of cultural nationalism (Martin, 2001). The methods used while applying this policy failed to provide fair treatment of national minorities while advancing the positions of titular nations in the Soviet republics. As a result, many examples of discrimination and assimilation of national minorities undermined the very concept of the “friendship of peoples”. While the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union was built on the principles of strict control and imposition of official state policy, it lacked social involvement and discussion of existing problems leading to the rise of mutual misunderstanding that exploded with the liberalization under Gorbachev. With the *glasnost* policy, the communist ideology was discredited in the eyes of the Soviet citizens bringing nationalism back to the political arena that filled the vacuum left after the failure of the Soviet ideological experiment.

After almost thirty years of independence, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia still have not reached the level of a mature, or consolidated democracy. The leftovers of the Soviet political system still exist to a more or less extent in all the three states of the region, with the underdevelopment of civil society, lack of civic consciousness and responsibility, and some elements of censorship dominating in the local political systems. At the same time, the political development of the three states of the region led to the changes increasing the political and social differentiation between the local nations. While Georgia showed significant progress in democratic development since the Rose Revolution, Armenia is still in the process of democratic transformation after Velvet Revolution, and Azerbaijan is experiencing some evolutionary development via top-down reforms and staff appointments. The states still have to pass through the long process of overcoming clan system, nepotism and state-level corruption.

One should not forget the risks of democratization and the threat of rising violence that might accompany the process of democratization if it takes place sporadically and without control. As Mansfield and Snyder (1995) suggest, the process of democratization might lead to the rise of violence due to the different positions of elites struggling for power. In this regard, many authors stress the importance of gradual, linear and consecutive changes that will bring qualitative changes not only in political parties, but also in the societies that are supporting them. The example of the

democratizing government of Saakashvili in 2008 when it promised the restoration of territorial integrity by all means shows that political elites might use the national card in an attempt to obtain more public support thus putting their countries under risk. The same can be referred to the democratizing government of Pashinyan, when the two years of his leadership were full of nationalist statements and actions, which were perceived to be extremely provocative in Baku and showed the futility of negotiations. Since September 2019, many experts noted the conflict could escalate at any moment, as, according to Shafiyev, the two states reached a “post-negotiation period” (Report, 2019). At the same time, while Georgia chose the strategy of domestic development that would attract its former territories to join back and refused to use a military rhetoric after the August War of 2008, in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh stagnates the liberalization of the local systems and both societies. The existing military rhetoric, the lack of readiness to open archives and discuss and recognize the crimes of the past are among a few examples showing the interdependence of the unresolved conflict and democracy in the region.

A mature, or consolidated democracy implies not only the election of a leadership by the absolute majority of the population, but also a transparent system of checks and balances, special norms and regulations that would guarantee the protection of the interests of minorities, and other factors. These elements can be reached through the transformation of systems by building a political and legal basis that would guarantee the rule of law and create equal opportunities for each and every citizen, as well as overcoming corruption, nepotism and the Soviet legacy of state censorship over the media. It should also be complemented by the reassessment of national ideologies and official rhetoric, as well as the dominance of civic nationalism over ethnic nationalism. At the same time, as Aliyeva (interview) notes, one should highlight not only the liberalization of regimes, but also the “liberalization of minds” and the transformation of societies that would guarantee the long-lasting effect of reforms regardless of future changes in the local governments, building a stable system that would be supported by a variety of civil societies, as well as broadly developed civic responsibility that would bring the protection of each individual to a new level of relations. Finally, while the Soviet experiment showed the temporary character of top-down measures to overcome

ethnic clashes, it is the understanding of a comprehensive transformation of the societies that would bring a long awaited long lasting peace to the region. In this regard, democratic development can serve as a basis to eliminate the risks of future tensions between conflicting ethnicities and be a “carrot” for the reunion of secessionist territories with their *de jure* centers.

6.3.2 Transactions between nations at economic and social levels

The founder of the theory of security communities, Karl Deutsch, in his works accentuated the importance of economic and social transactions for the establishment of the spirit of cooperation that would gradually lead to the establishment of a common identity between nations. United around the concept of “transactionism”, these ideas significantly contributed to the works of different neo-functionalists such as Ernst Haas (1958), Schmitter (1969), Pierson (1996), and others. According to these theories, the complementarity of economies, trade and other types of economic cooperation can lead to the establishment of mutual interest of the involved states bringing them to peaceful coexistence and the refusal from military actions against each other. These principles were put at the basis of the European Coal and Steel Community, the predecessor of the European Union in the early 1950s when the traditional antagonism between France and Germany could be overcome by the understanding of mutual interests in economic cooperation and profit gained from the complementarity of two industries for the former enemies. This cooperation was placed at the core of the further spinning process that intensified communication between different states of Western Europe, brought in other countries of the continent and, at a final stage, led to the formation of a mature level of a security community.

The economy was not the only factor leading to the decision on the necessity of regional integration in Western Europe (see Chapter 2). Indeed, different scholars, such as Charles Kupchan (2010, p. 399), accentuate the small effect of economic integration alone at the early phases of stable peace between nations. However, transactions in a broader understanding, including social transactions between people, the exchange of ideas and the establishment of common platforms for cooperation might significantly

contribute to the formation of a common identity and a common vision of the future. Similarly, the weakness of a lack of communications between societies distances them from each other and puts under question the possibility of future cooperation. Moreover, in the case of unresolved ethnic conflicts, social transactions are vitally important for the exchange of visions on the solution of the conflicts and sustaining a basis for future peaceful coexistence between communities.

The analysis of the history of economic and social transactions in the South Caucasus shows that although they were part of a common system under both Russian and Soviet rule, the three states of the region failed to develop mutual economic codependence and to build strong communication links between their societies. While during the period of the Russian empire several measures were taken for the construction of a common regional infrastructure, including the first railroads and pipelines connecting the region, these measures were serving mostly the interests of the center and were not focused on the development of regional cooperation and economic interdependence. Moreover, it was impossible to expect such cooperation in the conditions of a low level of industrialization in the South Caucasus along with one of the lowest levels of literacy in the Russian empire, (after Siberia and Central Asia) (Yefimova and Dolgikh, 2016, p. 79). After the collapse of the Russian empire, the short history of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR) and the ensuing period of independence of regional states was characterized by the efforts to build structural bases for future economies, however the unfavorable conditions of the World War I and its consequences, foreign attacks and unresolved conflicts between the local nations impeded the process of state-building and regional cooperation. With the establishment of the Soviet Union, the three states became elements of a common system again, but as in the Tsarist times, the center did little for the development of regional cooperation and establishment of the basis for economic complementarity of the different parts of the region. The dissolution of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (TSFSR) in 1936 and the new system of hub-and-spoke relations with the center in Moscow created a paradoxical situation in which local industries were linked to distant parts of the Soviet Union, such as Belarus or Siberia but had little economic connection and interdependence between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia per se.

With the rise of interethnic conflicts in the late 1980s and the following collapse of the Soviet Union, both the hub-and-spoke system of economy and connections between different parts of the region were destroyed within a short period of time. While in the case of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the links between these districts and the center in Tbilisi were still active due to the presence of a Georgian population on the territory of the secessionist republics, in the case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations the measures taken during the active phase of the conflict in 1988-1994 and the years that followed led to a much more dramatic alienation of both the economies and societies of the two states. The economic blockade of Nakhchivan (from the Armenian side) and Armenia (from the Azerbaijani side) since 1989, ethnic cleansing and the ensuing homogenization of both societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan, a large number of refugees and memory of the atrocities of the war brought two states to the condition where there was the lack of any basis for economic or social exchange between the two nations and the absence of any chance to revert this process to the pre-conflict period created a vicious circle of codependence of the existing situation on the unresolved status of the conflict and the further alienation and the inability of the two societies to compromise due to the lack of any kind of communications between the two sides.

The situation is aggravated with the specifics of Armenian and Azerbaijani economies giving little motivation for the local governments to reopen the borders and restore economic and societal links between the two nations. It is both the Armenian diaspora remittances and the character of the Azerbaijani *rentier* economy based on the export of energy resources that makes both states dependent on sources impeding the healthy development of a business culture. Aggravated by the legacy of the Soviet communist past, neither states has elaborated the concept of entrepreneurship due to the high level of corruption and the lack of motivation for both countries to establish markets and business projects that could serve the interests of both sides and contribute to the transformation of attitude in both societies. At the same time, in the early 1990s, there were both Azerbaijani and international initiatives using oil and gas pipelines as a basis for peacebuilding suggesting the construction of an energy corridor through Armenian

territory in exchange of Yerevan's concessions in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, these initiatives did not give any fruitful results due to the intransigence of the Armenian side caused by the high level of distrust in the society. This example correlates with Kupchan's theory on the low probability of economic incentives to bring peace if applied separately from other factors.

In contrast, the oil and gas pipelines that were constructed in the early 2000s significantly contributed to the level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia, eliminating the possibility of high tensions, despite the unresolved status of the international border between the two states and a large number of the ethnic Azerbaijani minority living in Georgia. Still, while the pipelines brought high expectations on the spillover process in the future of Azerbaijani-Georgian cooperation, they failed to bring a wide-range involvement of society or develop any kind of integration between the two economies. As many experts note, the reasons standing behind this failure lie in the lack of bottom-up initiatives and a low business culture in both countries. For the establishment of long-lasting peace and a common identity between nations, the integration initiatives between the two economies should include a wider involvement of local societies and be applied in different sectors of the economy.

Bottom-up economic initiatives and the development of social interaction are especially important in the areas of high risk of tensions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the examples of the Sadakhlo and Ergneti markets in Georgia showed the potential of economic cooperation between different sides of ethnic conflicts. Indeed, both Armenian-Azerbaijani and Georgian-Ossetian economic interaction in the Sadakhlo and Ergneti markets, respectively, had a positive effect on the attitude of both groups towards each other and contributed to the sustainment of the period of relative peace in the region. The closure of these markets in 2006 significantly aggravated the situation and, as some experts note, affected the rise of escalation to a full-scale war in South Ossetia in August 2008 (De Waal, 2009). In contrast, the restoration of such initiatives might create bonds between the people and lead to a mutual interest to cooperate, which might trigger the societies to make concessions in the existing conflicts as well.

Apart from economic cooperation, social transactions is another factor necessary to overcome perceptions about an enemy, which might significantly contribute to the eradication of ethnic hatred and the transformation of national identities. While the 1990s were characterized by some efforts of building a dialogue, including different peace-building initiatives, the exchange of opinions between civil societies and joint Armenian-Azerbaijani-Georgian television projects, in the following years most of these initiatives were closed while the societies lost the last opportunities for dialogue and the revision of their position regarding the conflicts. It is also necessary to stress the specifics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in terms of the level of dehumanization of the other side and the intransigence of both societies to compromise. Indeed, unlike the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where the Georgians still continue to cohabitate with the local minorities, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict led to the total eviction of both communities from their lands starting with the mass evictions of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1987, continued with the atrocities in Sumgait in 1988, and followed by the eviction of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories. In the circumstances where there is no communication between societies, including travel of individuals of Armenian or Azerbaijani origin, the road for the transformation of local societies might take years and even decades to bring any tangible results. On the other hand, the political will of the governments and active and fair involvement of the international community could significantly contribute to the solution of the existing conflicts, which in its term could open the road to the restoration of economic and social communications between nations.

6.3.3 Reconstruction of trust between nations

Trust is one of basic elements necessary for the construction of a common identity between nations. While memories of the past and the behavior of the other side defines its image in the eyes of people, it might take years, if not decades to restore trust which preceded the escalation of a conflict or any other change considered as an act of treason. Many scholars accentuate the importance of trust in their works, including Acharya (2001), Adler (1997), Boulding (1978), Deutsch (1957) and others. Adler and Barnett

(1998) stress the mutual dependence between identities and trust: identity contributes to the development of trust between nations and trust deepens the common identity. While trust might be easily achieved between countries with similar identities and a history of cooperation which is broadly known and remembered in the public, it might be extremely difficult for nations to control the memory of being engaged in wars and conflicts throughout the centuries to reconstruct trust between each other and build common identities. Moreover, the behavior of one nation or its leadership against another nation might undermine its image in the eyes of other neighbors. This argument is broadly used in the discussion of historical examples of alliances united under one hegemon: both in Nazi Germany during its dominance over Europe in the late 1930-early 1940s and in the Soviet Union, the actions of the state leadership against one member of the alliance (or union republic) was observed by other members as undermining the credibility of the hegemon not only among the victims and recipients of the said behavior, but also among other members of the alliance.

In the South Caucasus, the modern history of relations between the three nations has experienced its fair share of ups and downs. As many authors acknowledge, the states not only lacked unity during the period of their independence in 1918-1920, but also waged wars against each other in the Armenian-Georgian, and the Azerbaijani-Georgian clashes and during, the most long-lasting among these clashes, the Armenian-Azerbaijani war. With the establishment of the Soviet control over the region, all the three republics were forced to refrain from their claims over the neighboring territories. The establishment of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (1922-1936) was aimed at eradicating the consequences of local conflicts and developing cooperation at regional level. After the dissolution of the TSFSR, the Soviet propaganda promoted the construction of a “friendship of peoples” image among its citizens. It worked well in some of its areas with a mixed population, but at the same time, it failed to prevent the rise of nationalism in the period of the Soviet weakness during the late 1980s. The reason of this failure can be partially explained by the Soviet national policy in which the titular nations of each republic gained relatively more rights than other minorities; at the same time, the Soviet policy brought more understanding on the feeling of national unity among local societies, mostly achieved after the policy of

secularization and the improvement of literacy, jointly with the promotion of a national culture in literature, cinema and history classes at schools. In Armenia, the construction of the Tsitsernakaberd memorial had a big influence on the reassessment of Armenian memory of the 1915 events and its consequences for the country. Some scholars note that it was after the construction of the memorial in 1967 the acts of discrimination against the Azerbaijanis increased in Armenia. At the same time, strict control and the communist ideology evaded the discussion of the issues that later exploded into an open conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Today, trust does not exist between the societies of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The traumas of the 1988-1994 war, the tragedies committed against civilians on both sides, the presence of more than one million refugees and IDPs on both sides, different interpretations of justice in the region with the understanding of the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani side and the implementation of the right of self-determination by the Armenian side are among the main reasons of the current intransigence to compromise at the negotiation table. Concession from each side is perceived as a violation of its own rights, which can be followed by the further violation of the regulations for agreement. The lack of a dialogue between the two societies and the absence of the reassessment of history create a vicious cycle of never-ending mistrust, which blocks the negotiation process and impedes the establishment of normal relations between the societies.

In this regard, government and grassroots initiatives regarding the reconstruction of a dialogue should be held in order to break the existing myths about the other and the deconstruction of the dehumanized image of each other. The cultural legacy of both communities should be recognized, media and history textbooks should be free of hate speech, conspiracy theories should be denied, the propaganda of chauvinism should be prevented. Most importantly, there should be mutual apologies and punishment of the criminals responsible for the organization and implementation of the tragedies of the late 1980s-early 1990s (Vanyan, 2006). All of these steps would require a gradual democratization with the transformation of societies, which will be open for a dialogue and reassessment of their history. Moreover, this process would require not only

democratization in the South Caucasus, but also in Russia, due to the necessity of opening archives in Moscow, too.

6.3.4 Understanding of a common security threat

Many scholars stress the importance of a common vision of security threats between states for the construction of a security community. Common threats contribute to the development of cooperation and interconnection at the state level; in contrast, disagreements over the source of threat can weaken the feeling of belonging to a common identity between the members of a security community. In the modern world, security threats are not limited only to traditional state and military threats, but also include other sources and risks to the security of individuals, such as economic and environmental threats, the threats of human trafficking, international terrorism and others.

On the other hand, constructivists stress the role of perceptions in the understanding of threats; these perceptions are influenced by memory of the past, cultural background, ideology and the rhetoric of state officials. In this regard, constructivists acknowledge that the perception of threat does not always correspond with the real threats; cultural background and identities of nations influence decisions and foreign policy choices. However, the transformation of identities can lead to the transformation of the vision of threats and cooperation between nations in their foreign policies. In other words, identities and threats can influence each other, when identities might play a big role in the definition of threat for a country and at the same time be gradually changed under the influence of external factors, as security community theory suggests. Moreover, the modern interpretation of threats as those challenging the security not only of states, but also of individuals requires some transformation of the political system and social values, which would be based on the broader vision of security, involving different aspects such as respect and protection of human rights, national minorities and ecosystems.

In the modern history of the South Caucasus there were several periods when the local states gained independence (both in 1918 and 1991), however neither in the first half of the twentieth century, nor after the collapse of the Soviet Union the states could ever achieve a stable peace in the region. Although in 1918 there was an effort of the first and only regional integration initiated by the local states, this integration project did not last long, as the Transcaucasian Federation fell only a month after its establishment as a result of the different positions of the local states on the perception of external threat. Indeed, it was hard to expect a long-lasting period in the South Caucasus during the period of the last months of World War I characterized by the chaos caused by the collapse of empires (notably the Russian and Ottoman empires), as well as the involvement of new actors, such as British and German military forces who were searching for their allies in the struggle against traditional regional powers. At the same time, different perceptions of threat in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan played a crucial role in the failure of the three states to stay united. In May 1918, substantial differences in the positions between the three states on the role of Ottoman empire in the future security of the region led to the search of military assistance of the German army by the Georgian leadership. Georgians were motivated to balance Turks due to the existing territorial claims of the latter on the Black Sea coast. Similarly, Armenia perceived the Ottoman empire as the number one threat, and it was quite understandable taking into account the recent trauma of the 1915 events and the arrival of refugees from Eastern Anatolia who comprised, according to some records, around half of the population of the Armenian Democratic Republic (De Waal, 2014). In contrast, Azerbaijanis saw the Turks as their saviors who could restore justice and assist Azerbaijanis in restoring control over their territory. As a result, the different position of each country in its foreign policy orientation led to the collapse of the region and the failure to understand the real threat emanating from Russia. Several months after reconquering the North Caucasus, the Bolshevik Red Army used the contradictions between the three states and easily occupied the region by February 1921.

The Soviet period was relatively stable as the region was under the immediate control of Moscow, and there was no immediate threat to the region, with the exception of the risk of conflict escalation on the Soviet-Turkish border in 1946-1947. At the same time, it is

important not to ignore the Soviet period as it was characterized by the active formation of national identities of the local states, and, at the same time, the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union did little for the development of liberal values in local societies that could create a basis for a future vision of non-traditional and non-military threats in the region. Moreover, it was exactly the mistakes in the nationalist policy of the Soviet system that led to the explosion of ethnic conflicts of the region in late 1980s-early 1990s.

The ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus to a large extent defined the security architecture of the region and also defined the foreign policy orientations of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. Also, akin to the period of independence of 1918-1920, in the modern history of the region, the memory of the past and their perceptions of enemies affected their choices where Armenia joined the pro-Russian CSTO bloc in order to balance the threat emanating from Turkey and Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan has the support of Turkey and Georgia seeks the support of the West. The local conflicts also cannot be solved due to the existing security dilemma mindset, in which each country sees the 'other' side as a potential threat without taking into account alternative understandings of the threat.

On the other hand, cooperation within the region, taking into account the interests of each state, can potentially diminish the factor of confrontation between the West and Russia affecting the current international orientation of the three regional states (Pashayeva, 2010, p. 27). Cooperation and the transformation of the vision of threat is possible after the solution of existing unresolved conflicts within the framework of the requirements of international law; at a later stage, the resolution of existing threats current states pose to each other might open a new road for the reassessment of cooperation in different spheres, including cooperation in security issues. For that to happen, the vision, or perception of threat should be expanded to non-traditional security, including economic, environmental, terrorist threats, among others. The understanding of a threat coming from the functioning atomic station of Metsamor, a threat, which is quite alarming and urgent for all the states of the region due to its location in a seismoactive zone, might lead to the reassessment of security priorities for

the local nations. In this regard, seeing a common interest and a common threat might provide a big impetus to cooperate and lead to the gradual transformation of the local national identities.

6.3.5 Proper timing

The theoretical basis of this thesis lies predominantly in the framework of social constructivism and primordialism. It is true that both innate and constructed elements of identity play a significant role in the level of interconnectedness and cooperation between regional states; however one should also take into account other factors that might not be directly linked to societies and local governments, but still should be taken into account. The international context, under which a region might get involved into the process of the establishment of common identities and integration, involves different factors. In the neorealist interpretation, one can speak about the role of great and regional powers that defines the development of regions, including the political and economic interests of great powers, the existing traditional zones of influence of external powers and other factors. Additionally, the international environment should be appropriate for integration: there should be no destabilizing elements such as major regional wars or economic crisis. Also, the theorists of a security community suggest that international organizations and hegemon powers might lead to the establishment of new security communities or attract new members to existing ones. The term “hegemon” in this regard differentiates from the Gramscian interpretation of a hegemon state dominant over others; instead it is a nation sharing a common identity with other members of a security community, but taking a leading role in the process of the formation and development of this community.

The analysis of the literature on the examples of security communities shows that the majority, if not all, of the existing zones of stable peace belong to regions with the influence of one regional or global power. Despite the real threat of the Soviet Union, for the states of Western Europe during the Cold War, the European Economic Community was created in the circumstances of the dominance of the United States in the region, as most obviously expressed in the American financial assistance to the

Europeans under the Marshall Plan, as well as the membership of most of the European states in NATO. The same can be referred to other regions of stable peace such as North America (NAFTA), Latin America (Mercosur) and South East Asia (ASEAN) with some elements of integration and a common identity shared between its members. In all aforementioned examples, the traditional influence of great powers over these regions do not contradict the cooperation between its members.

Finally, proper timing can imply the international involvement and interest of the world community to solve existing ethnic conflicts between nations and put an end to wars in regions. Vice versa, the position of great powers influencing the regions to keep local conflicts frozen undermines the future of regional development and delays the establishment of a security community. The involvement of the international community might take place in cases when a region the conflicting nations belong to has a special value in political and economic terms for leading world powers. In this regard, the position of the regional hegemon, its interests in the region as well as its own system of values and the level of democratic development can define their course and behavior in the process of conflict resolution and regional integration.

Good timing can also be understood as the so-called “window of opportunity” for the successful outcome of negotiations and, to a large extent, is influenced by the goodwill of the local leadership and a favorable international situation (Caspersen, 2011, p. 80). One should also not forget that societies, too, play an important role in the process of conflict resolution, as the weariness of war by the nations involved in a conflict can significantly contribute to the transformation of local identities, as it happened in Western Europe after the end of World War II. In this regard, although state policy and propaganda play a big role in the process of identity transformation, in most cases in history, it was the negative experience of wars and atrocities that could substantially decrease the level of nationalism and ethnic hatred in local societies. In this case, the representatives of the intelligentsia, as well as the political elites can analyze the prospects of regional integration as a method for conflict resolution or normalization of relations in the post-conflict period.

While analyzing the history of the development of the South Caucasus and the role of factors beyond the control of local societies, the traditional perception of the region as “Russia’s backyard” affected its development and impeded the process of conflict resolution several times in history. While the collapse of Russian empire in 1918 could be used as a window of opportunity for the South Caucasus, the region failed to build a long-lasting integration process, mostly due to the different position of its political elites, as well as the growing influence of external powers, such as Great Britain, Germany and the USA. In other words, it was the improper timing of enduring world war, collapsing empires and their attacks on the region that led to the failure of that attempt in 1918. The further loss of independence of the region stalled this process for other seventy years. The period of the Soviet presence in the region had some positive results in the normalization of relations between the region’s hostile nations, however it failed to create a real basis for the integration of the local economies and societies, as the system of hub-and-spoke and the dependence of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia on Moscow was deeper than the correlation and the level of cooperation between the three states.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, new opportunities were opened for the reconstruction of cooperation in the region, but the rise of the conflicts in the region impeded the process of regional integration. It was improper time for integration, primarily not because of external influence, but due to the rise of national movements, which exploded into an ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. According to Libaridian (2012, p. 241-242), after the ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994 there was another window of opportunity for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional cooperation in 1995, when all three leaders of the South Caucasus could consolidate power in their countries with the priority of a state-building over nationalist ideology, and all of them had a strategic vision for the future of the region and had similar perspectives regarding their relations with external powers, including Russia, Iran, Turkey and the West. This opportunity was lost mostly due to the intransigence of the leaders of the Karabakh secessionist regime as well as Armenian society to any kind of compromise. In the following years, the growing influence of Russia over the region, the ascendance of new governments in Armenia, and the gradual decrease of

communication between the three societies distanced the region from the chances of cooperation for an indefinite period.

Today, the rise of militarist rhetoric in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the provocative actions of the Armenian leadership of Nikol Pashinyan, the growing influence of Russia over the region are among the many factors that impede the reassessment of the idea of regional integration in the South Caucasus. The intransigence of the Azerbaijani and Armenian governments to sign a peace treaty that would account for some concessions to both sides is caused by the radical positions of their societies and the lack of weariness of war. Nevertheless, it was also the lack of proper international involvement into the process of conflict resolution in the South Caucasus that left the conflicts of the region unresolved until now. According to Vanyan (interview), a solution to the conflicts in the South Caucasus can be reached only after the pressure of international actors on the local governments to sign a peace treaty.

In order to see real examples and achieve integration in the region, windows of opportunity and the involvement of the international community might not be enough. In this regard, all the aforementioned elements, including transformation of local societies and systems, the establishment of economic and social transactions between nations, the reconstruction of trust and a vision of a common threat that can contribute to the understanding of the advantages a security community might bring to the region. Proper timing is important in terms of a favorable international situation and, simultaneously, the preparedness of society for these kinds of actions. At the same time, the understanding of a favorable situation in the international arena would imply several factors, such as the lack of clashes of interest between Russia and the West, as well as between Russia and traditional regional actors, such as Turkey and Iran.

Different experts accentuate the importance of changes in Moscow. According to them, the regime in Russia should become democratized, dissolve or lose its influence over the conflicts, for the transformation of the situation in the South Caucasus to ensue (Aliyeva, Kakachia, interviews). Also, according to Mamradze (interview), a normalization of relations in the region and the unification of Georgia can take place

under the influence of global change of geopolitical proportions, like the Russian Revolution in 1917, or the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

On the other hand, most of the interviewees agree on the importance of an external stimulus, such as the prospect of joining an economic or political integration project for long-term regional cooperation to take place. It is notable that while these measures are not identity-driven, the pragmatic aspiration to join a club of states or integration project can significantly affect the transformation of local societies and contribute to the formation of a security community in the region. Membership in the European Union or a similar project could be a good motivation for the local states to intensify cooperation (Aliyeva, Kakachia, interviews), while the advantages of joining a bigger market could stimulate the local economies. However, the existing local problems within the EU, such as the consequences of Brexit, the rise in populism and other issues leave little hope for the possibility of this scenario in the foreseeable future. Finally, for the successful implementation of these changes, a comprehensive approach should be implemented, with the parallel introduction of the aforementioned elements and the gradual preparation of the societies for peace and cooperation. As a result, unlike any other formal steps, these measures can bring about a stable and long-lasting peace to the region, contribute to its political and economic development, bring in new foreign investments and transform it into a strong actor in the international arena.

6.4 Conclusion

The understanding of the South Caucasus as a region of a security community looks mainly utopian. While security communities require the elements of trust and common identity, none of these elements exist in the current system of relations between the states of the South Caucasus. The history of conflicts, traumas of the past, unwillingness to reassess the past and build a dialogue with the opposite side create the atmosphere of absolute distrust between the hostile nations. In contrast, despite the history of peaceful coexistence between the three nations and the efforts of the Soviet government to create a common Soviet identity among its citizens, there is no common identity between the people of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Moreover, in some cases, these identities

are clashing and can be interpreted as mutually exclusive. The legacy of the ethnic conflicts, which became a part of national identities too, still affects the region and it is hard to expect any major changes in this issue unless the local conflicts are settled once and forever, with the respect of international law and basic rights of each side of the conflict. Even though the integration of the South Caucasus with the establishment of strong links between nations could solve many interethnic problems and prevent the onset of new conflicts, the unresolved status of existent ones together with a radical attitude of societies is the main problem of the failure of integration projects in the region. As Chikovani (2005, p. 63) notes, today the idea of the establishment of a common Caucasian Home is an “ideal model, for which the states of the region can aspire to. (...) [However] taking into account the developments of the recent centuries, it is hard to consider any unity and harmony of interests” making this idea an aspiration and a dream rather than reality.

Nonetheless, the successful examples of reconciliation around the world, such as the French-German and Japanese-Korean cases, show that identities can be transformed under some conditions caused both by the domestic and foreign policies of the states, as well as the maturity of societies and a benevolent international situation. As it was discussed in the chapter, these conditions require the understanding of the advantage of cooperation between states that would share common interests and common threats. In terms of interests, economic cooperation and trade, together with other types of social interaction might create an atmosphere of cooperation, which would be beneficial for each country of the region. Interaction between societies will decrease the existing level of distrust and animosity between the hostile nations who are engaged into inter-ethnic conflicts. The gradual transformation of societies and political regimes will create common values and guarantee respect and protection of human rights regardless of ethnic or religious belonging of the citizen of the South Caucasus. The perception of a common threat either in terms of traditional or broad security will bring nations to the understanding of benevolence of cooperation that would guarantee economic, environmental and other types of security to its nation. Finally, societies should be gradually transformed and at the same time be ready for the window of opportunities, when both international situation and domestic preparedness and maturity of societies

will bring local societies to the construction of a stable peace and long-lasting integration. This understanding will sooner or later come about, as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are “destined to live and coexist together by the very history, geography, geopolitics and realities of the modern world” (Gadzhiyev, 2010, p. 225).



7. CONCLUSION

Characterized by ethnic diversity and the conflicting relations of its population, the South Caucasus remains a deeply fragmented region. Despite many commonalities in culture, local traditions and common historical legacy, the three local states do not consider themselves as parts of a common region and do not share a common identity. Interethnic conflicts continue to be the main cause for regional division, together with the different international orientations of the three states. While since the 1990s, the local governments were predominantly unstable, they were also affected by the involvement of powerful neighbors, each of whom was “determined to oppose the region’s domination by another” (Brzezinski, 1997, p 124).

Traditionally, the literature on the region has looked at the problem of fragmentation from a neorealist viewpoint and accentuated the issues such as the balance of power, as well as the role of global and regional powers in the political development of the South Caucasus. Other works use a neoliberal approach and discuss the level of democratic development and its influence on the foreign policy of the states in general, and their position in the negotiation process in particular. However, both approaches lack the understanding of the historical roots and memories of the past still actively influencing the position of the nations at the negotiating table and the choices of allies and enemies defining their current foreign policy. In this regard, the theory of constructivism and the discussion of the role of national identities can shed some light on the origins of the conflicts, the internal sources of the unyielding position of the states, the existing perceptions of threat and their influences on the current situation and regional fragmentation.

Indeed, an identity is a powerful tool that can affect the relations between nations both in a positive and a negative way. Identities are not monolithic; they consist of different elements expressing different aspects of a nation’s culture, history, traditions or current relations. In this regard, the three states of the South Caucasus can be parts of different networks, depending on the context: “The South Caucasus” in geographic terms, “Eastern Europe” politically or “The Black Sea” economically (Gamaghelyan,

interview). Similarly, while different elements of national identity, such as ethnic origin, religion, history or regional affiliation might have different importance and value due to the influence of internal and external political developments, identity can be understood through the hierarchy of its elements and have a different impact on the domestic and foreign policy of nations. However, different approaches to the character of identities as a fixed concept or a constantly changing process can affect the understanding of correlation between identity and state domestic and foreign policy, too. The traditional, or primordialist approach sees national identity as a static concept, which is based on historical memory, specifics of culture and traditions, and cannot be changed or modified under the influence of the changing conditions of the modern world. Also, primordialism does not accept the possibility of the transformation of clashing identities and in many cases sees the rise in ethnic conflicts as the inevitable outcome of clashing identities and the innate hostile attitude of nations toward each other.

In contrast, the constructivist understanding of national identity interprets it as a transformative process that cannot be defined by the given characteristics of a nation alone, such as its linguistic or religious belonging, or the historical legacy of the past, but is also being constantly transformed and influenced by current domestic policy of states, as well as the international context and many other internal and external factors. Constructivism interprets national identity as a dynamic and constantly changing concept that can be used for the purposes of political elites in order to consolidate societies, while in some cases this policy might lead to the formation of a new type of identity, including a common identity that would unite different societies under one institution, or one “common home”, as the theory of security communities suggests. Moreover, according to the constructivist theory, the appropriate policy of states and confidence-building initiatives of civil society can contribute to the restoration of trust between nations and as a result, transformation of identities that can potentially lead to the resolution of many diplomatic deadlocks in interethnic conflicts.

While both primordialism and constructivism face some criticism when applied to the role of identities and states in different conflicts, it is appropriate to see identity as a hybrid term comprising the elements of both approaches. In the analysis of the South

Caucasus, the current state of frozen conflicts shows that the primordialist approach based on memory of the past and mutual distrust defines the current position of states and leads to their intransigent position at the negotiating table. This is why the perspective of the establishment of any signs of cooperation between them looks unrealistic, as the identities are not only different, but in some cases are also hostile and mutually exclusive. At the same time, while political leaders are the hostages of public opinion, they still possess political tools in their hands that can either reduce, or at least soften the existing enmities and attitudes of their societies. While the transformation of the societies, the gradual democratization of the states and the development of local economies could contribute to the resolution of the existing conflicts and the development of region cooperation, the local societies still continue to suffer from closed borders and the consequences of the wars.

At the same time, the unresolved status of the conflicts blocks many initiatives that could contribute to the restoration of a dialogue between the hostile nations of the region. In this regard, both in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only the unstable ceasefire, but a stable and final peace treaty with the respect of positions of both sides of the conflict is important for the transformation of the relations between the enemies in particular, and the whole region in general.

The fragmentation of the South Caucasus is a historical tradition. The only two projects of integration ever implemented in the South Caucasus were initiated due to the pressure of external powers: in 1918, its establishment took place in response to the requirements of Ottoman Turkey, while in 1922 the region was united as a Soviet federative republic under the jurisdiction of Soviet Russia. During the first attempt of April 1918, different visions of threat to the three nations, as well as uncoordinated negotiations with the allies led to the breakup of the federation only a month after its establishment. An inability to defend themselves on their own, together with their diametrically different visions of security led to the involvement of the great powers on different sides in the region. German, Ottoman, British and Bolshevik troops were occupying and liberating different parts of the region, causing even more instability and

threat. On the other hand, the unresolved status of the regional borders and the inability of the three nations to compromise led to their failure at the Paris Conference, as the Western powers refused to recognize the three states *de jure* without a definite demarcation of their borders.

During the years after the occupation of the region by the Bolshevik army, the Soviet initiative of integration brought some changes to the regional development of the South Caucasus that could be interpreted both in a positive and a negative way. On the one hand, the Russian occupation brought European education and secularism, established a modern infrastructure and communication links in the region and contributed to the formation of a new identity, by bringing standardization of lifestyle and eradicating the cultural differences between the local ethnicities. The example of cosmopolitan cities such as Baku and Tbilisi served as proof of the success of Russian/Soviet policy in the region. On the other hand, this Soviet identity collapsed under the pressure of economic crisis and general disappointment in the crimes of the Communist Party, revealed during the *glasnost* policy. Instead, the national identities of the periphery countries re-emerged in a devastating swath of interethnic confrontations. While the origins of these conflicts date back to the period preceding the communist rule, the Soviet system of governance exacerbated the problematic relations between the local nations.

Indeed, the undemocratic character of the Soviet system could not provide its national minorities with all the rights necessary to overcome the enmities between nations. The ethnic conflicts that had emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century were rather frozen than solved by the Soviet leadership. Also, the process of formation of national identities was artificially paused by Soviet rule and put them (at best) at the level of development of the newly established states of Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. As a result, the Soviet presence impeded the natural evolution of security relationships between the local states, due to the direct presence of outside powers in the region. Finally, Moscow was not interested in the establishment of regional integration; instead, it practiced its control over the region through the system of “hub-and-spoke”, thus avoiding the establishment of economic ties between the three nations of the region.

As a result of the political and social processes of *glasnost*, the emergence of new political movements and the growing interethnic clashes led to the fragmentation of the region and played a big role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The first years of independence were characterized by the rise in extreme nationalism in the local societies, as well as idealistic foreign policy and statements lacking strategic thought, which led to huge economic, human and in the case of Azerbaijan and Georgia territorial losses in the region. Although this policy did not last long and was replaced with the pragmatic approaches of the experienced politicians, its consequences had devastating outcomes for the region. The lessons of the first years of independence were set as a basis for the foreign policy strategies and international orientations of the three states, leading to even deeper fragmentation of the region.

Today, the unresolved status of the existing interethnic conflicts shapes the architecture of the region and impedes the establishment of regional cooperation. It is notable that while the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia violate the territorial integrity of Georgia and remain the source of instability and generally contradict the concept of a security community as a region free of war, the main obstacle to regional integration and normalization of relations between two out of the three states lies in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the intransigent position of both Azerbaijan and Armenia on this issue. The primordialist approach to identities and the memory of the past is prevailing in the current rhetoric of the states, while any discussion of possible compromise causes irritation in local societies. The governments that claimed the necessity of concessions and revision of their official policy were overthrown, as the example of the Levon Ter-Petrosyan government showed in 1998; the representatives of civil society and the intelligentsia that were calling for peace and mutual understanding were marginalized and presented as betrayers and collaborationists.

As for Azerbaijani-Georgian and Armenian-Georgian relations, despite the lack of an open conflict between the nations and a much more tolerant attitude towards each other, limited opportunities were found to create expanded cooperation at a bilateral level. For the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia, the success of energy and transport

projects initiated in the early 2000s contributed both to the economies of the two states as well as their friendly relations of strategic partnership, however this level of cooperation failed to transform into a deeper level of integration with the involvement of the local societies. As the analysis of the bilateral relations showed, the achievements of the Azerbaijani-Georgian friendship of the 1990s-2000s to a large extent were influenced by the good personal relations between the leaders of the two states. With the demise of the Saakashvili government, the strategic cooperation lost its previous dynamics and faced several challenges in the following years. The David Gareji crisis of 2019 showed the vulnerability of relations and the need for a deeper understanding of the existing contradictions between Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Similarly, relations between Tbilisi and Yerevan never reached the level of strategic cooperation that could serve as a basis for regional integration; moreover, despite the commonalities in the culture of the two states, Armenian-Georgian relations failed to experience the success of the strategic partnership between Georgia and Azerbaijan. Here, one can note the pragmatism and the lack of influence of national identities in the political choices of the two nations; however, as the in-depth analysis shows, these choices were motivated both by the rational calculations of the political and military alliances and the priority of the resolution of ethnic conflicts as a part of the national identities of both states. In this regard, the different positions of Georgia and Armenia over the priority of the principle of territorial integrity led to the search for divergent strategies in the foreign policies of the two states. Moreover, the active influence of Russia in the regional conflicts played a decisive role in the international orientation choices of Georgia and Armenia, leading to the failure of bilateral cooperation between the two states.

While there are many reasons standing behind the unresolved status of the conflicts and the failure of the states to cooperate, the identities shaped by the memory of the past, together with the current rhetoric and ideology, have had a significant impact on regional fragmentation and the current level of intransigence of the local states. In this regard, the role of identities was expressed both at the national and international level of relations. In domestic and regional policy, conflicts became an inseparable part of their

identities and so influence the official position of states, public rhetoric and ideology, while blocking any initiatives for compromise. At the international level, despite being predominantly pragmatic in their choices, the states are searching for the strongest allies in order to defend their unyielding positions in the negotiation process.

However, if one interprets an identity not as a fixed, but as a constantly changing concept, it would lead to a new understanding of the role of the choices and the will of societies and regimes to change. Here, neorealist and neoliberal interpretations of the situation in the region can explain the reasons for this failure. The unresolved status of the conflicts and the security dilemma caused by them, along with the political and economic weakness of the states, a lack of mature democracy, as well as the factor of international influence all matter in the current development of the region. As a result, some elements of identity are being misinterpreted; some of them gain public support, while others are being ignored under the influence of domestic and international trends. In the 1980s, the lingering contradictions between the nations reemerged under the influence of the national policy of the Soviets, the new ideology of *glasnost*, as well as the constantly changing international situation and the new role of the Kremlin in the region. During the following years, foreign policy and public opinion in the local states were influenced by the domestic and international changes when, for example, after the Rose Revolution the government of Saakashvili raised the concept of “Europeanness” in Georgian national identity, while after the August War of 2008 Azerbaijan chose a moderate position in terms of Russia, being expressed in a more positive image of Russia in its public rhetoric. These two examples show how current ideologies correspond with foreign policy interests and can easily affect the public opinion (and in some cases, identities) of local societies.

The transformation can come with the parallel changes in different aspects of social development. In this regard, the concept of the “5T”s provides some perspective on possible ways of the reconstruction of national identities through the process of interaction and dialogue. This concept includes the **transformation** of societies and governments, the economic and social **transactions** of local nations, the reconstruction

of **trust**, the perception of a common **threat** and the proper **timing** for the establishment a common integration project in the region.

The failure of regimes such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union to bring long-lasting peace to hostile nations shows that the gradual transformation of societies and the democratization of local regimes is necessary for the introduction of norms and regulations that would protect the rights of national minorities and potentially serve as a “carrot” to attract the secessionist republics to rejoin their *de jure* centers. For this condition to be implemented, the concept of civic nationalism should prevail over ethnic nationalism and the rule of law should be guaranteed. Also, this requires the development of civil societies, as well as the proper functioning of a system of checks and balances that would guarantee the rule of law for the norms to be implemented. Notably, the example of risks posed by democratizing states shows that the process of liberalization of societies and governments has to develop gradually without giving rise to populism, which implies the support of majority without the protection of minority of states. Finally, the examples of states such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Spain where the national minorities claimed for independence despite the democratic character of their governments show that democracy has its limits when dealing with strong national identities. Nevertheless, a dialogue and mutual concessions is the only way that can lead societies to long-lasting peace and prosperity.

The transformation of societies is impossible without transactions between nations that would include social communications, as well as economic cooperation and trade. The current conditions characterized by closed borders and a lack of communications between the hostile nations complicate people’s negative attitude toward each other and decrease the chances of a peaceful resolution of the existing frozen conflicts. The situation is exacerbated by the existing economic models, where the Azerbaijani economy is heavily influenced by its oil and gas industry, while Armenia is highly dependent on annual remittances from the Armenian diaspora leaving little motivation for the establishment of economic ties between nations. Economic transactions and mutual interest to cooperate could break the vicious circle and motivate the political elites to establish connections between the states. In this regard, the establishment of

healthy economies with the support of small business and local agrarians could significantly contribute to the promotion of regional cooperation and the reopening of interstate borders. The example of the Sadakhlo and Ergneti markets can serve as a good model for the reestablishment of connections and be the basis for a future bottom-up integration.

Another aspect of the reassessment in relations would require measures aimed at the reconstruction of trust between nations. These measures would include different steps taken both at the level of states as well as grassroots initiatives, and involve the reevaluation of history with the mutual recognition of the cultural legacy of the opposite side, control over any expressions of hate speech in the media and a change in rhetoric, with more attention paid to the positive moments in relations, and many others. These measures would also require the refusal of denialism and conspiracy theories in the official discourse, mutual apologies and punishment of the criminals responsible for the organization and implementation of the tragedies of the late 1980s-early 1990s. However, these steps are impossible without the democratization of the local regimes and societies, while the understanding of democracy would not be limited to the support of the majority of the population, but would also imply respect for human rights, including the right of all refugees to return to their homelands. Importantly, these measures would also require the opening of state archives, including the ones in Moscow, which is impossible without the process of democratization, not only in the states of the region, but also in Russia.

The international aspect of cooperation would require a common position in the foreign policy choices and a common perception of threat for the leadership in Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan. While today each of the nations follows its own political interests and defines its strategy partially based on its memory of the past and its perception of threat, the transformation of the societies and the change in attitudes towards each other might change the understanding of threat, unite the nations in their international orientation and, as a result make the region less vulnerable to external influence due to its unity in foreign policy. A change in the understanding of threat can lead to the gradual transformation of societies and the formation of a common identity. For the South Caucasus, the understanding of security in the broad sense of human security, together

with a new understanding of environmental, economic, natural disaster and other types of threats, can potentially decrease the level of existing regional fragmentation. The atomic power station of Metsamor located in a seismic zone, the current level of water supply and other types of environmental threat caused by the consequences of conflicts in the region, can trigger a reassessment of the vision of threat in the region and contribute as well to a change in the relations between the opposing sides of the conflicts.

Finally, proper timing is important for the successful implementation of all the above-mentioned elements. While it is a big challenge for any leadership to take unpopular measures for rapprochement between hostile nations, it is both the goodwill of political leaders and the involvement of international community that is necessary for conflict resolution and the successful implementation of steps leading to rapprochement. At the same time involvement of third parties and their position that would guarantee respect of both sides of the conflict in the framework of international law can significantly contribute to the fair and stable conflict resolution that could be an impetus for the further process of regionalization in the South Caucasus. In this regard, proper timing also implies a favorable situation in the international arena and common interest of the great powers to establish peace in the region. For the South Caucasus, a favorable situation in the international arena would first and foremost imply the lack of clashes of interest between Russia and the West, as well as between Russia and the traditional actors influencing the region such as Turkey and Iran.

Currently, there is no interest for the three states in reconsidering the existing structure of relations in the region. While several efforts for compromise and search for a dialogue were negatively perceived by the societies and political elites, the negotiation process reached its deadlock, and still requires deep transformation of current positions and attitudes. However, while the basis of these perceptions lies in the recent traumas of the past, the history of the region still has many unclear periods that need to be analyzed and discussed. For example, the truth about the role of intelligence services in the rise of the conflicts in the 1980s is still hidden in the KGB archives and needs to be reassessed in the future.

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the Soviet occupation of the first democratic republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1920, followed by the occupation of Georgia in 1921. Created in the last months of World War I, soon after the breakup of the Russian empire, the three states emerged after a failed attempt to establish a Transcaucasian Federation that existed for only a month in April 1918 and collapsed because of internal disputes between the states. The first attempt of integration failed due to the unresolved character of the ethnic conflicts in the region, the nationalistic policy of the ruling elites and their choice of cooperation with international actors rather than with their immediate neighbors. Today, the similarities between the modern situation in the region with the period from 1918 to 1921 are quite evident. As in 1918-1921, today the unresolved status of ethnic conflicts, and the nationalist policies of the modern states of the region leave little hope for the peace process and cooperation, while choices of international orientation exacerbate the region's fragmentation. Moreover, despite the seventy years of official propaganda for the "friendship of peoples" and the borders superimposed by Moscow, the policy of ethnic cleansing of the late 1980s-early 1990s created new traumas in the national identities and left little chance of repeating the 1918 effort of integration.

The potential transformation of national identities and the reconstruction of mutual trust, as well as the current conditions for establishing economic complementarity, together with the existing common cultural basis provides hope that cooperation and the de-securitization of the region is still possible. While the establishment of cooperation at the level of a security community requires both domestic transformation and a favorable international context, internal changes have to create conditions for future peace until the changes in the international arena allow for a security community to be formed. This thesis has aimed to show that although currently different and clashing identities of the local peoples impede the establishment of peace and integration in the region, it is in the hands of the region itself to build strong states, healthy economies and tolerant societies, as the nations of the South Caucasus are destined to live side by side and share common past and common future. An understanding of this potential will be the first step in the construction of a security community in the South Caucasus, when millions of people of

different ethnic, religious and cultural origins can reach the consensus to call it a common Caucasian Home.



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APPENDIX A - MAPS

Figure A.1 The South Caucasus, 2020



Source: Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

Figure A. 2 The South Caucasus, circa 1780



Source: Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 15.

Figure A. 3 Pipeline and energy routes of the South Caucasus



Source: Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 168 (updated according to the recent changes as of 2020 – NG).

Figure A. 4 The occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts of Azerbaijan



Source: Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 101.

APPENDIX B – TABLES

Table B. 1. Demographic Changes in Karabakh, 1810-2005

	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Territory
1810	12,500 (20 %)	47,500 (80 %)		Karabakh khanate
1823	4,366 families (22 %)	15,729 families (78 %)		Karabakh province
1897	109,250 (40 %)	164,098 (60 %)	2,605 (1%)	Elizavetpol governorate, including Shusha, Jebrayil, Javanshir uyezds
1926	111,700 (89 %)	12,600 (10 %)	596 (0,4 %)	Territory of NKAO
1979	123,076 (75 %)	37,264 (23 %)	1,265 (0,8 %)	Territory of NKAO
1989	145,500 (76 %)	40,688 (21 %)	1,990 (1 %)	Territory of NKAO
2005	137,380 (95 %)	6 (0%)	171 (0,1 %)	Territory of former NKAO, occupied by Armenia

Table B. 2 Demographic Changes in Erivan khanate/Armenia, 1828 - 2001

	Armenians	Azerbaijanis	Russians	Territory
Prior to Russian conquest in 1828	25,151 (18 %)	117,849 (82 %) (Muslims)		Erivan and Nakhichevan khanates
After 1828	82,377 (50 %) 65,280 – In Erivan only	82,073 (50 %) 49,875 – In Erivan only		Erivan and Nakhichevan khanates
1897	439,926 (53 %)	350,099 (42 %)	16,388 (1,9 %)	Erivan governorate
1914	643,300 (65 %)	267,900 (27 %)	32,700 (3,3 %)	Erivan governorate
1922	671,300 (85 %)	77,800 (10 %)	19,200 (2,5 %)	Armenian SSR
1939	1,062,000 (82 %)	130,900 (10 %)	51,500 (4 %)	Armenian SSR
1959	1,551,600 (88 %)	107,700 (6 %)	56,500 (3,2 %)	Armenian SSR
1989	3,083,600 (93 %)	84,900 (2,6 %)	51,600 (1,6 %)	Armenian SSR
2001	3,145,400 (98 %)	0 (0%)	14,700 (0,5 %)	Republic of Armenia

Source: Farid Shafiyev, *The Russian-Soviet resettlement policies and their implications for ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus*, PhD thesis, Carleton University, 2015; <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru>

Table B.3 Demographic Changes in Baku, 1897 - 2009

	Azerbaijanis	Armenians	Russians
1897	40,341 (36%)	19,099 (17%)	37,399 (33%)
1926	118,737 (26%)	76,656 (16%)	159,491 (36%)
1959	211,372 (32%)	137,111 (21%)	223,242 (34%)
1979	530,556 (52%)	167,226 (16%)	229,873 (22%)
1989	735,462 (61%)	145,758 (12%)	227,679 (19%)
2009	1,848,107 (90%)	104 (0,005%)	108,525 (5 %)

Table B.4 Demographic Changes in Tbilisi, 1897 - 2014

	Georgians	Armenians	Russians
1897	41,151 (25%)	47,133 (29,5%)	44,823(28%)
1926	112,206 (38%)	100,148 (34%)	45,937 (15%)
1959	336,247 (48%)	149,258 (21%)	125,674 (18%)
1989	824,412 (66%)	150,138 (12%)	124,867 (10%)
2002	910,712 (84%)	82,586 (7%)	32,580 (3 %)
2014	996,804 (89%)	53,409 (4,8%)	13,350 (1,2%)

Table B.5 Demographic Changes in Abkhazia, 1897 - 2011

	Abkhazians	Georgians	Russians
1897	58,697 (55%)	25,781 (24,4%)	5,135 (4,8%)
1926	55,918 (26,4%)	67,494 (32%)	13,259 (6%)
1959	61,193 (15%)	158,221 (39%)	86,715 (21%)
1989	93,267 (17%)	239,872 (45%)	74,914 (14%)
2003	94,597 (44%)	44,041 (20%)	23,420 (10 %)
2011	122,175 (50%)	46,499 (19%)	22,064 (9%)

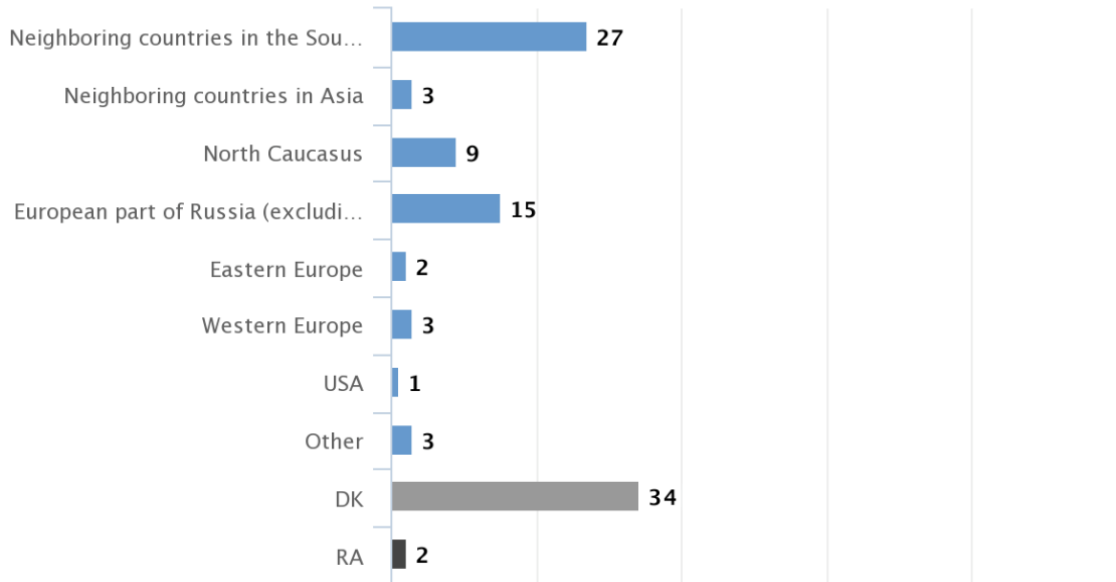
Table B.6 Demographic Changes in South Ossetia, 1886 - 2015

	Ossetians	Georgians	Russians
1886	57,786 (70%)	20,652 (25%)	11 (0,1%)
1926	60,351 (69%)	23,538 (26%)	157 (0,2%)
1959	63,698 (65%)	26,584 (27%)	2,380 (2,5%)
1989	65,232 (66%)	28,554 (29%)	2,128 (2,2%)
2003	94,597 (44%)	44,041 (20%)	23,420 (10 %)
2015	48,146 (89%)	3,966 (7%)	610 (1,1%)

Sources: General census of the population of Russian empire/USSR, (1897, 1926, 1959, 1979, 1989), Census of population of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia. Available from: www.demoscope.ru; <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru>; <http://pop-stat.mashke.org>

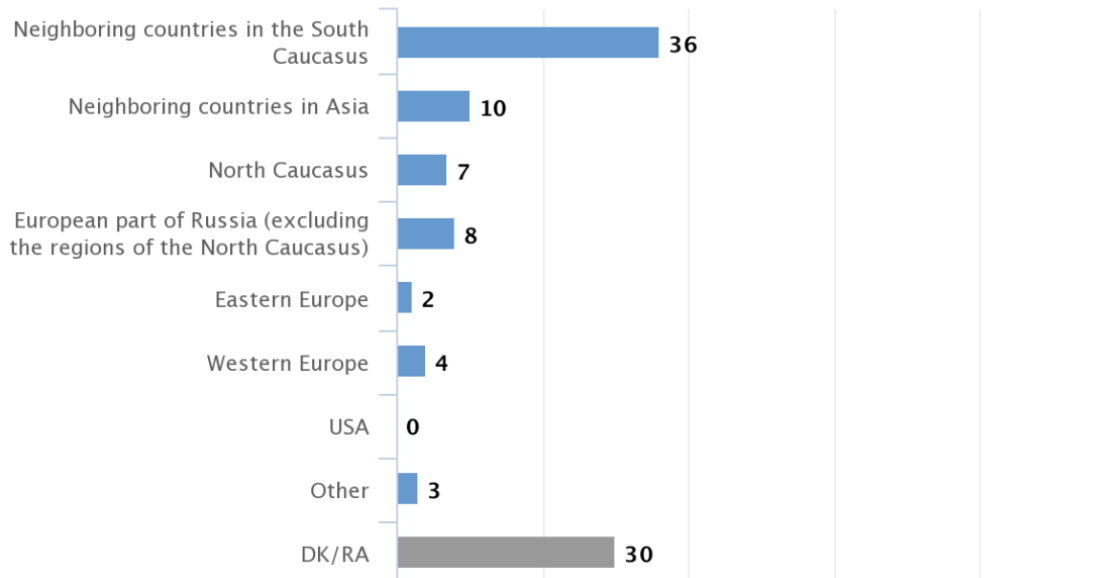
APPENDIX C – SURVEYS

Figure C.1 Traditions of which region are closest to Georgian traditions (%), 2015.



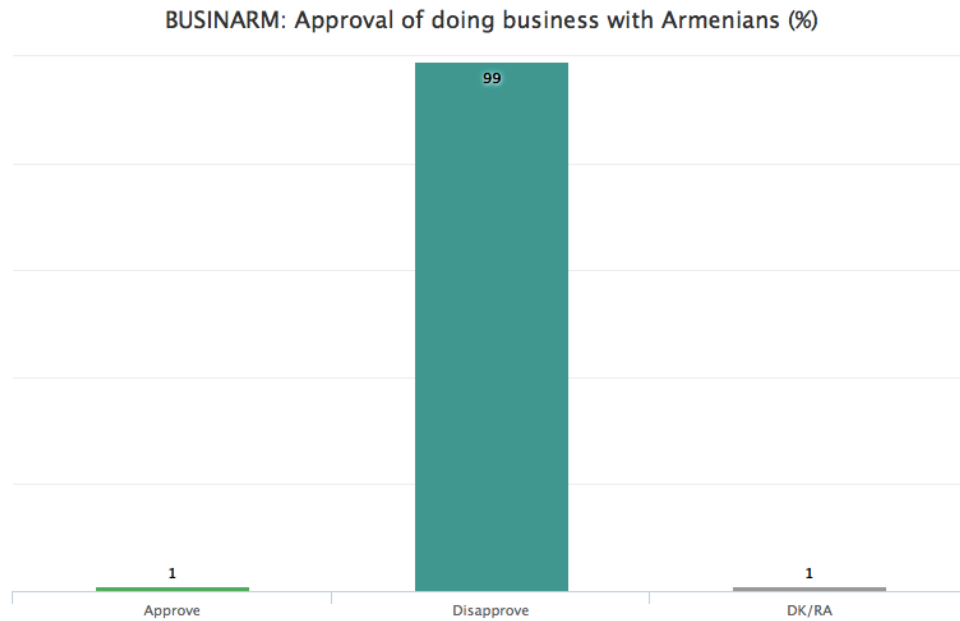
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015ge/CLSTRAD/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C.2 Traditions of which region are closest to Armenian traditions (%), 2015.



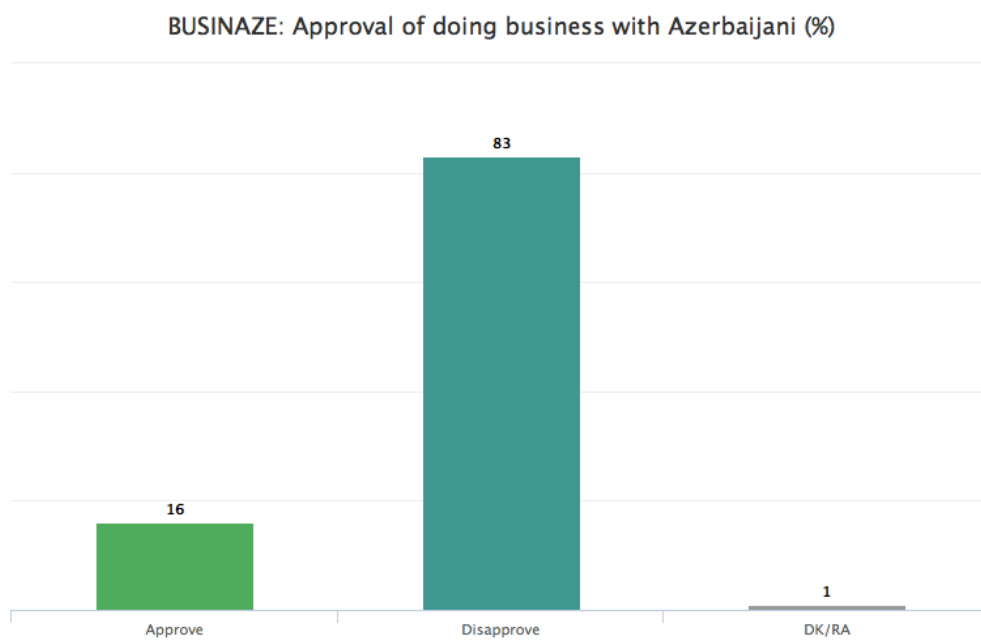
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015am/CLSTRAD/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C.3 Azerbaijani approval on doing business with Armenians (%), 2013.



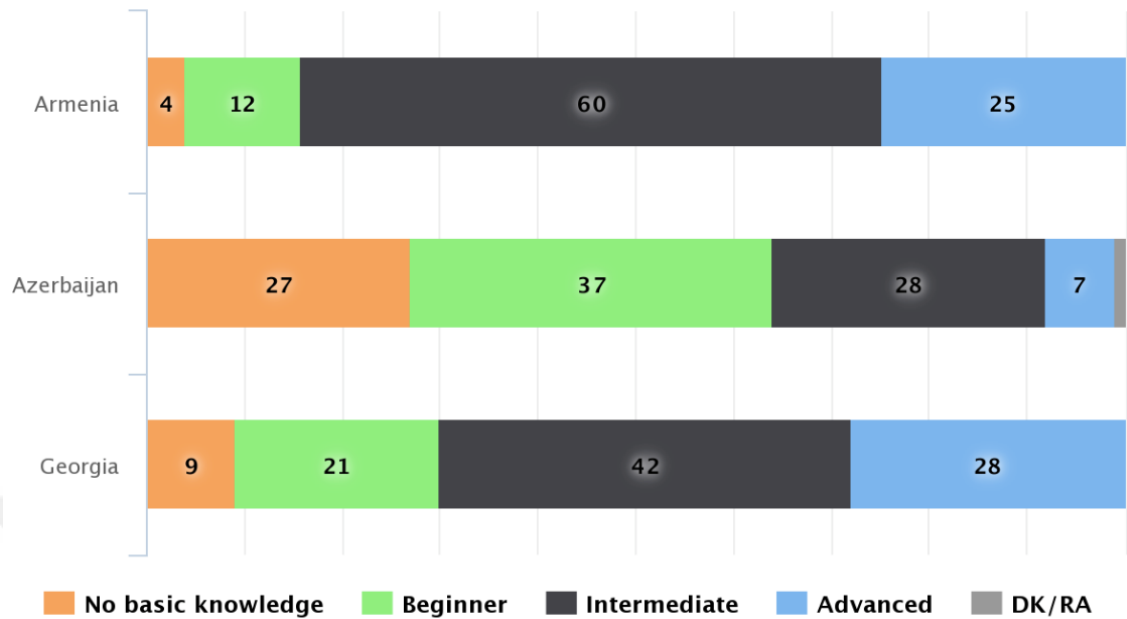
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013az/BUSINARM/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C.4 Armenian approval on doing business with Azerbaijanis (%), 2017.



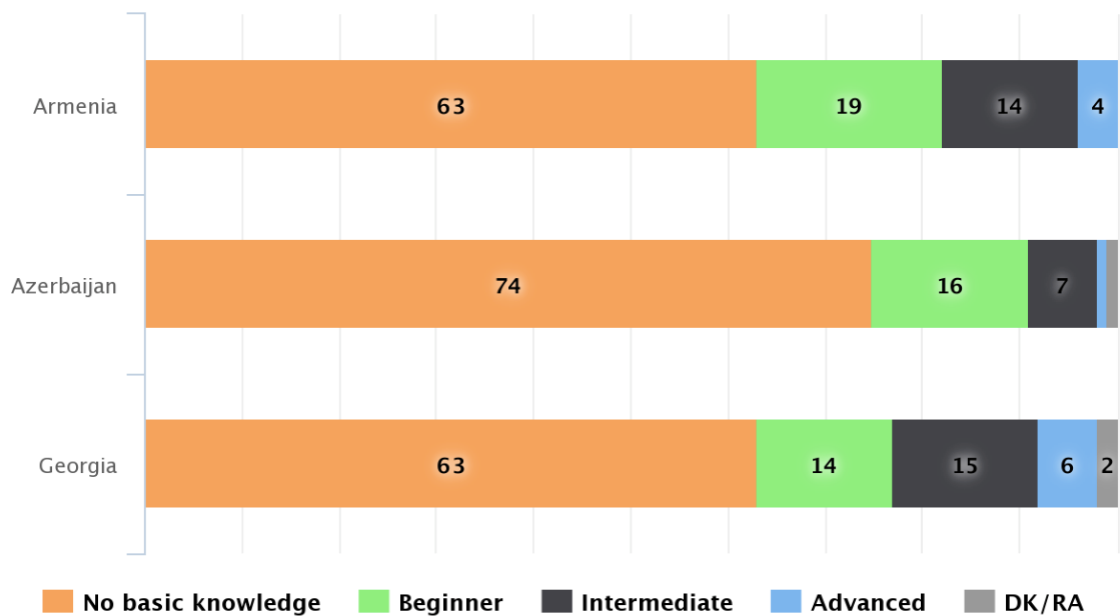
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017am/BUSINAZE/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C. 5 – Knowledge of Russian in the South Caucasus, 2013.



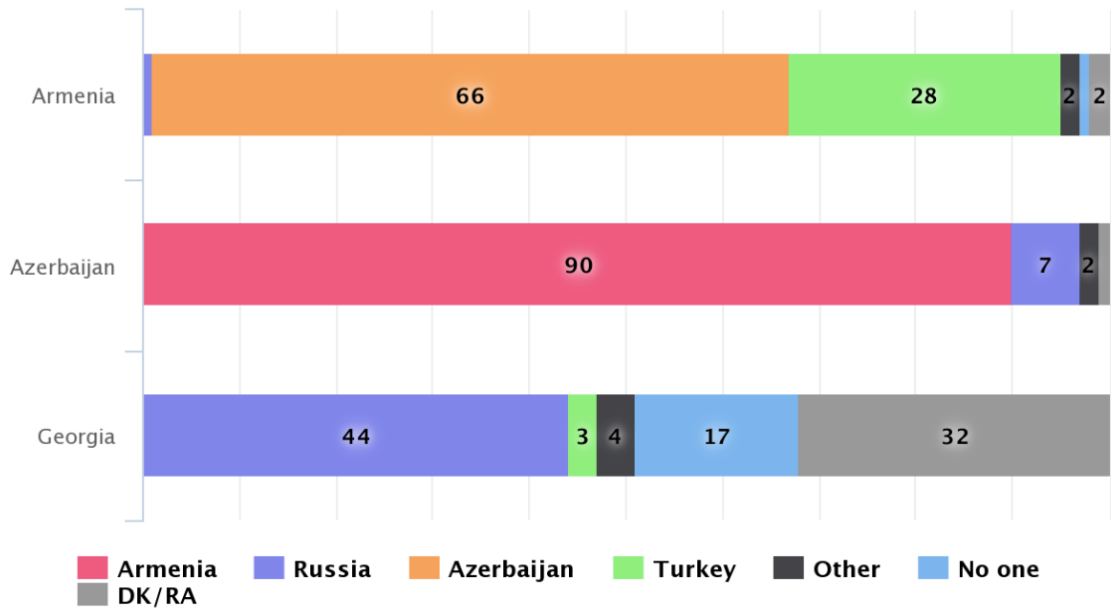
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013/KNOWRUS/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C. 6 – Knowledge of English in the South Caucasus, 2013.



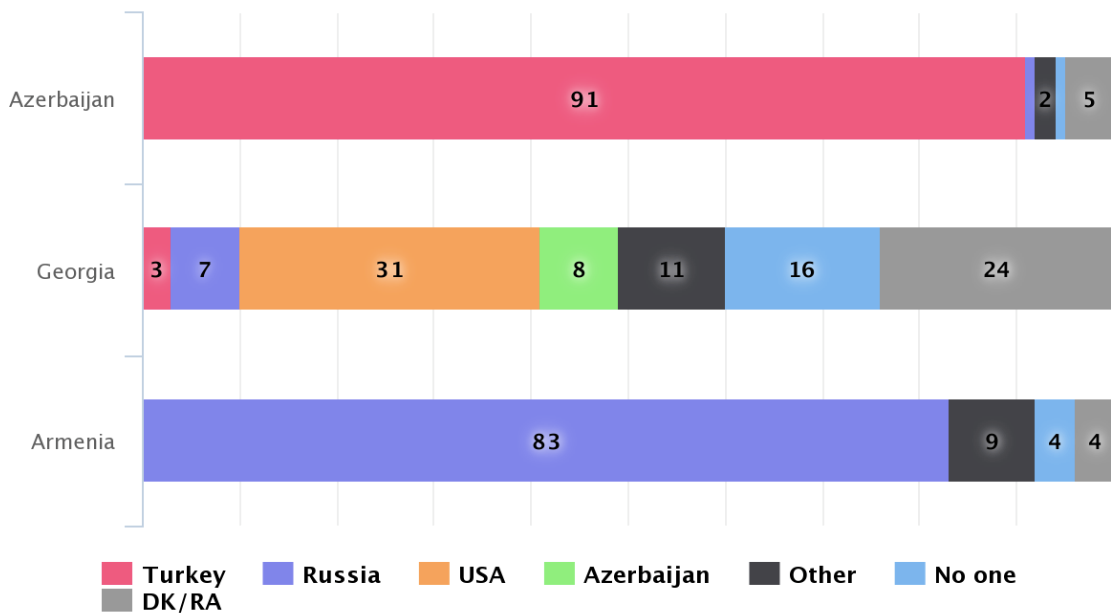
Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013/KNOWENG/> [10 March 2020].

Figure C.7 Main enemy of the country (%), 2013.



Source: Caucasus Barometer, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013/MAINENEM/> [10 March 2020].

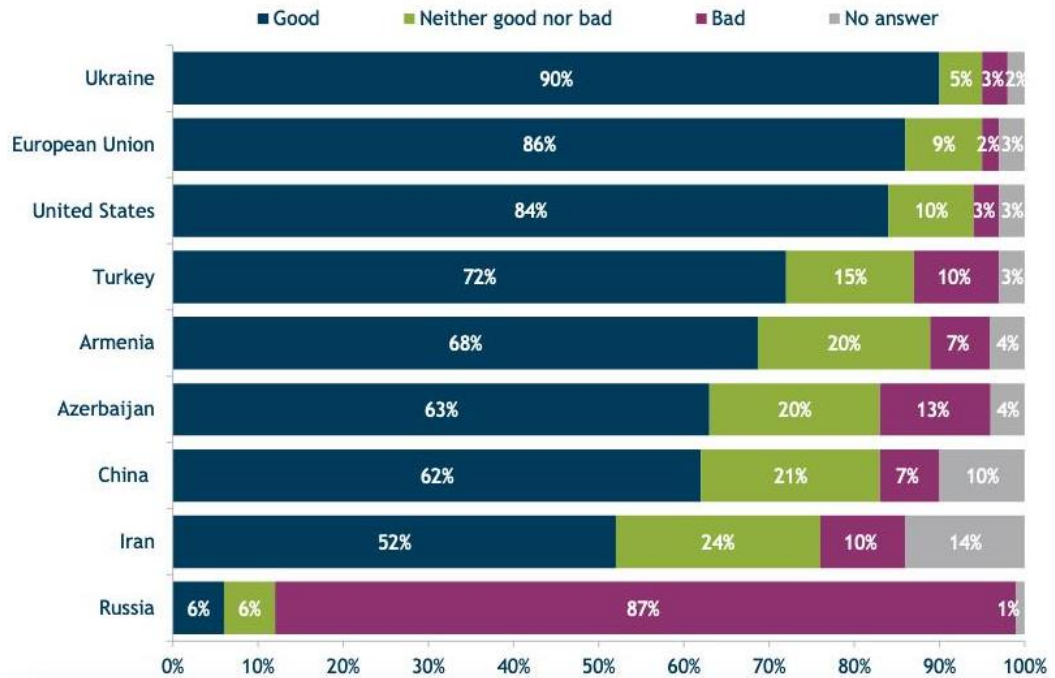
Figure C.8 Main friend of the country (%), 2013



Source: Caucasus Barometer, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013/MAINFRN> [10 March 2020].

Figure C.9 Evaluation of the relations between Georgia and other states (%), 2019.

How would you evaluate the current state of the relationship between Georgia and the following countries?



Source: Center for Insights and Survey Research, International Republican Institute, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/georgia_poll_2.pdf [18 March 2020].

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW METHOD

D.1 Interview questions

1. Do Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia belong to the region of the South Caucasus or should we refer them as a part of other geography – Eastern European, Black Sea, Caspian, Middle Eastern, any other?
2. Is/was there any South Caucasian identity or was it just a Soviet myth?
3. Do you agree with the statement that difference and clash of identities is the main reason of conflicts and weak cooperation in the region?
4. What is the nexus between democracy and peace in the South Caucasus? Can we admit that democratic developments did not bring progress in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus?
5. To what extent do non-state actors shape regionalism in the South Caucasus? (Civil society initiatives, grassroots projects, local and international NGOs).
6. Is there a chance that economy and communications between three nations can contribute to the rapprochement, cooperation and integration (at the final stage) in the region?
7. Why did the cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan in a series of energy (BTC/BTE) and transport (BTK) projects not lead to integration at a deeper level? What does the case of David Gareji crisis of 2019 show in this regard?
8. Why did Georgia and Armenia fail to extend cooperation and integrate despite the lack of any open conflict between the states?
9. What should be done for the restoration of trust between the conflicting nations of the region?
10. To what extent does national identity define international orientation of the three states (European identity for Georgia, Turkic for Azerbaijan and memory of the Ottoman past for Armenia)? If territory is the part of national identity, can we consider the territorial dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh in case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, or Abkhazia and South Ossetia in case of Georgia an issue of national identity as well?
11. Is there any chance to build a security community (an area free of war and

violence with a common identity and a common vision of the future) in the South Caucasus? Is the idea of “Caucasian Home” a utopia?

D. 2 List of interviewees

1. **Aliyeva, Leyla.** Affiliate Researcher at Oxford School for Global and Area Studies, Oxford, UK. February 18, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
2. **Alizade, Zardusht.** Co-founder and member of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan in 1988-1990, political analyst. March 27, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
3. **Çelikpala, Mitat.** Vice-Rector of Kadir Has University. March 16, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
4. **Gamaghelyan, Philip.** Co-founder and board member of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation. March 5, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
5. **German, Tracey.** Deputy Dean of Academic Studies (Research) at the Defense Studies Department, King’s College London. April 2, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
6. **Japaridze, Tedo.** Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia (2003-2004). February 25, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
7. **Iskandaryan, Alexander.** Director of Caucasus Institute based in Yerevan, Armenia. March 3, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
8. **Kakachia, Kornely.** Director of Georgian Institute of Politics based in Tbilisi, Georgia. January 24, 2020 (Skype conversation).
9. **Mamradze, Peter.** Member of Parliament of Georgia in 1992-1995 and 2008-2012. February 27, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
10. **Mansurov, Timur.** Assistant Lecturer, Department of Conflict Resolution Studies, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation. March 15, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
11. **Pashayeva, Gulshan.** Board Member of the Center of Analysis of International Relations based in Baku, Azerbaijan. February 26, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).
12. **Vanyan, Georgi.** Chairman of Caucasus Center of Peace-Making Initiatives based in Yerevan, Armenia. April 1, 2020 (e-mail correspondence).