

STATE SOVEREIGNTY IN GEORGIAN POLITICAL THINKING AND PRACTICE

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The Problem and Theme of the Study

Along with the concepts of “state” and “territory,” sovereignty is one of the central themes both in the study and practice of international relations.¹ The sovereignty issue is all-important for Georgia as a post-Soviet “transition state” still working on its statehood.

State sovereignty and state independence are inextricably related to the nation-state² as the main actor in the contemporary international system. (There is no doubt that Georgia is one such state.) Independence within a nation-state can be rationally substantiated as a political tool used to achieve and realize the highest values, as well as specific positive aims and tasks pursued by the population of any sovereign state taking due account of its economic, scientific, cultural, spiritual, etc. development, which cannot be affected by outside factors. Aristotle regarded state sovereignty as a tool in the context of his “happy state” conception; a sovereign state helped realize the highest values and achieve the ultimate aims of its population.³ On the other hand, Aristotle pointed out: “For a state is not a mere aggregate of persons, but a union of them sufficing for the purposes of life.”⁴ This is not a purely instrumental and axiological idea of statehood and sovereignty—the philosopher supplied their final axiological interpretation. Normally nation-states regard sovereignty as their highest value and ultimate aim.⁵ State and national independence develop into the ultimate value with no fair equivalent, even if overpriced.⁶ This is particularly typical of peoples with a mythologized national identity; they regard themselves as a living organism with a creative force and spiritual identity.⁷ For most so-called de-mythologized peoples that mostly regard themselves

¹ See: Th.J. Biersteker, “State, Sovereignty and Territory,” in: *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. by W. Carl-snaes, Th. Risse, B.A. Simmons, London, 2002, p. 157.

² See: B. Anderson, *Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts*, Frankfurt-New York, 1996, pp. 16-17. According to Walter Sulzbach “nation is a group of people that needs a state of its own because it is sovereign in relation to other states” (quoted from: U. Albrecht, *Internationale Politik. Einführung in das System internationaler Herrschaft*, München, 1986, p. 46).

³ See: Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book Seven, Chapter VII. When writing about a “happy state,” Aristotle obviously had in mind a sovereign state with its own territory, even if the term was coined in a different epoch.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter VIII.

⁵ Cf.: H.-U. Wehler, *Nationalismus. Geschichte-Formen-Folgen*, München, 2001, p. 37.

⁶ See: C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, quoted from Henrike Ricardo Otten, “Wie die Realpolitik in den Mythos umschlägt. ‘Die Sachlichkeit’ des Politischen bei C. Schmitt,” in: *Mythos Staat—Carl Schmitts Staatsverständnis*, Rüdiger Voigt (Hg.), Baden-Baden, 2001, p. 173.

⁷ See: L. Ranke, quoted from H.Th. Gräf, “Funktionsweisen und Träger internationaler Politik in der Frühen Neuzeit,” in: *Strukturwandel Internationaler Beziehungen*, Jens Siegelberg/Klaus Schlichte (Hg.), Wiesbaden, 2000, p. 105.

as a “society” rather than a “nation,”⁸ sovereignty is an indisputable value. The point has been amply demonstrated by international experience.⁹

Inevitably, there are exceptions: for example, the Scots, a nation with a highly developed national self-identity, voluntarily abandoned their sovereignty and independence, while the Canadians, Australians, and some other peoples formally delegated their sovereignty to the English crown. There is another type of collective self-identification that abandons national and state sovereignty in favor of other, much larger entities. It is rooted in a shared culture, faith, language, etc. I have in mind pan-Slavism, pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, and other similar phenomena,¹⁰ the success of which is always short-lived or even virtual.

The above is part of my discussion, within the limits of the present article, of whether sovereignty as an ultimate aim is self-sufficient and valuable for Georgia at the level of the political elites and society as a whole; how important is sovereignty as a tool for realizing other important values and aims, i.e. what does the political class and society mean by sovereignty, and what specific features can be observed in this connection; how does the present idea of sovereignty in Georgia affect political practice (particularly the country’s foreign policy orientation and implementation of the republic’s strategic objectives).

Pre-History of Russian-Georgian Relations as a Mirror of the Ideas about Sovereignty Current in Georgia

The dissident movement¹¹ of the 1970s-1980s in Georgia aimed at achieving the republic’s national and state independence. This means that sovereignty was valuable per se for a society that regarded itself as a nation created by the Georgian ethnos and confirmed by corresponding myths. The absolute majority of Georgians voted for the country’s independence at the 31 March, 1991 referendum; the world community gradually recognized it throughout late 1991 and the first half of 1992.

As an independent state, Georgia had to cope with the dilemma of CIS membership. We all know that the post-Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states which had different starting and other potential, chose to join the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States. Under Abulfaz Elchibey, Azerbaijan joined the CIS some time later. Georgia was the only state to reject CIS membership. Shortly before he was deposed, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Georgian president, spoke of the new structure as a “modernized empire.”¹² Several months later, when Eduard Shevardnadze

⁸ Cf.: K. Hübner, *Istina mifa*, Moscow, 1996, p. 329.

⁹ When talking about the European Union, within which the nation-states voluntarily abandon a considerable part of their sovereignty in favor of supranational structures, we should bear in mind that this was a *voluntary* act and that only *part* of their sovereignty was delegated. The recent disagreements over the Iraqi and certain other international issues have shown that the countries retained their own ideas about their national interests—therefore they should be regarded as sovereign subjects of international politics.

¹⁰ German nationalist historian of the 19th century Heinrich von Treitschke put it in a nutshell by saying that it was great powers that could realize great aims (quoted from: R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg. Eine Theorie der Staatenwelt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, p. 677).

¹¹ The Georgian dissidents concentrated on national problems rather than human rights and democracy issues as distinct from the dissident movement in Russia (cf.: J. Gerber, *Georgien: Nationale Opposition und kommunistische Herrschaft seit 1956*, Baden-Baden, 1997, pp. 64-79).

¹² *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 8-9 December, 1991 (in Georgian).

came to power, the supporters of the former president insisted that Shevardnadze had come back as a “Kremlin agent” to incorporate the country into the CIS. It should be said that the plans were opposed not only by those who supported the deposed president, but also by his former opposition (the National Democrats and the Republicans). Georgian society was obviously dead set against CIS membership.

Out of populist considerations, the new president first declined the invitation to join the CIS, even though it would have been reasonable: Russia and its president, Boris Yeltsin, were obviously displeased. This would have been an important step toward alleviating Moscow’s mistrust of Shevardnadze; Russia’s high brass did not like him at all. For this reason, Russia chose to support the Abkhazian separatists. In September-October 1993, when Sukhumi detached itself from Georgia thus threatening Shevardnadze’s power, the president publicly approved CIS membership for Georgia. Moscow reciprocated by supporting him with the Black Sea Fleet under Admiral Baltin when it came to routing Gamsakhurdia’s supporters in Western Georgia.

On the other hand, it was obvious (and it is even more obvious today, even though not all the parties accept this) that membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States, an amorphous structure the very name of which treated independence as a priority, could not limit Georgia’s sovereignty in any tangible way, while the West still regarded the country as part of Russia’s military and political sphere of influence. If Georgia had joined the CIS at the right time, it would have been able to find a common language with the Kremlin and would have probably avoided the conflict in Abkhazia. ... At that time, the Georgian leaders preferred to ignore this and deliberately distanced themselves from Russia.

In 1994, in the wake of the events in Abkhazia, when Georgia joined the CIS, the relations between the two countries improved to a certain extent. President Yeltsin visited Tbilisi, where he addressed the Georgian academic and artistic community with a “reconciliatory” speech at the Academy of Sciences. In January 1996, the Council of the CIS Heads of State passed a resolution on an economic blockade of Abkhazia. In Georgia, the public cherished the fond hope that Russia would help to promptly resolve the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. In 1998, when it had become clear that this would not happen, President Shevardnadze opted for an obviously pro-Western course. In June 1998, V. Nadibaidze, the pro-Russian defense minister, was replaced with U.S.-educated David Tevzadze. In a statement he made in 1999, Eduard Shevardnadze pointed out that his country would strive for NATO membership and would knock at its door in 2005.¹³ During the Second Chechen War, Georgia abandoned its formerly neutral position in favor of Chechnia. This could not pass unnoticed: President Putin, who replaced Yeltsin as president, responded with open interference in the internal affairs of Georgia’s two separatist regions (the people in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region were given the opportunity to become Russian citizens; Russian companies started buying real estate in the two areas, etc.) and introduced visas for Georgian citizens.

The new leaders brought to power by the Rose Revolution tried to patch up the rip: they changed the country’s policy regarding Chechnia and set up joint anti-terrorist centers together with Russia. President Saakashvili went even further: When answering a question asked by a Russian journalist about the tragedy of 9 April, 1989: “Will the wound heal? Will the Georgians forgive the tragedy?” he said: “It is not easy to forget 9 April. I should say that after the first, and quite understandable, bout of anger, the Georgians realized that it was the Soviet, not the Russian army that attacked the people on Freedom Square. The Soviet empire was bloodthirsty and merciless: it attacked and killed Russians in Novochoerkassk, Lithuanians in Vilnius, Czechs in Prague, and Hungarians in Budapest with the same cruel indifference. Today we have learned to distin-

¹³ See, for example: [<http://www.wps.ru/ru/pp/military/1999/11/15.html?view=for-print>; <http://sovsekretno.ru/2001/09/3.html>], etc.

guish between the Russian and the Soviet. To tell you the truth, I was amazed by the speed with which the people's hearts grew warmer."¹⁴

Still, after the events of the summer of 2004 in the Tskhinvali Region when the Russian peacekeepers helped the separatists retain power, bilateral relations rapidly cooled down. Their level went on sinking until it reached the present-day very low level (I have in mind the scandal caused by the arrest in Georgia of Russian intelligence officers and Russia's unprecedented anti-Georgian steps that followed).

Sovereignty Assessed from the Position of Negation and the Radical Pro-Western Course of the Country's Leaders as an End in Itself

The brief outline of Georgia's recent history presented above permits certain preliminary conclusions to be drawn on how the political community and society perceive the country's state sovereignty and how this perception affects political practice.

Georgian political thinking negatively perceives state sovereignty; political thinking in Georgia bears a stamp typical of all former colonies: maximum distancing from the former metropolitan country (Russia in our case) in all (particularly military and political) spheres is seen as the ultimate manifestation of the country's sovereignty. The rational considerations are vague: *Why should Georgia move away from the Russian Federation? There is no answer to this key question of Georgia's foreign policy* (it proved impossible to promptly move away from Russia in the economic and cultural spheres and personal contacts).

In Georgia, Russia is seen as an enemy; the Georgian ruling circles have been painstakingly promoting this image of Russia (openly or otherwise) for fifteen years now,¹⁵ which is consolidating Georgian society around the ruling circles. State propaganda and Russia's passivity (or even failures in its Georgian policy) considerably diminished Moscow's influence and altered Russia's image among the Georgians: while in 2000-2001 about half of the polled regarded Russia as a country on which the future of their own country depended to a great extent,¹⁶ according to the public opinion polls conducted early in 2006, only 8 percent still shares this conviction (as opposed to 65 percent who believe that it was the United States, and 11 percent who describe the EU as the most influential force).¹⁷ As few as about 32 percent regard Russia as Georgia's partner; over 53 percent ascribe this role to the United States; and over 70 percent perceive Russia as a threat to their country's state security.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Izvestia*, 13 April, 2004, available at [<http://www.izvestia.ru/world/article56054/>].

¹⁵ The Act on Georgia's State Independence adopted on 9 April, 1991 by its Supreme Soviet says: "Georgian statehood rooted in its centuries-old history was lost in the 19th century when the Russian Empire annexed the country and destroyed its statehood. The Georgian nation will never reconcile itself to the loss of freedom" (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, No. 70, 10 April, 1991). Whether true or false this statement repeated all over again could not but damage Georgia's relations with Russia.

¹⁶ Figures supplied by Eurobarometer (see: Prof. H. Best, "Druzhestvenny skepsis: Evropa i Evropeyskiy Soiuz v vospriatii naselenia Gruzii i drugikh stran-preemnikov Sovetskogo Soiuza," in: *Materialy konferentsii "Vneshnepolicheskie prioritety dlia Iuzhnogo Kavkaza v XXI veke: blokovaia prindlezhnost ili neitralitet?—Evropeyskiy opyt*," Batumi-Tbilisi, 2001, p. 52).

¹⁷ Figures supplied by the IRI; polls were conducted in April 2006 (see: [<http://www.iri.org.ge/eng/engmain.htm>], POR-April 2006, diagram 56).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, diagram 55.

On the other hand, the Georgian leaders are still keeping the door open for the Russian capital; the pragmatically minded cabinet guided by the classical “Non olet” (“money has no smell”) nearly sold the Russia-Georgia-Armenia transit gas pipeline to Gazprom of Russia. The opposition objected on the strength that this would cripple the country’s sovereignty (by selling the pipeline, Georgia would have lost an important political tool when dealing with Russia). Significantly, it was the U.S. State Department that helped to thwart the deal—a visit by one of its officials to Georgia was accompanied by the statement that to protect the republic’s interests the pipeline would not be sold (in this case, the U.S. and Georgian interests coincided). President Saakashvili distanced himself from some of his ministers and the issue was dropped.¹⁹ Today, the Russian VypelKom mobile communications company²⁰ is ready to move onto the Georgian market despite the serious political complications between the two countries. (Russian capital is present in several large Georgian enterprises: the Madneuli mining company, the Azoti chemical plant, Telasi, an energy distributor in Tbilisi, and others.)

To compensate for its strained relations with Russia, Georgia is pursuing an active pro-Western policy that rests on its possible NATO and probable EU membership. The so-called Declaration on National Agreement on the Main Foreign Policy and Domestic Aims (for 2005-2010), which the leading party together with the major opposition parties and all the parliamentary factions joined, says: “The political parties and parliamentary factions declare that Georgia’s defensive policy should develop as part of European and Euroatlantic security.” Georgia sees NATO and EU membership as its ultimate aim; it believes that it should develop and deepen its strategic partnership with the United States.²¹

The Conception of National Security of Georgia endorsed by the parliament on 8 July, 2005 puts bilateral relations with the Russian Federation in fifth place, after the country’s strategic partnership with the U.S., Ukraine, and Turkey, as well as cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Significantly, no mention is made of any positive circumstances (either past or present) in relation to Russia alone: the document expresses the hope that Russia’s democratization and respect for European values, as well as abidance by the treaty concluded within the OSCE in 1999 on the withdrawal of Russia’s military bases from Georgia would help develop cooperation with the Russian Federation on “principles of good-neighborly relations, equality, and mutual respect.”²²

The Georgian political community, both the ruling elite and the opposition, present their orientation toward NATO, the United States, and the EU as the nation’s will bolstered with historical references. The introductory part of the National Security Conception says: “Georgia as an inalienable part of the political, economic, and cultural European space, the fundamental values of which are rooted in European values and traditions, wants integration into the system of Europe’s political and economic security. Georgia is striving to *regain* its European tradition and *remain* an inalienable part of Europe” (italics mine.—G.R.). The latest public opinion polls quoted above demonstrated that even though the nation is positive about NATO and EU membership in the long term,²³ only 2 percent of the polled believe it to be the country’s highest priority; 48 percent consider it to mean Georgia’s restored territorial integrity; and 45 percent more jobs; while only 4 percent (more than those who support NATO and EU membership as a priority) consider reforms to be an urgent task.²⁴

¹⁹ See, for example: [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2005-04-15/1_georgia.html].

²⁰ See: [<http://www.bit.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?id=43527&ct=news>].

²¹ See: [http://www.parliament.ge/print.php?gg=1&sec_id=63&info_id=7787&lang_id=GEO] (in Georgian).

²² [<http://nsc.gov.ge/index1.php>] (in Georgian.)

²³ See: [<http://www.iri.org/ge/eng/main.htm>], IRI-POR-April 2006, diagram 64.

²⁴ See: IRI-POR-April 2006, diagram 26.

We should ask what ultimate goals and values are offered to justify the pro-Western course of the ruling elite and a larger part of the opposition community. I have already written that Georgia's foreign policy is conditioned primarily by a negative interpretation of sovereignty and the desire to assert itself by moving away from the former metropolitan country; there are formal, fairly superficial positive arguments as well. In any case, those who are positive about Georgia's future NATO and EU membership (see above) nurture the following hopes: 51 percent of the polled who selected three priorities expect that NATO will guarantee the country's security; 52 percent, restored territorial integrity; 24 percent, social prosperity, and 20 percent, stronger democracy. The EU is expected to offer: security (41 percent); restored territorial integrity (40 percent); financial support (34 percent); social well-being (35 percent); and stronger democracy (20 percent).²⁵ The figures coincide with the logic of the Georgian government, which expects that NATO and EU membership will help to deal with the major issues: social and economic problems and territorial integrity. This, however, has never (with rare exceptions) been analyzed in any depth and never openly discussed either by the country's leaders, or by the main opposition forces, or by the various analytical centers functioning in the republic. Everything remains on the primitive level—the two Western structures are merely associated with a “better life.” More likely than not, nobody seems willing to ask whether Georgia can hope to join the EU and (especially) NATO, and how the country will live before the EU and NATO dreams come true (if ever). It is not my task to discuss and analyze these issues; the scope of the article, however, permits a brief outline.

The North Atlantic Alliance is obviously not ready to extend its membership to an unstable state on Europe's fringes. Georgia, with two conflict zones, in which its immediate neighbor, Russia, has its interests, is precisely such a state.²⁶ NATO's members do not want to be sucked into ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus that have nothing to do with their national interests. This alone makes Georgia's membership in NATO doubtful, at least in the near future. Some people may doubt this, but I should say that the NATO bureaucrats have repeatedly confirmed this. Late in 2005, in Brussels, during a visit by Georgian Premier Nougaideli, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Georgian TV journalists that he was not ready to say exactly when Georgia would be invited to join NATO. In March 2006, Jean Fournet, NATO's Assistant Secretary-General, said in so many words that Ukraine and Georgia's NATO membership depended on when they settled their domestic crises. He also pointed out that this was a long process that required of certain obligations by the candidates related to the Alliance's principles and rules, which would require several years to master.²⁷ In October, General Henault made a similar statement.²⁸ No wonder, in September 2006, instead of the expected Membership Action Plan (MAP), NATO offered the Georgian government an Intense Dialog²⁹ that would postpone membership for an indefinite time. EU membership is even

²⁵ See: IRI-POR-April 2006, diagrams 65 and 66.

²⁶ Compared: on 16 October Chairman of NATO's Military Committee General Ray Henault informed the journalists that the alliance did not plan to deploy its peacekeepers in the zones of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. He pointed out that NATO did not plan to address the issue and added that NATO was involved in negotiations with Georgia and other interested countries. He pointed out that NATO regarded the relations between Russia and Georgia as bilateral and, therefore, had no direct influence on them. He also said that NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer made an official statement, in which he called on Moscow and Tbilisi to settle the conflict as soon as possible. On his part, the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee pointed out that NATO would stay away; available at [<http://www.rambler.ru/news/world/georgiaabkhazia/8910324.html>].

²⁷ Quoted from: *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 10 March, 2006.

²⁸ Speaking on Echo of Moscow radio, the general said that the decision about Georgia's membership would be made by all members at the political level; to reach this stage, the sides should negotiate several critical points, including an invitation to NATO and a certain plan of action. Today, the alliance has not reached any of these points, added the general; available at [<http://www.vz.ru/news/2006/10/16/53027.html>].

²⁹ The official spokesmen of the Georgian leaders repeatedly stated that MAP would be initiated by the end of 2006 (see, for example: [<http://www.newsgeorgia.ru/geo1/20060404/41638357.html>], [<http://www.civil.ge/rus/article.php?id=10183>], etc.).

less probable.³⁰ The EU has not yet recovered from the shock caused by the failure of the European Constitution at referenda, the budget crisis triggered by the EU's eastward enlargement, its obvious contradictions with the U.S. and Turkey, and the cultural shock brought about by the mass disturbances initiated by European Muslims in France, Belgium, and Germany. ... Even though the prospects for Georgia's imminent NATO and EU membership are vague, Moscow is showing its displeasure. Seen from Russia, this looks like Georgia's anti-Russian course (this is especially true of Georgia's possible NATO membership and, to a lesser extent, of it joining the EU).³¹ It is Moscow's response that causes constant confrontation between the two states; Tbilisi takes Moscow's irritation as a sure sign that the pro-Western course is the correct one; there is the illusion that Moscow is disturbed because Georgia's NATO membership is around the corner.

Georgia does not need confrontation with Moscow for economic reasons in particular (the country's leaders and the public tend to ignore the economic side of Georgian sovereignty). Meanwhile, Georgia, the annual budget of which is about \$1,650 million, owes other countries and international organizations nearly \$1,750 million.³² Former Foreign Minister of Georgia A. Chikvaidze was quite right when he said: "In the broader perspective, the main problem of Georgia's foreign policy course is that it is absolutely not linked to the Georgian economy or to the country's domestic situation. Whatever it does, the country does not have to pay for it out of its own pocket. This cannot possibly serve as a long-term basis of statehood."³³

The above has amply demonstrated that the country's radical pro-Western course, obvious in Georgia's desire to become a close partner of the United States, a NATO, and probably an EU, member, has become an end in itself. This course has not received profound substantiation (in the context of the country's stronger sovereignty, among other things) and does not rest on more or less reasonable considerations.

American Influence and the Limits of Georgian Sovereignty

Everyone knows that the United States influences the Georgian leaders to a great extent. In November 2003, during the Rose Revolution, the West, particularly the U.S., sided with the Saakashvili-Burjanadze-Zhvania trio. U.S. state and private structures are funding (on a permanent basis or through grants) NGOs in all spheres of life. There are American schools and higher educational establishments patronized by the U.S. embassy in Georgia. Many of the departments and ministries are

³⁰ See interview Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Enterprise and Industry Boosting Innovations Günter Verheugen gave in December 2005, in which he said that the European Union had to decide how many new members it could accommodate at all. The EU paused to ponder, but, the Vice-President said, it was not so much the pondering as the pause; available at [<http://linkszeitung.de/content/view/5578/45>].

³¹ Prominent Russian commentators do not mince words on the subject. See, for example, the comment offered by Viacheslav Nikonov, President of the Politika Foundation, who said: "The Georgian authorities should take into account the fact that Georgia's desire to join NATO causes displeasure in Moscow" (quoted from: *Svobodnaia Gruzia*, 23 February, 2006). The above-mentioned decision to start an "intense dialog" caused a very negative response of the Russian Foreign Ministry, despite the fact that the time limits remained vague. This shows that Moscow is jealous of Georgia's *desire as such* to join NATO. Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Russia of 22 September, 2006 (abridged), available at [<http://vsesmi.ru/news/112829/294378/>].

³² See: [http://www.uabanker.net/daily/2006/10/100906_0800.shtml] (information supplied by the Finance Ministry of Georgia.) Georgia owes over \$1 billion to its main creditors—international financial institutions.

³³ A. Chikvaidze, "No Overcoat, Thank You Very Much!" *International Affairs*, No. 6, 2005.

supervised by American advisors. Americans have already established strategic control over the energy branch.³⁴ Official Washington deems it appropriate to interfere in the state's policy in the religious sphere by supporting all sorts of American sects operating in Georgia.³⁵

Until recently, America's involvement in Georgia's decision-making (which contradicts the very idea of sound sovereignty) did not stir up serious objections in the larger part of the opposition and the public as a whole. In fact, the dissatisfied opposition parties went to the U.S. embassy to complain or approached visiting American dignitaries in an effort to put pressure on the powers that be. Part of the public, especially that close to the government circles, took for granted the fact that the state lived on money shelled out by official and unofficial Western structures: the West, after all, is regarded as a "friend." The money that comes from Russia at least causes concern and condemnation and even goes as far as accusations of "high treason."

The above suggests that the guarded or even negative perception of Russia by the Georgian political establishment, on the one hand, and its close ties with the U.S., as well as America's image as a "friend" accepted by society, on the other, speak of the country's very limited West-biased sovereignty. Political dependence goes hand in hand with the country's economic dependence, while another pillar of state sovereignty—cultural and axiological independence—is totally ignored by the political community and, partly, by the nation. In Georgia, the idea of national independence (at least its foreign policy aspect) is deprived of specific content if we do not count the obsession with NATO and EU membership as such, as well as Georgia's declared devotion to "European values."

Recently, however, certain changes have occurred because politics is a fluid substance. It is wrong to believe that "both the elite and the public pin their hopes *only* on the West (the U.S. and Europe)"³⁶ (italics mine.—*G.R.*). Georgian society is showing the first signs of its disillusionment with the West and the United States. Some of the opposition parties that carry some weight with the public have started doubting the U.S.'s indiscriminating support of Georgia's ruling regime. Sh. Natelashvili, leader of the Labor Party, subjects America's Georgian policy to scything criticism.

Latent anti-Western sentiments mounting in Georgian society are caused by the persistent social and economic plight: Western aid brought no obvious results—the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Society is also displeased with the West's political and cultural expansion manifested, among other things, by America's support of its religious sects. It is too early to predict how the trade, economic as well as political and humanitarian, blockade Russia initiated will affect the public's bias: will it become more pro-Western or more pro-Russian? Today, however, we can safely say that the leaders and a large part of the opposition are steering the country toward the Western development vector. They are encountering objective and subjective problems and face the public's mounting dissatisfaction. The country has reached a crossroads—the main clashes over its foreign policy lie ahead.

C o n c l u s i o n

The public looks at the country's sovereignty as a final value limited by the need to uphold Georgia's political independence from Russia as the former metropolitan country. The nation tends to

³⁴ Control is realized in the form of assistance (even though control and technical assistance are not mutually exclusive). The Georgian energy market is patronized by USAID. For more detail, see: [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/press/success/2006-08-02.html].

³⁵ See: G. Rtskhaladze, "Religion and Conflict Potential in Georgia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (33), 2005, pp. 59, 61, 62-64, as well as letters from the Helsinki Commission of the United States to President Saakashvili relating to the situation with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia; available at: [<http://www.kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/639136.html>], [<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-russian&y=2005&m=February&x=20050211072857btruevecer0.8640863>].

³⁶ S. Lounev, "Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus: Geopolitical Value for Russia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006, p. 24.

ignore or fails to realize (at least until recently when this turned out to be more painful than expected) that the country has lost a greater part of its real sovereignty to new actors (the U.S. being one of them). So far, Georgia has not tapped its sovereignty potential to the full as a tool needed to realize values and aims unrelated to its independence from Russia. The country's leaders and public have not yet turned their attention to two basic components of sovereignty—the economy and cultural-axiological self-sufficiency.

This idea of sovereignty echoes in the country's political practice in the form of the contradictory foreign policy course described above. The government and a large part of the opposition are still at the helm because the United States has limited Georgia's sovereignty by extending political and financial support. The importance of sovereignty is never doubted at the verbal level, while its curbing is never declared as a deliberate choice.