

## GUAM: THE GEORGIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### *I n t r o d u c t i o n*

The pursuit of effective mechanisms for developing regional cooperation has become one of the major dimensions of Georgian foreign policy. A fundamental attribute of such mechanisms should be a responsiveness to the interests of the parties involved and the ability to

contribute to the promotion of stability and development in the respective region. In an effort to boost its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Georgia is more actively looking into the opportunities that emerge from forging viable partnerships with like-minded countries. First of all, this refers to those sharing a common history with Georgia and facing many similar challenges characteristic to the process of post-Soviet transformation. Georgia is gradually distancing itself from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which has long discredited itself as a worthy international organization. At the same time, strengthening ties with those CIS members that declare adherence to the same democratic values and have a common understanding of the existing geopolitical environment and the role they have to play in it is an important element in Georgia's foreign relations. In many respects, by building strong alliances amongst its regional partners, Georgia will maximize its chances for securing successful integration into the larger European and Euro-Atlantic family.

This paper looks at the opportunities that rise for Georgia from its membership in the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM (hereinafter GUAM). Established on 23 May, 2006 as a regional organiza-

tion, GUAM signified a joint effort on the part of the original group of four—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova—to breathe life into a decade-long, but futile, cooperative framework that originally united these countries around the common interest of fostering security and political and economic cooperation.<sup>1</sup> This article seeks to assess the opportunities that revitalized GUAM provides its members, particularly Georgia. In addition, it will attempt to analyze the possibility of GUAM escaping the danger of being merely a “talk shop” and the chances for its development into a valuable forum for building common approaches toward the most crucial issues facing its member countries.

<sup>1</sup> GUAM as a consultative forum was set up by four countries—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova—on 10 October, 1997. The meeting of the countries' four presidents took place during the summit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and issued a joint communiqué that expressed the willingness of the participating countries to cooperate closer in several strategic directions; namely, (i) development of transportation and communication corridors, (ii) integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, (iii) peaceful settlement of conflicts, and (iv) interaction within regional and international organizations. On 7 June, 2001, the Yalta summit institutionalized GUAM and laid down its structure, objectives, and principles. In 1999-2005, the group changed its name to GUUAM reflecting Uzbekistan's membership.

## Positioning Georgia in Regional Frameworks of Cooperation

Before addressing the issue of Georgia's membership in GUAM, let us consider the effects of Georgia's participation in a regional cooperative framework in general. What benefits might this bring to a country meant to play a focal role in political, security, economic interactions from the Black to the Caspian seas?

In recent years we have witnessed a growing interest in Georgia toward different formats of cooperation with other like-minded countries as a means of promoting the country's major security and foreign policy goals. The development of strong regional alliances supporting Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations is largely perceived as an important element in bringing Georgia closer to NATO and EU membership. Georgia is steadily intensifying the development of its regional identity, bearing in mind the overarching grand interest, which is membership in the above-mentioned institutions.

The most immediate area, which is perceived as a strategically beneficial environment for building this regional identity, is that surrounding the Black Sea and including its neighboring countries, which comprise the territory broadly referred to as a the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA). In an effort to escape its affiliation with the South Caucasus—wherein two of the countries are involved in a conflict which thwarts any hopes for beneficial regional cooperation—Georgia sees more opportunities in moving toward the Black Sea area and beyond and forging partnerships with the countries of the region sharing similar principles and goals.

The accession of Rumania and Bulgaria to NATO and the EU augmented attention toward the region. As a result, we are witnessing a slow but important shift in the attitudes toward the region on the part of these structures. One example of this is the communication of 11 April, 2007 developed by the European Commission entitled “Black Sea Synergy—A New Regional Initiative.” The document states in its first words that the countries around the Black Sea are of immediate concern to the EU. With its focus on ongoing regional cooperation processes, the communication sets a framework for strengthening cooperation with the region as a whole in the common priority areas. Besides the fact that this document indicates the EU’s readiness to develop a clear strategy toward the region, it also sets an important framework for the elaboration of specific initiatives on the part of the countries of the region, which will take advantage of this new reality and will contribute to the strengthening of regional cooperation and EU-Black Sea linkages.

It should be mentioned, however, that notwithstanding the existence of clear regional priorities, there are divergent opinions throughout the region about the practical mechanisms of implementing those priorities. One of the most salient examples is cooperation in the area of security. Strengthening security and stability in the region is the principal concern for all states of the WBSA, which should be the major contributors to making this space free of the many malaises facing the global community in the 21st century.

The practical implementation of a region-wide response to these existing challenges, however, is very often hindered by the absence of a common approach amongst the region’s countries toward the means and mechanisms that should be employed in the process. Regretfully, there is no agreement among the littoral states on security implementation mechanisms existing to date. The complexity of the Black Sea region, stemming from the different interests of the littoral states, makes it difficult to forge an efficient and viable framework for cooperation, particularly in the security area, which would engage all the regional countries. On the other hand, NATO’s further engagement in the region does not provide a clear-cut solution either. Russia’s and Turkey’s resistance to any stepped-up NATO involvement in the Black Sea puts additional strains on the Alliance, which will have to come up with ways of keeping these leading regional powers engaged in any future strategy toward the region that is developed.

As mentioned above, strengthening Georgia’s participation in regional activities, particularly with respect to security issues, is largely seen as a part of Georgia’s further integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. These aspirations not only guide Georgia’s foreign and security policies, but also set the strategic context for Georgia’s further development. The fact that the last waves of NATO and EU enlargements have brought the Black Sea region into the limelight of the Euro-Atlantic discourse is seen by Georgia as yet another opportunity to position itself as an effective contributor to the security environment in the region. The best means to serve this goal is participation in effective multilateral formats of cooperation in the region. When we look at the existing regional cooperative frameworks, it is evident that whilst the old ones have not lived up to their promises, the new initiatives have yet to prove their right to life. This renders unrealistic the idea of the formation of a Black Sea regional identity in the foreseeable future. The fact that attempts are being made to revive some old formats of cooperation in the region (BSEC, GUAM), which is paralleled, however,

by the development of new initiatives aimed at harmonizing different national interests and policy agendas (the Black Sea Forum for Partnership and Dialog, the Community of Democratic Choice), implies that there is a growing understanding throughout the region about the need for genuinely effective means of cooperation.

The one possibility for Georgia to forge such cooperation in the region is to use the existing mechanisms and, through a value-based approach, engage like-minded countries in a common effort to strengthen security and stability in the region. The commonality of interests and visions is the major driving force of any cooperative effort. The success of such an effort is dependent upon the degree of support and commitment of each participant country. At the end of the day, the future of any regional project depends upon the political will and the choice of each participant country.

## Developing GUAM into a Regional Actor

The evolution of the informal consultative GUAM group into a regional organization was broadly perceived as an attempt to break away from its poor performance record and transform the group into a body capable of setting realistic priorities and fulfilling its goals. This was largely made possible by the changes brought about by the so-called Color Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, which revamped the stagnated political systems in both countries. The new Georgian government was looking for opportunities to expand its circle of allies in the region and to build relations with other countries based upon shared values and common strategic choices.

The first opportunity to break an impasse emerged during the Chisinau summit on 22 April, 2005. Against the backdrop of the regime changes in two of the member countries and the pro-Western shift in the Moldovan government's political course, GUAM entered a new stage of its development. The meeting was referred to as a "Revival summit" by some commentators who, nevertheless, argued that it failed to produce tangible results and ended in another symbolic declaration of common commitment toward European integration and the creation of common security, economic, and transport spaces.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Chisinau Declaration of the Heads of State "In the Name of Democracy, Stability and Development" reiterated adherence to the principles enshrined in the Yalta Charter. It also included, however, several important elements, such as the establishment of close political-military cooperation and peacekeeping operations. Other notable points expressed the determination to make a joint contribution to the immediate formation of free trade areas (in accordance with the 2002 GUAM Agreement on the Creation of a Free Trade Area), as well as to intensify energy cooperation.<sup>3</sup> The Chisinau summit was followed by a change in the group membership. Uzbekistan officially announced its full exit from the group, explaining its decision by the incompatibility of the new goals and priorities with the interests of Uzbekistan as outlined at the summit.<sup>4</sup> Some analysts, however, call Uzbekistan's withdrawal Moscow's most successful anti-GUAM operation, which succeeded in persuading Uzbekistan to leave the group in return for the favor of Russia's backing in the Andijan events.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: V. Socor, "Summit Takes Stock of GUAM's Projects, Institutional Development," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 4, Issue 120, 20 June, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See: *The Chisinau Declaration of the GUUAM Heads of State "In the Name of Democracy, Stability and Development,"* available at [www.guam.org.ua].

<sup>4</sup> See: *GUAM Factsheet*, Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia [www.mfa.gov.ge].

<sup>5</sup> See: I. Makovetskiy, "GUAM: ob'ediniia kontinenty," *Analiticheskaia gruppa "Nashe mnenie,"* 11 July, 2007, available at [http://www.nmnby.org/pub/0707/11m.html].

Throughout its ten-year history, GUAM went through periods of great expectations, decline, and ambiguity. This process often reflected shifts in the level of commitment and divergence of the attitudes of its member states coupled with the absence of a realistic mission that would not only respond to the interests of the member states, but also define the practical implementation of the declared objectives. Consequently, GUAM remained a futile forum that hardly managed to convert its declarations into acts. The revival of GUAM and its subsequent transformation into the ODED caught many by surprise, since the prevalent opinion about the future of this “semi-dormant” framework did not leave room for any optimistic forecasts.

Georgia was amongst the four founding members of the group which was created to counter-balance the failing CIS with its heavy reliance upon Russian dominance.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of GUAM as a framework for beneficial cooperation took place against the backdrop of deep disappointment in the CIS as a responsive organization capable of addressing the major concerns of its members. Georgia was provided with an opportunity to engage in cooperative efforts with its like-minded partners hoping to forge an alliance based upon mutual respect and understanding. Most importantly, Georgia saw a chance within GUAM to strengthen its own security through contributing to the regional security hand in hand with other group members which faced the same political and security challenges as Georgia (secessionist conflicts and the presence of foreign troops on their territories).

The rationale for Georgia’s participation in GUAM was largely determined by the need to explore new possible mechanisms which would help Georgia on its road to Europe. For a country that was in the process of building its independent statehood, the existence of regional partners with a similar outlook and aspirations was more than desirable. There was a clear understanding within Georgia that the country’s strategic choice was fixed squarely within integration into the European family of democratic nations. GUAM, therefore, was seen as a new mechanism that would erase Georgia’s post-Soviet identity, protect the country against Russia’s neo-imperialistic policies, and bring it closer to the European system of values. It merits special note that this desire to escape Russian control was the major unifying element of all the group members. In addition, the territorial integrity of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova was violated and Moscow’s dubious role in the processes of conflict resolution damaged its relations with these countries. As for Ukraine, it needed alternative energy supplies and the opportunity to establish itself as an influential geopolitical player.<sup>7</sup>

One significant element of this alliance was the agreement to cooperate within the framework of various international organizations that would enable group members to harmonize their approaches and speak in one voice with regards to issues of their common concern. This implied regular consultations and the elaboration of common positions among the GUAM countries in international organizations. Experts even dubbed such a concerted stand as “the primordial *raison d’être* of GUAM ... and one of the few tangible manifestations of its viability.”<sup>8</sup> The elaboration of a joint position was most salient within the OSCE (in discussions on the issues related to the CFE Treaty) and the U.N.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, in 2006, despite severe resistance from the Russian Federation, the GUAM members succeeded in placing the issue of “protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for

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<sup>6</sup> Notably, strong U.S. support of the initiative (both political and financial) was interpreted by many in Russia as an attempt to create an anti-Russian coalition in its own backyard.

<sup>7</sup> See: “GUAM: Test for Ability to Act,” *Ukrainian Monitor, Policy Paper #5*, Center for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine, June 2005, available at [<http://cpcfpu.org.ua/en/projects/foreignpolicy/papers/052005/>].

<sup>8</sup> V. Socor, “Energy Insecurity, Frozen Conflicts Preoccupy GUAM Summit in Kyiv,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Thursday, Vol. 3, Issue 102, 25 May, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> In 2003, by a Resolution of the 58th Session of the U.N. Assembly /RES/58/85, GUAM was granted observer status in the U.N. General Assembly.

international peace, security and development” on the agenda of the 61st U.N. General Assembly Session.

The GUAM summit in Baku in June 2007<sup>10</sup> laid out the concrete work plans for the member countries regarding interaction in the international structures—the U.N., the OSCE, and the CoE. These plans include the promotion of GUAM’s principles and imply the development of joint statements and initiatives toward issues of common concern. Joint action plans have been elaborated with regards to the EU and NATO. The key tasks for a possible dialog between GUAM and the EU have been identified as follows: 1. the development of balances and the mutually beneficial and result-oriented interaction based upon shared values and common interests, 2. the provision of added value to existing bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation, 3. the support of European integration of GUAM countries, and 4. the study of potential areas of cooperation between GUAM and EU in the political, economic, security, and other spheres, including those envisaged in the EC regional initiative “Black Sea Synergy.”

Within the GUAM + NATO format, member countries expressed their willingness to engage in a dialog with the Alliance on such issues as energy security, peacekeeping, border management and cross-border activities, combating organized crime and trafficking, fighting terrorism, and civil emergency planning.

GUAM is reaching out to other countries and international organizations as manifested in the Baku Declaration “GUAM Bringing Continents Together.” It affirms GUAM’s intention to undertake active measures to develop the all-European, Transatlantic, Black Sea, Trans-Caspian, and Asian vectors in GUAM’s activity.<sup>11</sup> Notably, some outside countries are already expressing their interest in GUAM. The presidents of Rumania, Lithuania, and Poland attended the last summits as observers, while others (Bulgaria, Estonia, and Latvia) sent their high-ranking officials. The U.S., as a long-time supporter and strategic partner of GUAM (through the GUAM-U.S. Framework Program), is traditionally present at these events. In addition, GUAM launched a dialog with Japan within a GUAM-Japan format during the Baku summit, which reflected Japan’s increased interest in GUAM as originally voiced in 2006 by the country’s foreign minister, Taro Aso, in reference to the Japanese government’s “arc of freedom and prosperity” (stretching from Central Asia through the Black and Caspian Seas to Ukraine) policy initiative.<sup>12</sup> He stressed the importance of fostering Japan’s cooperation with the GUAM countries as a contribution to the “formation of stronger roots for democracy” in the Baltic-Black Sea-Caspian area.<sup>13</sup>

In turn, GUAM is also positioning itself as an organization aspiring to strengthen stability and development across the Baltic-Black-Caspian Sea rim. The transformation of GUAM into a full-fledged regional organization marks a significant stage in the development of the cooperative framework which was once dubbed as “stillborn.” The notion of GUAM serving as a channel through which its members could reach out to Europe resonates through the many statements made by the political leaders of the participating countries. At the Chisinau summit, the president of the Moldovan host country, Vladimir Voronin, spoke of the “irreversible course toward European integration encompassing the GUAM countries,”<sup>14</sup> while Mikhail Saakashvili, the president of Georgia, referred to

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<sup>10</sup> This was the largest GUAM summit in terms of participation. Representatives of 30 states as well as international organizations attended this event.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Baku Declaration “GUAM: Bringing Continents Together,”* issued at the second meeting of the Council of the Heads of State in Baku, Azerbaijan, 19 June, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See: “Georgia Outlines Priorities at GUAM Summit,” *Civil Ge.*, 18 June, 2007, available at [www.civil.ge].

<sup>13</sup> Speech by Mr Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, on the occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar, “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons,” 30 November, 2006. Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [www.mofa.go.jp].

<sup>14</sup> V. Socor, “GUAM Revival Summit Inconclusive,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 2, Issue 80, 25 April, 2005.

GUAM as a common vehicle for the expression of European aspirations and called for “joining hands and walking toward Europe.” This reaffirmed his earlier statements about GUAM’s mission to play the role of a union of countries aiming for Euro-Atlantic integration and the “re-establishment of the Baltic-Black Sea rim of stability” by means of GUAM.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Kiev Declaration on the Establishment of the ODED—GUAM emphasizes the growing role of regional cooperation in the pan-European processes and reaffirms the endeavor of the GUAM states to deepen European integration and enhance relations with the EU and NATO.<sup>16</sup>

Strengthening GUAM’s role across the whole spectrum of regional issues, ranging from common transportation and communication projects to European and Euro-Atlantic integration, will inevitably bring about the establishment of this organization as a major mechanism in building regional identity.

## Promoting GUAM Principles

GUAM is now going through a testing period. If it manages to establish itself as a real, value-driven alliance, it has a chance to become the primary mechanism for promoting the common interests of its members; namely, stable development and security in the Caspian-Black Sea region and integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The GUAM countries identified democracy, economic development, and regional security as the main principles of the organization. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko even referred to them as “the three whales” of GUAM. These are the principles that make up GUAM’s identity and adherence to these principles is continuously restated by all its members.

Clearly, strengthening democracy, ensuring economic development, and promoting security are crucial for the development of every country. By putting these principles into a regional context, however, GUAM is providing an opportunity to draw upon each member’s potential in these areas and synthesize the different experiences in order to maximize the benefits. Regrettably, there is no evidence that would allow us to expect any breakthrough development in any of these directions in practical terms. So far, GUAM has yet to translate the rhetoric of “good intentions” into actions. Nevertheless, these are the principles that brought the GUAM countries together with the desire to create a common regional identity.

The existence of democratic practices in a country is one of the key prerequisites for its integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Consequently, the development of democratic institutions should constitute the major policy priority for GUAM states. The fact that GUAM’s new title includes the word “democracy” conveys the message about the member states’ strategic choice to join the European community of democratic nations through sharing the very democratic values to which these countries aspire. Of course, the level of democracy differs throughout the GUAM space, and there is still long way to go in making democratic transformation in these countries irreversible. Attention in this process should be focused on strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring the necessary balance among the different branches of the individual governments. The supremacy of the rule of law and the protection of human rights and freedoms are the principal elements of any dem-

<sup>15</sup> See: “Saakashvili: GUAM a Vehicle for Baltic-Black Sea Stability, EU Integration,” *Civil Ge.*, 25 March, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> See: *Kiev Declaration on the Establishment of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM*, Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia [www.mfa.gov.ge].

ocratically functioning country. Notwithstanding the peculiarities of each member state, their commitment to democratization will be judged against their performance record.

The Kiev Declaration reiterates the significance of deeper economic cooperation in the spheres of energy, transport, and trade for the regional development. The implementation of the Agreement on the Establishment of a Free Trade Area is still to be seen. The main prerequisites for its fulfillment are the harmonization of customs and border regulations and tariff policies among the member states. While the benefits of economic cooperation within GUAM have been continuously stressed by the member countries, bilateral interactions have always surpassed multilateral ones in practice. One example is that Georgia has successfully been engaged in trade with Ukraine within the framework of a free trade agreement with this country against the long delayed implementation of free trade areas. The potential for economic cooperation within GUAM, therefore, is hardly being utilized. Some analysts downplay GUAM's potential for economic development, noting that its markets cannot compete with those of Russia, for example, the Ukrainian-Russian trade volume exceeds \$20 billion, while the turnover with the GUAM states is roughly equivalent to \$1 billion.<sup>17</sup>

The GUAM countries still find it difficult to break away from Russian influence in order to live up to the promises of GUAM. This definitely has its objective reasons, since, in many respects, these countries are still dependent upon Russia, most notably in economic terms. GUAM does not offer the potential for competing with Russian markets,<sup>18</sup> while the heavy reliance on Russian energy resources perpetuates this influence.

Some see the opportunity for developing more active cooperation in energy security as GUAM is considering possible new energy transit projects bypassing Russia. This refers particularly to enhancing the transit functions of Ukraine for the transportation of Caspian oil resources further into Europe. Here again, however, there are certain pitfalls that complicate the process. Particularly, the full realization of Ukraine's transport potential depends on the position of Kazakhstan in the transportation of its oil through the Odessa-Brody pipeline,<sup>19</sup> since the largest part of Azerbaijan's oil output is committed to go through the BTC pipeline.<sup>20</sup>

The peaceful resolution of the conflicts and the fight against international terrorism and transnational crime constitute major directions of cooperation in the security area. The commonality of security problems amongst three members of GUAM—Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova—arising from the separatist conflicts on their territories, determines their joint approach to conflict settlement. One important step in this direction is an agreement among the member states to establish GUAM peacekeeping forces and civilian police units which will be involved in ongoing peace operations in the conflict zones under the mandates of the U.N. or the OSCE. In the case of Georgia, this will allow internationalization of the current peacekeeping formats in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the long-awaited replacement of the Russian peacekeepers. Consultations on this matter are still going on.<sup>21</sup>

A special working group was set up within GUAM aimed at fighting terrorism, trans-border organized crime, and drug trafficking. One of the relevant projects implied the establishment of a

<sup>17</sup> See: "GUAM Gets New Life, New Identity," *EurasiaNet.Org.*, 24 May, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> One of the most salient examples in support of this argument is the situation concerning the Russian embargo on Georgian wine, mineral water, and agricultural products which left the country without an enormous portion of its export revenue. Georgia continues to struggle to diversify its foreign trade markets.

<sup>19</sup> This refers to a connection to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and a prospective extension eastward to Kazakhstan and westward to the Polish port of Gdansk.

<sup>20</sup> At an energy summit in Vilnius on 10 October, 2007, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Poland, Lithuania, and Kazakhstan signed a joint agreement on setting up a special group to study the technical feasibility of the project.

<sup>21</sup> According to the Georgian Ministry of Defense, the main organizational and legal work on the establishment of a GUAM peacekeeping contingent is coming to an end. Discussions on the composition of the personnel and maintenance of a GUAM peacekeeping contingent are to be completed in the nearest future (source: APA).



GUAM virtual Center and Interstate Information Management System which would aim at promoting cooperation in the field. The national VLEC center (the Virtual Law Enforcement Center) was opened in Georgia in 2005. This was followed in 2006 by the first experiment on exchanging information through coded communication systems. A further development of information exchange among the law enforcement agencies and national centers of the GUAM states is also envisaged. These activities contribute to raising the level of effectiveness in interstate cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts and the fight against transnational crime, which are of particular importance given the region's geographical location at the junction of various transit routes, as well as due to the participation of the GUAM states in the U.S.-led antiterrorism coalition.

Although all these areas of cooperation are of particular and strategic importance for the GUAM member countries, reality shows that multilateral interaction within the group is not fully realized. This often leads some experts to question the commonality of the interests of the GUAM members. Is there substantial evidence to claim that GUAM is truly based upon common interests? Is the quadri-lateral cooperation that GUAM offers more productive than bilateral relations among the countries? As one source suggests, the members' interests did not always coincide, particularly at the earlier stage of its development, which sometimes gave the impression of only a situational union of the former Soviet Republics.<sup>22</sup> Others referred to the absence of a joint perspective of development and the internal weakness of the countries. All these arguments are valid. These were the main reasons for GUAM being only an "empty shell" for so many years.

### *C o n c l u s i o n*

The transformation of an informal cooperative framework into a full-fledged international regional organization marked an important development in the institutionalization of GUAM. Today, the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM is positioning itself as an alliance of like-minded countries aiming at strengthening stability and security in the Caspian-Black Sea region. The major driving force of this union is the commitment of its member states to bring their countries into the European community through the process of democratic transformation. The GUAM member states declare their adherence to democratic values and wish to strengthen their prospects for successful European and Euro-Atlantic integration by means of building a union based upon common interests and shared values.

This political dimension of GUAM, in addition to security considerations, is its major unifying element. As we have discussed earlier, notwithstanding the substantial transit potential of the GUAM members states, multilateral interaction within the group in economic, transport, and energy security areas remains marginal at best. It is yet to be seen whether or not GUAM will become a mechanism through which its members will develop a regional identity.

The fact that GUAM is already an institutionalized body with a defined structure places it ahead of the many new regional initiatives of which Georgia is a part. Now it depends upon the member countries—Georgia among them—to demonstrate not only in words, but also in actions that GUAM is moving forward on the road to becoming a true regional alliance with members committed enough to make it work.

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<sup>22</sup> See: "GUAM: Test for Ability to Act."