

## GUAM: WILL IT EXPAND TO CENTRAL ASIA?

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

The mini-CIS (EurAsEC, ORI, the Russian-Belorussian Union, CACO, and GUAM) is a central concern among the many other conceptual and strategic issues the Commonwealth of Independent States is facing today. GUAM stands apart: it is a unique structure that has little in

common with the interstate alliances; it is a post-Soviet organization in the full sense of the word. Its three dimensions—post-imperial, economic, and geopolitical—confirm its specific nature.

## A Symbol of Post-Imperial Reorganization

The very fact of its existence reflects the obvious and latent struggle to change the status quo across the post-Soviet expanse. The sixteen years of post-Soviet development brought two issues to the forefront of all the discussions on the content, form, and nature of the political transformations in the former Soviet republics and in their international relations: their attitude toward Russia and toward democracy. The old order meant that Moscow remained in control and that the non-democratic regimes inherited from the Soviet past survived. According to a theoretical postulate, all the strong powers (and Russia belongs to this category) are mainly status quo states. This means that they prefer to preserve the old order in international relations in order to underpin their high status. The small states, on the contrary, especially the newly independent states (many of which were colonies or dominated by large powers) want to change the order of things for objective reasons. Therefore, they can be described as anti-status quo states.

In the post-Soviet expanse, Russia acts as a status quo state, while the others would like to destroy the old order. Analysts have already pointed out that there is a direct correlation between Russia's neo-imperial post-Soviet geopolitics and the fact that most of the CIS countries have already rejected democracy. The democratic wave was the natural response to the victory over the totalitarian regime. Western support was inevitable. It was this line that separated Russia and the new undemocratic states, on the one hand, and the West, on the other. The Russian Federation and the group of undemocratic states see the situation as black and white: the Western idea of democracy promotion is a Western plot against them.<sup>1</sup> It would be hardly correct to reduce the democratic wave to a Western project from the academic point of view. This approach would have smacked of slighting the nations and the public and political movements, as if they were unable to raise a democratic wave without encouragement from across the ocean.

GUAM, the symbol of the struggle for a new status quo, stands apart in the post-Soviet expanse. Its members—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova—are dedicated, to different extents, to the ideas of democracy and pro-Western orientation. It is no accident that on 23 May, 2006, at the GUAM summit in Kiev, they initiated a new movement for democracy by setting up the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM, and adopted its charter, according to which the Council of the Heads of State would meet once a year. Many analysts regard GUAM as an integration model parallel to the CIS.<sup>2</sup>

Is this true? I doubt it: its members are looking toward Europe and are not forming some united and independent region. Three South Caucasian countries—Azerbaijan and Georgia, which belong to GUAM, and Armenia, which is not a member—joined the EU's long-term New Neighborhood Policy Program.

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<sup>1</sup> I have already tried to disprove the theory of Western plots in the guise of proliferation of democracy in: "The Moment of Truth: End of the Transition Period? (On the Democratic Initiative in the Central Asian States)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (35), 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See: I. Gelashvili, "Dve modeli integratsii. Baku gotovitsia k sammitu GUAM," available at [www.centrasia.ru], 14 March, 2007 (Source: *Vesti of Russia*).

Today, I can discern two possible integration models—either within the CIS or within the EU; there are different opinions about the integration prospects of the Central Caucasus, where there are two members of GUAM: the Central Caucasus and Central Asia might form Central Eurasia as an independent regional structure. Eldar Ismailov of Azerbaijan believes that this format will boost the importance of the Caucasus and its geo-economic advantages: “since the geo-economic function of the Central Asian region, keeping in mind that it is identical to the geo-economic function of the Central Caucasus, will allow the latter to fully carry it out. Coordinated implementation by the Central Caucasian and Central Asian countries of their geo-economic function is throwing integration opportunities wide open.”<sup>3</sup>

I am still convinced that the initial pro-Western/pro-European bias of the GUAM states will continue to dominate over the GUAM-centrist (in the territorial sense) intentions. This explains why the members will not be able to realize their independent integration program. It seems that Gaiane Novikova, a political scientist from Armenia, was right when she said that even though the South Caucasian countries are included in the common Plan of Action within the European Neighborhood Policy elaborated in the EU to encourage regional cooperation, their motives cannot be described as identical. Indeed, their expectations are different.<sup>4</sup>

Here is how the political processes in the contexts of these countries’ foreign policy look.

### Georgia

It was the last to join the CIS and it intends to be the first to leave it. From time to time it confirms its resolution to join NATO.

Recently the Defense and Security Committee of NATO’s Parliamentary Assembly supported the resolution that offered Georgia NATO’s Membership Action Plan. As soon as the plan is fulfilled the sides will start the membership procedure.

Tbilisi is seeking NATO and EU membership for three reasons: to escape Russia’s pressure; to confirm its position in the Black Sea; and to preserve its territorial integrity.

### Ukraine

This country is considered GUAM’s leader; its resolution to join NATO added geopolitical weight to the Organization as a whole and emphasized its democratic and post-imperial nature. The expert community believes that Ukraine’s membership in GUAM is responsible for the European paradigm of its foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> The republic has already announced that it has switched to NATO standards; its Defense Ministry has established active contacts with NATO in the military and military-technical spheres.

The Ukrainian president believes that the time has come to set up a single expanse within GUAM for producing and transporting energy resources. “This should be based on the Odessa-Brody

<sup>3</sup> E. Ismailov, “New Regionalism in the Caucasus: A Conceptual Approach,” *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> See: G. Novikova, “Yuzhny Kavkaz-Evropeyskiy Soiuz: ozhidania i realii,” in: *Voprosy regional’noy bezopasnosti: 2006, Sbornik tsentra “Spektrum,”* Amrotz group, Yerevan, 2006, pp. 10-18.

<sup>5</sup> See: I. Gelashvili, op. cit.

oil pipeline that will be extended to Poland,” said President Yushchenko. The upcoming Baku summit, like the Kiev summit of 2007, will concentrate on the Odessa-Brody-Plock-Gdansk oil pipeline as an alternative to Russian energy supplies to Europe.<sup>6</sup>

### **Azerbaijan**

Its pro-NATO orientation is clear enough. All the analysts point out that Baku wants to involve the Alliance in the Karabakh settlement. As a Muslim country and an OIC member, Azerbaijan might run up against the same problems as Turkey, if the question of its EU membership is raised at all. Turkey has been on the waiting list for almost fifty years now.

The republic’s European orientation is limited to loading the BTC and other oil pipelines; ensuring its leading role in the Caspian region, and restoring its territorial integrity.

### **Moldova**

This country, which for many years insisted on its neutral status, is now demonstrating pro-NATO and pro-Western biases. Speaking at the 53rd session of NATO’s Parliamentary Assembly that met in October 2007 in Reykjavik, Deputy Chairman of the Moldovan Parliament and leader of the pro-Rumanian Christian-Democratic People’s Party Yuri Roshka said that his country should shed its neutrality for the sake of NATO membership: “It was Moscow that imposed neutrality on Moldova so that it should remain a geopolitical appendage to Russia and would never join the free Western nations.” President Voronin seems to disagree: “Moldova is a neutral state and has no intention of joining any of the military blocs. This is one of our political convictions and the cornerstone of our ideas about national security.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Uzbekistan** **(member of GUUAM from 1999 to 2005)**

Its pro-Western orientation, which survived until 2004, was obvious and geopolitically justified. It could have preserved its course if not for the tragic events that unfolded in Andijan. It comes as no surprise today that there are signs of new rapprochement between Uzbekistan and America; the previous developments were cut short by Western criticism of the way the republic’s leaders responded to the Andijan disturbances. The new course was confirmed, in part, by the visit of head of the U.S. Central Command Admiral William Fallon to Tashkent in February 2008.

This is the only post-Soviet state that meanders on the foreign policy arena in an effort to fit the changing geopolitical contexts, which has not brought any impressive achievements so far.

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<sup>6</sup> See: “Klub na tri bukvy. Moldavia mozhет vyiti iz GUAM,” available at [www.centrasia.ru], 22 June, 2007 (Source: Moskovskie novosti).

<sup>7</sup> A. Matveev, “‘Ostrov GUAM’ pod protektsiyey NATO,” *Voенno-promyshlenny kur’er*, No. 40 (206), 17-23 October, 2007.

### Armenia

At first glance, the republic does not belong to any discussion of *GUAM*, however, it does belong to the discussions *around GUAM* and *in connection with GUAM*. Any analysis of the future of *GUAM* cannot ignore this Central Caucasian country; this is all the more important, since the republic's pro-European orientation is beginning to compete with its pro-Russian bias. Tigran Torosian, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia, for example, has the following to say on this score: "As for the three South Caucasian countries, there is no alternative to integration with Europe either from the point of view of their development and qualitative improvement of their living standards or from the point of view of conflict settlement in the region."<sup>8</sup>

Erevan consistently supports the idea of regional cooperation in the Caucasus; it seems to be less mesmerized than its neighbors by the idea that cooperation is impossible because of unresolved conflicts. This is an important and correct approach which suggests that the Caucasian, or wider *GUAM*, development cannot be totally successful without Armenia.

## Central Asian Expansion

*GUAM/GUAM* has always been an open structure and always wanted to expand its geographic dimensions. Central Asian involvement in *GUAM* would have been instrumental in spreading democratic geopolitical principles.<sup>9</sup> Expansion that will extend the geographical zone of its responsibility will allow Central Asia to become "a window to Europe." It should be said that Europe equally wants to create "a window to Asia" with the help of *GUAM*. The EU's new Central Asian strategy adopted in 2007 and the support previously extended to *GUAM* projects through *TRACECA*, etc. were important steps on this road.

Uzbekistan, which joined *GUAM* in 1999, offered the first link between Central Asia and *GUAM*. The structure is of economic importance to Central Asia with respect to implementing large-scale projects such as *TRACECA* and *INOATE*. These plans and *GUAM* itself caused geopolitical fears bred not so much by its members' political orientation, but by possible *GUAM* membership for Central Asia. No wonder these fears gave rise to numerous publications about the alleged unsoundness of those projects in which Moscow had no part to play.

V. Khliupin of Russia wrote quite recently: "*TRACECA* is a chimera, the younger sister of *GUAM*, another chimera." And further: "Access to the North-South corridor is no longer an issue of economic advantage/disadvantage for Uzbekistan, but a matter of life or death."<sup>10</sup> The author turned to geopolitical arguments in his effort to prove that the *TRACECA* and *GUAM* projects were economically unviable. *GUAM* suffered its first geopolitical defeat when Uzbekistan left it in 2005.

Today it has become clear that the *BTC* oil pipeline, a target of frantic Russian criticism, is functioning; moreover, Kazakhstan is laying a pipeline to China.

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<sup>8</sup> T. Torosian, *Evropeiskaia integratsiia—iskliuchitel'ny shans dlia reshenia problem Yuzhnogo Kavkaza—Yuzhny Kavkaz kak chast Bol'shoy Evropy*, *Sbornik tsenra "Spektrum"*, Amrotz group, Erevan, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> About how democratic geopolitics differ from the old imperial see: F. Tolipov, "Russia in Central Asia: Retreat, Retention, Or Return?" *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (47), 2007.

<sup>10</sup> V. Khliupin, *Voyna, Islam i geopolitika: Rossiia i Tsentral'naia Azia v XXI veke*, Moscow, 2000.

Kazakhstan's possible involvement in the BTC pipeline is actively discussed; I think that very soon GUAM will acquire another letter—K. The same is true of Turkmenistan. It can be said that the chances of the East-West corridor are no less impressive as those of the North-South corridor. At least the GUAM summits are actively discussing the structure's possible expansion. Vladimir Litvin, former speaker of Ukraine's Supreme Rada, believes that in the future, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Armenia, and other countries of the Caspian-Black Sea region might join GUAM. He said this at a press conference that concluded the second meeting of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly in Yalta.<sup>11</sup>

The economic advantages of a transcontinental communication system are obvious; the Second Eurasian Intercontinental Bridge (the shortest route from China to Europe) crosses Central Asia and the Caucasus. The fact that Japan is just as interested in GUAM as Europe and the United States confirms GUAM's global importance. Japan set up the GUAM-Japan Forum along the same line as the Japan-Central Asia Forum. On 4-6 December, 2007, Tokyo hosted the second meeting between Japan and the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development—GUAM. The GUAM-Japan consultations and other events were attended by GUAM Secretary-General Valery Chechelashvili and national coordinators from the GUAM member states; the Japanese side was represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Masakatsu Koike, Special Representative of the Foreign Ministry on GUAM Keiiti Katakami, and other officials.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the tangible progress achieved since the first meeting in Baku in June 2007 and discussed possible cooperation in trade and investments, tourism, energy, transport, and peaceful conflict settlement based on the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council.<sup>12</sup>

As E. Ismailov correctly pointed out: "It is more than obvious that the real need for cooperation among the Central Caucasian and Central Asian states is to develop and operate transportation routes, form joint security mechanisms, and implement energy projects, including the geopolitical and environmental aspects. What is more, implementation of the Central Caucasus' geo-economic function—ensuring transit trade between the East and West—defined the region's geopolitical destiny and security in the past and should continue to define them in the future."<sup>13</sup> Jannathan Eyvazov, another analyst, described the transportation and communication East-West axis as an important strategic alternative to the North-South axis; if restored the latter may strengthen the continental power's control over the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>14</sup>

There is one more dimension, the civilizational one, in the GUAM-Central Asia bond. Turkey is located at its Western end, something which is extremely important for Central Asian countries. Its influence on the neighboring Caucasian states and kindred Central Asian countries is a fact and geopolitical constant from the point of view of international relations in the GUAM-Central Asia group of states.

In fact Turkey is gaining political weight in the world and in Europe. We all know that allied states have an important role to play in dealing with international issues. Turkey, in turn, is such a state for all the Central Asian countries: the new geopolitical paradigm has good potential, from which the Central Asian states in particular will profit.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [<http://www.proua.com/news/2005/05/29/124139.html>].

<sup>12</sup> [<http://www.guam.org.ua/188.987.0.0.1.0.phtml>].

<sup>13</sup> E. Ismailov, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> See: J. Eyvazov, "Geopolitical Lessons of the Post-Soviet Caucasus: Forward to Globalization Or Back to Classical Eurasian Geopolitics?" *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006.

<sup>15</sup> For Turkey's new geopolitics see: G. Bacik, "Turkey's New Geopolitical Narrative," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006.

Nicholas Norling has concluded in his study: “Turkey could become the critical link of Europe’s influence on Central Asia, and cooperation with Turkey in these respects should be doubled.”<sup>16</sup> The four sides (Europe, Turkey, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia) have no other choice, since the circles of Eurasian regional and continental security (which include Southeast Europe, the Balkans, the Black, Adriatic and the Aegean seas, Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, Asia Minor, the Caucasus and Central Asia) all intercept in Turkey.

Among other things, GUUAM is one of the ways the Greater Central Asia conception is being implemented, and not merely in the sense the Americans impart to it. In fact, when Uzbekistan joined the SCO in 2001, Central Asia was already Greater Central Asia; in October 2004, when Russia joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), the region became Greater Central Asia for the second time.<sup>17</sup> The CACO has no fewer reasons for existing than the EurAsEC and SCO; this turned Central Asia into Greater Central Asia for the third time. The three projects offer three different alternatives. Finally, if the Central Asian states join GUAM and if Uzbekistan returns to the structure, the region will become geopolitically and geo-economically Greater Central Asia for the fourth time.

Today, there is a lot of skepticism about GUAM’s future. Here is my, maybe a little contradictory, response to the critics and skeptics. The future of GUAM is not that important—the structure is no more efficient than the EurAsEC, ORI, or SCO, which have not yet proved their efficiency either. They are presented as international structures, but much of what is done within them can be described as bilateral rather than multilateral projects and programs. The Asian Development Bank, for example, has pointed out that the Customs Union within the EurAsEC is potentially detrimental to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan: its impact on trade outside the region would have deprived Kazakhstan of \$10 billion by the year 2015.<sup>18</sup>

The above suggests that Central Asia has become the market place for multilateral formats, including a market for security services. GUAM is another entity on the same market, which means that Uzbekistan will profit from its restored GUAM membership. After all, it left it for geopolitical rather than economic reasons; it joined EurAsEC for geopolitical rather than economic reasons. The SCO also has a geopolitical dimension. This means that Uzbekistan’s restored GUAM membership will create a certain geopolitical symmetry that will let it contribute to the democratization of post-Soviet geopolitics.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, if viewed in the context of the entire post-Soviet expanse, GUAM has introduced a strong centrifugal trend into the potential reintegration of the former Soviet republics.

No matter what is in store for the CIS/EurAsEC and how the GUAM experiment will unfold, the latter can be described as an interesting phenomenon in the context of the transformations taking place in post-Soviet territory and the unfolding transformation and geopolitical processes.

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<sup>16</sup> N. Norling, “EU’s Central Asia Policy: The Adoption of a New Strategy Paper 2007-2013,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (45), 2007, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> The Greater Central Asian conception, formulated by prominent American scholar S. Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University’s Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, includes Central Asia and Afghanistan (see: F. Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, No. 4, July-August 2005).

<sup>18</sup> The figures are quoted in: N. Norling, *op. cit.*

A Russian academic offered an interesting opinion about GUAM: “The elites of the newly independent states have been using similar projects as a means ‘to utilize’ the energy of political confrontation between Moscow and its Euro-Atlantic partners.”<sup>19</sup> He is right and wrong at the same time. He is right because as long as there is political confrontation, the newly independent Central Asian states cannot ignore the chance of utilizing its energy: this is not their choice, but rather the Great Game logic. He is wrong because projects of the GUAM type are being used by the newly independent states to “utilize” the energy of their sovereignties and to acquire the status of international entities.

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<sup>19</sup> N. Silaev, “GUAM and the Smaller Game in the Post-Soviet Expanse,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (40), 2006, p. 92.