

ARMENIA AND GEORGIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Introduction

Relations between Armenia and Georgia go back many centuries into the history of these two neighboring nations. The recent history of their relations as two post-Soviet newly independent states is only two decades old, which means that certain problems have not yet been resolved.

Both countries have to cope with political, ethnopolitical, economic, linguistic, and religious problems; the situation in both countries is further complicated by the far from simple processes of nation-building and the countries' involvement in bloody ethnopolitical conflicts in the Caucasus. This has inevitably affected the political and so-

cioeconomic development of both Armenia and Georgia.

Here I am going to assess the general dynamics, present state, possible prospects, and potential problems in Armenian-Georgian relations. I have paid particular attention to the main parameters of their relations in the economic, communication, political, military, cultural, educational, and humanitarian spheres, to say nothing of an especially important aspect regarding the Russian factor in Armenian-Georgian relations and the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti, an administrative region of Georgia with a predominantly Armenian population.

Cooperation in the Economy and Communications

Economic cooperation between the two countries is mainly limited to the transit of goods to and from Armenia and of energy resources from Russia to Armenia across Georgia. The economies of both Armenia and Georgia are poorly integrated; they operate in different markets; they deal with different importers, while the structures of their economies have little in common, etc.

Trade turnover between them is carried out via one railway and two highways (the Bagratashen and Bavra checkpoints). The Guguti checkpoint on the border between Armenia (Tashir Region) and Georgia (the Kvemo-Kartli administrative region) is rarely used. The electric power systems of the two countries are connected by several power lines. Georgian territory is crossed by the North-South main gas pipeline, which brings Russian gas to Armenia. Armenia receives commodities “from the outside world” via Georgia (through the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi) and along the highways from Turkey (through the Vale and Sarpi checkpoints; another checkpoint at Karzakhi will soon be opened). The still unsettled Nagorno-Karabakh conflict makes the transit of goods from Azerbaijan to Armenia via Georgia practically impossible.

It should be said that, on the whole, the intensity of transit of Armenian cargoes across Georgia depends on the political situation. In March 2010, after a long hiatus caused by political problems between Russia and Georgia, the Verkhniy Lars checkpoint on the Russian-Georgian border was reopened.

According to the National Statistical Service of Armenia, in 2009 export of Georgian goods to Armenia amounted to \$40,890 million, while Armenia exported \$52,806 million-worth of goods to Georgia.¹

According to Georgian statistics, in 2009 Georgia exported \$88,442 million-worth of goods (7.9% of the total volume of Georgian exports) to Armenia and bought Armenian goods totaling \$41,346 million.² The different figures are explained by different calculation methods and by the fact that Georgia registers part of transit trade turnover as its own imports. In 2009, Georgia ranked fifth among the countries that export goods to Armenia (7.4% of the total) and 19th (with 1.2%) in the total structure of Armenian imports. Armenia, in turn, ranks fourth (7.9%) among the countries that import goods from Georgia and is outside the group of top ten largest exporters.

Armenia mainly exports construction materials, glass, rubber and plastic goods, animal and agricultural products, machinery, and medical supplies to Georgia and imports from it foodstuffs, agricultural products (mainly sugar and wheat, which may to some extent be re-export commodities), nitrogen fertilizers, metal products, timber, and wood products.³

In the last few years, re-export of second-hand cars (from the U.S. and Europe) to Armenia has come to the fore as an important item of Georgian export, together with ferroalloys and nitrogen fertilizers. In 2008, Georgia re-exported cars totaling \$706.8 million; the figure for 2009 was \$254.7 million. In 2007-2009, over 70% of the cars exported from Georgia went to Azerbaijan and Armenia.⁴ According to the figures for January 2011, cars dominated in Georgian exports: the country sold cars totaling \$26 million (18% of its overall exports)⁵ mainly to Azerbaijan and Armenia.

For a long time, Armenia sold electric power to Georgia and Turkey (through intermediary companies and across Georgian territory). In recent years, however, Georgia has developed its energy sphere (it has built several gas-turbine power stations) to the extent that it no longer needs to buy electric power from Armenia. At the same time, the fifth block of the Hrazdan thermal electric power plant (its pilot testing began in the spring of 2012) will produce enough exportable electricity (about 160 megawatts) to be resold to Turkey via Georgia. There is information that Gazprom of Russia has been studying the capabilities of several German intermediary companies.⁶

Today, Georgia's tourist revenue, primarily generated by visitors from Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, is rising: tourism has become an important branch of the country's economy. The number of Armenian tourists who spend their holidays on the Georgian Black Sea coast (particularly in Ajaria)

¹ See: *Statistichesky ezhegodnik Armenii—2010*, Yerevan, 2010.

² See: *External Trade of Georgia, 2009. National Statistic Office of Georgia*, Tbilisi, 2010.

³ See: *Statistichesky ezhegodnik Armenii—2010*.

⁴ See: *External Trade of Georgia, 2009*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ See: “Gazprom pri posrednichestve nemtsev khochet vyvesti armianskuiu elektroenergiyu cherez Gruziiu v Turtsiiu,” available at [www.regnum.ru/news/1372256.html], 7 February, 2011.

is increasing: Armenians are attracted by the affordable prices and comfortable distance from their country. In 2010, the number of Armenian tourists on the Georgian Black Sea coast was a little more than 100 thousand.⁷

In turn, in anticipation of an inflow of Armenian tourists to the seaside resorts of Georgia, Armenian business in Ajaria and some other regions has become more active. It is estimated that Armenians have already poured several tens of millions of U.S. dollars in investments into the tourist and transport infrastructure.

In mid-2010, the Armenian public became concerned about the allegedly vast capital outflow from Armenia to Georgia. According to the media, during 2010 about 100 Armenian companies and private enterprises reregistered their businesses in Georgia.⁸ There was information that several big entrepreneurs planned to move their businesses to Georgia to profit from its more favorable business climate, acceptable legal regulation of business activities, and low corruption level. It seems that the subject has been excessively politicized: no one can say whether the country is facing capital outflow or whether Armenian businessmen, having prospered at home, are expanding to other countries. Nothing has been done to go deeper into the economic aspects of the issue.

Relations in the Political Sphere and Regional Processes

Sustainable and safe transport routes between the two countries is an important issue both economically and politically in view of Armenia's unsettled relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey and the fact that Armenia's only link with the rest of the world is the one railway that runs through Georgia. According to different sources, about 60 to 80% of Armenian exports and imports are moved across Georgia.

The Armenian leaders have to take into account Mikhail Saakashvili's position and the pro-Georgian bias of the Western countries (particularly the U.S.) when dealing with Georgia. This primarily applies to the rights of the Armenian population of Georgia and the fact that Georgia has monopolized its transit communication potential. This means that Erevan cannot do much about the problem of Javakheti.⁹

The Russian-Armenian strategic partnership and the Armenian-populated region of Javakheti (which is right on the Georgian-Armenian border) are two important factors affecting the relations between the two countries.

They cannot agree on how to settle the regional ethnopolitical conflicts: Georgia is devoted to the principle of territorial integrity (threatened by the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia), while Armenia takes the opposite stance: it defends the right of nations to self-determination, keeping in mind Nagorno-Karabakh. It should be said that in the absence of alternative transit routes, Armenia cannot recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: it badly needs good relations with Georgia.

Georgia and Armenia prefer different foreign policy partners, which became too obvious during the Five-Day War between Georgia and Russia (the latter being Armenia's main military-strategic

⁷ According to the National Agency of Georgia for Tourism, in 2010 nearly 480 thousand Armenians visited Georgia. Not all of them, however, were tourists: many of them either travelled across the country or came for business purposes. The figure 100 thousand looks much more plausible: according to the Ministry of Economics and Sustainable Development of Georgia, about 95 thousand Armenian tourists visited Ajaria (the main tourist attraction); together with other seaside resorts a figure of about 100 thousand looks realistic.

⁸ See: "Myagkoe pogloshchenie: v 2010 godu 103 arмянские компании перерегистрировали бизнес в Грузии," available at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-abroad/armenia/1372814.html>], 8 February, 2011.

⁹ In Georgian this region, part of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Gubernia, is called Javakheti, while the local Armenians and Armenian sources call it Javakhk.

partner) in August 2008. What is more, Armenia is keeping a close watch on Georgia's developing cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Some of their joint projects (like the planned Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway) might isolate Armenia from communication and transportation routes.

It should be said that the results of the August 2008 war seriously affected the dynamics and present state of Armenian-Georgian relations. Since the war, the Georgian public and political elite have become even more sensitive to political processes that might affect their country's regional status. Settlement or even positive dynamics in Nagorno-Karabakh will obviously deprive Georgia of some of its regional impact and of its economic and political advantages created by the present tension between its South Caucasian neighbors.

The Georgian leaders are apprehensive of even the slightest changes around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (if, for example, Armenia and Turkey draw closer together or if the two countries open their common border) because this might cost Georgia its role in the region. Some Georgian experts (Gia Nodia, former Minister of Education of Georgia, now Chairman of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, among them)¹⁰ have pointed out that there is an awareness in Georgia that normalized relations between Armenia and Turkey, which implies an open common border and communication lines between these two countries, will cost Georgia "its privileged position" in the regional transit and economic projects. It was noted that in this case Armenia would acquire more reasons and more opportunities to put the problems of the Armenians of Javakheti on the agenda.

In 2009-early 2010 (until April 2010 when Armenian-Turkish relations ran into a dead end and the protocols were not ratified), the Georgian public and political elite were very concerned about possible Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. In the spring of 2010, when the Armenian-Turkish process had ground to a halt, official Tbilisi resumed its talk about its exclusive role in meeting Armenia's communications needs, which could be easily discerned in Georgia's tariff policies and exploitation of its transit capabilities.

The relations between the two countries are far from cloudless: there are nagging conceptual political problems (communications, Javakheti, and relations with Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, as well as potential economic rivalry in the region) and several other fairly urgent problems, delimitation of the state border based on Soviet administrative-territorial division being one of them. This cannot be done in a hurry owing to the lingering disagreements over the Soviet borders, the rugged relief, etc. The talks underway on straightening certain stretches of the common border to keep several Armenian villages within Armenia cannot be described as easy.

Armenia is very much interested in the future of the North-South main gas pipeline through which the republic receives Russian gas produced in the Northern Caucasus. The pipeline crosses Georgia, which appropriates about 10% of the gas Russia supplies to Armenia. Talks about selling the gas pipeline, which belongs to the Georgian state and is regarded as a strategic object, began in 2010: on 6 July, the Georgian parliament removed it from the list of strategic objects and permitted its privatization. Earlier Georgia had agreed to prohibit any commercial deals involving the gas pipeline for a period of five years, which expired in April 2011. Armenia is worried about Georgia's plans to sell part of the North-South gas pipeline, since this might mean Azerbaijan acquiring a share in this strategically important facility: in November 2010, Head of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) Rovnag Abdullaev announced that his company was prepared to buy the Georgian stretch of the pipeline.

This question was most likely discussed during President Saakashvili's state visit to Armenia late in January 2011. According to the Georgian media, Georgia intends to place 25% of the shares on the London stock exchange, while Minister of Energy Alexander Khetaguri reiterated that Georgia had no intention of parting with the controlling share, the matter concerned only 25%.

¹⁰ See: G. Nodia, "Pending Normalization of Turkish-Armenian Relations: Implications for Georgia," *CIPDD Policy Brief*, No. 2, January 2010.

Early in March 2011, Minister of Power and Natural Resources of Armenia Armen Movsisian said in the Armenian parliament that if this stretch was acquired by foreign companies, including Azeri companies, the gas pipeline would function very much as before, adding that the Georgians has assured the Armenian government of this. "The Armenian government has discussed this issue and drawn the line beyond which we shall not retreat. We are convinced that selling 25% of the shares will not threaten our country," said he.¹¹

Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Nino Kalandadze said on the eve of President Saakashvili's latest visit to Armenia that the sides would discuss the possibility of coordinating their positions in international organizations. During the visit, the controversial issue was discussed by the presidents.¹²

When voting in the U.N., OSCE, and other international organizations, Georgia frequently sided with the Azeri resolutions and statements on Nagorno-Karabakh; Armenia responded with its anti-Georgian voting on resolutions and documents relating to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

It should be said that, at one time, Armenia suggested neutrality in such situations, which Georgia declined. In September 2011, at a sitting of the U.N. General Assembly, Armenia, in anticipation of Georgia's pro-Azeri voting on Nagorno-Karabakh, once more voted against Georgia.¹³

The sides, however, shared opinions on certain issues of regional and international policies: they regularly discuss the EU Eastern Partnership program and, in anticipation of additional economic aid and financial assistance, occupy more or less similar positions.

Military Cooperation

In the military sphere, cooperation is fairly modest and is limited to education and training, mainly within the multisided NATO programs and exercises and regarding military transit across Georgian territory to Armenia.

In the latter half of the 1990s-first half of the 2000s (while Russian military bases remained in Georgian territory), the 142nd tank repair plant of the former Transcaucasian Military District repaired tanks and other armored vehicles for the Armenian army. After the Russian military bases were removed from Georgia, no information about the plant can be found. There is no reliable information about military-technical cooperation between Armenia and Georgia; early in the 2000s Georgia sold Armenia several Su-25 fighter jets assembled at the Tbilisi aviation plant.

From time to time, the Armenian and Georgian military meet at training exercises under the NATO aegis conducted in their territories. In 2007-2008, Armenian officers attended mountain training courses at the training center of the Georgian Defense Ministry in Sachkhere within an exchange program.

The August 2008 five-day war created transit problems for military cargoes to Armenia, particularly from Russia. In 2005, the issue of military supplies to the Russian troops stationed in Armenia across Georgia was discussed as part of an agreement under which Russia removed its military bases from Georgia.

After August 2008 it became next to impossible to move Russian military cargoes across Georgia; in April 2011, Georgia denounced the treaty on Russian military transit; late in April 2011, the defense and foreign ministers of Georgia came to Yerevan to explain Georgia's position.

¹¹ "Dazhe imeia 25% aktsiy gazoprovoda 'Sever-Yug,' Azerbaijan ne smozhet shantazhirovat Armeniiu," available at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/economy/news/63045/>], 2 March, 2011.

¹² See: "Chto nameren obsudit Saakashvili v khode vizita v Yerevan?" available at [<http://www.profi-forex.org/news/entry1008063633.html>], 22 January 2011.

¹³ Later, for different reasons, Azerbaijan withdrew its resolution.

The Georgian side assured Erevan that denunciation was limited to the military cargoes intended for the Russian military bases and would not affect cargoes intended for the Armenian army. This meant that Armenia's security was ensured and relations between the two countries survived.

The Russian Factor in the Armenian-Georgian Relations

The Georgian political elite and public regard the Russian factor as very important; in the post-Soviet period their attitude toward Armenia and the Armenians depended on relations between Erevan and Moscow.

In Georgia, anti-Russian sentiments are mixed with suspicions that the Armenians of Javakheti nurture separatist feelings. Against the background of strong and strengthening allied relations between Armenia and Russia and the former's membership in the CSTO, anti-Russian sentiments in Georgia unintentionally (or even intentionally) are transferred to Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. The Russian factor is behind the periodical disagreements between Armenia and Georgia (Armenia's voting in international organizations on the RF/Georgian resolutions related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia). This means that the relations between the two countries will not improve soon: the negative sentiments toward Russia created by the August 2008 war will survive in Georgia for a long time to come. At the same time, the realization that relations with Russia should be improved might soften the anti-Russian feelings in Georgia. It is entirely possible that the public in Georgia and Russia will demonstrate pragmatism and reassess the nature of the relations between their two countries. The Georgian public might learn to look more soberly at Armenian-Russian strategic cooperation, and the Georgian leaders and public might learn to look more favorably at the relations between their country and Armenia.

It seems that better and deeper relations between Armenia and Georgia mainly depend on the Georgian leaders and particularly on the public, which should correlate their approaches.

The Samtskhe-Javakheti Factor in the Relations between the Two Countries

In 1991, when the two counties gained their independence, their relations became vitally important for the Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti; the fact that ethnic Armenians were in the majority in at least two districts of this administrative-territorial region of Georgia (Armenians comprise 95% of the total population in the Akhalkalaki and 96% in the Ninotsminda districts) was an important factor of regional policy and bilateral relations.¹⁴

Throughout the post-Soviet period, the Georgian political elite and the Georgian public remained suspicious of Armenia: they suspected that Erevan was fanning separatist and irredentist sentiments among the region's Armenians to detach it from Georgia. In fact, in the last two decades Erevan has been demonstrating caution and pursuing a well-balanced policy; in Georgia, however, the situation in Javakheti is contemplated within the context of Nagorno-Karabakh.

¹⁴ For more detail, see: S. Minasian, *Etnicheskie menshinstva Gruzii: potentsial integratsii na primere armianskogo naseleniia strany*, Erevan, 2006.

Certain political forces in Armenia and in Javakheti, in turn, are convinced that Georgia is resolved to change the ethnic composition in the region by squeezing Armenians out of it and creating unbearable socioeconomic and political conditions for those resolved to stay put.

After losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the August 2008 war, Georgia will hardly be able to tap to the full, at least in the near future, the potential of its defense and security structures, which received a lot of attention after the Rose Revolution. It can, however, use force against the administrative-territorial regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli with their predominant Armenian and Azeri population, respectively.

This means that the status quo in Samtskhe-Javakheti will survive for a long time to come. Georgia will continue its “small steps” policy to put pressure on the local Armenians: it will add to the impact from the center; expand the use of state symbols; make the Georgian bias in schools more obvious; and increase the number of Georgians in the local administrative and defense and security structures. Armenia will do its best to play down the negative sentiments among the local Armenians. The international community and European structures (the Council of Europe being one of them), on the other hand, will demonstrate restraint when criticizing violations of the rights of ethnic minorities in Georgia.

The United States, likewise, needs better relations between Georgia and Armenia and stability in the Southern Caucasus; the Armenian lobby and Dashnaktsutiun (one of the traditional Armenian parties with structures in the United States) are working in the same direction. Early in February 2012, when visiting America, President Saakashvili met the pro-Armenian congressmen to discuss American aid to Javakheti.¹⁵

The relatively large and growing diaspora of Samtskhe-Javakheti Armenians in the Russian Federation is not sufficiently consolidated; it avoids involvement in the social and political field because some of its prominent members and businessmen engaged in joint projects with the Georgian authorities and economic activities in Georgia do not want to be drawn into anti-Georgian political activity.

Relations in the Sphere of Religion

In the post-Soviet period, relations between the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) (which has been present in Georgia since the 4th century and has its own diocese) have become fairly strained. This is primarily caused by the fact that as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist the GOC laid claim to the Armenian churches and cultic objects (the most important of them being the churches of Surb Norashen in Tbilisi and Surb Nshan in Akhaltsikhi) which belonged to the AAC and been confiscated by Soviet power. Owing to the prominent role the GOC plays in post-Soviet Georgia, the authorities do not dare to transfer these religious and architectural monuments to their true owner.

In 2006, the GOC intended to set up the Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir eparchy (to acquire a tighter grip on the above-mentioned religious monuments) to reach southern Kvemo-Kartli and cross the Armenian border into several northern districts of Armenia with several abandoned Georgian churches and no Georgian population.

Late in 2008, during an official visit to Georgia, Prime Minister of Armenia Tigran Sargsyan, accompanied by several Georgian officials (including two ministers of the Georgian Cabinet), visited the Surb Norashen Church, but nothing was done to return it to the AAC.

¹⁵ See: “Kogressmeny SShA obsudili s Saakashvili vopros Javakhka,” available at [<http://www.yerkirmedia.am/?act=news&lan=ru&id=5072>], 3 February 2012.

Like the other confessions in Georgia, the AAC is not a public law legal entity (the GOC, which signed a concordat under President Shevardnadze defining its legal status and powers is the only exception).¹⁶ The Armenian Church and the other religious confessions present in Georgia (the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Church, and other so-called traditional Christian churches) refused to register as foundations of all sorts or as entities of private law.

In public and official contexts, the AAC and GOC carefully avoid any signs of tension and demonstrate friendly relations. The official visit of Catholicos Garegin II, however, which should have included a trip to the Armenian-populated districts of Javakheti together with head of the Georgian Church Ilia II, was postponed several times in a row. In June 2011, on the very eve of the visit, information appeared that Georgia had arrived at a political decision to grant an adequate legal status to several traditional confessions (including the AAC eparchy in Georgia) without infringing on the rights and powers of the GOC.

Nothing much happened though; in the wake of the visit of the 60-year-old Catholicos, the Georgian Patriarch publicly described him as “young and inexperienced.” The response of the Chancellery of St. Ejmiadzin was restrained but ambiguous: Garegin II, said the statement, respects and takes into account Ilia II’s “age.” It also accused the Georgian colleagues of bringing “market relations” into the relations between the churches when discussing the status of the AAC and the fate of the Armenian churches.

This, however, cannot worsen the relations between the two countries; moreover, the Georgian president has already passed a decision on the legal status of several “traditional” churches present in the country, the AAC being one of them. Early in July 2011, a special sitting of the Georgian parliament finally granted a public law legal entity status to the so-called traditional confessions; and the Civil Code was amended accordingly.¹⁷ This means that from that time on the AAC could function as a religious organization in Georgia with the full set of rights of a legal entity.

Some members of the GOC, however, came forward with accusations of the Georgian authorities and the AAC even though, unlike the Catholic and some other Christian confessions, it never preached among ethnic Georgians. In the face of the wave of religious intolerance and mass protests against the Armenian Church and Armenians in Georgia, the Georgian government retracted its own decision. The parliament adopted a “political document” which preserved a legal status for the traditional confessions, albeit with limited rights to demand return of their property and the so-called disputed churches.

Humanitarian, Scientific, and Educational Contacts

In the post-Soviet period, these contacts should be described as inadequate; Georgia allows Armenia to supply Armenian schools in Georgia with textbooks in the Armenian language and Armenian literature; there is a department of Armenian philology at the Linguistic University of Tbilisi (its student body consists of Armenians who are Georgian citizens); and there is a small center of Georgian studies at Erevan State University.

The highly inadequate level of cooperation between higher educational establishments, academic institutes, theaters, and other scientific, educational, and cultural structures is inherited from Soviet

¹⁶ For more detail, see: I. Khaindrava, “Religiia v Gruzii: XXI vek,” in: *Religiia i politika na Kavkaze. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii*, Kavkazskiy Institut SMI, Erevan, 2004.

¹⁷ According to the new rules, those religious organizations that had historical contacts with Georgia or the status of a religious organization in one of the countries of the Council of Europe were registered as legal entities.

times. Tours of theaters and dance ensembles arranged to coincide with official visits of political figures or memorial dates and events invariably stir up a lot of interest, particularly since, although they may be relatively regular, they are still few and far apart.

Late in 2010-early in 2011, the first Armenian-Georgian school Olympiad for mathematics, physics, and information technology was held for Armenian schoolchildren from the country's regions; the Georgian team of 30 also included Armenian children from Armenian families living in Georgia. The Olympiad was sponsored by Erevan State University, the Synopsis Company, and the Pyunik Charity Fund, while the idea was put forward by the presidents of both countries.¹⁸

On the whole, the mutual cultural and scientific interest of both countries leaves much to be desired; this is partly compensated for by the fairly large diaspora of Georgian Armenians who live in Armenia. They keep in touch with relatives on the other side of the border and serve as vehicles of a cultural exchange of sorts.

There is fairly ramified cooperation between NGOs, journalists, ecologists, and other similar structures, the number of which has been rapidly rising. This is largely explained by the fact that many of the international donor organizations and Western funds insist on a regional scope for South Caucasian grant seekers. This explains why Armenian and Georgian NGOs (but not scientific and cultural organizations mainly funded by the state) are seeking professional contacts and deeper cooperation on a regional scale.

Today, close cooperation is limited to fairly small groups of NGO activists, expert centers, and sociopolitical communities of both countries, while the larger part of the public and the scientific and cultural elite of Armenia and Georgia maintain, mostly by inertia, fragmentary professional contacts.

The fact that the Russia language (the traditional instrument of professional and other communication between Georgians and Armenians) is gradually losing ground in Georgia, especially among the younger generation, is having a negative impact on the present and future of contacts between the two countries in all spheres.

Conclusion

The relations between the two countries have reached an important point where the momentum retained from Soviet times that predominated during the two decades of independence is retreating under the pressure of more pragmatic, rational, and mature relations between the two states. This is especially obvious in politics and the economy, as well as in the regional and international contexts. Today, the two countries have avoided the possible negative repercussions of the August 2008 war and contradictions over their attitude toward third countries, even though each of them has its own geopolitical vector and geopolitical priorities.

At the same time, not all disagreements have been settled to mutual satisfaction; there are certain specific features of Georgia's domestic development; urgent problems of the Armenian diaspora; religious issues; and the political and linguistic rights of the Armenian ethnic minority in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

It should be said that in view of the highly emotional attitude of the Georgian political elite and public to these issues, which are frequently associated with the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a flexible approach is strongly advised. Inevitable politicization of these issues calls for a cautious and far-sighted policy both on the part of the Georgian authorities and on the part of the Armenian organizations in Armenia and Georgia that try to help them.

¹⁸ See: "Prezidenty Gruzii i Armenii vruchili nagrody pobediteliam pervoy armiano-gruzinskoy shkolnoy olimpiady," available at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/society/news/60097/>], 23 January, 2011.

Some of the recent events (the beginning of legal registration of the Georgian Eparchy of the AAC, cooperation between the Georgian authorities and Armenian organizations in the United States in obtaining social and economic assistance for Javakheti, and more active humanitarian contacts at the international level) breed hope that, in the mid term, relations between Armenia and Georgia in these spheres will move in the desired direction.
