

GUAM AND THE SMALLER GAME IN THE POST-SOVIET EXPANSE

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“Western Expansion” or a “New Democratization Wave in Eastern Europe”?

The recent political transformations in the post-Soviet expanse are often described as a “Big Game,” meaning a confrontation among the global actors: America, the EU, and Russia.

We are used to hearing about how Russia is being squeezed out of its traditional and “natural” sphere of influence—the former Soviet territory—by the West with the help of pro-Western political groups in the Soviet successor states. It has become commonplace to assert that political freedom and democracy, Western values, and the Western civilizational model have spread across the post-Soviet expanse and that they are opposed by Eastern authoritarianism and imperialism. Politically, these two approaches are mutually exclusive; but if assessed in absolute magnitude, disregarding their ideological and emotional aspects, we find that they stem from the same logical basis.

I mean that the logic of “Western expansion” and “democratization” describes the Soviet successor states and post-Soviet societies as targets of influence of the largest world actors, rather than entities of international politics with willpower, interests, and strategies of their own. In the event these countries are allowed to retain the “right to remain entities,” their willpower, interests, and strategies

are described in an extremely simplified way—as the European choice of ideological conceptions. Both the Russian and Western expert communities tend to perceive only the enlarged view of the post-Soviet expanse and more likely than not are unable to discern and analyze the details. In fact, the Big Game paradigm draws us away from a more detailed discussion of the newly independent states' foreign policies.

The geopolitical value of the post-Soviet expanse is immense—it would be wrong to deny that the U.S. and other leading Western countries are not interested in it. There is much steadily mounting interest. It is likewise obvious that the Soviet successor states are demonstrating a growing pro-Western foreign policy orientation. In the Southern Caucasus, it was recently boosted by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. It is hardly wise to deny that these trends have become the central ones across the former Soviet territory.

Still, any international system is multileveled, which is especially true of the post-Soviet expanse: there the leading world powers and governments are not the only factors of influence. Self-proclaimed structures (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, the Trans-Dniester Region, and South Ossetia) play their roles as well, as do certain political and economic clans operating in the local states. Here is an example: there is the opinion that in the summer of 2004 Georgia tried to close the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia for transit traffic partly in the commercial interests of the Burjanadze family in order to remove South Ossetian competition from the bread trade. The same can be said of the active involvement of Governor of the Krasnodar Territory Alexander Tkachev in the political game around the presidential election in the non-recognized republic of Abkhazia in the fall of 2004. It should be said that the weak state institutions in many of the post-Soviet states (in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia especially) and the obvious trend toward using informal mechanisms to govern the state strengthen clans' influence on domestic and foreign policies. Finally, public organizations may also play an important role in post-Soviet foreign policies. A Ukrainian public association, Pora, which displayed excessive interest in the parliamentary election in Azerbaijan in November 2005, thus endangering relations between Kiev and Baku, is a case in point.

The multilevel system of post-Soviet international relations does not rule out other more prominent and important trends within the system, which might be described as the Big Game, but the lower levels of the post-Soviet international political system should also be studied. To achieve the required depth of analysis of the post-Soviet international relations, the smaller game should become an object of comprehensive studies.

This cannot be done within the scope of one article. It is possible, however, to outline here the “smaller game” paradigm within which the local countries stop being merely objects of international politics, but act as its subjects. This is best illustrated by the attempts to revive GUAM undertaken by its members in 2005-2006. The way GUAM is perceived is a classical example of thinking within the Big Game paradigm (“Russia's geopolitical environment,” etc.). At the same time, in the last twelve to eighteen months the international political situation within this structure has demonstrated dynamism and provided enough evidence to compare the interests, motivations, and strategies of its members.

Lonely Georgia and Ambitious Ukraine

GUAM, which united Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova into an informal alliance, was set up back in October 1997. In April 1999, they were joined by Uzbekistan, at that time regarded as the most loyal American ally in Central Asia. GUUAM caused a lot of concern in Russia where many

of the political observers started talking about a West-inspired “sanitary belt.” The concern gradually deepened when it became obvious that the West, the United States in particular, was obviously supporting the newly established bloc. After a while, as Moscow and the West moved away from the acute political conflict caused by the Kosovo issue toward the anti-terrorist alliance of the fall of 2001, Russia’s concerns dissipated. Meanwhile, the newly established bloc stagnated or even underwent degradation. It failed to achieve practical results, while the statuses of those who represented the member states at the GUUAM meetings were steadily declining. In 2002, Uzbekistan “suspended” its membership. It is unlikely there was a connection between better relations between Russia and the West and GUUAM’s stagnation, yet there is the feeling that the elites of the newly independent states were using similar projects as a means “to utilize” the energy of political confrontation between Moscow and its Euro-Atlantic partners.

In the early half of 2005, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova tried to revive the nearly dead bloc. Each of them had reasons of its own for doing this.

Late in 2004, Georgia and its president, Mikhail Saakashvili, became aware that isolation within the CIS had grown too acute. In the wake of the Rose Revolution, cooperation between Moscow and Tbilisi looked probable. The then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov played an important role in Eduard Shevardnadze’s resignation; the new president paid his first foreign visit to Moscow, where the sides managed to reach a compromise on an issue that Moscow (and especially its mayor) found very painful—the change of power in Ajaria in May 2004. Several months later, however, in July, when the Georgian leaders tried to restore control over South Ossetia, Moscow did not, and could not, respond positively. The Russian leaders did their best to help the Georgians avoid embarrassment, but relations between the two countries were spoiled. The Georgian rhetoric, in which Moscow discerned anti-Russian overtones, did nothing to improve the situation.

The difference was keenly felt between the presidential style of Mikhail Saakashvili, a young and brilliant pro-Western politician who led a velvet coup, and most of the other CIS leaders who belonged to the older political generation that emulated the ways of the Soviet nomenklatura.

By the summer of 2004, the “defensive” trends in the CIS, graphically set forth in the Statement of the CIS Members on the State of Affairs in the OSCE published on 3 July, 2004, had become obvious. The CIS members accused the OSCE of double standards, disregard of the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of states, and excessive attention to human rights and humanitarian issues. In fact, the CIS members voiced their displeasure with the practice of OSCE assessment of elections as democratic or undemocratic.¹ In view of the important role this assessment played in the Rose Revolution (and later in the Orange Revolution), Mikhail Saakashvili felt like the odd man out in the CIS. No wonder he tried to balance this isolation with contacts with the “Orange” opposition in Ukraine. In fact, both sides needed them: the Ukrainian opposition placed its stakes on the presidential election of the fall of 2004 in the hope of carrying out the scenario successfully tested in Tbilisi. Ukraine’s Pora and Georgia’s Kmara organizations, which used the same “textbooks,” easily found a common language.

As leader of the Ukrainian opposition, Viktor Iushchenko attended Mikhail Saakashvili’s inauguration in January 2004.² A year later it was the Georgian president’s turn to attend Viktor Iushchenko’s inauguration.³ The contacts between Tbilisi and the Orange leaders became inter-state.

¹ See: [<http://www.cis.minsk.by/main.aspx?uid=2096>]. Mikhail Saakashvili abstained from voting and pointed out: “Georgia believes that the OSCE should be improved and its institutions reformed.” Turkmenistan abstained because of its traditional neutrality, while Azerbaijan, unwilling to quarrel with an influential European institution, abstained as well: the presidential election, highly important for legitimizing Ilham Aliiev’s regime, was less than twelve months off. Ukraine, which normally did not coordinate its foreign policies with the CIS, signed the document.

² Interfax, 23 January, 2004.

³ See: [<http://www.newsru.com/world/02jan2005/uty.html>], 27 June, 2006.

They were strengthened thanks to the Carpathian Declaration both presidents signed early in January 2005, in which they said that their coming to power had started a new wave of liberation in Europe, thanks to which “freedom and democracy will finally triumph across the European continent.”⁴

At that stage, Georgia needed these contacts to overcome isolation within the CIS, while Ukraine was aiming much higher. The Orange victory created an absolutely new context in the post-Soviet expanse. Based on the example of the Rose Revolution, this method of power change in the second largest post-Soviet state spoke of a new budding trend. The liberal political pro-Western groups were watching the “success story” and learning from it. The new Ukrainian leaders and their supporters inside the country were euphoric: “In three years’ time, we will reach the living standards of the Czech Republic” was the most typical statement in February-March 2005. For the first time in its history, Ukraine could think about challenging Russia as a center of attraction for the CIS and the entire post-Soviet expanse. The country seemingly had everything: a high (up to 12 percent) economic growth rate achieved by the Yanukovich cabinet and liberal “Orange” slogans enthusiastically hailed across post-Soviet territory, while the West was prepared to greet the new foreign policy course. An alliance with Tbilisi was seen by Kiev as the first step toward Ukraine’s leadership across the post-Soviet expanse.

Compromises and Consolidation

GUAM would have remained half dead had not Moldova badly needed it. President Voronin was worried, with good reason too, that his country might fall victim to the next “color revolution,” the script of which had been tested in Georgia and Ukraine. To save himself and his power, he embraced the slogans of the liberal and pro-Western opposition and drew close to Tbilisi and even closer to Kiev. The maneuvers were simplified by the fact that earlier, late in 2003, Kishinev, which had heretofore sympathized with Moscow, spoiled its relations with Russia by refusing to sign the Kozak memorandum, on which the sides had earlier agreed,⁵ which contained Russia’s plan of conflict settlement in the Trans-Dniester Region.⁶ From that moment on there was no danger of being dismissed as Moscow’s puppet unwelcome in the West.

Georgia and Ukraine appreciated the move—the bilateral relations of the two “color revolution” countries could develop into a regional bloc. Voronin’s affiliation with the Communist party and his friendship with Moscow prior to the Kozak memorandum were forgotten.

Between late February and early March 2005, the three leaders held several bilateral meetings; Azerbaijan, the fourth member, did not demonstrate much activity—it preferred to follow the developments. On the one hand, Baku was aware of the dangers of distancing itself from Georgia and Ukraine in view of the triumphal Orange political model in the CIS on the eve of the parliamentary election scheduled for November 2005. The Azeri president felt much safer in the same boat as the post-Soviet regimes, which had already demonstrated their liberal pro-Western sentiments. The November election, however, demonstrated that GUAM membership was no guarantee against “Orange imports.” On the other hand, Azerbaijan was fully aware that GUAM could not be revived without it: the bloc’s economic agenda inevitably raised the issue of alterna-

⁴ [<http://president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=5&sm=2&id=29>], 27 June, 2006.

⁵ See: [<http://www.fin.org.ua/news.php?i=282732>], 27 June, 2006.

⁶ RIA “Novosti,” 25 November, 2003.

tive sources of fuel and alternative transportation routes, leaving Russia out in the cold. Azerbaijan was the only oil-and-gas-rich GUAM member and it alone could supply the bloc with an economic foundation, even if virtual: the members failed to translate their discussion of alternative fuel sources into practice.

At the same time, certain steps taken by GUAM's "reanimators" undermined some of the bloc's ideological principles as a union of countries that "opted for freedom." In an effort to add weight to the structure, they tried to persuade Islam Karimov, the most authoritarian of the CIS rulers, to attend the summit. Much was done to prevail over the Uzbek president—Premier of Georgia Zurab Nogaideli went to Tashkent to persuade Karimov. His efforts failed—Uzbekistan refused to attend the summit and some time later withdrew from the bloc altogether—Nogaideli had to cut short his two-day mission.⁷

Kyrgyzstan, which refused to join the bloc, delivered another blow to GUAM's ideological foundation: acting head of state of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiev (brought to power in Askar Akaev's place by the coup in Bishkek carried out according to the Kiev and Tbilisi scenario) refused to revive GUAM, thus undermining the bloc's "revolutionary message." Not only that: Ukraine and Georgia, which negotiated at a very high level (they sent their foreign ministers—Salome Zurabishvili and Boris Tarasiuk—to Bishkek), lost some of their image.⁸

All the failures notwithstanding, the summit held on 22 April, 2005 in Kishinev was a success: the bloc that for several years had shown practically no signs of life suddenly produced a lot of information. The participants managed to outline more or less clear objectives—something they had failed to do earlier: promoting democracy across the post-Soviet expanse and fighting separatism.

It should be said that promoting democracy was less carefully outlined than fighting separatism. When talking about democracy, the summit vehemently criticized Belarus President Lukashenko and his regime; the final document, however, made essentially no mention of this.

Fighting separatism was the bond that consolidated the rather different bloc members. Three out of four countries that met in Kishinev—Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova—had trouble with break-away territories. It can even be said that discussion of the future of the still frozen conflicts and unrecognized states in the post-Soviet territory, which began in 2004, helped revive GUAM. Typically enough, as distinct from many of the international legal documents dealing with post-Soviet conflict settlement, the Kishinev Declaration made no mention of the right of nations to self-determination and employed harsh terms when talking about possible settlement in the form of "reintegration of the uncontrolled territories into the state of which they are parts."⁹

This was what Tbilisi, Baku, and Kishinev wanted. During the summit, Kiev concentrated, contrary to expectations, not so much on promoting democracy, as on fighting separatism and the future of the Trans-Dniester conflict in particular.

Speaking in Kishinev, Viktor Iushchenko said: "Ukraine is resolved to push forward at least some of these problems (the "frozen" conflicts.—*N.S.*). I have in mind the Trans-Dniester problem."¹⁰ He offered his own plan of settlement that hinged on democratic elections in the Trans-Dniester Moldavian Republic, mentioned in positive terms in the Kishinev Declaration. Kiev was obviously not so much concerned with defeating separatism as with snatching the role of "geopolitical sponsor" of the unrecognized republic from Moscow. (Russia's influence on the unrecognized states in the post-Soviet territory is justly regarded as one of its foreign policy tools). This produced a great impression on the sides involved in the Trans-Dniester settlement: the memories of Russia's failure were still fresh.

⁷ RIA "Novosti," 19 April, 2005.

⁸ Interfax, 31 March, 2005.

⁹ See: [<http://www.guam.org.ua/181.449.0.0.1.0.phtml>], 27 June, 2006.

¹⁰ RIA "Novosti," 22 April, 2005.

The Ukrainian initiative confirmed that its leaders considered themselves strong enough to challenge Russia, through GUAM, in the post-Soviet expanse. In March 2006, Ukraine blocked off the self-proclaimed republic—another step in the same direction.¹¹

On the whole, all the “sharp angles” were successfully avoided: there was no discussion of the democratic or undemocratic nature of the regimes represented in Kishinev; the participants managed to agree on an agenda that suited everyone. This revived GUAM and helped it to develop into the foundation of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development twelve months later. After a while, however, the differences between the countries involved and their interests and strategies became more obvious.

The Dialectics of Oil and Democracy

The Georgian leaders used the very-much-needed foreign policy achievements as domestic tools. This first became obvious on the eve of the Kishinev summit when President Saakashvili was first confronted with large-scale opposition actions. Leader of the opposition Labor Party of Georgia Shalva Natelashvili promised a rally that would demand Saakashvili’s resignation in mid-April 2005, the day President George W. Bush was expected in Tbilisi. The rally did take place, but passed unnoticed for obvious reasons.¹² In April, the rightist opposition launched itself into action: the Georgian Conservative Party headed by Koba Davitashvili announced that it intended to collect signatures for President Saakashvili’s resignation.¹³ Since then, pressure on the president has been mounting. The Georgian leaders’ economic policies produced certain results (in 2005, Georgia’s GDP increased by 9.3 percent).¹⁴ The effect, however, is much lower than the popular hopes pinned on the Rose Revolution and its leaders. Recently, Georgia’s permanent economic troubles were augmented by the restrictions Russia imposed on Georgian imported commodities. The promised restored control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia is nowhere in sight. According to certain assessments, the rate of Saakashvili’s United National Movement at the upcoming local elections is about 30 percent.¹⁵ This is much lower than the 66 percent the party that joined with the “democrats” of Nino Burjanadze gained at the parliamentary election in March 2004.¹⁶ This is forcing the Georgian president to rely on foreign policy arguments to bolster his domestic position.

His main argument comes from the West, which looks at Georgia as the leader of democracy in the CIS and the “motherland of the color revolutions.” This logic allows Mikhail Saakashvili to strengthen his position across the former Soviet Union with every new event. It can be said that Georgia’s interest in GUAM was suggested by these considerations as well: Georgia, the “most democratic” country “badly hit by separatism” (there are two “frozen” conflicts on its territory),

¹¹ *Ekspert*, a Russian business weekly, wrote the following in this respect: “The ties between Western Ukraine, the pillar of the present Ukrainian rulers, and the Trans-Dniester Region are much closer than one might imagine. During the war in the area, Ukrainian volunteers, some of them from the western regions, fought side by side with Russian volunteers. During the years of the unrecognized republic’s semi-legal existence, West Ukrainian bureaucrats and businessmen established close contacts with the local elite. This was not limited to the need to maintain transit traffic to Russia and back, but was also promoted by fairly close personal ties and business interests. All types of contacts with the Trans-Dniester Region supply many Ukrainian politicians, Orange politicians, some of them from the close presidential circle, with money” (A. Protopopov, “Seraia zona,” *Ekspert*, No. 10 (504), 13 March, 2006).

¹² Interfax, 10 May, 2005.

¹³ Interfax, 14 April, 2005.

¹⁴ Interfax, 22 March, 2006.

¹⁵ See: [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/651022.html>].

¹⁶ PRIME-TASS, 19 April, 2004.

has logically assumed the leading role in the alliance, which focuses on promoting democracy and fighting separatism. Its real economic and geopolitical status has nothing to do with this. No wonder that since after the Kishinev summit Georgia actively developed contacts with the Belorussian opposition to keep alive the democracy issue across the post-Soviet expanse, which had wilted somewhat at the GUAM summit.

At the same time, the democracy issue cannot develop within GUAM itself. First, the alliance obviously needs more resources to promote democracy, or rather its Georgian-Ukrainian version, elsewhere. Second, and most important, the preparations for the summit demonstrated that the task of creating a regional alliance as an alternative to Moscow's projects contradicts, to a great extent, rigid orientation toward pro-Western and liberal political ideals, which are not approved by many of the post-Soviet regimes.

Significantly, as GUAM develops from an informal alliance into an international structure, the democracy issue loses its pertinence. Late in May 2006, the final document of the Kiev summit spoke of democratization in the most general terms. This provided an unwelcome contrast to the clear and highly specific statements about cooperation in "frozen" conflict settlement and the energy sphere.¹⁷ Georgia and Ukraine are using another organization—the Democratic Choice Community—the two countries set up in August 2005 to present their "democratic" agenda.¹⁸

Azerbaijan has not introduced any dramatic changes into its GUAM strategy: it follows the tactics it used on the eve of the Kishinev summit and prefers to observe the developments rather than actively shape the alliance's policies. At the same time, some of the GUAM partners gave the Azeri president certain reason to believe that drawing too close to the alliance might destabilize his regime.

I have in mind two episodes of the parliamentary election held last fall, which official Baku found very painful. One of them related to the future of Rasul Guliev, the former speaker, who was considered one of the most influential opponents of the ruling regime. Accused of embezzlement at home, he is forced to live in the United States. In mid-October 2005, disregarding the threat of arrest, he decided to return home, but his plane did not reach Baku. It landed, instead, in Simferopol (Ukraine) where Guliev was detained on Baku's request and released several days later. Baku responded in sharp and negative terms. The statement President Aliiev issued read: "The fact that a member of the international mafia, Rasul Guliev, well-known in our country as a thief accused of embezzling over \$117 million of state funds and on the international wanted list, was released after being detained in Ukraine amazed the Azerbaijanian public and caused regret."¹⁹ He added that this would not help cooperation within GUAM. The other episode was caused by the cooperation between the Azeri opposition and the Ukrainian Pora organization, which played an important role in the Orange Revolution. In October 2005, Musavat, an opposition party belonging to the Azadlyg opposition bloc, signed an agreement on mutual understanding and cooperation with the Ukrainian revolutionary structure.²⁰ This caused a lot of concern in the Azeri government, which did not want a repeat of the Georgian or Ukrainian events during or after the parliamentary election. A Pora member who came to Baku was arrested and deported.²¹ Kiev apologized to Baku and had to explain that this organization did not represent Ukraine's foreign policy.²²

Baku is fully aware of the fact that Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova badly need its presence in GUAM. The twelve months that separated the two GUAM summits were filled with problems the three

¹⁷ See: [<http://www.guam.org.ua/181.611.0.0.1.0.phtml>].

¹⁸ Interfax-Ukraina, 12 August, 2005.

¹⁹ Interfax-Ukraina, 4 November, 2005.

²⁰ Interfax-Ukraina, 21 October, 2005.

²¹ Interfax-Azerbaijan, 18 September, 2005.

²² Interfax-Azerbaijan, 17 February, 2005.

countries experienced in their relations with Russia as far as gas issues were concerned. Though some of them were provoked by the governments of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova themselves or invented (this happened in Georgia after the blasts at the main gas pipelines in January 2006), the three governments agreed that they needed alternative sources of energy fuels.²³ This issue is moving to the forefront on the GUAM agenda: for obvious reasons Azerbaijan is indispensable.

The unpleasant episodes with Rasul Guliev and the Pora organization notwithstanding, President Aliiev can rest assured that his regime is safe and will survive in the near future. Today, in fact, Baku can use its GUAM membership to parry accusations of insufficient democracy. Indeed, few people in the West are ready to accuse a member of a pro-Western regional international structure operating in the post-Soviet expanse of authoritarianism.

More than that: as a GUAM member, Azerbaijan remains free from binding economic obligations. The Kiev summit did pass a decision on a free trade area within GUAM,²⁴ but economic cooperation within it remains mainly "virtual." The trade volume among the members is not large, while very costly joint transportation projects are hardly economically efficient. The Odessa-Brody oil pipeline, the largest geo-economic project realized for the sake of GUAM's further development, proved to be an economic failure. The discussion of its possible reversal (today it brings Russian oil to the Odessa terminal to be shipped in tankers through the Black Sea straits), resumed shortly before the Kiev summit, failed to arrive at any specific decision.²⁵ This means that Azerbaijan is safe with its approval of GUAM's economic projects without troubling itself with finding more oil to fill the newly planned pipeline.

The Flourishing Post-Soviet Complexity

Today the GUAM members are no longer setting themselves ambitious aims. Kiev had to abandon its hope of replacing Russia as the leader of the post-Soviet expanse: last fall Iulia Timoshenko lost the post of Ukrainian premier; the Maidan coalition fell apart, and the results of the parliamentary election led to a protracted political crisis.²⁶ The results of the parliamentary election in Azerbaijan in November 2005, as well as the instability that followed the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, devalued the forecasts of a "new democratization wave" in the post-Soviet expanse and undermined the ideological foundation of revived GUAM. Today it survives on the problems in Russia-the West relations and the mounting exacerbation of the problem of the unrecognized states on post-Soviet territory. The Russian "Conservatives" and "hawks" should always keep in mind that their statements, which bring the problems of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Trans-Dniester Region into the context of geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West, encourage GUAM.

²³ The Kiev declaration on setting up the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development-GUAM of 23 May, 2006 said that the member states "declare that economic pressure and monopolization of the energy market cannot be accepted. They emphasize the need to work more actively toward achieving energy security by diversifying the transportation routes for energy fuels from the Central Asian and Caspian regions to the European market," available at [<http://www.guam.org.ua/181.611.0.0.1.0.phtml>], 27 June, 2006.

²⁴ See: [<http://www.guam.org.ua/181.611.0.0.1.0.phtml>], 27 June, 2006.

²⁵ On the eve of the Kiev summit, Ukraine suggested that the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline be extended to Gdansk in Poland to move Caspian oil to the East European markets. "We are convinced that this is a profitable and unique model," said Viktor Iushchenko (Interfax-Ukraine, 12 May, 2006).

²⁶ The second edition of the Orange coalition created by Ms. Timoshenko's second advent as the prime minister will hardly change the situation: the Oranges have lost the political and ideological dynamism that motivated them early in 2005.

At the same time, it should be said that an analysis of the strategies the alliance members have been using in the last couple of years does not confirm the fairly widespread opinion that their foreign policies are subordinated to the West. The leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova cannot ignore the United States and the largest of the EU members; they have to strengthen their relations with that part of the world. This choice, however, offers numerous options suggested by the complicated and dynamically developing interests of the post-Soviet elites. In most cases, pragmatic foreign policy strategies use ideological considerations as tools rather than a driving force.

International relations across the post-Soviet expanse are patchy: there are too many factors and too many contradictions; in future this will become even more obvious. In the near future, for example, we can expect a sharp economic upsurge in Azerbaijan, in contrast to its Trans-Caucasian neighbors. This will obviously create new political contexts.

The post-Soviet states have grown accustomed to being international players—even if of secondary importance. This means that the Russian elite should accept the fact that the future of the post-Soviet expanse can no longer be discussed and settled with the West. To strengthen its influence Moscow should take into account Baku, Tbilisi, Kiev, and other capitals. The West, on the other hand, will discover that the driving forces behind post-Soviet politics are much more complicated than they are usually described in the applications for civil society development grants.