

Postmodern Openings

ISSN: 2068 – 0236 (print), ISSN: 2069 – 9387 (electronic)

Coverd in: Index Copernicus, Ideas RePeC, EconPapers, Socionet,
Ulrich Pro Quest, Cabel, SSRN, Appreciative Inquiry Commons,
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Postmodern Openings, 2014, Volume 5, Issue 1, March, pp: 13-29

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://postmodernopenings.com>

Published by:

Lumen Publishing House

On behalf of:

Lumen Research Center in Social and Humanistic Sciences

Geostrategic Interests of the Russian Federation in Member States of the Eastern Partnership

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Abstract

The twentieth century ended with the disappearance of the empire, the importance of which will be determined only through history. Incredibly, the state formed for over a century, has ceased to exist. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the most immense empire with an area of 22.402 million square kilometers which had direct access to the aquatic areas of three oceans – the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic Ocean, the country which owned land and access routes directly to the European bloc, China and India, with enormous natural resources (Mendeleyev elements table can be found entirely on the Russian territory) produced a geopolitical confusion in the international arena, contributing to the formation of a "black hole" in the center of Eurasia. Nevertheless, Russia remains the country with the largest territorial extent. Also, despite having lost part of its territory, the Russian Federation is still holding geostrategic interests in the ex-Soviet countries.

In this article the intention is to keep under review the geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation in the Member States of the Eastern Partnership, former Soviet republics-Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

Keywords:

Eastern Partnership, geostrategic interest, international arena, area, economic relations, partner.

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Introduction

The twentieth century ended with the disappearance of the empire, the importance of which will be determined only through history. Incredibly, the state formed for over a century, has ceased to exist. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the most immense empire with an area of 22.402 million square kilometers which had direct access to the aquatic areas of three oceans – the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic Ocean, the country which owned land and access routes directly to the European bloc, China and India, with enormous natural resources (Mendeleyev elements table can be found entirely on the Russian territory) produced a geopolitical confusion in the international arena, contributing to the formation of a "black hole" in the center of Eurasia (Brzezinski, 1999). The Russian Federation, the successor of the last empire, currently covers an area of 17 million square kilometers and decreased considerably, encompassing not one sixth of the land but only one eighth of it. (Torkunov, 2004).

However, Russia still remains the state with the largest territorial extent. Russia possesses 60% of the economic potential and 75% of the ex-Soviet territory. Although it occupies the largest area of Eurasia, is a largely continental country rather than an oceanic one (Carpinski, 2007). Also, the collapse of the former USSR resulted in Russia having 150 million inhabitants out of 289 million (which constitutes 2.5% of world population) (Sternik, 2012).

Although some authors argue that the empire fell apart, other researchers point out that it is not appropriate to underestimate Russia which has a significant geographical position and because of that a lot of strategic assets. Therefore, in the present context, it is necessary to know the principles of geopolitics of Russia today.

Russia's geostrategic interests in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

Signed on 7 May, 2009, *the Eastern Partnership* includes six ex-Soviet countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. Although these republics declared independence and are subjects of international law, yet not too distant past and relations with the Russian Federation make the former union center to aspire to maintain influence in these countries.

The only country that even from the period of gaining its independence, openly declares its intention to maintain relations with the Russian Federation is the Republic of Belarus. First, the Russian Federation has a keen interest in Belarus, which has a great transit potential due to its geostrategic position, being at the crossroads of railways and highways, oil and gas pipelines, airways between the developed Europe and Asia rich in natural resources. Given the western strategies Belarus is a buffer zone between the European Union and the Russian Federation. According to some western sources, this area should be freed from economic relations with the Russian Federation, which would have harsh repercussions on the economy of Russia. Through communication pathways of Belarus 70% of trade and economic relations are made between Russia and the European area (the export of energy resources). Belneftekhim Concern annually pumps 85 million tons of oil and gas to European countries. Businesses in Gomel and Novopoloțk are part of the pipeline "Druzhba" which provides 80% of export transportation fuels to Germany, Poland, the Baltic states and Ukraine.

Also, two Russian military facilities on the territory of Belarus present a geostrategic interest. The radio-controlled station "Volga", part of the anti-missile system placed in Gantevici (the Brest area) has been in use since 1 October, 2003. It has coverage of the North East area and has the potential to track ballistic missile launch in Europe. The second strategic objective is Russian communication node located at Vileiki (Minsk region), which retransmits the radio waves designed for the navy and the underwater fleet in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. Similar stations were built in the Soviet period in Latvia, Ukraine, Caucasus, Krasnoyarsk region, which were intended to be united in the so-called "ring of defense" that, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union remained on the territory of those States being subsequently destroyed or liquidated. In this context, Belarus is the only state that allowed Russia the construction of the space research station which is considered the property of the Belarus. In case of a political turnover of Belarus towards NATO, these stations can become part of the North Atlantic Alliance and the construction of such stations on the Russian territory would take time and huge investments (according to some estimates 20-25 billion required) . Also the Russian military defence

complex collaborates with 120 Belarus enterprises to produce 1,600 special destination units (Godin, 2007).

For the time being, Belarus remains the principal strategic partner of Russia in the western part. Russia shall endeavor to maintain the partnership and not to allow the emergence of a new NATO member western border. Currently, in the opinion of Godin, Belarus is "Brest fortress" of the Russian Federation in the western part of its border. Occupying 0.9% of the ex-Soviet Union, Belarus openly and strongly advocates cooperation with the Russian Federation. Already on February 21, 1995, in Minsk an agreement of friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation was signed between the Russian Federation and Belarus for a period of ten years, and on April 2, 1996 the Agreement establishing the Union Russia – Belarus was signed. On April 2, 1997, in Moscow the presidents of the two countries signed the "Agreement Russian Federation Union - Belarus", and on 23 May - Union Status.

Thus, under Article 3 of the Statute states that "the prospects for Union cooperation focuses on the benevolent unification of the States participating and principles of international law", so status, as well Union in particular, more declarative, form and content and does not correspond to the actual needs and requirements of the Russian Federation and Belarus. The primary role of the Union and it was for ensuring a dynamic development, the creation of a common economic space and favorable conditions for agriculture, the creation of common infrastructure (transport and energy provision system, creating common information). The financial sector is expected to create a single currency, a single tax system, and creating conditions for the Implementation of a single currency.

In the commercial sphere, the focus is on mutual trade, forming a single customs system used in relations with third countries, the creation of a single trade, as well as introducing unified tariffs. In this context, the Union shall provide for the establishment of a union between the two countries. Also the need to develop and implement fully a program of achieving market reforms is further declared, taking into account the features and the development of each participating state. Although the new strategy includes directions for cooperation, it does not indicate the terms and mechanisms for achieving objectives.

Therefore, most initiatives have remained more declarative without being implemented into practice.

If we look at the Russia-Belarus relations, the Russian Federation remains the main economic partner of Belarus. According to the Trade Chamber of Russia and Belarus, about 8,000 Russian and Belarusian agencies depend on mutual production being created about 3 million jobs in Russia. Trade remains the strength of relations between Russia and Belarus. The Russian exports to Belarus were 36.5 % in 2007 from 45.5 % in 1995. The share of imports in 1995 was 53.29 % , is currently 59.94 % and in relations with CIS increased six times, i.e. 17.4 % of total exports and constitute \$ 10.7 billion , of which Russians and returns 36.5 % and 46.1% CIS . Russian main import products are trucks, tractors, refrigerators, meat and dairy products, automobile parts, furniture, metal products, transformers, footwear, cookers, technical roads TVs. On the basis of Russian exports to Belarus are oil products and natural gas, electricity, remnants and black metals (Ärgașev, 2012).

Such a structure allows the Belarusian foreign trade to keep the economy formed in the USSR times. On the territory of Belarus there are currently working 579 companies with Russian capital, including 54 joint venture companies located in six free economic zones - Brest, Minsk, Gomel-Raton, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Grodnoinvest (Andronova, 2010, pp.93-98).

The concern for the Russian Federation is the loss of Ukraine - which also means a loss of potential rich agricultural and industrial economies, and 52 million of people close ethnically and religiously to the Russian people. Ukrainian independence deprived Russia of its dominant position in the Black Sea, where Odessa was vital for Mediterranean trade and the world beyond it. Losing Ukraine is a loss of geopolitical pivot because it limited the geostrategic options for Russia. And by keeping control of Ukraine, Russia could still try to be the leader of an arrogant Eurasian empire that Moscow would have dominant non-Slavs in southern and south-eastern USSR.

Loss of dominance in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea is repeated not only because of the independence of Ukraine, but also because of independence of the Caucasian states - Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaidjan. Before 1991, the Black Sea was the starting point of Russian naval power in the Mediterranean. By the mid 90s it had only a small strip of Black Sea coast and unsolved dispute with Ukraine over the right to keep bases

in Crimea the remnants of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. Following the Russian-Turkish wars, Russia gained access to the Black Sea in 1783. At the beginning of the twentieth century but also during the Second World War 1941-1945 the Black Sea fleet was one of the main military forces. Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, its maritime fleet becomes heritage for CIS and on April 5 by signing the Decree regarding "the means of constitution of the maritime forces of Ukraine" by the Ukrainian president, according to which, the Black Sea fleet went under jurisdiction of Ukraine and on this basis armed forces of Ukraine were formed".

Russia's reaction was immediate. Already on 7 April the same year the Russian President issues decree stating that the Black Sea fleet passes under Russian jurisdiction. This problem was disputed for a period of seven years. Only on May 28, 1997 the states signed parameters regarding the division of the Black Sea Fleet "the status and conditions of the Russian fleet in Ukraine," mutual calculations regarding the division of the Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine". All these agreements were concluded for a period of 20 years, with the possibility to be extended automatically for a period of five years, where if one side will not require its termination. These agreements allowed the signing of Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on 31 May 1997. Under these agreements, maritime fleet will not hold nuclear weapons in its arsenal. The purpose of their stay on the territory of the Black Sea is ensuring security and maritime exploration path.

Currently, there are 388 units in the Black Sea. Practically 70 % of Russian infrastructure maritime fleet in the Black Sea is in the Crimea. It also has maritime fleet in Sevastopol dislocation (Sevastopoliscaia, Iujnaia, Karantinaia, Kazakh), Feodosia and Nikolaev – for vessel repair. It also influences the Russian military potential of this area. Director of the CIS Institute states that in August 1992 the fleet in the Black Sea were 894 vessels, maritime aviation numbered 400 aircraft, ground forces had 28 missile shields, 258 medium tanks, 826 armored cars, 457 artillery systems. Coverage of the air fleet was made by AAF forces (anti-aircraft forces). In those conditions the fleet was located on the Black Sea from the Danube delta up to Batumi. Its bases were located over a length of 1750 km length and a depth of 200 km. Also, the defense system also included bases in Bulgaria, Syria, Egypt and

other countries in the Mediterranean, which constitutes a ratio of 2.5:1 in favor of the USSR.

In 1997 already, the capacity of the maritime fleet is reduced considerably (in its current composition there is only a submarine) the shore division is reformed and bases in the cities of Simferopol, Yevpatoria, towns and Mejgorie Perevalinoe are lost. Also there is a decrease in Marine Forces Brigade with 31 tanks remaining (it decreased 8 times), 211 armored cars (reduced by 4 times), 54 weapons and mine launchers (reduced 6 times), and maritime aviation was liquidated entirely. Part of air forces was transferred to Novorossiisk region. All these reductions show considerable weakening of maritime and military power of Russia in the Black Sea.

In this context, one can mention the Ukraine's request to take under its jurisdiction all the naval and hydrographic objects motivating the responsibility for swimming security in the aquatic territories belonging to Ukraine. As a result of the submitted requirements the liquidation and withdrawal of Russian objects took place. There are also claims coming from the Crimean Property Fund, under which, the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation illegal uses 96 items Crimea. Another requirement of Ukraine refers to the rent costs of the bases on territory of which the Russian naval forces are deployed. Although the agreement contains a fixed amount of 97 mln USD, annually Kiev quite regularly raises this issue, strongly sustaining their positions. Thus, it is obvious that the present Black Sea navy is hostage to the disputes among the two countries - the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

One problem, no less important in Russian-Ukrainian relations concerns the delimitation of maritime borders between states in Kercensk Strait and the Azov Sea. Until the collapse of the USSR the Azov Sea was a national sea and under the principles of international law the Kercensk Strait belonged to internal waters. The boundaries of the region of Crimea and Krasnodar, as parts of a state were purely nominal. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union in the international arena, this border became an interstate one and the Kercensk Strait with Tuzla Island passed under the jurisdiction of Ukraine. In these circumstances, the military marine and civil vessels have to pay a transit and exploitation tax to pass the strait to Rostov, Taganrog, Eisk, Temriuk, the Caucasus port (about 2000 vessels pass it annually). Ukraine, thus has 70 % of Azov aquatic area rich in various species of fish, the breeding of which is

undertaken by Russia alone having its priority in exploring mineral resources on the coast as well as approximately 120 gas and oil. Since 1992 some negotiations have been held, but so far the issue remains unresolved, which lead to disputes and conflict situations (Andronova, 2010, pp.109-111).

The Russian Federation is also limited by joint military naval and land maneuvers of NATO and Ukraine, including the growing role of Turkey in the Black Sea. The new country has got 39 new air engineering enterprises built in the USSR period, of which 28 manufacture parts and 11 of them specialize in repairing all types of aircraft. If in Soviet times planes were manufactured as many as 350 annually now their number has decreased to 300 aircrafts of the type An- 24, An- 26, An- 32 and about 1,500 helicopters Mi-8, Mi-24, Ka -25. Tank construction industry is important for the Ukrainian economy. T - 80UD tanks manufactured at the plant Malisev can compete successfully on international markets. Another great potential it has is also the ship building industry. If in Soviet times the Ukrainian plants produced 30% of all vessels and 40 % by their amount, currently these plants have specialized in the construction of different vessels - from patrol cutters to submarines and aircraft carriers. Thus, it can be concluded that Ukraine has inherited a strong aircraft and maritime industry, which has a competitive potential and is ranked 6th in the world in the export of arms (after the U.S., Russia, France , Britain and Germany).

Yet, despite divergent relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, Russia remains the main economic partner of Ukraine. It is also noted that Ukraine enters the list of the ten main partners of the Russian Federation. It is notable that in the Russia-Ukraine relations, the Russian part in the Ukrainian import decreased from 37.6% to 27.8% and it is characterized by the increasing European quote from 23.0% to 28.2% and for Asian states from 3.8% to 14%. The more so, in trade relations with Ukraine, Russia's quote tends to shrink - from 26.8%. Also, for the integration processes in the post-Soviet area, the trends are of decreasing the quotes for the former Soviet republics in Ukrainian exports - from 51.4% in 1996 to 37.0% in 2007 and imports from 63.5% to 42.2%.

It also refers to the EU, as the trade relations quotes with Ukraine in 2007 constituted 32.9% versus 24.4% in 1996. Considering the decrease of balance in trade between the EU and Ukraine, if in 2003

the balance rate was 820 million USD, then by 2007 it decreased considerably. Such a situation cannot satisfy EU countries. Currently, the EU-Ukraine dialogue goes on creating a free trade zone. Also, Ukraine is an important partner for China (rate of trade balance was - 2.8754 billion; China is the 4th largest trading partner of Ukraine).

Even with economic cooperation, Russia and Ukraine remain to be competing not only internationally but also regionally. Thus, the metallurgical industry and food engineering, including agriculture remain to be in competition. Contradiction lies in the energy sector, which largely depends on the budget of the Russian Federation and the Ukraine is a competitor, both on foreign markets and the domestic ones. Therefore, signing the free trade agreement between the parties encountered great difficulties. Moreover, the cooling of relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation was conditional on Ukraine's desire to join the NATO military bloc, by the provision of pro-Western and anti-Russian delivery by creating economic zone GUAM. All this helps maintain a tense situation between the parties - the imposition of Russian tax and customs duties, as well as bans on Ukrainian products (candy, fruit, dairy products, margarine and butter). In turn, Ukraine takes similar measures - imposing high excise duties on Russian cars and increasing production by supporting local producers, especially by producing cars "Avto ZAZ –Daewoo". Lately, the Russian VAZ has reduced sales on the Ukrainian market, which also has a negative impact on the Russian economy – the figure diminishes from 54 % to 37 %.

If we examine the structure of Russian exports to Ukraine, we see 58% of it constituting the exported mineral products, Russia being a regular provider of energy recourses for the economy of Ukraine, which also allows operation of Ukrainian enterprises, but also the functioning of the agricultural sector. Also, Russia is not only the main supplier of energy resources to Ukraine, but also the only transit corridor for transporting coal from Central Asia area. Car industry is placed on the second place in this country, and here electrical machinery, vehicles and aircraft may be exposed, which are unquestionably important.

The structure of the Ukrainian export to the Russian Federation is characterized by the presence of a more balanced and stable market place, Russia remaining the main economic partner. It should be noted that despite large diameter pipes, the Ukrainian car industry plays an

important role in the Russian economy. Still food is severely criticized on Russian markets, making Russia take respective measures (banning export of dairy products in 2006 and 2007 including animal products, and the embargo to chocolate products in 2013). The investment sector situation deserves special attention too, Russia being the seventh. Currently in Ukraine there are 1633 enterprises with Russian capital. Other investments are for the health sector, metalworking industry, agriculture and construction (Anrdonova, 2010, pp.118-133).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 is not merely an unfortunate series of events in a faraway land, but a serious threat to European stability and, more broadly, the rules-based international order. Ukraine is not a NATO member, but it is unquestionably a part of Europe (Cecire, 2014).

Another ex -Union country is the Republic of Moldova. Currently, there are reasons that could explain the assiduous efforts of the Russian Federation to keep Moldova in reach of influence. During the USSR, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) still had a military and strategic importance. Representing the southwest border of the USSR, Soviet Moldova was attributed to the Odessa military district designed primarily for the role of the main bastion in case of aggression in the southwest region. In addition, Moldova's territory served as a bridgehead for future offensive operations towards the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, the Suez Canal and the North African coast as a secondary strategic objective. The disintegration of the USSR and Ukrainian independence diminished the strategic importance of the new Moldovan state. Moldova has ceased to be a "bridge to the Balkans". It became clear, especially after the establishment of a democratic regime in Serbia, the last supposed ally of Russia in the region, and the orientation of Serbia to the EU.

Moldova's small territory does not allow it to declare itself "the crossroads of trade routes between East and West". Moldova has no natural resources of a strategic nature. The food that Moldova exports to Russia is not of major importance for the Russian food market. A particular economic interest is represented only by some wine business enterprises and tobacco processing. We can also assume that the Transnistrian "black hole" and the corruptibility of public officials might be the interest of that Russian capital which often has a dubious origin, Moldova fulfilling many of the features of an "off-shore" zone.

Nor does the negative attitude (the interest that this area could represent for the adversary's strategies) towards Moldova have a valid support. Moldova's reduced strategic value is attested by the absence of a military infrastructure which could be used in a possible conflict between Russia and NATO. In addition, access Russia's access to Transnistria is blocked by Ukraine, which seldom adopts a different policy regarding Moldova. Nor does the presence of Russian troops in Moldova seem to be a pretty convincing argument to explain the Russian interest towards the Republic of Moldova. In this case, Moldova could be used by Russia to control Romania and Ukraine. However, Romania's policy in the last decade, the adherence to Euro-Atlantic security and economic structures leaves no room for different speculations on the change of the foreign policy vector (Anrdonova, 2010, pp.300-320).

It should be noted that the Moldovan-Russian relations have been deeply influenced by two issues: the illegal military presence and the Transnistrian conflict. The Russian military presence problem appeared in political and legal terms when the Moldovan President Decree nr.234 of November 14, 1992, under which the weapons, ammunition, vehicles, military equipment, military bases and other property belonging to military units of the Soviet Army stationed in the republic were declared the property of the Republic of Moldova. On March 18, 1992, Decree No. 73 issued by President Snegur stipulated that "in order to create the basis for the establishment of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova", the former Soviet military units stationed in Moldova were put under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Moldova to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic "with all equipment, weapons, buildings and other property located in the balance of military units." Ignoring the decrees of the President Mircea Snegur, on 1 April 1992, Boris Yeltsin, the Russian president issued Decree No.220 "On passing the military units of the Armed Forces of the USSR under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation temporarily located in the Republic of Moldova". Under this decree, "the 14th Army Guard, formations, military units and institutions of the former Soviet Armed Forces on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and which became part of its armed forces were put under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and subordination of the supreme command of the Unified Armed Forces of the CIS. Moving troops under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation is explained by the following reasons: to maintain a

stable leadership and ensure the functioning of the troops, to prevent the involvement of troops in ethnic conflicts, to protect socially the military and their families" (Gribincea, 1999)

Geostrategic interests in the Caucasus region of the Russian Federation

The loss of the Caucasus revived fears for Turkey's strategic emergence, the loss of Central Asia has generated a sense of impoverishment, given the enormous energy and mineral resources of the region, as well as the fear of a possible challenge from Islam and the independence of Ukraine challenged the essence of Russia's claims to have international status of being the next superpower in the world, now regarded only as a regional power.

Georgia has a wide opening to the Black Sea where it has two major ports - Sukhumi and Batumi. On the other hand, the geopolitical position of Georgia has increased due to the discovery of energy resources in the Caspian Sea, the country located on one of the main roads for the Caspian oil to the Black Sea and from there, to Europe. Georgia, a relatively small country with an area approximately equal to that of Ireland (70000 square km), where live about 5.5 million inhabitants. It became part of Russia at the beginning of the 19th century, with a few years exception after the First World War. Until the 1990s it had an above average standard of living compared to the other Union republics. Along with Moldova it produced the best wines in the former Soviet Union and had a massive export. In addition, the Georgians provided the Russian market with vegetables.

Georgia declared its independence in 1991 and so did some provinces of the country at the same time. The first to declare independence was South Ossetia. Ossetians are a Caucasian nation who lives in two provinces - North Ossetia, Russian integrated with 600,000 inhabitants and South Ossetia, part of Georgia, with 100,000 inhabitants, 65% of which are Ossetians and 35% are Georgians. South Ossetia declared its independence and was not recognized by Georgia, which caused the outbreak of a military conflict (which ended with the accession of Georgia to the CIS in 1993). Following the same scenario the conflict in Abkhazia took place, another region within Georgia - 540.000 inhabitants, 17 % of which are Abkhazians , Georgians 43% and 17 % Russian, having capital in Sukhumi. Abkhazia declared its

independence and Tbilisi did not recognize the decision, thus an armed conflict broke out, Abkhazians being supported by “volunteers” in the North Caucasus. The fact is that, on 14 May 1994 in Moscow the ceasefire agreement was signed which provided for the establishment of a security zone to deploy the CIS peacekeeping forces. Being countries of the same Orthodox religion they should have distinguished relations.

The geostrategic importance of Georgia is also characterized by two reasons – the oil pipeline directed to the Russian port of Novorossiisk passes on its territory, whereas Georgia also has a border with Chechnya on a length of 130 km. Georgia's strategic importance lies in the fact that its territory serves as one of the two routes that cross the North Caucasus and reach the Black Sea. Abkhazia's significance is even bigger because it is situated on the Black Sea coastline and the port of Batumi is located on its territory. On the other hand, its territory was designed for the pipelines to pass Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan and Baku - Soupsa and Nabucco gas pipeline (Baku - Erzurum). Georgia also possesses several Black Sea ports (Soukhoumi, Poti, Soupsa, Koulevi and Batumi), which have become very active in exporting oil to the West. Russia does not control the supply routes, as happens with routes from the northern Caucasus (Baku - Novorossiisk). The importance of this area comes from considerations of geopolitical strategies of major powers that dispute their spheres of influence. Thus, Georgia is taken into account because it is:

a) energy corridor to the West.

The construction of the Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan (BTC), Baku - Tbilisi – Erzurum pipelines and Karas – Akhalkalai highway are part of a plan to capitalize Georgia geostrategic position between Europe and Asia. In geoeconomic terms, Georgia is located on the shortest route linking Europe and Asia , meaning that the territorial proximity transposed to other projects such as TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) - projects that make visible the Western economic interests in the country's economic development. Caspian basin energy potential requires that these resources be transported through a branched pipeline system, some of which had to cross Georgian territory. Currently, Georgia has two maritime terminals through which the Caspian oil is transported to other areas. One is located at Supsa with

a capacity of 200,000 barrels per day, and one in Batumi port, with the same capacity.

Georgia is an essential energy corridor to the West and with other transit states have an obligation to ensure the safety of oil and gas pipelines that start in the Azerbaijan area of the Caspian Sea. The pipes are of great importance for the EU, because they reduce the dependence on Russian supplies and do not cross Russian territory. Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan pipeline has a total length of 1,768 km, 443 km of which cross Azerbaijan, 249 – Georgia and 1076 km cross Turkey. They cross many mountains that reach heights of up to 2,830 meters and 3,000 cross roads, useful lines and 1,500 waterways with the widths of up to 500 meters (e.g. river Ceyhan in Turkey). The pipeline occupies a corridor 8 meters and is buried along its entire route at a depth of at least one meter. Parallel to the BTC there is the South Caucasus pipeline, which transports natural gas from the Sanganchal Terminal up to Erzerum, Turkey. It has a projected exploiting term for a period of 40 years starting in 2009, carrying a million barrels (160,000 cubic meters) of oil per day. It has a capacity of 10 million barrels of oil that would flow through the pipeline to 2 meters per second. There are eight pumping stations along the pipeline (2 in Azerbaijan, Georgia in 2 and 4 in Turkey) . The project cost \$ 3.9 billion, 70 % of the costs were financed by third-party - The World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the credit agencies operating in seven countries and a syndicate of 15 commercial banks.

b) access corridor to Iran and Syria

Since the Caspian Sea (one of the largest oil and gas fields in the world) is a large enclosed lake, the transport of oil to the Western market is difficult. In Soviet times all routes were built by Russia. A pipeline going through Iran from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf would be the shortest route, but Iran was considered an unwanted member for several reasons (theocratic government, nuclear program, U.S. sanctions are restricting Western investment in the country). Therefore, beyond the significance of Georgia's energy position, we should also mention the importance of this country in terms great powers' access to Iran and Syria, countries with major geopolitical weight in the Arab world with close military and nuclear partnerships with the Russian Federation and a significant economic, human and military potential. Moreover, Russian experts have acknowledged that the strategic partners with which Russia

manages to oppose Western geopolitical plans in Asia are Armenia and Iran. Despite the coincidence of Russian and Iranian plans on Caspian energy resources, Iran keeps steady bilateral relations with Georgia, showing the same interest in positioning Georgia as energy transport hub. Also, the U.S. has a vested interest in the diversification of routes of access to the Persian area both for emergency situations (military intervention), and to establish a bridgehead for controlling Russian relations with Iran and Syria.

c) control area of major frozen conflicts

In the geopolitical sense, the position of Georgia is the key to its importance for the entire South Caucasus, especially when taken into consideration and the conflict between two countries in the region - Armenia and Azerbaijan. Due to its location in the midst of nations with systemic risk factors, and a very high degree of corruption, it has left the way open for the development of this country. "The Rose Revolution" had as its most important result the increase of international confidence in a country which proclaimed its adherence to democratic values. Maintaining frozen conflicts is a geopolitical priority for the Russian Federation, as they are very important regional control levers, monitoring or the military involvement in those conflicts of this power being provided by bilateral agreements. Overall, Georgia may be considered a geopolitical "bridgehead" for the development of regional business and promoting economic interests regarding the area's marketplace, exploiting the mineral resources in the area, the use of workforce etc. (Țăranu, 2011).

Armenia has about 4 million inhabitants, has no outlet to the sea or other important ways of communicating. Three of the four neighboring states are Islamic (Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran), and from Georgia it is divided by a mountain crossed by a railway which cannot carry more than a quarter of the country's trade. Basically Armenia holds a similar position as Nepal and Lesotho - without access to a significant communication. Therefore, the main solution for survival is a good relationship with the Russian Federation.

The largest Caucasian state, *Azerbaijan* (8 million people) suffered from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, being defeated by a smaller state and losing an important territory. Nagorno-Karabakh region was an enclave within Azerbaijan (out of 190 000 inhabitants 80% are Armenian and 20% are Azerbaijanis). In 1920, the Congress of Armenians in

Nagorno-Karabakh decides on the unification of this area with Armenia, and later, after Stalin's intervention, the territory was ceded to Azerbaijan (a practice used for Moldova – the North and the South being taken and ceded to Ukraine). In the early 90's there were demonstrations of Armenians in the enclave in favor of unification with Armenia, reaching to the open conflict. Thus, in spring 1993 offensive of ethnic Armenians breaks out, after which two corridors connecting Armenia were opened and 10% of Azerbaijani territory was conquered. A year later, in 1994, an Agreement between the parties was signed in Moscow. As a direct neighbor of Iran, Azerbaijan's strategic importance has increased with the discovery of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan is developing ties with the West, especially the U.S. In this context, Western countries are interested in relations with Azerbaijan (Dobrescu, 2008).

Conclusions

The disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of 15 new independent states on its territory generated a completely new geopolitical and geostrategic situation for Russia. Thus, Russia has found itself "pushed deep inside Eurasia" actually perceived as something unacceptable for the country that for centuries has played a major role in international and European politics. Russian borders in the Caucasus were reduced to the ones it had in the early nineteenth century, in Central Asia to the borders it had by the middle of the same century and to the West, the borders it had around 1600 immediately after the reign of Ivan the Terrible. However, claiming to be further qualified as a great power; Russia aspires to regain the status of past times, the superpower status. In order to achieve this, Russia has used varied political economic and military pressure in its relations with the former Soviet republics.

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