

Everything but Article 5: NATO-Georgia and NATO- Ukraine Relations amid the New Strategic Context

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Executive Summary

Amid the rising conventional and non-conventional threats, NATO initiated the reflection process to adopt the new Strategic Concept and better situate itself in the coming decade. Resurgent Russia, rising China, emerging threats of climate change, technology and health and stark political differences among allies necessitated the reinvigoration of the political cohesion of the Alliance. Russia's annexation of Crimea led to NATO's increased presence in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Alliance and the further enhancement of the partnerships.

As part of forging its new role and purpose, NATO needs to address the question of Georgia and Ukraine's accession to the Alliance; the aspirant states that at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 were promised an eventual membership, causing Russia's ardent opposition. Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 demonstrated the difficulty of delivering on the membership promise, leaving the alliance walking on a tightrope.

Trying to meet the membership aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine on the one hand and addressing Russia's opposition to the enlargement process on the other, the Alliance has pursued the policy of Everything-but -Article 5 vis-a-vis these countries: that is, extending strong political and practical support while refraining from offering either Membership Action Plan or the eventual membership in the foreseeable future. Although Georgia and Ukraine continue to seek immediate membership as they face aggressive Russia, Russia's opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement, allied disunity on the benefits of the enlargement and Georgia and Ukraine's territorial conflicts with Russia pose strategic limitations on the fulfilment of their declared foreign policy objectives.

Meanwhile, NATO, Georgia and Ukraine cooperate extensively within the frameworks of respective NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine commissions, with Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine guiding practical cooperation in the security and defence sectors. Georgia and Ukraine have been significant contributors to the NATO-led operations, increasing their interoperability with NATO forces. Since Russia annexed Crimea, enhancing Black Sea security and forging resilience has become part of NATO-Georgia-Ukraine's common agenda. Cooperation between Visegrad states and Georgia and Ukraine remains limited, while the possibilities of further practical cooperation in support of Georgia and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations are on standby.

Further development of NATO-Georgia-Ukraine relations depends on the strategic environment and the degree to which Russia maintains its opposition to the eastward enlargement. While NATO should continue its adherence to the Open Door Policy and commit to Georgia and Ukraine's sovereign aspirations to join the Alliance, Georgia and Ukraine should focus their efforts on the consolidation of democracy and forging resilient states and society to better deal with both strategic challenges and opportunities.

Introduction

With the adoption of the NATO 2030 Agenda¹ and the subsequent decision during the 2021 Brussels Summit to update the current Strategic Concept², NATO has started deliberations on how it is going to fare in the coming decade amid the renewed strategic and non-strategic challenges.

Developments in the last decade necessitated the major re-evaluation of NATO's role and purpose in the world, including stressing the Alliance's internal political cohesion, updating strategies to engage with outside challengers and placing the organization's role in the world where evident non-conventional challenges of climate, technology and healthcare add to the conventional challenges of conflict and instability brought by the actions of both state and non-state actors.

Looking at its role and the future, NATO has to also deal with the question of enlargement; the process that some see as a source for stability, while others see as giving way to further escalation and instability. Debates on NATO's enlargement have been ongoing since the end of the Cold War. The most contested aspirant states are Georgia and Ukraine who have often been described as the 'states in-between'; that is, states that are in a liminal position—struggling to fully distance with the Soviet past but failing to fully make it to the Western world.

NATO 2030 Agenda voices clear support for the organization's Open Door Policy.³ Georgia, Ukraine and Bosnia-Herzegovina are currently recognized as aspirant states, enjoying the Alliance's political, practical and discursive support. In 2008, at the Bucharest Summit, Georgia and Ukraine have been promised that they will become members of the Alliance.⁴ Although NATO has since reiterated that the promise holds, Georgia and Ukraine still need to get the Membership Action Plan before they are invited as members. Both of these steps require political consensus that NATO Allies are currently lacking.

¹ NATO. 2021. "NATO 2030: Making a strong Alliance even stronger." Last accessed December 12, 2021. <https://www.nato.int/nato2030/>

² NATO. 2010. "Strategic Concept." Last Accessed December 12, 2021. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf

³ NATO. 1949. "The North Atlantic Treaty." Accessed December 12, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm

⁴ NATO. 2008. "Bucharest Summit Declaration." Last accessed December 12, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

The lack of consensus on admitting Georgia and Ukraine leaves the question of how NATO should engage with these states to maintain organizational credibility; defend the notion that states are free to choose their security arrangements against Russian proposals to base European security architecture on the sphere of influence approach while being aware of the structural and domestic factors that put Georgia and Ukraine on an irreversible NATO membership aspiration path.

This paper aims at understanding NATO's policy vis-a-vis Georgia and Ukraine amid the new strategic context and the concomitant debates about NATO's role in the coming decade. It also looks at the evolution in relations and Georgia and Ukraine's immediate priorities vis-a-vis NATO. The paper then tries to map the areas where both NATO and eastern partners' priorities coincide, giving way to the possible practical ways forward in their relations. The paper also aims at understanding the role that Visegrad 4 (V4) states play in advancing Georgia and Ukraine's NATO integration efforts. To do so, the paper consults with the primary and secondary sources and draws further insights from several interviews held with the policymakers and the subject experts.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The paper first overviews NATO 2030 vision and defines the new strategic context. It then reviews the current state of NATO-Georgia-Ukraine relations. The discussion of NATO, Ukraine and Georgia's immediate priorities in their relations with each other follows. The paper then maps out the common areas of practical cooperation. The next section discusses the role V4 states have been playing, and can continue to play, in bringing Ukraine and Georgia closer to NATO. The paper ends with some conclusions and policy recommendations.

NATO 2030, the New Strategic Context and the Enlargement Question

On November 25, 2020, as part of the NATO 2030 agenda, the Reflection Group, appointed by NATO Secretary-General, published its final report providing analysis of the security environment from 2010 to 2030 and issuing relevant recommendations to better situate NATO in the new security landscape that emerged over the past decade. The report stressed the need for the Alliance to maintain a political cohesion “to consolidate the transatlantic Alliance for an era of strategic simultaneity, in which numerous interconnected threats face the Alliance at the same time”.⁵ It has also described the nature of ‘strategic simultaneity’- that is, traditional challenges coming from state actors (first and foremost

⁵ NATO. 2020. “NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General.” p.10. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf

Russia; then China as a systemic rival) and non-traditional security threats caused, among others, by terrorism, hybrid warfare, emerging and disruptive technologies, climate change, pandemics and the natural disasters. The report comes up with general and practical recommendations as to how the Alliance could find its ‘political purpose’ to better respond to the old and new security threats.⁶ Its insights are likely to inform the content and the focus of the Alliance’s next Strategic Concept.

This paper acknowledges the importance of non-conventional threats that NATO and its member states face; however, it takes the state-centric view and defines the new strategic context as an emerging geopolitical competition between NATO and its allies on the one hand and Russia and China on the other. This is largely due to the fact that the issue at hand- Georgia and Ukraine’s relations with NATO- by definition places a premium on the interstate aspect of international politics while not excluding the significant role that non-conventional threats play as the geopolitical interactions develop. That said, threats coming from Russia and China (to a lesser extent for this paper), discussed below, are key variables of the new strategic context affecting NATO’s strategic thinking in general and vis-à-vis Georgia and Ukraine in particular.

Russia ‘that will respond’⁷

The strategic context has indeed changed over the past decade. The Strategic Concept adopted by the Alliance in 2010 sought, in the spirit of the then-dominant mode of resetting relations with Russia, ‘a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia’, ignoring the first signs of Russia’s revisionism- the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and its consequences for the European security. With Vladimir Putin coming back to formal power, the growing Russian-Western differences over the Arab Spring and, most importantly, Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, ignoring Russia’s revisionist posture has become impracticable.

NATO’s response to the annexation of Crimea included the reinforcement of its presence in the Baltic states and Poland as well as the acknowledgement of the importance of the Black Sea region for the security of NATO members. Russia posed further ‘hybrid’ challenges to the Allies causing disruptions in their democracies, using chemical weapons to execute political persecutions at home and abroad and increasing its strategic foothold in the Middle East and the South Caucasus.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Burns, William. 2019. “How the U.S.-Russia relationship went bad: An American diplomat tells the inside story of Yeltsin, Putin, and opportunities lost.” *The Atlantic*, April, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/william-j-burns-putin-russia/583255/>

NATO's current approach towards Russia, likely to be reflected in the new Strategic Concept to be adopted at the Madrid Summit in 2022, builds on the 'dual-track' engagement with Russia as suggested by the Reflection Group. That in effect means the following: contain Russia where it needs to be contained, engage with Russia where it needs to be engaged. This is best conveyed by M.E. Sarotte's 'light is particle, light is wave' analogy acknowledging 'the two compelling truths' that should guide the US engagement with Russia: "Washington's highest priority should be the peoples formerly dominated by Moscow; Washington's highest priority should be Moscow."⁸

In practice, and particularly concerning Georgia and Ukraine whose membership aspirations are the most contested by Russia, this means NATO sitting on the fences: It has to on the one hand deliver on its promise made during the Bucharest Summit- and by doing so defend its Open Door Policy and the right of states to choose their security arrangements- and on the other hand engage with Russia to avoid instability and further deterioration in the Western-Russian relations. Russia's recent deployment of its forces near the Ukrainian border and the demands of 'legal guarantees' that NATO will not expand eastwards point to the salience of Ukraine and Georgia's place in NATO's discussions of its vision for 2030 and beyond.

China that no longer rises peacefully

NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept did not mention China at all and there was a good reason for it. At that time, China was increasingly seen as accepting of the rules-based international order led by the Western states. China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 and became the second world economy in 2010, while also increasing its military and scientific-technological power.⁹ Until the mid-2010s the US remained confident that it could stay ahead of China both economically and militarily, seeing economic interdependence as an instrument to liberalize China politically and economically and by doing so reducing China's incentives to challenge the US's global primacy.¹⁰ However, things changed with the rise of Xi Jinping, who increased the role of the Party-State in the economy to the detriment of market reforms and asserted China's more expansive role in global affairs.¹¹ China's rising military, technological, political and economic power - demonstrated by territorial disputes

⁸ Sarotte, M.E. 2021. *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*. Yale University Press. p.4

⁹ Foot, Rosemary. 2019. "China's rise and US hegemony: Renegotiating hegemonic order in East Asia?." *International Politics*, p.4-5

¹⁰ Foot, Rosemary and King, Amy. 2019. "Assessing the deterioration in China-U.S. relations: U.S. governmental perspectives on the economic-security Nexus." *China International Strategy Review*, p.5

¹¹ Foot, Rosemary and King, Amy. 2019. "Assessing the deterioration in China-U.S. relations: U.S. governmental perspectives on the economic-security Nexus." *China International Strategy Review*, p.5

in the South and East China seas, the Belt and Road Initiative, the establishment of parallel international financial institutions, the use of coercive diplomacy to advance its political interests and growing violation of human rights at home - have led to the realization that China represents a sole systemic challenge to the liberal international order.

While NATO as an organization usually distanced itself from China, this changed in 2019. At the NATO London Summit, NATO took first official notice of China stating that “ [...] China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.”¹² Vis-à-vis China, the Reflection Group recommended that “NATO should enhance its ability to coordinate strategy and safeguard Allies’ security vis-à-vis China”, while at the same time “keep open the prospect of political dialogue with China on shared interests and differences, for example in arms control”.¹³

This dual-track approach was reflected in the 2021 Brussels Summit Communiqué. NATO stressed value differences, expanding nuclear arsenal, non-transparency in military modernization, military cooperation with Russia including joint exercises in the Euro-Atlantic area, non-transparency and use of disinformation and China’s actions in space, cyber and military domains as manifestations of “systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and areas relevant to Alliance security”.¹⁴ NATO also committed to engaging with China in mutual areas of concern, including climate change¹⁵

NATO’s focus on China is indicative of not only the rising conventional threats and the prospects of tense great power competition but also an acknowledgement of the new areas of threats - such as cyber, technology, environment and global health- that will define NATO’s engagement with China and the rest of the world in the coming decade.

Enlargement Question: NATO’s Open Door Policy amid the new strategic context

NATO’s enlargement policy has been subject to academic and policy debates. From the 1990s onwards, the opponents continue to argue that the enlargement would be “a policy

¹² NATO. 2019. “London Declaration”. Last Accessed December 10, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm

¹³ NATO. 2020. “NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General.” p.28. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf

¹⁴ NATO. 2021. “Brussels Summit Communiqué.” Last Accessed December 10, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm

¹⁵ Ibid, paragraph 56

error of historic proportions“ causing Russia to question the post-cold war settlement¹⁶, and link Russia’s war against Georgia and the annexation of Crimea to NATO’s eastern enlargement agenda.¹⁷ Proponents have argued that NATO’s enlargement bolstered democracy and reforms, extended the security community to central and eastern European states and, importantly, that the sovereign choices of NATO aspirant countries matter.¹⁸

Over the past decades, NATO continued to enlarge to the Western Balkans with four members- Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia- added to the Alliance during 2009-2020. These waves of enlargement have caused Russia’s resistance, particularly to Montenegro¹⁹; however, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, this has not constituted the so-called red line for Russia. Of current NATO aspirant states, Russia voices most ardent opposition to Georgia and Ukraine’s potential membership, which it continues to see a threat to its claim to regional hegemony in the post-Soviet space.

Despite Russia’s opposition, NATO continues to adhere to Article 10 of the Washington Treaty which stipulates that “the Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty”.²⁰ Not only has NATO expressed that the Open Door Policy stands, but also repeatedly reiterated its Bucharest Summit decision to one day admit Georgia and Ukraine to the Alliance. As a corollary to enlargement debates, NATO stresses the right of the states to choose their foreign policy alignments. NATO’s latest summit in Brussels stated that Allies support Georgia and

¹⁶ Arms Control Association. n.d. “Opposition to NATO Expansion”. Last accessed December 11, 2021.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-06/arms-control-today/opposition-nato-expansion>

¹⁷ Mearsheimer, J. John. 2014. „Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin”, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014. Last accessed December 11, 2021.<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>

¹⁸ Council on Foreign Relations. 1995. “Should NATO Expand”. Last accessed December 11, 2021.

<https://www.cfr.org/report/should-nato-expand>; Rasmussen, F. Anders. 2022. “On Russia, NATO cannot

fold.” *Politico*, January, 2022. https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-nato-vladimir-putin-ukraine/?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=59951b3eb9-EMAIL_CAM-PAIGN_2022_01_03_06_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-59951b3eb9-190034153&fbclid=IwAR2rcQOjCybZGcVhD8iLCP-ffvkwPiq79vRPIB3OoHQCoD51l2DdCQdk2rc

¹⁹ Stradner, Ivana. 2020. “Montenegro Is the Latest Domino to Fall Toward Russia. Last accessed December 11, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/17/montenegro-latest-domino-fall-russia-pro-west-europe-nato/>

²⁰ NATO. 2021. “The North Atlantic Treaty.” Last accessed December 11, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm

Ukraine’s “right to decide its future and foreign policy course free from outside interference.”²¹

NATO’s new Strategic Concept will most likely retain support for the Open Door Policy and the principle that states have the right to pursue independent foreign policy. The Strategic Concept, however, is being deliberated amid Russia’s aggressive attempts to secure legal guarantees from NATO allies and the US; if achieved, this will effectively stop NATO’s enlargement too, and the military cooperation with, the former Soviet republics.²² In its December 16 statement, the North Atlantic Council noted that it is ‘aware of Russia’s recent European security proposals’, but conditioned dialogue on reciprocity, on the fundamental documents that govern European security and on the inclusion of NATO’s European partners into the consultation process.²³

Russia’s forceful demands to secure legal guarantees brought Georgia and Ukraine’s membership question to the fore. Some Russian analysts, as well as politicians, suggested that NATO could issue a political declaration during the upcoming Madrid summit stating that NATO will not enlarge to the east and by doing so annulling the Bucharest Summit promise or enshrining the same point in the new Strategic Concept.²⁴ Thus far, it seems rather unlikely that NATO will make a formal pledge that will refute its previous decisions and undermine the sovereign rights of states to choose their foreign policy alignments. It remains to be seen, however, how the ongoing negotiations with Russia are likely to affect NATO’s relations with Georgia and Ukraine.

Evolution in NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgian Relations

NATO’s relations with Georgia and Ukraine began in the early 1990s as they regained their independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both states pursued the NATO integration path, reflecting their foreign policy choices. In Georgia’s case, there was much consistency in terms of its desire to achieve NATO membership, with all administrations of

²¹ NATO. 2021. “Brussels Summit Communiqué.” Last accessed December 11, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm

²² See Russia’s proposals here: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en and here: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en&clear_cache=Y

²³ NATO. 2021. “Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the situation in and around Ukraine “. Last accessed December 17, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_190373.htm

²⁴ Frolov, Vladimir. 2021. “Can Russia and NATO Come to an Agreement?.” *Carnegie Moscow*, last accessed December 24, 2021. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/86067>

independent Georgia sharing the same goal. In the case of Ukraine, NATO membership aspirations reflected the dominant two visions of the country's foreign policy whereas the issue stayed on or went off the foreign policy agenda depending on the priorities of the respective administrations.²⁵

The following sections discuss Georgian and Ukrainian contexts to track the evolution of their relations with NATO. It shows that both domestic and international factors influenced how NATO-Georgian and NATO-Ukrainian relations developed. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 has been the landmark date, bringing practical cooperation to a new high.

Evolution in NATO-Georgian relations

The evolution of NATO-Georgian relations can be grouped into four periods: 1) post-independence to Rose Revolution; 2) Rose Revolution to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war; 3) Russian-Georgian war to the annexation of Crimea and 4) Post-annexation of Crimea.

Post-independence to Rose Revolution. The first stages of NATO-Georgia relations begin in 1992 when Georgia joins the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), with upgrades in 1997 as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) replaced the NACC.²⁶ Practical relations kickstart with Georgia's participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994. Politically, this is a period of turbulence in Georgia as the country faced a coup, civil war and two wars of secession in the early 1990s.²⁷ The period is characterized by pragmatic relations with Russia as, joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1993, Georgia sought to secure at least formal recognition of its sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation. In practice, however, relations have been fraught mostly due to Russia's role in Georgia's separatist regions. This led to the emergence of a more clearly articulated Western orientation in Georgian foreign policy. In the late 1990s, Georgia engages with the European Union through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and joins the Council of Europe. In 1999, Georgia sends its first peace-keeping mission in Kosovo.²⁸ In 2002, at the Prague Summit, Georgia registers its official

²⁵ Shyrokykh, Karina. 2018. "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70, no. 5 (2018): 1-19

²⁶ NATO. 2021. "Relations with Georgia." Last accessed December 18, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm

²⁷ Jones, Stephen. 2003. "The role of cultural paradigms in Georgian foreign policy." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19, n. 3 (2003): 83-110

²⁸ Ministry of Defence of Georgia. 2016. "Georgian Peacekeeper's Day." Last accessed December 18, 2021. <https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/5264/qartvelimshvidobismkofelis-dge>

desire to join NATO²⁹, creating foundations for the advancement of its political and practical engagement with NATO. In 2004, Georgia was the first country to agree on the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO.³⁰

Rose Revolution to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. Following the Rose Revolution, the new Georgian government intensified its relations with NATO and sought membership to the Alliance as a major foreign policy goal.³¹ Intensified Dialogue with NATO was launched in 2006.³² This period coincides with Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s. Georgia starts to significantly contribute to the NATO-led international security missions while getting practical support from NATO Allies to train and equip Georgian soldiers to make them interoperable with Western military standards. Georgia becomes one of the largest contributors to NATO's missions in Afghanistan. Its relations with Russia become tense as Georgia's Western aspirations are more pronounced. Gradual crisis in relations led to the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 followed by Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and recognition of their statehood. The war was preceded by NATO's consequential Bucharest Summit in April 2008 which refused Georgia and Ukraine the Membership Action Plan (MAP) but promised them an eventual membership to the Alliance. NATO's commitment to the eastern enlargement has been one of the variables explaining Russia's decision to invade Georgia in 2008.³³

From the 2008 war to the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Relations between NATO and Georgia developed further following the Russian-Georgian war. A month after the war, NATO-Georgia Commission was established "as a forum for both political consultations and practical cooperation to help Georgia achieve its goal of membership in NATO".³⁴ In December 2008, the Annual National Programme was developed, replacing the IPAP as the guiding framework of relations between NATO and Georgia since 2004.³⁵ In 2010, NATO Liaison Office

²⁹ NATO. 2002. "Statement by President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze at the EAPC Summit". Last accessed December 19, 2021. <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm>

³⁰ NATO. 2017. "The Individual Partnership Action Plans." Last accessed December 19, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49290.htm

³¹ Ministry of Defence of Georgia. n.d. "National Security Concept of Georgia". Last accessed December 19, 2021. <https://mod.gov.ge/en/page/70/national-security-concept-of-georgia>; see the 2005 version here: https://www.gfsis.org/media/download/GSAC/resources/National_Security_Concept_Georgia.pdf

³² NATO. 2006. "NATO offers Intensified Dialogue to Georgia." Last accessed December 19, 2021. <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/09-september/e0921c.htm>

³³ Tsygankov, P. Andrei and Tarver-Wahlquist, Matthew. 2009. "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5, n.5 (October 2009): 307-326

³⁴ NATO. 2012. "NATO-Georgian Commission." Last accessed December 19, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52131.htm

³⁵ *ibid*

was opened in Georgia aimed at, among others, strengthening civilian and military cooperation.³⁶ International and domestic factors affected the nature of Georgia-NATO relations in this period. Internationally, notwithstanding Russia's aggression in Georgia, the prevailing mood in the United States was to continue cooperation with Russia with the hope that its membership in the international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), would play a constraining role on Russia's behaviour. The policy of reset, as it came to be known, however, was later believed to have contributed to Russia's revisionism vis-à-vis Ukraine. Domestically, in 2012, Georgia underwent the first peaceful transfer of power through the ballot box, putting Georgia on the path of consolidating its democracy. Like its predecessors, the new government pursued the European and Euro-Atlantic integration while introducing partial reset policy vis-à-vis Russia.³⁷

Post-annexation of Crimea. Milestone developments in Georgia-NATO relations came in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea. The update in NATO-Georgian relations was structurally driven rather than necessarily borne out of bilateral dynamics of integration between NATO and Georgia. Structural response to Russia's annexation of Crimea became necessary, resulting in NATO's increased presence in the Baltic region, Poland and the Black Sea.³⁸ At the Wales Summit, in 2014, Georgia was included in a newly launched Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative (DCB) and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP) was endorsed. These tools were designed to "strengthen Georgia's defence and interoperability capabilities with the Alliance, which will help Georgia advance in its preparations towards membership in the Alliance."³⁹ In addition, as part of the Partnership Interoperability Initiative, Georgia was designated as "Enhanced Opportunities Partner" along with other partner nations.⁴⁰ Georgia became part of NATO's Black Sea strategy, including through Georgia's participation in the Alliance's maritime exercises such as Exercise Breeze, training of Georgian Coast Guard, further cooperation between Georgia and

³⁶ NATO. 2017. "NATO Liaison Office (NLO) Georgia ". Last accessed December 19, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_81066.htm

³⁷ Sirbiladze, Irakli. 2020. "A Decade of Russian-Georgian Relations: Key Patterns and Things to Watch", GFSIS, last accessed December 20, 2021. <https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/opinion-papers/144-expert-opinion-eng.pdf>

³⁸ NATO. 2021. "NATO ships exercise in the Black Sea." Last accessed December 21, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185879.htm

³⁹ NATO. 2014. "Wales Summit Declaration." Last accessed December 21, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

⁴⁰ NATO. 2021. „Partnership Interoperability Initiative.“ Last accessed December 21, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_132726.htm

NATO's Standing Naval forces, passage exercises and port calls as well as the "exchanges between Georgia's Joint Maritime Operations Centre and the NATO Shipping Centre."⁴¹

Evolution in NATO-Ukraine relations

Ukraine's relations with NATO reflects the foreign policy priorities of the country over the last decades. As Ukraine's foreign policy switched from pro-Western to multi-vector⁴², so did Ukraine's relations with NATO.

NATO-Ukrainian relations since the end of the Cold War could be grouped into four phases: initiation of the partnership (from independence to Orange Revolution); partnership with clear membership agenda (Orange Revolution to Non-Bloc Status); partnership with no membership agenda (Non-bloc Status to Annexation of Crimea), and partnership with clear membership agenda (post- annexation of Crimea).

Initiation of the partnership. The presidencies of Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005) sees the initiation of the partnership with NATO, with Kravchuk backing the NATO membership agenda, while Kuchma adopting a more pragmatist approach. The choice of neutrality vis-à-vis NATO served as a deterrent to Russia's requests to include Ukraine into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and it also recognized that "Ukraine had no chance to be included within the likely first wave of NATO members who will be admitted to that organization by the end of the decade."⁴³ However, although Ukraine rejected "military and political co-operation with Russia and in CIS supra-national structures Ukraine's elites wholeheartedly back co-operation of a similar nature with NATO".⁴⁴ Major outcomes of cooperation were Ukraine's membership in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and its participation in the Partnership for Peace program in 1994. Relations further upgraded to 'distinctive partnership' in 1997 with the signing of the Charter on Distinctive Partnership, giving birth to NATO-Ukraine Commission. This period laid some foundations in terms of Ukraine's interoperability with NATO through joint exercises and defence reforms. Although Kuchma's presidency did not in practice endorse the NATO membership agenda, his second term has been seen as more pro-Western⁴⁵,

⁴¹ NATO. 2018. "NATO-Georgia Commission Declaration at the Brussels Summit." Last accessed December 22, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156627.htm

⁴² Shyrokykh, Karina. 2018. "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70, no. 5 (2018): 1-19

⁴³ Kuzio, Taras. 1998. "Ukraine and NATO: The evolving strategic partnership. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 21 n. 2, (1998): 1-30. p.25

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Shyrokykh, Karina. 2018. "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70, no. 5 (2018): 1-19, see footnote 3

manifested in his statement in May 2002 announcing Ukraine's desire to eventually join NATO, leading to the establishment of NATO-Ukraine Action Plan.⁴⁶

Partnership with clear membership agenda. Ukraine-NATO relations changed substantially with the Orange Revolution and the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko. The new government has departed from the multi-vector foreign policy pursued by President Kuchma and declared membership to NATO and the EU as a top foreign policy priority.⁴⁷ New government priorities led to the establishment of Intensified Dialogue with Ukraine in 2005, which provided support for key reforms necessary for integrating with NATO.⁴⁸ Discussions on granting Ukraine (and Georgia) the Membership Action Plan (MAP) ensued, but the MAP was rejected at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 in exchange for the promise that Ukraine and Georgia “will become members of NATO”.⁴⁹ In 2009, The Declaration to Complement the Charter on Distinctive Partnership was issued, mandating the development of the Annual National Program under NATO-Ukraine Commission to underpin “Ukraine's efforts to take forward its political, economic, and defence-related reforms on its Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO, with a focus on key democratic and institutional goals.”⁵⁰

Setback in the partnership with no membership agenda. The change of government in 2010 and the election of Viktor Yanukovich also brought a change in Ukraine-NATO relations. In 2010, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to abandon NATO membership aspirations, declaring Ukraine's non-bloc status while still maintaining some practical cooperation.⁵¹ At the 2012 NATO Lisbon Summit Declaration, the Alliance noted that it respects Ukraine's non-bloc status and welcomes the continuation of practical cooperation within the existing frameworks that guide relations, including the NATO-Ukraine Commission.⁵² The new Ukrainian

⁴⁶ NATO. 2007. “NATO-Ukraine: A Distinctive Partnership.” Last accessed December 23, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2007_06/20090304_nato-ukraine2007-e.pdf

⁴⁷ Malek, Martin. 2009. “The “Western Vector” of the Foreign and Security Policy of Ukraine.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 22 n. 4 (2009): 515-542

⁴⁸ NATO. 2007. “NATO-Ukraine: A Distinctive Partnership.” Last accessed December 23, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2007_06/20090304_nato-ukraine2007-e.pdf

⁴⁹ NATO. 2008. “Bucharest Summit Declaration.” Last accessed December 12, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

⁵⁰ NATO. 2009. „Declaration to Complement the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership.“ Last accessed December 23, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_57045.htm

⁵¹ BBC. 2010. “Ukraine's parliament votes to abandon Nato ambitions.” Last accessed December 23, 2021.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/10229626> ; See also: KyivPost. 2010. “Cabinet approves action plan for annual national program of cooperation with NATO in 2010 .” Last accessed December 23, 2021. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/cabinet-approves-action-plan-for-annual-national-p-70823.html>

⁵² NATO. 2010. “Lisbon Summit Declaration.” Last accessed December 23, 2021.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm

government has however maintained its commitment to the EU integration until, under Russian pressure, President Yanukovich refused to sign the Association Agreement (including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement) that sparked protests and eventually led to Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine. These developments set Ukrainian foreign policy back to the NATO membership agenda, giving way to ever-expanding practical cooperation.

Re-expansion of partnership with clear membership agenda. Following the Revolution of Dignity, the new Ukrainian government led by Petro Poroshenko revoked the non-bloc status at the end of 2014.⁵³ In 2016, NATO initiated the Comprehensive Assistance Package which aims at “consolidating and enhancing NATO's support to Ukraine, including by tailored capability and capacity building measures for the security and defence sector.”⁵⁴ In 2017, the Ukrainian parliament reinstated NATO membership as its foreign and security policy objective⁵⁵; the change has been recognized by NATO in its 2018 Brussels Summit stating that “in light of Ukraine's restated aspirations for NATO membership, we stand by our decisions taken at the Bucharest Summit and subsequent Summits.”⁵⁶ Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's political and practical relations with NATO deepened. This is the first time when the new political leadership has not reverted to multi-vector foreign policy, which often implied charting pragmatic relations with Russia to the detriment of pursuing NATO membership agenda.

Mapping the NATO-Georgia-Ukraine Priorities amid the New Strategic Context

The new strategic context resulted in a major re-definition of NATO's engagement with its eastern and south-eastern Allies and partners. NATO, Ukraine and Georgia saw Russia's annexation of Crimea as a harbinger to more Russian expansionism that, along with other threats on the horizon, contributed to the weakening of the rules-based international order. Each has accordingly pursued policies that would take into account a more assertive Russia. This section of the paper maps the respective priorities of NATO, Georgia and

⁵³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 2014. “Ukraine Votes To Abandon Neutrality, Set Sights On NATO.” Last accessed December 23, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-parliament-abandons-neutrality/26758725.html>

⁵⁴ NATO. 2016. “Warsaw Summit Communiqué.” Last accessed December 21, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm

⁵⁵ NATO. 2022. “Relations with Ukraine.” Last accessed December 24, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm

⁵⁶ NATO. 2018. “Brussels Summit Declaration.” Last accessed December 24, 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm

Ukraine amid the new strategic context, setting the stage for the discussion of where the priorities could converge as the relations unfold.

NATO priorities amid the new strategic context

The early 2010s set the stage for the new strategic context that would ultimately bring back the dormant potential for great power competition. Russian-Georgian war in 2008, the Arab Spring and conflict in Syria, China's growing ambitions as Xi Jinping came to power, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the rise of the Islamic State, immigration crisis, rise of populism, Brexit, the election of Donald Trump and attendant tensions in the US-China and transatlantic relations, the role of technology, increasing environmental challenges as well as the pandemics- all in their own right contributed to the emergence of the new strategic context. The security reality now is reminiscent of the Buzanian understanding of security: the state is not the only actor that matters and the threats go beyond the military and are also of political, economic, environmental, social, technological and health nature. Added to this is the rising geopolitical powers that show discontent with the US leadership and seek to constraint or replace altogether the liberal international order that guided the patterns of cooperation and competition over the last seven decades.

It is in this strategic context that NATO has to set out its priorities and renew its Strategic Concept. Based on the NATO 2030 agenda and NATO's recent summits, NATO's priorities can be grouped into the following categories: Strengthening Allied security and cohesion; dealing with Russia; dealing with China; dealing with the new threats and the Open Door Policy and engagement with partners.

Strengthening Allied security and cohesion. NATO's primary purpose is to protect the security of its members. Doing so requires the Alliance to assess the changing strategic environment and make sure that it stands ready and cohesive to respond to it. Politically, various challenges strained NATO's internal cohesion.⁵⁷ Militarily, NATO allies have not faced any significant threat, yet Russia's annexation of Crimea forced the Alliance to ensure the balance of forces and "reinforce its eastern flank, and have greater capacity there to defend against the possibility of Russian aggression".⁵⁸ Addressing the Alliance's security and cohesion is a key task that lies ahead.

⁵⁷ This includes strained transatlantic relations during the Trump administration; the question on the EU-NATO military compatibility and Turkey's actions in the Middle East and its procurement of Russia's air defence system.

⁵⁸ US Department of States. 2022. "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Press ". Last accessed January 8, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-11/>

Dealing with Russia. NATO-Russian relations have been ever contentious due to Russia's opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement. The 1997 NATO-Russian Founding Act saw relative improvement in relations, only to deteriorate as Vladimir Putin sought to increase Russia's role in the world. Russia's withdrawal from The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, its aggression against Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 registered new lows in relations. Despite this, NATO has pursued a dual-track approach towards Russia, ensuring a balance of forces while keeping the political dialogue open to ensure long-term stability in Europe.

Dealing with China. China's rise poses a distinct threat to NATO. While China is not a direct military threat to the Alliance, its pursuit of challenging the rules-based international order poses a long-term threat to the Alliance's ability to defend its member states. NATO's upcoming new Strategic Concept is likely to recognize China's importance in the new geopolitics of the 21st century.

Dealing with new threats. NATO of today faces both traditional and non-traditional security challenges, requiring the Alliance to adapt to the new developments. These challenges include dealing with the consequences of hybrid warfare through forging resilience as well as dealing with the so-called 'shared fate' issues of climate change, technology and pandemics. Focusing on crises management and civil preparedness has gained new momentum as the multitude of threats abound.

The Open Door Policy and engagement with partners. Part of NATO's resolve to ensure security is to expand partnerships and maintain the Open Door Policy. Following the end of the Cold War NATO has committed to the enlargement agenda, with the latest member joining in 2020. Although NATO continues to rhetorically support NATO's enlargement towards Georgia and Ukraine, NATO is unlikely to offer membership or the Membership Action Plan to these countries in the short or medium term. It does however commit to continue political and practical support to these states, making sure that they undertake necessary reforms to gradually align themselves to NATO's democratic and military standards, including through their participation in the NATO-led missions and exercises.

Ukrainian priorities vis-à-vis NATO amid the new strategic context

All major strategic documents of Ukraine identify full membership to the EU and NATO as top foreign policy and national security priorities, along with consolidating "international support and sanctions against the Russian aggression".⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Bureiko, Nadiia, Maksak, Hennadiy and Shelest, Hanna. 2020. "Ukrainian Prism: Foreign Policy 2020. Analytical study // Foreign Policy Council", *Ukrainian Prism*, p.21. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/17704.pdf>

According to the National Security Strategy of Ukraine, adopted in 2020, the principles of deterrence, resilience and cooperation guide Ukraine's national security thinking. *Deterrence* aims at developing defence and security capabilities to preclude aggression; *resilience* implies achieving state and societal adaptability and minimizing internal and external vulnerabilities amid the changed security situation, and *cooperation* pursues strategic relations primarily with NATO, the EU and the United States as well as other states.⁶⁰

According to the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine, in addition to pursuing NATO membership path, Ukraine's other priorities vis-à-vis NATO are as follows:

- securing invitation of Ukraine in the Membership Action Plan;
- intensifying joint activities with NATO to counter Russian aggression;
- increasing NATO's presence in the Black Sea region;
- cooperation with NATO on countering hybrid threats;
- reforming security and defence sector and meeting political criteria of the membership;
- contribute to international security through participation in the NATO-led missions.

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Georgian priorities vis-à-vis NATO amid the new strategic context

Similar to Ukraine, Georgia's major strategic documents set NATO and the EU membership as top foreign and national security priorities. Although Georgia has not yet updated the 2011 version of its major strategic document, the National Security Concept of Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia adopted parliamentary resolutions in 2013, 2016 and 2020 that reaffirm Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration as strategic foreign policy priorities.

The 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia sets NATO integration as one of the top foreign policy priorities, identifying the following sub-priorities to advance integration with NATO:

- continue and refresh political dialogue within the framework of NATO-Georgian Commission;

⁶⁰ Kabanenko, Ihor. 2020. "Ukraine's New National Security Strategy: A Wide Scope With Foggy Implementation Mechanisms", *The Jamestown Foundation*, September, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/ukraines-new-national-security-strategy-a-wide-scope-with-foggy-implementation-mechanisms/>

⁶¹The Presidential Office of Ukraine. n.d. "Указ Президента України №448/2021 Про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 30 липня 2021 року "Про Стратегію зовнішньополітичної діяльності України" ("Decree of the President of Ukraine №448/2021 On the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of July 30, 2021 "On the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine.") Last accessed December 24, 2021. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017>

- utilizing Annual National Program as the mechanism supporting NATO membership;
- utilize Substantial NATO-Georgia Package to increase self-defence capabilities and achieve interoperability with NATO;
- Strengthen relations with NATO to contribute to the Black Sea security;
- participation in the NATO-led international missions and the NATO Response Force;
- forging bilateral relations with NATO member states to develop defence capabilities, increase interoperability with the Alliance and forge consensus on the issue of Georgia's NATO membership.⁶²

Where is the Convergence? Avenues for Practical Cooperation

NATO's current relations with Georgia and Ukraine can be characterized as the Everything-but-Article-5 approach similar to the EU's approach to enlargement developed in the early 2000s. NATO is unlikely to offer Georgia and Ukraine membership or even the Membership Action Plan in the distant future largely due to lack of political consensus within the Alliance and due to their territorial conflicts with Russia.⁶³ Although democratic reforms are integral to Georgia and Ukraine's NATO membership, membership to the Alliance is primarily a geopolitical-driven endeavour, where the question of democracy comes inferior to the strategic considerations.⁶⁴ As the current geopolitical context reorients NATO elsewhere, the enlargement towards Georgia and Ukraine is relegated to the margins of the Alliance's current priorities and is rather 'not a very direct eventuality'.⁶⁵

The immediacy of the enlargement and granting of the Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine is therefore the major non-convergence between the priorities of NATO on the one hand and the priorities of Georgia and Ukraine on the other. In compensation for its indecision on membership, NATO offers Ukraine and Georgia full political and practical support. This is the approach that is born out of the current political consensus of NATO Allies and it is, other things being equal, likely to define the Alliance's engagement with Georgia and Ukraine in the coming decade. Georgia and Ukraine are left with the option to

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. n.d. "2019-2022 წლების საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკის სტრატეგია." ("2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia.") Last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/ForeignPolicyStrategy/2019-2022-clebis-saqartvelos-sagareo-politikis-strategia.pdf.aspx>

⁶³ Demko, Attila; Ugrosdy, Márton; Baranyi, Tamás; Ilyash, György and Stepper, Péter. Author's interview, November-December, 2021

⁶⁴ Ibid, author's interview, November-December, 2021

⁶⁵ Baranyi, Tamás. Author's interview, December, 2021

deepen relations with NATO based on this understanding while seeking to forge consensus among Allies on their fast-track membership when the geopolitical circumstances allow.

The following overarching issues hence form the convergence between Georgia, Ukraine and NATO priorities: 1) political-diplomatic support and democracy consolidation; 2) security and defence reforms and interoperability; 3) increasing cooperation in the Black Sea region and 4) participation in the NATO-led peace support and international security missions.

Political-diplomatic support and democratic consolidation. NATO-Georgia-Ukraine relations currently rest on the consistent political and diplomatic support that NATO provides as Georgia and Ukraine face external and internal challenges. NATO reiterates its support for the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of these countries, including their right to choose their foreign policy path. NATO continually upholds its promise given at the Bucharest Summit that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO. NATO heavily engages diplomatically with both states, reflected in the high-level meetings in addition to meetings within the bilateral frameworks of relations.⁶⁶ Georgia and Ukraine commit to undertake domestic democratic reforms to make themselves compatible with the membership requirements of the Alliance. As the challenges of democratic consolidation remain, NATO underlines the importance of democratic reforms and sees them as important to the progress ‘in preparations towards membership’.⁶⁷ As NATO Secretary-General recently underlined, these reforms are important to not only meet NATO’s standards but to establish strong, resilient societies that are capable of withstanding external aggression and malign action.⁶⁸

Security and defence reforms and interoperability. At the heart of NATO’s practical support to Georgia and Ukraine is to help them undertake necessary reforms to achieve interoperability with NATO and to develop independent self-defence capabilities. NATO’s relations with Georgia and Ukraine develop on two complementary tracks: one where NATO collectively supports Georgia and Ukraine and another where member states pursue bilateral

⁶⁶ Colominza, Piriz Xavier. 2021. “NATO and Georgia”. Georgian Center for Strategy and Development-GCSD, last accessed December 22, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/GCSDorg/videos/433275278547248>

⁶⁷ See the latest Brussels Summit Communiqué, particularly paragraphs 68 and 69 that refer to Georgia and Ukraine, respectively. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm

⁶⁸ NATO. 2022. “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Last accessed January 9, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_190508.htm?selectedLocale=en

relations and support. On the NATO level, the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine provide the key frameworks for practical support. The packages cover various issues where practical support is provided, including conducting joint military exercises, countering hybrid threats and forging resilience. On the bilateral level, Ukraine enjoys security assistance from individual member states such as the United States, United Kingdom, Lithuania and Latvia.⁶⁹ Both Ukraine and Georgia have signed the Charter on Strategic Partnership with the United States⁷⁰, which offers another path that Georgia and Ukraine can pursue to bolster their security given the enlargement hesitancy within the Alliance.⁷¹ Georgia is also the recipient of the US security assistance through programs such as Georgia Defence Readiness Program (completed in 2020) and the newly signed The Georgia Defence and Deterrence Enhancement Initiative (GDDEI); such programs aim at “enhancing deterrence and territorial defence capabilities, fostering interoperability with NATO, and enabling institutional reform and modernization through organizational change management.”⁷²

Increasing cooperation in the Black Sea region. Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the security environment in the Black Sea region has changed, forcing NATO to respond to Russia’s growing capabilities by strengthening its presence in the region. At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO allies agreed “to develop a tailored forward presence in the south-eastern part of Alliance territory on land, at sea and in the air”.⁷³ This means maintaining a multinational brigade, deploying more ships and conducting more naval exercises and increasing situational awareness and enhancing readiness in terms of air defence.⁷⁴ Maritime cooperation extended to partner states such as Georgia and Ukraine, with more training and exercise for maritime forces and coast guards as well as port visits.⁷⁵ Georgia and Ukraine

⁶⁹ Armyinform. 2021. “Міжнародна військова допомога Україні у 2021 році.” (“International military assistance to Ukraine in 2021.”). Last accessed January 9, 2021. <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/01/11/mizhnarodna-vijskova-dopomoga-ukrayini-u-2021-roczii/>

⁷⁰ See Georgia-US Charter on Strategic Partnership here: <https://www.state.gov/united-states-georgia-charter-on-strategic-partnership/>; See Ukraine-US Charter on Strategic Partnership here: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-ukraine-charter-on-strategic-partnership/>

⁷¹ Kakachia, Kornely, Lebanidze, Bidzina and Dzebisashvili, Lasha. 2020. “Game of (open) Doors: NATO-Georgian Relations and Challenges for Sustainable Partnership.” *Georgian Institute of Politics*, <https://gip.ge/publication-post/game-of-open-doors-nato-georgian-relations-and-challenges-for-sustainable-partnership/>

⁷² U.S. Embassy in Georgia. n.d. “FACT SHEET: Georgia Defence and Deterrence Enhancement Initiative.” Last accessed December 24, 2021.

⁷³ NATO. 2022. “Boosting NATO’s presence in the east and southeast”. Last accessed, January 9, 2022 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ *ibid*

continuously stress the importance of their engagement in NATO's Black Sea security strategy as Russia's strong presence in the region affects their security.⁷⁶

Participation in the NATO-led peace support and international security missions. NATO's international missions throughout the last decades relied heavily on contributions from both Allied and partner nations. Georgia and Ukraine have been part of the NATO-led international security missions which helped them achieve greater interoperability with NATO forces. Georgia in particular has punched above its weight and contributed to NATO's missions in Afghanistan as well as playing an important transit role in the US departure from Afghanistan in 2020.⁷⁷ Currently, Georgia and Ukraine support NATO's maritime situational awareness as part of the maritime operation Sea Guardian.⁷⁸ Georgia ponders the possibilities of participating in the so-called Article 5 operations such as tailored forward presence, while also offering itself as a regional transportation hub and seeing its place in the emerging security cooperation between NATO and the EU.⁷⁹

The further advancement of even practical security cooperation between Georgia, Ukraine and NATO is, however, dependent on the geopolitical circumstances, setting certain limits on NATO's engagement with Georgia and Ukraine given Russia's positions.⁸⁰ The ongoing demands presented by Russia demonstrate the difficult position that NATO finds itself in: it has to provide political, defence and security support to Georgia and Ukraine to the extent that it does not lead to Russia's perception that its security interests are violated. Finding this balance is the greatest test for NATO's upcoming Strategic Concept and the overall security environment in today's Europe.

V4 and Georgia and Ukraine: The State of Relations

The Visegrad 4 (V4) countries- Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia- initiated their regional cooperation in 1991, stressing common identity based on cultural and geopolitical proximity, shared historical experiences and shared democratization path forward amid

⁷⁶ See respective foreign policy strategies of both countries; Anonymous, author's interview, December, 2021

⁷⁷ Anonymous, author's interview, December, 2021

⁷⁹ Dolidze, Viktor. 2021. "NATO and Georgia". *Georgian Center for Strategy and Development-GCSD*, last accessed December 22, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/GCSDorg/videos/433275278547248>

⁸⁰ Demko, Attila, author's interview, November, 2021

the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁸¹ The purpose of the group varied at different decades: before joining the EU and NATO, V4's shared interest was to become respectable partners for the EU and NATO member states; after they acceded to the organizations, V4 aimed at increasing their bargaining power vis-à-vis the bigger member states or external powers; 2008 financial crisis and new security problems pushed further in-group cooperation.⁸²

The V4 platform “is consistently understood as complementary to European security organisations, neither aiming to pioneer a new framework nor replacing the existing platforms.”⁸³ Following Brexit and the migration crisis, the V4 assertiveness within the EU has increased, with the pronouncement of their ‘Atlanticist preference’ within the field of security and defence.⁸⁴ V4 security and defence cooperation enhanced from the early 2010s focusing on three critical areas of practical cooperation: capability development, procurement and defence industry; the establishment of multinational units and running cross border activities, and education, training and exercises.⁸⁵ The V4 achieved practical progress with the formation of ‘the V4 EU Battlegroups (BGs) at regular intervals, the establishment of the V4 Joint Logistics Support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ), holding of frequent joint exercises and having a multinational NATO Capability Target in progress.’⁸⁶ The new Long Term Vision pursues improvement on the targets identified in 2014 as well as developing cooperation with partners.⁸⁷

In 2020, V4 countries committed to “continue to build flexible partnerships with countries outside of V4, including in NATO and the EU neighbourhood, when and where appropriate” to “foster mutually beneficial cooperation”.⁸⁸ Support for the Eastern Partnership countries, which include Georgia and Ukraine, continue under the Hungarian V4 Presidency, including “the security consultations will continue between the V4 and Ukraine”.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Kolmašová, Šárka. 2019. “Competing Norms and Strategic Visions: A Critical Appraisal of V4 Security Potential”. *Europe-Asia Studies*, (2019): 1-24

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 2-3

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ VisegradGroup. 2014. “Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening their Defence Cooperation.” Last accessed December 27, 2021. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=253>

⁸⁶ VisegradGroup. 2020. “Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on the Defence Cooperation”. Last accessed December 27, 2021. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=454>

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ VisegradGroup. 2020. “Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on the Defence Cooperation”. Last accessed December 27, 2021. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=454>

⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. n.d. “Presidency Programme.” Last accessed December 24, 2021. <https://v4.mfa.gov.hu/page/presidency-programme>

The V4 countries are generally supportive of the Ukraine and Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations⁹⁰; however, differences in their threat perception⁹¹, including vis-vis Russia, leave Poland most supportive of the two countries' ambitions to join the Alliance. Hungary in particular differentiates between Georgia and Ukraine; while Georgia enjoys stronger support on its path to NATO, the question of Hungarian minorities in Ukraine remains an important, yet resolvable, stumbling point in Hungary's support for Ukraine's NATO aspirations.⁹²

That said, limited practical security and defence cooperation between V4 countries and Ukraine, in particular, has been ongoing over the years. The cooperation within the framework of NATO Trust Funds, military training and education, regular meetings of the military representatives of Ukraine and V4 states as well as the support of Ukrainian wounded soldiers are of notice.⁹³ Further areas of cooperation between V4 and Ukraine could include resilience, cyber security, air defence and intelligence.⁹⁴ Practical cooperation between V4 states as a group and Georgia is rather limited, although Georgia enjoys cooperation with individual V4 states in the defence and security sector, particularly in terms of study visits, experience sharing, and joint pieces of training and consultations on military-technical issues.

The current priorities of the Hungarian Presidency of the V4 do not envisage cooperation between V4, Georgia and Ukraine within the framework of NATO; it however supports the Eastern Partnership initiatives and plans various meetings between V4 and Eastern Partnership states.⁹⁵ Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy limits its focus to the intensification of "trade-economic ties with Visegrad states" amid the close political cooperation.⁹⁶ Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy aims at strengthening cooperation with Visegrad states

⁹⁰ Ugródsy, Márton, Baranyi, Tamás, Ilyash, György and Stepper, Péter. Author's interview, December, 2021

⁹¹ Kolmašová, Šárka. 2019. "Competing Norms and Strategic Visions: A Critical Appraisal of V4 Security Potential". *Europe-Asia Studies*, (2019): 15

⁹² Demko, Attila; Ugródsy, Márton. Author's interview, November-December, 2021

⁹³ Shelest, Hanna. 2019. "Is There a Future for Security Cooperation between the Visegrad Four and Ukraine?". *Center for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy*, <https://ceid.hu/future-security-cooperation-visegrad-four-ukraine/>

⁹⁴ *ibid*

⁹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary. n.d. "Presidency Program." Last accessed December 24, 2021. <https://v4.mfa.gov.hu/page/presidency-programme>, p. 36

⁹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. n.d. "2019-2022 წლების საქართველოს საგარეო პოლიტიკის სტრატეგია." ("2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia.") Last accessed December 24, 2021 <https://mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/ForeignPolicyStrategy/2019-2022-clebis-saqartvelos-sagareo-politikis-strategia.pdf.aspx>

in terms of sharing their EU and NATO integration experiences, increasing defence capabilities in Central and Eastern Europe, resuming participation in the V4's EU Battle Group and the implementation of joint education and humanitarian projects.⁹⁷

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The changing strategic context, primarily reflected in the rise of China, a resurgence of Russia and the emergence of non-traditional security threats, as well as the various political challenges within the Alliance, led to NATO's redefinition of its role and purpose in the next decade. Russia's annexation of Crimea has been pivotal in terms of traditional security challenges faced by the Alliance, leading to an increased presence in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Alliance to ensure the balance of forces vis-à-vis Russia.

The 2030 agenda and the planned adoption of the new Strategic Concept at the next Summit in 2022 need to also deal with the question of Open Door Policy and the future of NATO's relations with aspirant countries. The question of Georgia and Ukraine's path to membership particularly stand out. While the two countries' bid to NATO membership is endorsed by the Alliance through summit decisions and continued discursive support, Russia's imposition of the red line on Georgia and Ukraine's NATO membership; their unresolved territorial conflicts with Russia; the pace of political and military reforms within Georgia and Ukraine and the lack of political consensus among Allies on letting Georgia and Ukraine in pose significant limitations to Georgia and Ukraine's ability to achieve substantial progress in their decades-long aspirations to join the Alliance.

Given the strategic limitations, NATO has pursued Everything-but-Article 5 approach vis-à-vis Georgia and Ukraine since the Bucharest Summit decision in 2008 promising eventual membership to the two states. This approach rests on the expression of strong political support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine as well as towards their right to choose their foreign policy path, and on the allocation of practical support to advance Georgia and Ukraine's political and defence reform and strengthen their self-defence capabilities.

Reflecting on the respective priorities of NATO and considering the new strategic context, Georgia and Ukraine's priorities to get the Membership Action Plan and eventually join the

⁹⁷ The Presidential Office of Ukraine. n.d. "Указ Президента України №448/2021 Про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 30 липня 2021 року "Про Стратегію зовнішньополітичної діяльності України" ("Decree of the President of Ukraine №448/2021 On the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of July 30, 2021 "On the Strategy of Foreign Policy of Ukraine.") Last accessed December 24, 2021. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017>

Alliance seem currently unrealizable. While Georgia and Ukraine should continue to pursue European and Euro-Atlantic integration as the best possible way of realization of their democratic aspirations and security interests, they should also make good use of NATO's existing political and practical support by consolidating their democracies, undertaking defence and security reforms, improving interoperability with NATO forces and forging resilient societies. While V4 states support Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations, practical relations between the V4 as a group and Ukraine and Georgia remain limited, particularly so in relation to Georgia.

To further advance political and practical relations between NATO, Georgia and Ukraine,

NATO shall

- continue adherence to the Open Door Policy of the Alliance and reiterate NATO's commitment to the Bucharest Summit decision vis-à-vis Georgia and Ukraine in the new Strategic Concept to be adopted in 2022;
- continue voicing strong political support to Georgia and Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, and stress their inalienable right to choose their foreign policy path and security arrangements;
- continue providing practical support to Georgia and Ukraine, including encouraging further reforms in the defence and security sector to achieve interoperability with NATO standards; provide security assistance to Ukraine and Georgia with a view of developing their self-defence capabilities; continue joint military training with Georgia and Ukraine to that end;
- Continue providing practical support to Georgia and Ukraine to forge their state and societal resilience to better withstand the hybrid threats and disinformation that they face from the Russian Federation;
- Develop a stronger presence in the Black Sea region and enhance existing cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, with the view of including them in the Article-5 operations.
- V4 states shall include furthering security and defence cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine in the priorities of the respective presidencies, and support Georgia and Ukraine's practical cooperation with NATO both individually and as a V4 platform.

Georgia and Ukraine shall

- pursue political reforms at home aimed at the consolidation of their democracies, particularly in terms of carrying out judicial and electoral reforms, strengthening the rule of law and ensuring accountability of the security services;

- Continue efforts to resolve their territorial conflicts with Russia through the pursuit of diplomacy and through engaging in the multilateral frameworks of the conflict resolution;
- Continue pursuing extensive and coordinated diplomacy with a view of forging consensus among the Allies about the accession of Georgia and Ukraine to the Alliance;
- Continue to engage in the NATO-led peace support and security missions to improve interoperability with NATO forces;
- Seek ways to further improve political, security and defence relations with V4 states with the view of learning lessons from their NATO integration path as well as from their decades-long experience of regional cooperation.