

REVIEW ON SATENIK MKRTCHYAN'S PAPER "NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPTS OF GEORGIA (2005 AND 2011): REGIONAL, SUB-REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL SETTINGS"¹²

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Thank you. I know that I have 10 minutes. So, I will try to present the overview of Satenik's paper briefly. First of all, I would like to thank Satenik for brilliant work because I think that this is the first attempt to have a comparative analysis of Georgia's two National Security Concepts. In the first part of my speech I will briefly deal with the importance of the National Security concept as a document. Then I will demonstrate what are the similarities and differences between these two documents and as a final part of my speech, I will provide some personal observations.

National Security Concept is definitely the most important document when it comes to understanding states' national values and interests and threats and challenges to these interests and values per se. It acts as a set of general guidelines or broad roadmap that helps decision-makers to orient in the complex and globalized world. This document has clear communicative function as well; it informs public and wider international community on government's official thinking on national security priorities. At the same time, this document serves as the foundation for other conceptual and strategic policy documents of the country such as National Threat Assessment Document, Strategic Defense Review, Foreign Policy Strategy, National Military Strategy and many other documents that deal with different aspects of national security. Georgia had produced two National Security Concepts. The first one that was released in 2005, before 2008 Russia-Georgia August War and the second one that was adopted after the war, in 2011. These documents give us the possibility to conduct comparative analysis of how official thinking on National Security has

¹² The text is the transcription of the speech given at the conference.

developed over time in Georgia. Accordingly, author's decision to focus on the abovementioned documents as the source for understanding Georgia's national security views and foreign policy priorities is well-grounded and represents methodologically solid approach.

In her paper, Satenik Mkrtchyan highlights the major aspects of documents in comparative perspective. According to the author, both documents view Euro Atlantic and European integration of the country as the major policy priorities of Georgia. Both documents highlight that Georgia's *natural place* is among democratic and developed European nations and the membership of NATO and EU are seen as the major instruments for bringing Georgia back into its European family. Author rightly observes that in the document of 2005 Georgia's identity as the Black Sea nation is accentuated while the document of 2011 places emphasis on Georgia's Caucasian role as well. According to the author, 2011 National Security Concept is heavily concentrated on the role of Russia in Georgia's national security. As Satenik Mkrtchyan notes, while in the previous version of the National Security Concept, the issue of Russia was stressed in context of normalizing relations, the new document presents Russia as the major threat to sovereignty, territorial integrity and statehood of Georgia. This alteration in approaches towards Russia is natural as far as the new document reflects the changes in Georgia's security environment after Russia-Georgia war of 2008 and its subsequent occupation and international recognition of Abkhazia and Samachablo regions. 2011 National Security Concept goes even further and argues that 2008 Russia-Georgia War has resulted in worsening security environment of the whole Caucasus region generally. Besides, the role of Russia, both documents deal with the issues of regional and international cooperation with neighboring states and other regional and global actors, including, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Ukraine, Iran, Central Asian States, US and others. As the author observes, both documents deal with the role of Georgia as a transit state and its importance for the wider world in terms of energy security and transportation of energy resources. To conclude, author provides detailed analysis and comparison of two documents by clearly

demonstrating the points where both documents take similar or different approaches.

If one attempts to critically analyze Georgia's National Security Concepts of 2005 and 2011 it is obvious that these documents have more similarities than differences. On the level of country's general security and foreign policy priorities both documents state that major priorities of country's security and foreign policy are integration into western political and military institutions: NATO and EU. Despite the fact that Georgia's security environment has definitely worsened since the Russian invasion and occupation of Georgia in 2008, Georgia's top foreign policy priorities remain intact.

As it was argued in the introductory part of the paper, one of the major functions of the National Security Concept is to provide guidelines for policy-makers in security affairs. Usually, such documents are based on the evaluation of the security environment (threats and opportunities) of the state. Most of the Security Studies scholars will argue that change or continuity in the security environment is the major defining of states security policies and priorities. If we analyze the case of Georgia in light of this approach, then Georgia represents an exception to the rule. Despite the fact that country's security environment has changed, the official thinking on major aspects of national security remained the same.

Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 and then in Ukraine had signaled that when it comes to the Post-Soviet space Russia is more assertive power than the West. While United States, the NATO and EU are seen as Georgia's major allies and partners the Russia-Georgia War has demonstrated that none of them are ready to use hard power means to protect their interests in the region. The changes that resulted in Georgia's security environment since the Russia-Georgia War were adequately understood by the elites as well. While the term "misperception" is one of the major concepts in international relations theory when it comes to the cases when decision-makers have distorted understanding of objective security challenges facing their country, Georgia was not the case of elites "misperceiving" objective reality after the August War. 2011 security

concept demonstrates that political elites had fair understanding of changes in security environment after the Russia-Georgia War. A paragraph from 2011 National Security Concept clearly demonstrates this:

“International and regional developments of the last few years have significantly changed the security environment of Georgia... Moreover, the military aggression by the Russian Federation worsened the security environment in the Caucasus region as a whole.

So, what one observes in case of Georgia, we have the objective worsening of the security environment of the country, but we see no change in country’s national security and foreign policy priorities. Georgia sees integration into NATO, integration into EU as the only policy options even in light of risks and dangers that these policy options can bring for the country. Finding answers to this puzzle requires further research and exceeds the format of this particular paper.

As for the difference between the two documents, the major difference that should be emphasized is the heightened focus on the significance of the Caucasus in 2011 National Security Concept. While 2005 version of the document mentions Caucasus only twice (and makes it in the context of the North Caucasus only), in 2011 version Caucasus is mentioned 20 times and even whole section is appearing in it dealing with cooperation in the South Caucasus.

This difference between two documents in regards of role of the Caucasus for Georgia can be analyzed in light of Russia’s increased role in the region and Georgia’s desire to form united Caucasian counterbalance to Russia’s power and dominance in the region. Georgia’s discursive turn towards South Caucasus in realm of security is all the more surprising since otherwise Georgia has been trying to “leave” the region and rebrand itself as the Black Sea/East European country with European perspective alongside Moldova and Ukraine.

Besides the abovementioned similarities and differences, the 2011 version of the concept brings the wider understanding of security by emphasizing economic, social, energy, environmental, cyber, demographic challenges alongside more traditional political and military ones.

Conclusion

Satenik Mkrtchyan's comparative analysis of Georgia's National Security Concepts provides well-grounded approach towards understanding official stance on national security of the country. By demonstrating similarities and differences between the documents, the paper analyzed retrospective developments in Georgia's official thinking on the issues of national importance.

As a conclusion, it should be mentioned, that the 2011 version of the document, that largely represents the continuation of the pathos of the 2005 Concept, was adopted during the previous administration of the country. Despite the fact that current administration of Georgian Dream claims to have basically same foreign and security policy priorities as the previous administration (especially with regard to country's foreign policy orientation), still there are some important changes (e.g. observers of Georgia's foreign policy will agree that current administration puts more emphasis on cooperation with EU rather than NATO. Though, NATO still remains the only desirable political-military alliance that Georgia would like to join). It has also been trying to improve relations with Russia and pursue a low-profile foreign and security policy. Whether the existing government plans to modify or renew the National Security Concept of Georgia is still to be seen.