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ANALIZA SPOLJNE POLITIKE RUSKE FEDERACIJE PREMA GRUZIJI KROZ PRIZMU NEOIMPERIJALNIH REGIONALNIH AMBICIJA

SAŽETAK: Kavkaz, ili „evroazijski Balkan”, kako ga je Zbignjev Bžežinski nazvao, bližnje zarubežje (rus. *ближнее зарубежье*) kako ga Rusi percipiraju, predstavlja objedinjenu zonu interesa Rusije, i prostor na kom se odražavaju spoljnopolitički potezi Rusije, s primarnim ciljem pozicioniranja sebe kao regionalnog hegemonu i odvratanja zapadnog uticaja. Rad posmatra spoljnu politiku RF prema Gruziji u periodu posle dezintegracije Sovjetskog Saveza, uz primenu komparativne metode i metode analize sadržaja, oslanjajući se na teorijski okvir ofanzivnog strukturalnog realizma. Koristeći studije slučaja Južne Osetije i Abhazije, rad teži da pokaže kako se razvila neoimperijalna spoljna politika Rusije, te kako se, zavisno od dela Kavkaza na kom se sukob odigrava i stepena antiruskog uticaja u njemu, i sama spoljna politika Rusije menja. Rezultati pokazuju da je Rusija pažljivo stvorila uslove i odabrala trenutak da iskoristi sukob, to jest secesije na prostoru Gruzije da pozicionira sebe kao regionalnog hegemonu.

KLJUČNE REČI: Kavkaz, regionalna bezbednost, Rusija, Evroazija, spoljna politika Rusije, Abhazija i Južna Osetija

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Uvod

U slučaju Abhazije i Južne Osetije radi se o dve republike koje su priznate od strane tek nekoliko država, koje, s izuzetkom Rusije, imaju mali značaj za njihovo priznavanje u međunarodnom kontekstu, budući da se radi o Venecueli, Nikaragvi, Nauru i Siriji, kao i Vanuatu koja priznaje Abhaziju, ali ne i Južnu Osetiju. Pri tome, i samo priznanje od strane Rusije može se pre tumačiti kao politički potez načinjen s ciljem pozicioniranja sebe kao regionalnog hegemonu i s motivom odvratanja uticaja koji dolazi sa zapada, a ne kao znak vere u samoopredeljenje naroda koji žive na teritorijama Abhazije i Južne Osetije. Rad posmatra region u periodu od raspada Sovjetskog Saveza posle kojeg je nastalo mnoštvo država – njih petnaest, s još nekoliko naroda koji pokazuju pomenute etnoseparatističke težnje, sve do aktuelnog perioda i novih događanja vezanih za sukob u Nagornom-Karabahu, koji je nakratko buknuo – šest nedelja intenzivnog rata, pa je ponovo zamrznut, posredstvom Rusije (i Turske). Abhazija i Južna Osetija nastavljaju da postoje, ali pod plaštom ruskog pokroviteljstva, od Rusije zavisni u egzistencijalnoj meri, kako u ekonomskom, tako i u vojnom, političkom i drugim aspektima, tako da mogu biti posmatrani kao ruski protektorati.

Kroz sagledavanje delovanja Rusije na primerima dva sukoba, analizira se način na koji se spoljna politika Rusije adaptira i menja naspram situacije u pitanju. Prati se promena od inicijalnog prepuštanja Gruziji da balansira situaciju u Abhaziji i Južnoj Osetiji do otvorenog rata avgusta 2008. godine, potkrepljenog željom Gruzije da se pridruži NATO alijansi, pod plaštom „prava na zaštitu” (engl. *right to protect*) agende, koja podrazumeva obavezu zaštite ruskih građana na teritorijama dve republike, a kojoj je prethodilo masovno izdavanje pasoša. Isto tako se prati promena od aktivnijeg učešća i prodaje oružja Jermeniji, u vrednosti od jedne milijarde dolara tokom devedesetih godina prošlog milenijuma, do vođenja odmerenije politike i balansiranja Jermenije i Azerbejdžana prodajom oružja obema stranama i sprečavanjem prodiranja NATO uticaja po svaku cenu, izolovanjem regiona od neželjenog uticaja.

Rad počinje pregledom literature gde se daje objašnjenje teorijskog okvira realizma, odnosno ofanzivnog strukturalnog realizma Džona Miršajmera (*John Mearsheimer*). Nakon toga, sledi poglavlje koje razmatra i objašnjava razvoj spoljne politike Ruske Federacije, počevši od raspada Sovjetskog Saveza, posle kog je Rusija nakratko bila okrenuta ka prozapadnom liberalizmu, ali se nakon niza događaja, koji su se odlikavali u širenju snage i uticaja SAD u regionu, ipak odlučila za sprovođenje neoevroazijske politike sa snažnim neoimperijalnim regionalnim ambicijama. Potom sledi poglavlje koje objašnjava istorijske korene sukoba u Gruziji, odnosno Abhaziji i Južnoj Osetiji, a nakon toga sledi studija slučaja Abhazije i Južne Osetije, posmatrana upravo kroz prizmu neoimperijalističkih ambicija Ruske Federacije, odnosno toga kako se sukob odigrao, te kako je Rusija kreirala uslove da, kad se ukaže prava prilika, sukob iskoristi za pozicioniranje sebe kao suverenog regionalnog hegemonu. Posle toga sledi zaključak u okviru koga su sumirani stavovi i pogledi izneti u samom radu.

Pregled literature

Teorijski pristup realizma imao je ogroman uticaj na razvoj polja studija bezbednosti, usredsređivanjem na koncepte moći, straha i anarhije kao faktore putem kojih su pružana objašnjenja od centralnog značaja za sukob i rat. Realizam je doživeo šest varijanti, a to su klasični realizam, neoklasični realizam, realizam uspona i pada, te neorealizam, kao i ofanzivni i defanzivni strukturalni realizam (Vilijams 2012).

Prema shvatanjima klasičnih realista, volja za moć ukorenjena je u iskvarenoj ljudskoj prirodi, a države se neprekidno angažuju u borbi za povećanje vlastite moći, pa je tako i rat objašnjavan prirodom agresivnih državnika ili karakterom unutrašnjeg političkog sistema. Tako je realistički karakter bezbednosti označavao da države mogu održati svoju bezbednost samo osloncem na svoju vojnu moć ili na udruživanje, najčešće u vojnopoličke saveze (Marković 2014).

Defanzivni strukturalni realizam polazi od pretpostavke da države teže bezbednosti u anarhičnom međunarodnom sistemu, tj. da

glavna pretnja njihovoj dobrobiti dolazi od drugih država. Defanzivni strukturalni realisti pozivaju se na to da preovlađujuća tehnologija ili geografske okolnosti često pogoduju odbrani, oteti izvori se ne dodaju lako na one koje metropole već poseduju, domine ne padaju, a moć je teško održavati na daljinu, te skladno tome, oni zastupaju stanovište da države treba da podržavaju *status quo*, budući da je osvajanje u takvom svetu teško (Vilijams 2012).

Ipak, ofanzivni strukturalni realisti ne slažu se s postavkama defanzivnog strukturalnog realizma da države treba samo da teže odgovarajućoj meri moći. Glavni zastupnik ove teorije je Džon Miršajmer, koji u svom delu *Tragedija politike velikih sila* dokazuje da se države suočavaju s nesigurnim međunarodnim okruženjem u kojem bi svaka država mogla da koristi svoju moć kako bi nautila nekoj drugoj državi (Vilijams 2012). Njegova teorija sadrži pet pretpostavki: međunarodni sistem je anarhičan; velike sile poseduju izvesnu ofanzivnu vojnu sposobnost i stoga mogu naškoditi jedne drugima; države nikad ne mogu biti sigurne u namere drugih država; opstanak je prvenstveni cilj velikih sila; i velike sile su racionalni činiooci. Miršajmer iz tih hipoteza izvodi zaključak da se velike sile plaše jedne drugih, da za svoju bezbednost mogu da se oslone samo na sebe i da je uvećanje relativne moći najbolja strategija za države da obezbede svoj opstanak (Marković 2014). Miršajmer tvrdi da bezbednost iziskuje akumulaciju što je moguće više moći u odnosu na druge države, odnosno dokazuje da krajnju bezbednost može da postigne samo najsnažnija država u sistemu.

Ipak, „zaustavljajuća snaga vode” čini takvu globalnu hegemoniju nemogućom, te je drugi i mnogo verovatniji cilj dostizanje regionalne hegemonije, tj. dominiranje regionom u kome se velika sila nalazi. Pored toga, čak i u odsustvu oba tipa hegemonije, države teže da povećaju i bogatstvo i vojnu moć. On razaznaje različite vrste sila: kontinentalne i ostrvske velike sile, i regionalne hegemonie. Kontinentalna velika sila će težiti regionalnoj hegemoniji, ali kada ne može da postigne tu dominaciju, težiće uvećanju svojih relativnih moći koliko god je to moguće. Ostrvska velika sila pre će težiti ravnoteži s državama nego što će pokušati da bude regionalni hegemon, pa tako država poput Velike Britanije deluje kao spoljni uravnotežitelj, mešajući

se samo kada neka kontinentalna sila preti da postigne primat. Treća vrsta velikih sila prema Miršajmeru jeste regionalni hegemon kao što su SAD, a regionalni hegemon je država koja će težiti da brani postojeći povoljan raspored moći (Vilijams 2012).

Miršajmerova teorija iz ugla država koje se ne mogu klasifikovati kao velike sile, obiluje neprihvatljivim hegemonim stavovima, zanemaruje ulogu međunarodnih institucija i ne doprinosi međunarodnoj bezbednosti za sve, bez obzira na moć država. Važan faktor u tumačenju neoimperijalnih regionalnih ambicija Ruske Federacije ima i teorija bezbednosne dileme, tj. beskrajna „igra” nadmetanja koja zahteva stalno povećavanje odbrambenih sposobnosti država radi odgovora na pretnje drugih država, iako to, zapravo, upućuje signale za druge države i vodi u spiralu stalnog jačanja vojne moći i/ili trke u naoružavanju država (Marković 2014). Koristeći teorije ofanzivnog strukturalnog realizma i teorije o bezbednosnoj dilemi, moguće je, na studiji slučaja Južne Osetije i Abhazije, bolje sagledati i analizirati spoljnu politiku Ruske Federacije kroz prizmu petodnevnog rata s Gruzijom iz 2008. godine.

Pregledom literature može se zaključiti da se većina autora koji su se bavili spoljnom politikom Ruske Federacije većinski oslanja na teorijski pristup realizma, ili ofanzivnog realizma Džona Miršajmera, naglašavajući želju Moskve da bude regionalni hegemon, što čini neophodnost sprovođenja neoimperijalističkog projekta na Kavkazu, regionu koji Rusija smatra tradicionalno svojim. Spoljna politika Rusije se na Kavkazu odslikava tako da Rusija smatra da u regionu može postupati po svom slobodnom nahođenju, raspoređujući svoje trupe duž regiona, što predstavlja jasan znak da Rusija ne može da prihvati nezavisnost i suverenitet država nastalih posle raspada bivše države. Po raspadu SSSR-a, Rusija je jedno vreme balansirala između evroatlantske i evroazijske politike, pa je nakratko, pod Jeljcinom, imala period „zapadnjačkog” liberalizma, ali se ipak odlučila za koncept sprovođenja evroazijske politike i pozicioniranja sebe kao lidera u regionu, što je i navedeno kao zadatak u strateškim aktima iz 1992. i 1993. godine.

Takođe, Rusija je smatrala da bi sve bivše republike trebalo da pristupe Zajednici nezavisnih država (ZND), i da bi međunarodna

zajednica i druge sile (poput Kine i SAD koje su pokazale interes za region) trebalo da priznaju rusku supremaciju u regionu, te da bi duž spoljne granice ZND s Turskom i Iranom trebalo postaviti ruske vojnike (Abushov 2009). O’Lear (2011) objašnjava kako granica nije samo granica, tj. teritorijalni limit države, već da ona predstavlja okvir koji poseduje političku, ekonomsku i kulturnu dimenziju unutar kog postoji lokalno posredovanje, kao i postojeće strukture, a koje oblikuju individualno delovanje. To se nadovezuje na činjenicu da je Rusija bila lider regiona u proteklih 200 godina, što za posledicu ima da se politika Rusije prema zemljama u regionu i šire – kako na Kavkazu, tako i prema Belorusiji, Ukrajini i u centralnoj Aziji – sprovodi tako da ostvari rusku dominaciju nad njima, bilo putem saradnje, bilo putem prinude (Blank 2013; Abushov 2009).

Da bi Rusija uspela u sprovođenju tog neoimperijalističkog projekta i pozicioniranja sebe kao regionalnog hegemonu, autori smatraju da će ona, u tom pohodu, koristiti svoju političku, vojnu i ekonomsku moć da kontroliše države koje su bile bivše republike SSSR-a (Sushentstov & Neklyudov 2020). Naime, Rusija smatra da će kroz ostvarivanje regionalne hegemonije eliminisati bilo kakvu mogućnost da druga sila deluje u regionu koji smatra „tradicionalno svojim” (Karagiannis 2012). Sprovođenje neoimperijalističkog projekta s ekspanzijom na Kavkaz i centralnu Aziju rezultuje potvrđivanjem koncepta kao što su bližnje zarubežje (rus. *ближнее зарубежье*), „ruska zona interesa” i koncepta države (rus. *держава*) koji podrazumeva snažno multietničko carstvo s Rusijom kao primarnim akterom (Abushov 2009). Jedna od posledica raspada Sovjetskog Saveza jeste što je nestao „lepak” koji je sve držao pod kontrolom, pa status autonomnih oblasti pojedinih naroda nije više bilo moguće održati i usledio je porast secesionizma. Markedonov, koji se u svom radu bavi pitanjima defakto država i malih država u evroazijskom regionu i njihovim odnosima s drugim međunarodno priznatim državama, navodi kako je problem tog regiona, samim tim i međunarodne zajednice, činjenica da sve te države imaju ogromnu podršku naroda koji živi na toj teritoriji za politiku ekstremizma i secesionizma (2015).

Spoljna politika Rusije

Ruska spoljna politika je od decembra 1991. godine prošla kroz brojne reforme s različitim fazama. Nedugo po raspadu bivše države, u Rusiji su se pojavile dve glavne škole mišljenja u kom pravcu bi spoljna politika i koncepcija države trebalo da se odvija – prva škola mišljenja bila je evroatlanska, a druga neoevroazijska (Meshabi 1993: 181). Evroatlantska škola mišljenja bila je predvođena prozapadnim liberalima čiji je primarni cilj bio formiranje međunarodnog okruženja koji bi omogućio unutrašnji ekonomski razvitak. Dalje, oni su verovali da bi trebalo odbaciti istorijsku ideju o specijalnoj ulozi koju Rusija ima kao „most” između Evrope i Azije i okrenuti se ka Evropi (Light 2003: 44; Kropatcheva 2012: 375). To je bio kamen temeljac spoljne politike prve godine vlade Borisa Jeljcina (*Борис Ельцин*) (1992) kada je Jegor Gajdar (*Егор Гайдар*) bio premijer. Ipak, postati deo Zapada značilo je baciti senku na tradicionalnu ideju o Rusiji kao velikoj sili, a suverenitet i uloga države oslabili su pod uticajem cilja o transformaciji u tržišnu demokratiju. Liberalna prozapadna politika nije bila dugog životnog veka, te je zamenjena idejom o suverenoj Rusiji, s većom ulogom države i ideji o preporodu u vidu nezavisne velike sile (Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 149). Dakle, posle kratkog perioda idealizovanja i pokušaja približavanja Zapadu, krajem 1992. godine odlučeno je da se spoljna politika usmeri u pravcu ostvarivanja regionalne hegemonije nad postsovjetskim prostorom (Abushov 2009: 191).

Druga škola mišljenja – neoevroazijska – imala je nekoliko podgrupa i uključivala je neoimperijaliste, zagovornike zone ruskog interesa (bližnje zarubežje) i etnonacionaliste. U osnovi, zajednička im je bila želja za obnovom države unutar granica bivšeg Sovjetskog Saveza, tj. regionalna dominacija oličena kroz snažnu i suverenu Rusiju, koja bi sebi potčinila druge bivše države Sovjetskog Saveza kroz ekonomsku, političku i vojnu moć, kao i kroz osnivanje više defakto protektorata, tj. država zavisnih od Rusije (Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 151). Nov pogled ogledao se u tome da bi novonastale nezavisne države u regionu koji čini zonu tradicionalnih interesa Rusije – bližnje zarubežje – trebalo da budu fokus spoljne politike. Ruske vlade su postsovjetski prostor posmatrale

kroz koncept „države” (rus. „держава императорская”) satkanu od neoimperijalnih namera, što je iziskivalo sekuritizaciju Kavkaza kao regiona u kom se odlikavaju potencijalne pretnje po suverenitet i integritet Rusije (Abushov 2019: 4; Rezvani 2020: 7). Neoimperijalizam, kao kamen temeljac spoljne politike, predstavlja prikrivenu formu imperijalizma kroz koju država može priznati nezavisnost druge države, ali ipak nastaviti da dominira državom kroz kontrolu tržišta ili resursa (Abushov 2009: 188). Na Kavkazu se ispoljavaju tri faktora koji krucijalno oblikuju spoljnu politiku Rusije, a to su rivalitet između Rusije i Turske, kao i Rusije i SAD, zatim lokalni konflikti poput onih u regiji Nagorno-Karabah i Južnoj Osetiji i Abhaziji, ali i činjenica da je Kavkaz dom za etnoseparatističke i terorističke pretnje, što se moglo videti i u Čečeniji, zbog koje je Rusija vodila dva rata (Sushentsov & Neklyudov 2020: 5).

Na proleće 1993. godine, tadašnji predsednik Jeljcin i ministar spoljnih poslova Andrej Kozirev (*Андрей Козырев*) uputili su čak formalan zahtev UN da priznaju ulogu i značaj Rusije kao garantora očuvanja mira u više etničkih sukoba na prostoru bivšeg Sovjetskog Saveza, s obzirom na stepen njene uloge u zamrzavanju tih sukoba, kroz intervenciju ruskih trupa (Trenin 2009: 8). Po završetku hladnog rata primarni ciljevi bili su uklanjanje vredne infrastrukture iz drugih zemalja kako ne bi pale pod tuđi uticaj, zatim izgradnja odnosa s prijateljskim državama poput Belorusije, Jermenije i Kazahstana i obnova izgubljenog uticaja na postsovjetskom prostoru (Sushentsov & Neklyudov 2020: 4). Uopšteno, retorika korišćena u to vreme ukazivala je na želju da se postsovjetski prostor preuredi kao zona ruskog interesa i, skladno tome, formirana je strategija čija je implementacija trebalo da rezultuje obnovom imperijalne nadmoći nad regionom, uključujući Baltik, Kavkaz, monopolizaciju Kaspijskog mora, te dozvoljavanje novonastalim državama samo ograničenu dozu suvereniteta, a Zajednica nezavisnih država (ZND) i Ugovor o kolektivnoj bezbednosti (Taškentski pakt, posle Organizacija dogovora o kolektivnoj bezbednosti) predviđeni su kao nove alatke koje će doprineti ispunjavanju tog cilja (Abushov 2009: 191). Bivša država jeste nestala, ali i posle tog istorijskog događaja Rusija je ostala snažno povezana sa zbivanjima na postsovjetskom prostoru koji je u okvirima Zajednice nezavisnih država. Samim tim,

prostor koji ZND pokriva poprimio je obrise međunarodne arene u kojoj su koncentrisani medijatorski naponi Rusije u sukobima koji se na tom prostoru događaju (Morozova 2009: 671). Zajednica nezavisnih država, koja je uključila sve bivše države (sa izuzetkom baltičkih), pokazala se kao tranzicioni mehanizam putem kojeg je Rusija uspjela da sačuva vlasništvo nad nuklearnim oružjem bivše države, permanentno sedište Rusije u SBUN, kao i imovinu i infrastrukturu bivše države u inostranstvu, uključujući i ambasade (Trenin 2009: 7). Od 1993. pa sve do dolaska Vladimira Putina, na vrhuncu moći SAD i unipolarnosti, Rusija je predstavljala sebe kao silu, iako to nije bila. Zapravo, u tom periodu Rusija je bila najslabija, te je u tom periodu težila balansiranju iliti suzdržavanju uticaja SAD u regionu (Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 154; Rezvani 2020: 9). Ipak, događaj koji je nagnao Rusiju na promenu strategije povodom Kavkaza bio je NATO bombardovanje SR Jugoslavije (Karagiannis 2013: 84; Hughes 2013: 994; Zellner 2006: 393, Fabry 2012: 667). Iz tog događaja Rusija je uvidela kako demokratije, pod plaštom brige za ljudska prava, mogu da ratuju zarad svoje koristi (Wolff & Peen Rodt 2013: 814). Osim toga, nakon bombardovanja i usled proširenja NATO-a u Evropi (Poljska, Mađarska i Češka), prvi put u 250 godina, Rusija je prestala da bude sila u Evropi, to jest, sada je bila samo bivši Sovjetski Savez, ni manje ni više od toga (Trenin 2009: 9; Marten 2015: 189; Kazantsev, Rutland, Medvedeva & Safranchuk 2020: 3). Ruska spoljna politika prema regionu postala je po dolasku Vladimira Putina koherentnija i konstantnija, oličena u centralizaciji moći Kremlja, kao i u ograničavanju slobodne volje drugih država u regionu, tj. njihovom potčinjavanju volji Moskve, uključujući i one u Severnom Kavkazu. Takođe, od momenta njegovog (Putinovog) dolaska na vlast, Kremlj i nije imao drugu opciju nego da sprovodi konzistentnu politiku prema Kavkazu, budući da je od 1994. Zapad vođen ekonomskim interesima (kako SAD, tako i EU) počeo da se probija u region i takmiči za uticaj u njemu, počevši od potpisivanja sporazuma između Azerbejdžana i deset velikih korporacija koji je dozvoljavao istraživanje azerbejdžanskog dela Kaspijskog mora (Abushov 2009: 197).

Gruzija (Južna Osetija i Abhazija)

Da bi se razumela spoljna politika Rusije prema Gruziji i celom Kavkazu uopšte, sagledavanjem kroz sukobe u Južnoj Osetiji i Abhaziji, neophodno je, pre toga, razumeti izvore sukoba u te dve defakto državnice. Gruzija je, kao jedna od 15 republika Sovjetskog Saveza, u sebi imala dve podjedinice – Abhaziju i Adžariju – koje su imale status autonomnih socijalističkih sovjetskih republika, kao i autonomnu oblast Južnu Osetiju (Sotiriou 2017: 2).

Južna Osetija je status autonomne oblasti (po hijerarhiji slabiji od statusa autonomne socijalističke sovjetske republike koje su imale Abhazija i Adžarija) stekla aprila 1922. godine kao manjina u Gruziji. Prema popisu stanovništva, Južna Osetija je 1989. godine imala populaciju manju od 100000 ljudi, od kojih su se njih 66% izjašnjavali kao Osetijanci, a 29% kao Gruzini (Tuathail 2008: 673–674). Južna Osetija je bila autonomna oblast SSR Gruzije od 1936. do 1991. godine, a prema izveštaju iz 1988. godine, 86% Osetijaca nije umelo da se služi gruzinskim jezikom (Sotiriou 2017: 2). Tokom kasnih 80-ih godina, pojavio se u Južnoj Osetiji pokret Ademon Nykhaz („narodni parlament”; „narodna reč”), mreža osetijskih nacionalista tražila je ujedinjenje sa Severnom Osetijom, kao i unapređenje statusa iz autonomne oblasti u status autonomne socijalističke sovjetske republike, koja bi činila sastavni deo Gruzije, ali s mogućnošću potencijalne secesije u budućnosti. Gruzijски parlament je 10. novembra 1989. godine pristao na taj zahtev, ali je narednog dana svoju odluku opozvao (Tuathail 2008: 676; Cooley & Mitchell 2010: 61). Gruzijски nacionalni lider Zviad Gamsakurdija (*Звиад Гамсахурдия*) organizovao je protest ka Chinvaliju, glavnom gradu Južne Osetije, protiv zakona regionalnog parlamenta koji se tiče osetijskog jezika, pod plaštom izgovora o odbrani gruzijskog naroda. Osetijski nacionalisti i demonstranti su put ka Chinvaliju blokirali, gde su se i sukobili s pristalicama Gamsakurdije i u kojima je više ljudi povređeno (Karagiannis 2012: 77). Od tog momenta pa do dana današnjeg, teritorijalni integritet Gruzije pod znakom je pitanja (Tuathail 2008: 676). Oktobra 1990. godine Gamsakurdija je postao lider Gruzije i pod namerom sprovođenja slogana „Gruzija Gruzijcima” lišio je Južnu

Osetiju autonomije, što je kulminiralo otvorenim sukobom 1991. godine (German 2016: 157). Strah od izbijanja lokalnog sukoba, kao i dolazak Eduarda Ševarnandzea (Эдуард Шеварднадзе) na mesto predsednika Gruzije marta 1992. godine, rezultiralo je staloženijim pristupom koji je doveo do mirovnog sporazuma 24. juna 1992. godine, nakon čega su duž zone sukoba raspoređene mirovne trupe iz snaga Gruzije, Južne Osetije i Rusije (Karagiannis 2012: 78; German 2016: 157), a pored toga, jula 1992. godine je u Južnu Osetiju upućena i OEBS misija s ciljem utvrđivanja svih činjenica (Nishimura 2007: 32). Ševarnandze je bio uporan u nameri da povрати teritorijalni integritet Gruzije, ali je odbio mogućnost upotrebe vojne sile u tu svrhu, te je južnoosetijski sukob postao zamrznut (Karagiannis 2012: 78).

Abhazija je u periodu između 1922. i 1931. godine imala status SSR, ali je nakon toga ujedinjena sa SSR Gruzijom i u okviru nje je imala status autonomne socijalističke sovjetske republike od 1931. do 1991. godine. Po ujedinjenju, nad narodom Abhazije sprovedena je represija i diskriminatorna politika s ciljem urušavanja abhazskog kulturnog identiteta. Mediji koji su izveštavali na abhaskom jeziku ugašeni su, a škole u kojima je nastava vođena na abhaskom jeziku zamenjene su nastavom na ruskom ili gruzinskom jeziku. Sprovedenje ove politike ukinuto je po Staljinovoj smrti, ali je to ipak ostavilo snažan otisak, budući da je 75% Abhaza (od oko 220000 koliko ih ima, prema procenama) tečno govorilo ruski jezik, dok je ta brojka kod Gruzina u Abhaziji iznosila 56%. Takva politika probudila je abhaski nacionalizam koji je od 1930-ih više bio uperen ka borbi za secesiju od Gruzije, nego što je brinuo o dominaciji (od strane) Rusije. S usponom „narodnog parlamenta” u Južnoj Osetiji, abhaski nacionalisti osnovali su Abhaski narodni forum („Abkhaz Popular Forum – Aydylara“) putem kog su se Moskvi obratili za zaštitu abhaskih interesa (Sotiriou 2017: 2–3; Kereselidze 2015: 311). Secesionistički pokreti u Abhaziji i regiji Nagorno-Karabah tražili su pravo na samoopredeljenje, ali to nije bilo u skladu s Ustavom SSSR-a (Coppeters 2018: 996–997). Pre nego što je došlo do dezintegracije Sovjetskog Saveza, lideri Abhazije zatražili su obnovu statusa koji je Abhazija uživala pre 1931. godine i secesiju od Gruzije, a avgusta 1990. godine Vrhovni sovjet Abhazije deklarirao je suverenost republike (Murinson 2010: 8). Gruzija je svoju

nezavisnost proglasila 31. marta 1991. godine pozivajući se na Ustav iz 1921. godine, prema kom su i Abhazija i Južna Osetija nedeljivi delovi Gruzije (Sotiriou 2017: 3), što je u Abhaziji izazvalo ponovno uvođenje Ustava iz 1925. godine, prema kom Abhazija jeste bila u specijalnoj uniji s Gruzijom, ali koji je omogućavao secesiju kako iz SSSR, tako i iz Zakavkaske Sovjetske Federativne Socijalističke Republike. Usvojeni su grb i zastava, a država je preimenovana iz ASSR Abhazija u Republika Abhazija. Abhaski lider Vladislav Ardzinba (*Владислав Ардзинба*) isticao je kako to ne treba posmatrati kao akt secesije, ali je to za posledicu ipak imalo invaziju gruzijskih trupa 14. avgusta 1992. godine, čime je započet rat u Abhaziji (Murinson 2010: 8). Gruzijske trupe držale su prestonicu Abhazije Suhumi skoro četrnaest meseci, sve do iznenadnog napada septembra 1993. godine koji je omogućio prodor abhaskim snagama, što je za posledicu imalo masovni odlazak gruzijske populacije iz Abhazije (Fawn & Cummings 2007: 84). Gruzija je bila uverena kako Abhazi nisu mogli voditi rat bez spoljne podrške i logistike, tj. bez pomoći Rusije. Eduard Ševarnandze je, povodom toga, optužio pripadnike vojske Ruske Federacije, ističući kako podržavaju Abhaze s namerom potiranja nezavisnosti Gruzije, podržavajući separatističke namere Abhaza do nivoa fašizma (Fawn 2007: 132). Oktobra 1993. godine Ševarnandze se pokorio pritisku Rusije i pristao na otvaranje vojnih baza i luka, nakon čega su Abhazija i Gruzija potpisale primirje. Takođe, Ševarnandze je preokrenuo i poziciju i stav svog prethodnika Gamsakurdije, čime se Gruzija 8. oktobra 1993. pridružila Zajednici nezavisnih država, zauzvrat očekujući pomoć Rusije u suzdržavanju secesionističkih sukoba na teritoriji Gruzije i strahujući od totalnog kolapsa (Fawn & Cummings 2007: 85–87; Fawn 2007: 136). Treba istaći i to kako je međunarodna misija za utvrđivanje činjenica tokom sukoba u Gruziji, u izveštaju poznatom kao „Taljavini izveštaj” utvrdila da su Južna Osetija i Abhazija imale pravo na samoopredeljenje, ne samo kao manjine već i prema objektivnim karakteristikama, poput zajedničkog jezika, kulture i religije, kao i prema istaknutoj nameri da oforme svoju političku zajednicu. Istovremeno, u izveštaju se navodi da pravo na samoopredeljenje ne implicira pravo na secesiju Južne Osetije i Abhazije (Markedonov 2015: 198–199).

Ipak, Ševarnandze je, u svojoj nameri da povrati suverenitet nad Južnom Osetijom i Abhazijom, bio nezadovoljan podrškom Moskve, te je od 1995. pa nadalje počeo da traži podršku i partnerstvo sa SAD i NATO-om, s ciljem balansiranja uticaja Rusije u regionu, na koji se, iz ugla Gruzije, gledalo kao na primarni izvor nestabilnosti regiona (Devdariani 2005: 167–173). Gruzija je 1997. aplicirala za članstvo u NATO, a pored toga, pružala je utočište čečenskim izbeglicama i borcima. Naredni udarac po prisustvo Rusije u regionu došao je na OEBS samitu u Istanbulu 1999. godine, nakon koga je Rusija morala da ukloni sve vojne baze s teritorije Gruzije, uključujući i one u Abhaziji, budući da je Gruzija sumnjala da je kroz te baze pružana podrška separatističkim režimima. Na OEBS samitu takođe je došlo do sporazuma između Gruzije, Azerbejdžana i SAD povodom izgradnje Baku–Tbilisi–Čejhan naftovoda koji bi zaobilazio postojeći Novorosijsk, tj. putem kog bi se vršio transport energenata iz kaspijskog basena do evropskih tržišta. Balansirajući naponi Gruzije i Azerbejdžana s kraja 90-ih doveli su do pojave regionalne alijanse GUUAM (Gruzija, Ukrajina, Uzbekistan (koji je GUUAM napustio 2005. godine), Azerbejdžan i Moldavija), a koji je od strane Moskve percipiran kao instrument za ograničavanje ruskog uticaja u zoni koja tradicionalno pripada upravo Moskvi, potpomognut od strane Zapada (Abushov 2009: 197). Gruzija je 1999. godine napustila tadašnji Ugovor o kolektivnoj bezbednosti, koji je potom, na inicijativu Vladimira Putina, reorganizovan u Organizaciju dogovora o kolektivnoj bezbednosti (Kazantsev, Rutland, Medvedeva & Safranchuk 2020: 9). Rusija je bila nezadovoljna pro-NATO sloganima i odbijanjem Ševarnandzea da joj pruži pomoć u sukobu s Čečenijom, što je dovelo do strožih mera od strane Kremlja. Počevši od 1999. godine, Rusija je promenila svoj izolacionistički stav prema Južnoj Osetiji i Abhaziji, otvorivši granice s Abhazijom i ignorišući embargo, a takođe, davana je podrška zapošljavanju rezervista i penzionisanih veterana Rusije u bezbednosnim strukturama Južne Osetije i Abhazije. Od 2000. godine Rusija je uspostavila vizni režim prema Gruziji, istovremeno vršeći naturalizaciju stanovništva Abhazije i Južne Osetije, izdavajući im pasoše, objašnjavajući to humanim gestom, s obzirom da življe tog područja na drugi način ne bi moglo da putuje. Na taj način je Rusija zadržala pravo intervencije u obe defakto države u slučaju napada od strane Gruzije (Abushov 2009: 199).

Revolucija ruža, koja se zbila 2003. godine, dovela je na čelo gruzijske države Mihaila Sakašvilija (*Михаил Саакашвили*). Sakašvili se tokom kampanje zalagao za jačanje odnosa Gruzije s Evropom i SAD, uz obećanje da će ponovo ujediniti zemlju kroz reintegraciju Južne Osetije (Killingsworth 2012: 229; Tuathail 2008: 681). Putin je, inicijalno, podržavao promenu režima u Tbilisiju, nadajući se da će usled toga doći do poboljšanja u bilateralnim odnosima Gruzije i Rusije, međutim, nadanja nisu bila dugog životnog veka, te se i Putin ubrzo okrenuo protiv Sakašvilija. Iz ruske perspektive, ružičasta revolucija nije bila istinski demokratski događaj, već dobro iskoordinirana akcija sa zapada, s ciljem izolovanja Rusije (Nodia 2012: 722; Abushov 2009: 199; Karagiannis 2012: 78). Sakašvili ne samo da je otvoreno isticao kako je prozapadno orijentisan već je, u zamenu za američku pomoć i podršku prilikom apliciranja Gruzije za članstvo u NATO, poslao 2000 gruzijskih trupa u Irak, čime je Gruzija postala treća zemlja po broju trupa koje učestvuju u ratu, odmah iza američkih i britanskih (Tuathail 2008: 682). Maja 2004. godine Sakašvili je primorao lidera Adžarije Aslana Abašidzea (*Аслан Абашидзе*) da dà ostavku i time je reintegrirao Adžariju u Gruziju, što nije naišlo na otpor od strane Rusije. Sakašvili se nadao sličnom scenariju u Južnoj Osetiji, pa je juna 2004. godine izbio manji sukob duž granice Gruzije i Južne Osetije, ali situacija je sada bila drugačija. Gruzija je naišla na otpor Rusije, kako vojni, tako i politički. Genadij Savčenko (*Геннадий Савченко*), izaslanik pri Ministarstvu inostranih poslova Rusije, izjavio je kako Rusija poštuje princip teritorijalnog integriteta, ali da je u slučaju Gruzije teritorijalni integritet pre mogućnost nego politička i pravna realnost (Abushov 2009: 199; Karagiannis 2012: 78). Zvaničnici Gruzije su više puta istakli kako će nastaviti borbu za svoj teritorijalni integritet, ali su u međuvremenu bilateralni odnosi, kako oni između Gruzije i Južne Osetije i Abhazije, tako i između Gruzije i Rusije, dodatno narušeni i delovalo je kao da su došli do tačke iza koje nema povratka.”

Jednostrano proglašenje nezavisnosti tzv. Republike Kosovo 17. februara 2008. godine nagovestilo je kakva će biti dinamika same godine, stavivši nov pritisak na već postojeća žarišta širom Kavkaza (Cheterian 2012: 703). Zvaničnici sa Zapada (koji su priznali tzv. Republiku Kosovo) isticali su kako je to jedinstven slučaj, ali je priznanje

ipak imalo za posledicu izjave lidera Abhazije i Južne Osetije da će ubrzo zatražiti od Rusije, Zajednice nezavisnih država, Ujedinjenih nacija, kao i drugih međunarodnih organizacija da priznaju njihovu nezavisnost (Caspersen 2013: 929). Aprila 2008. godine ruski ratni avion oborio je gruzijsku bespilotnu letelicu u vazдушnom prostoru Abhazije, usledilo je mnoštvo optužbi s obe strane, stvorila se ratna atmosferu između dve zemlje, ali se iz tog događaja dalo videti koliko je Rusija osetljiva na bilo kakvu vrstu vojnog upada u Abhaziju, a ruski zvaničnici su više puta isticali kako će braniti svoje građane u Abhaziji i Južnoj Osetiji po svaku cenu, čak i upotrebom sile, ako za tim bude bilo potrebe. 18. aprila 2008. godine Vladimir Putin je dao instrukcije o uspostavljanju zvaničnih odnosa Rusije sa dve defakto republike, stavivši time Gruziji do znanja da njihova reintegracija u Gruziju nije mogućnost (Abushov 2009: 200; Karagiannis 2012: 79). Gruzijske snage su se za rat pripremale nedeljama pre samog početka sukoba, preuzimajući strateške pozicije oko Chinvalija, raspoređujući svoje trupe i oružje duž regiona i preraspoređujući mirovne trupe unutar zone sukoba (Antonenko 2008: 23). Naime, tokom jula 2008. godine sprovedene su brojne vojne vežbe, s jedne strane u sadejstvu SAD–Gruzija pod imenom „Trenutni odgovor 2008”, a sa druge „Kavkaz 2008” u režiji Rusije. Krajem jula je serija bombaških napada u Chinvaliju ubila nekoliko Gruzina, što je izazvalo revolt osetijskih separatističkih grupa koje su počele da napadaju gruzijska sela i vojne pozicije u Južnoj Osetiji. Tokom noći 7. avgusta gruzijske vojne snage napale su Chinvali, preuzimajući kontrolu nad većim delom grada, usmrтивši pri tome mnoštvo civila i nekolicinu pripadnika mirovnih trupa iz redova ZND-a, koji su tu bili stacionirani još od rata iz prošlog veka. Odgovor ruskih trupa usledio je približno dvanaest sati nakon započinjanja gruzijske ofanzive, s vazдушnim i pešadijskim napadima. 9. avgusta su, zajedno sa abhaskim saveznicima, otvorili drugi front u Kodori dolini, a nedugo potom ušli su u zapadni deo Gruzije i zauzeli luku Poti. Do 10. avgusta su preuzeli kontrolu nad Chinvalijem i započeli s napadima protiv gruzijske vojske koja je počela da se povlači u matičnu zemlju. Ruske trupe su narednog dana bombardovale i zauzele neosporivi deo Gruzije, uključujući i grad Gori. Predsednik Rusije Dmitrij Medvedev (*Дмитрий Медведев*) oglosio se 12. avgusta porukom kako je cilj operacije ruske vojske u primoravanju

Gruzije na mir postignut, te kako je odlučeno da se obustavi operacija, čime je petodnevni rat završen (Killingsworth 2012: 229; Karagiannis 2012: 79). Suštinski, gruzijski naponi za ponovnim uspostavljanjem kontrole nad Južnom Osetijom izazvali su Rusiju na vojnu invaziju. Uzevši u obzir da je Rusija godinama unazad davala pasoše građanima Južne Osetije i Abhazije, to su iskoristili kao razlog i motiv za pokretanje vojne operacije na teritoriji Gruzije. Nakon što su obezbedili region, Moskva je otišla korak dalje i formalno priznala nezavisnost Južne Osetije i Abhazije 26. avgusta 2008. godine. Prema Izvjestiji, rat je posmatran kao najznačajniji podvig Medvedevljevog mandata, putem kog se Rusija na velika vrata vratila na geopolitičku mapu sveta. Jednostrano proglašenje nezavisnosti tzv. Republike Kosovo poslužilo je takođe kao izgovor za ofanzivu, koji je Rusija iskoristila da kazni Gruziju za približavanje NATO alijansi, ali i da demonstrira Zapadu da je Kavkaz region koji „pripada” Rusiji (O’Lear 2011: 270; German 2012: 1654).

Posle završetka rata, Rusija je ažurirala svoju legislativu, dajući predsedniku mogućnost da raspoređuje ruske trupe van granica Rusije pod izgovorom odbrane „časti i dostojanstva” ruskih građana širom postsovjetskih zemalja. Prema zakonu donetom 11. avgusta 2008. godine, ruske vojne jedinice mogu biti upotrebljene van granica Rusije u slučajevima kada je potrebno uzvratiti napad protiv napadnutih ruskih vojnih trupa van granica Rusije, u slučaju kada je potrebno sprečiti ili uzvratiti agresiju protiv druge zemlje, zarad borbe protiv piraterije i osiguravanja sigurnog prolaska brodova i, najzad, zarad odbrane ruskih državljana van granica Rusije. Zakon bi bio pravni osnov za ofanzivnu projekciju vojne sile Rusije, kao i za bilo kakav budući napad protiv Gruzije, ali bi pružio i osnovu za upotrebu sile protiv bilo koje države od Baltika do Centralne Azije, pod plaštom odbrane časti i dostojanstva ruskih građana (Blank 2013: 6).

Abhazija i Južna Osetija okupiraju unikatnu poziciju na postsovjetskom prostoru, budući da nijedan drugi politički entitet u regionu nema dublju povezanost s Rusijom od njih, što ih čini defakto ruskim protektoratima. Rusija je od krucijalne važnosti za njihov opstanak, s obzirom na to što je jedna od retkih zemalja koja priznaje njihovu nezavisnost. Abhaziju je priznalo sedam država (Ruska Federacija, Nikaragva, Venecuela, Nauru, Vanuatu, Tuvalu i Sirija), a

Južnu Osetiju tek pet, pored Rusije to su Nikaragva, Venecuela, Nauru i Tuvalu. Na osnovu toga, Rusija je, u odnosu na Abhaziju i Južnu Osetiju, razvila snažan mehanizam zavisnosti i prinude, koji se ogleda u sedam tipova povezanosti: ekonomska, međuvladina, tehnokratska, socijalna, informaciona i civilna povezanost, i na kraju institucionalna povezanost i paralelnost (Gerrits & Badder 2016: 298).

Rusija podržava ekonomije Abhazije i Južne Osetije bivajući njihov glavni ekonomski partner, tako što je najveći partner Abhazije, a gotovo jedini Južne Osetije, a pored toga, najvažniji ekonomski i infrastrukturni objekti potpadaju pod vlasništvo Rusije. Međuvladina i tehnokratska povezanost ogledaju se u činjenici da je Rusija dugi niz godina izdavala pasoše građanima Abhazije i Južne Osetije, što dalje daje pravo Rusiji da interveniše u slučaju bilo kakvog napada na svoje građane, a i pod okriljem Rusije organizovani su samiti četiri neprepoznate države postsovjetskog regiona – Abhazije, Južne Osetije, Nagornog-Karabaha i Transnistrije. Isto tako, Rusija je 26. avgusta 2008. zvanično priznala nezavisnost dve države, potpisani su i sporazumi o iskoordiniranim spoljnim politikama i zajedničkom odbrambenom prostoru, dok se tehnokratska ogleda u tome da je većina državnika (kao i građana) dve defakto države svoje obrazovanje stekla u Rusiji, ili su bili pripadnici vladajuće elite u Rusiji. Socijalna, informaciona i civilna povezanost, kao i institucionalna više su nego očigledne kada se uzme u obzir da su zakoni u dve defakto države gotovo identični kao oni u Rusiji, kao i u oblicima institucija i struktura koje postoje i funkcionišu na teritorijama Abhazije i Južne Osetije. Ruski jezik je gotovo univerzalno korišćen na prostorima Abhazije i Južne Osetije, Rusija daje stipendije i pruža mogućnost studija u svojoj zemlji, a ruska televizija i mediji dominantni su i nadaleko dostupni, putem kojih se takođe vrši promocija ruskog jezika (Gerrits & Bader 2016: 298–306).

Diskusija

Spoljnu politiku Ruske Federacije prema Gruziji, samim tim i Kavkazu i celokupnom regionu, moguće je posmatrati s velikom podudarnošću naspram teorije ofanzivnog strukturalnog realizma

Džona Miršajmera. Naime, kroz odnos RF prema Gruziji, počevši od raspada Sovjetskog Saveza sve do rata iz 2008. godine, vrlo se jasno naziru osnovne postavke teorije ofanzivnog strukturalnog realizma. Pre svega, Ruska Federacija je, iako bi se osnovano moglo pretpostaviti da ima unipolarnih ambicija, veoma dobro svesna „zaustavljajuće snage vode” kako je to Miršajmer definisao, prema tome teži uspostavljanju regionalne hegemonije, u čemu je i ostvarila velike uspehe. Iako je opstanak osnovni cilj svake države, što je svakako bilo posebno izraženo u RF po raspadu bivše države, svaka velika sila, kakva Rusija nesumnjivo jeste, teži uvećanju sopstvene moći, budući da je akumulacija moći (nauštrb drugih država) najbolji način za postizanje kako visokog stepena sopstvene bezbednosti, tako i visokog stepena hegemonije u regionu. Pored toga, velike sile jesu racionalni činioci koji u anarhičnom međunarodnom sistemu povlače poteze koji im donose bolju šansu opstanka i poziciju u tom međunarodnom sistemu, a Rusija je svoj neoimperijalni regionalni projekat na Kavkazu ostvarivala korak po korak, čekajući pravu priliku da deluje. Približavanje Gruzije SAD i EU predstavljalo je pretnju po hegemoniju Ruske Federacije u regionu, te je Rusija počela s naturalizovanjem življa Južne Osetije i Abhazije, a pravu priliku za pozicioniranje sebe kao regionalnog hegemonu uvidela je u jednostranom proglašenju nezavisnosti tzv. Republike Kosovo i namerama Gruzije da pripoji nekadašnje teritorije Južne Osetije i Abhazije, započevši (i pobedivši) petodnevni rat iz 2008. godine, čime je u znatnoj meri neutralizovan uticaj SAD i Zapada, i čime se Rusija definitivno vratila na scenu na „velika vrata”, kao hegemon „tradicionalno svog” regiona.

Zaključak

Spoljna politika Ruske Federacije je, po raspadu bivše države, prošla nekoliko faza, nakratko okrenuta ka prozapadnom liberalizmu, ali je ipak, tokom godina, svoju spoljnu politiku usmerila ka ostvarivanju neoimperijalnih ambicija u evroazijskom regionu. Tokom 90-ih godina intenzivirali su se višedecenijski interetnički sukobi koji su rezultirali secesijom Južne Osetije i Abhazije, u okviru kojih je Rusija videla

moćnost za proširivanjem, odnosno ponovnim uspostavljanjem svog uticaja na sada postsovjetskom prostoru, koji je buknuo nestabilnostima i etnoseparatističkim namerama posle raspada Sovjetskog Saveza i na kom su Sjedinjene Američke Države želele da prošire svoj uticaj, privoljavanjem Gruzije (kao i Azerbejdžana, Ukrajine, baltičkih zemalja...) svojoj ideologiji. Usled obojenih revolucija, prevashodno Revolucije ruža i dolaskom Mihaila Sakašvilija na scenu, Gruzija se okrenula ka traženju članstva u NATO alijansi uz ambiciju da reintegriše nekadašnje autonomne socijalističke sovjetske republike i autonomne oblasti, a posle uspeha s Adžarijom, Sakašvili se nadao da će svoju nameru prema Južnoj Osetiji (i Abhaziji) ostvariti na isto tako lak način.

Međutim, Rusija je tokom godina počela da izdaje pasoše građanima s podneblja Abhazije i Južne Osetije, čineći ih naturalizovanim Rusima, što im je davalo za pravo da interveniše u slučaju gruzijske ofanzive, kako je i bilo 2008. godine. Ishod rusko-gruzijskog rata takav je da je Gruzija poražena, a da su Abhazija i Južna Osetija dobile ono što su želele – svoju (defakto) državu, dok je Rusija pokazala izuzetnu spremnost na upotrebu sile zarad odbrane svojih interesa, pri tome pokazavši SAD (i EU) ko je ipak hegemon u regionu, zauzvrat želeći da pokaže dozu revanšizma za jednostrano proglašenje nezavisnosti tzv. Republike Kosovo, kao i za bombardovanje SR Jugoslavije 1999. godine kom se protivila i koja je bila izuzeta u donošenju (i sprovođenju) te odluke.

Ipak, može se postaviti pitanje koliko su Abhazija i Južna Osetija dobile svojom nezavisnošću i kojim pravcem će se kretati u budućnosti. Svakako, življe s tog podneblja je dobilo svoje države, ali države koje su priznate od tek nekolicine – i to ne moćnih – država, s izuzetkom Rusije, tj. od strane sedam zemalja u slučaju Abhazije, odnosno pet u slučaju Južne Osetije. Obe države su u tolikoj meri zavisne od Rusije da su faktički ruski protektorati, i bez uticaja Rusije bi se moglo postaviti pitanje njihovog opstanka, kako u ekonomskom i socijalnom, tako i u političkom i vojnom smislu. Obe države su pod pritiskom Gruzije i izolovane od sveta na taj način da njihovi državljani nigde ne mogu ni da otputuju (osim u „matičnu” Rusiju), da međunarodne kompanije nisu voljne da otvore svoja predstavništva na njihovim teritorijama, kako zbog pitanja bezbednosti, tako i zbog pitanja pravne regulative, s obzirom na njihovu nepriznatost širom sveta; njihove ekonomije su

u ogromnoj meri zavisne od Rusije i većinski je čine poslovi s Rusijom. Samim tim, verovatnije je da će njihova budućnost više nalikovati na Severni Kipar, pre nego na tzv. Republiku Kosovo.

Na kraju, ruski protektorski stav prema njima ne treba posmatrati kroz naročitu brigu za narod sa tih teritorija, već kroz neoimperijalističke ambicije koje Rusija gaji prema regionu, a koje se ogledaju u suzdržavanju prodiranja antiruskog uticaja u region, koje je Gruzija svakako vrlo otvoreno ispoljavala, što je navelo Putina i Medvedeva, tj. Rusiju, na ulazak u rat 2008. godine koji je bio veoma pažljivo proračunat i za koji se Rusija pripremala godinama. Posmatrano kroz prizmu ofanzivnog realizma Džona Miršajmera, putem kog je Rusija iskoristila povoljnu situaciju i ušla u rat, a iz njega izašla kao regionalni hegemon, što joj omogućava potčinjavanje regiona svojim interesima i bolje šanse za opstanak u međunarodnom sistemu.

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RUSSIA'S NEO-IMPERIALIST AMBITIONS: ANALYSIS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS GEORGIA

ABSTRACT: The Caucasus, dubbed “the Eurasian Balkans” by Zbigniew Brzezinski, or “the near abroad” (*bližnee zarubežbe*) by the Russians, is both a region of strategic interest for Russia, and a space where the Russian foreign policymaking was clearly manifested, Russia’s main goal being to establish regional dominance and discourage the Western influence in the region. Using comparative and content analysis and relying on the theory of offensive structural realism, the paper will discuss the foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards Georgia in the years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Analysing the case studies of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the paper seeks to show how Russia’s neo-imperial foreign policy has been shaped, and how Russia’s foreign policy has shifted in accordance with the part of the Caucasus involved in the conflict and the degree of anti-Russian influence in it. The results show that Russia carefully created the conditions and chose the moment to use the conflict, i.e., the secession on the Georgian soil, to position itself as a regional hegemon.

KEY WORDS: Caucasus, regional security, Russia, Eurasia, Russian foreign policy, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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1. Introduction

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been recognized as independent states by only a few countries, such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Syria, as well as Vanuatu which recognized Abkhazia but not South Ossetia. Apart from Russia, these countries have little influence globally to significantly improve Abkhazia and South Ossetia's chances of international recognition. Even Russia's recognition of the two states can be interpreted as more of a political move with the aim to position itself as a regional hegemon and prevent Western influence, rather than a sign of faith in the right to self-determination of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's citizens. This paper will give insights into the events in the region since the collapse of Soviet Union, which brought about the creation of fifteen independent states, with several other nations also exhibiting separatist tendencies, until the present day and recent developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan erupted again with six weeks of intense fighting until Russia (and Turkey) intervened and brokered a cease-fire. Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to exist under the Russian patronage and remain existentially dependent on it in economic, military, political and other aspects. Both states can therefore be considered Russian protectorates.

Using the abovementioned conflicts as examples, this paper will analyse the ways in which Russia's foreign policy changes and adapts to a current situation. The paper further looks at the change from the initial decision to let Georgia try to pacify the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the all-out war in 2008. The 2008 war was incited by Georgia's attempt to join the NATO. Russia entered the conflict under the guise of exercising "the right to protect", which involved the protection of Russian citizens on the territory of both republics, which was preceded by the mass passport issuance. Moreover, the paper will follow Russia's shift from the active participation in global affairs and a billion-dollar worth weapon sale to Yemen in the 1990s, to a more prudent policy of balancing Yemen and Azerbaijan by selling weapons to both parties and preventing the intrusion of NATO impact at all costs, even by isolating the region from the unwanted influence.

The paper starts with a review of literature that explains the theoretical framework of realism, or offensive structural realism of John Mearsheimer. The following chapter discusses and explains the development of the foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation, starting from the collapse of Soviet Union after which Russia shortly turned to pro-Western liberalism. However, after a series of events that resulted in the increasing US influence in the region, Russia decided to pursue a neo-Eurasian policy with strong neo-imperial ambitions. The next chapter explains the historical roots of conflicts in Georgia, or Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Then, we will analyse the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through the prism of the neo-imperial ambitions of Russian Federation. The case study shows how the conflict developed and how Russia created the right conditions so that, when the opportunity arises, it can use the conflict to position itself as a supreme regional hegemon. Lastly, in the conclusion we will summarize the insights and viewpoints discussed in the paper.-

2. Literature Review

Theoretical approach to realism had an enormous impact on the development of security studies with their focus on the concepts of power, fear and anarchy as crucial factors for providing explanation of the conflict and war. Realist theory went through six stages: classical, neoclassical, the rise and fall realism, neo-realism, as well as offensive and defensive realism (Williams 2012).

According to perceptions of classical realists, the will of power is rooted in the corrupted human nature, and states are continuously engaging in struggles to maximize their power. As noted, this is the reason why war is understood as a consequence of either the aggressive nature of state officials or the nature of the internal political system. Security studies, as a predominantly realistic area of study, claims that states can maintain their security only by relying on their own military power or by entering military-political alliances.

Defensive structural realism starts from the assumption that the states seek security in anarchic international system, that the main threat to their welfare comes from other states. Defensive structural

realism alludes to the fact that predominant technology or geographical conditions often favour defence, seized resources cannot be added easily to those already possessed by the metropole, dominoes do not fall, and power is difficult to project at a distance. Accordingly, defensive structural realists predict that states should support the status quo since conquest in such a world comes with a hard price (Williams, 2012).

Offensive structural realists disagree with the defensive structural realist perception that states only should only seek an 'appropriate' amount of power. The main proponent of this theory is John Mearsheimer, who in his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, argues that states face an uncertain international environment in which any state might use its power to harm another (Williams, 2012).

Mearsheimer's theory is built on five assumptions: there is anarchy in the international system; all great powers possess offensive military capabilities, which they are capable of using against each other; states can never be certain that other states will refrain from using those offensive military capabilities; great powers seek to maintain their survival above all other goals; great powers are rational actors.

Based on these assumptions, Mearsheimer concludes that all great powers fear one another and argues that the best way for great powers to ensure their survival is to maximize power and pursue hegemony, relying only on themselves (Marković, 2014). Mearsheimer claims that security requires accumulation of as much power as possible, in relation to other states, and argues that only the most powerful state in the system can achieve the ultimate security.

However, the "stopping power of water" makes such a global hegemony impossible, so the other more reachable goal is achieving regional hegemony, the dominance of the area where the great power is located. Aside from that, even in the absence of both types of hegemony the states still seek to maximize their wealth and power. Mearsheimer also distinguishes between different kinds of power, such as continental and insular, and the power of regional hegemons. A continental great power seeks regional hegemony but, if unable to achieve this level of dominance, it will seek to maximize its relative power to the extent possible. On the other hand, an insular great power would rather seek the balance against other states than try to become the regional

hegemon, just like Great Britain that acts as an offshore balancer and intervenes only when the continental power threatens to achieve the primacy. Lastly, the third type of power according to Mearsheimer is the power of regional hegemons, the states which seeks to defend the existing favourable distribution of power, such as the USA (Williams, 2012).

From the point of view of the states which cannot be qualified as great powers, Mearsheimer's theory is full of unacceptably hegemonic standpoints, overlooks the role of international institutions, and does not contribute to global security, regardless of states' individual power. Another important factor in interpreting Russia's neo-imperial regional ambitions is the theory of the security dilemma, or the endless "game" of competition, requiring a constant increase of defence capabilities of one state as a response on other state's threats. This leads the states into a "spiral model" of constant increase of military power and/or an arms race (Marković, 2014). Using theories of offensive structural realism and the theory of the security dilemma and examining the case study of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it is possible to better understand and analyse the foreign policy of the Russian Federation through the prism of the five-day war with Georgia in 2008.

It can be concluded that most authors who wrote about foreign policy of the Russian Federation mainly rely on theoretical approach to realism or offensive realism of John Mearsheimer. They emphasized Moscow's desire to become the regional hegemon, which necessitated the implementation of a neo-imperialist project in the Caucasus, a region that Russia has traditionally laid claim on. According to the Russian foreign policy, Russia can act at its own discretion by arranging its troops across the region which is also a clear sign that Russia is not yet ready to accept independence and sovereignty of the states formed after the collapse of the USSR. After the dissolution of USSR, Russia's policy balanced between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian orientation for some time. It even went through the "western liberalism" while under Yeltsin's leadership, but eventually still opted for the concept of Euro-Asian policy implementation as well as becoming the leader of the region, which was even essentially stated as a part of their mission in the strategic acts from 1992 and 1993.

In addition, Russia also held that all former republics should join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and that the international community, including other forces such as China and USA who already showed interest in the region, should acknowledge Russian supremacy. Also, Russian soldiers should be positioned along the CIS external border with Turkey and Iran (Abushov 2009). O'Lear (2011) explains that this border is not merely a border denoting territorial boundary of a state, but a frame with its political, economic and cultural dimensions along with local mediations within these dimensions, as well as the existing structures that shape individual operations. All this adds to the fact that Russia has been the leader of this region for the past 200 years and consequently implements its policy not only on Caucasus but also Belarus, Ukraine, and Central Asia so as to achieve dominance, either by cooperation or coercion (Blank, 2013; Abushov, 2009).

Some authors argue that Russia will use all political, military, and economic power to control the states of the former USSR in the campaign to succeed in implementing the neo-imperialist project and become a regional hegemon (Sushentstov & Neklyudov 2020). Russia believes that achieving regional hegemony can prevent other states from gaining any influence in the region Russia traditionally considers its own (Karagiannis, 2012). Implementing the neo-imperialist project with its expansion into the Caucasus and Central Asia provided the validation of such concepts as the near-abroad (*bližnee zarubežbe*), "Russian interest zone" and the idea of the state as a strong multi-ethnic empire, with Russia as the primary actor (Abushov 2009). The Soviet Union acted as the "glue" that kept everything under control, so, after its fall, maintaining the status of some nations' autonomous regions was no longer possible which subsequently led to the rise of secessionism. Markedonov's article (2015) discusses the phenomenon of *de facto* states and statelets in the Eurasian region and their relations to other internationally recognized states. It is argued that the major problem for the region, and the international community as well, is the domestic dynamics in these entities, i.e., the overwhelming majority of the population in favour of the policy of extremism and separatism.

3. Russian Foreign Policy

Since December 1991, Russia's foreign policy went through numerous reforms with various stages. Soon after the collapse of the USSR, two broad trends or "schools of thought" appeared – the Euro-Atlanticist and Neo-Eurasionist (Meshabi 1993: 181). The Euro-Atlanticist school of thought was led by pro-Western liberals whose main goal for Russia to join the international community and thus boost the economic growth. Furthermore, they believed that the traditional concept of Russia having a special role as the "bridge" between Europe and Asia should be rejected and that Russia should turn its focus towards Europe (Light 2003: 44; Krpatcheva 2012: 375). This school of thought had been the cornerstone of thinking in Russian foreign policy during the first year of Boris Yeltsin's government (Борис Ельцин) when Yegor Gaidar (Егор Гайдар) was the Prime Minister. However, joining the West meant abandoning the traditional idea of Russia as a great power, while the transformation into a market democracy weakened the state's sovereignty and role. Hence, the liberal pro-western policy did not last long and was replaced with the idea of a sovereign Russia, the state with a greater role, and the idea of reviving Russia as an independent great power (Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 149). In late 1992, after the short period of idealizing Western society and attempts to emulate it, it was decided that the Russian foreign policy would be directed towards achieving the regional hegemony over the post-Soviet space (Abushov 2009: 191).

The other school of thought - Neo-Eurasionist – consisted of several subgroups such as neo-imperialists, Russian interest zone ("the near abroad") proponents and ethno-nationalists. They all shared the ambition to establish the regional domination of a strong and sovereign Russian state that would subordinate the former Soviet Union republics by using economic, political, and military power along with establishing more *de-facto* protectorates, i.e., states dependent on Russia (Kuchins and Zevelev 2012: 151). These newly established independent states in the region that was seen as being of special interest to Russia –the near abroad, were supposed to be the focus of the new Russian foreign policy. Russian governments viewed the post-Soviet space as a neo-imperialist state (*державы императорская*), which required the securitization of

the Caucasus as a region in which potential threats to Russia's sovereignty and integrity are manifested (Abushov 2019: 4; Rezvan 2020: 7). Neo-imperialism, as the cornerstone of Russian foreign policy, is nothing but a covert form of imperialism: a state can recognize the independence of another state yet continue to dominate it by controlling its market and resources (Abushov 2009: 188). In the Caucasus, there are three forces at work which shape Russia's foreign policy: firstly, the rivalry between Russia and Turkey, as well as between Russia and the USA; secondly, local conflicts such as those in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and South Ossetia and Abkhazia; lastly, the threats of separatism and terrorism, as was the case in Chechnya, where Russia fought two wars (Sushentsov & Neklyudov 2020: 5).

In the spring of 1993, the then President Yeltsin and the Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (Андрей Козырев) sent a formal request to the UN to recognize the role and importance of Russia as a guarantor of peace in those areas through the deployment of Russian troops (Trenin 2009: 8). After the Cold War ended, the main purpose of Russia's policy was to remove valuable Soviet infrastructure facilities from under the influence of hostile neighbours, while building preferential relations and alliances with friendly states such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia, therefore trying to restore its own influence lost after the USSR collapse in the post-Soviet space (Sushentsov & Neklyudov 2020: 4). The rhetoric used at the time echoed the desire to view the post-Soviet space as a Russian sphere of influence. Thus, a post-imperialist strategy was designed, which implied the restoration of Russian imperial power over the Baltic, Caucasus and Central Asia, monopolisation of the Caspian Sea, and allowing the new states a limited sovereignty. The CIS and the later Collective Security Treaty (CST; the Tashkent Declaration, later Organization of the Agreement on Collective Security) were to be the new tools of Russian foreign policy to reach this goal (Abushov 2009: 191). Despite the fact that the former state disappeared for good, Russia has remained a major player in the post-Soviet space which makes up the CIS. This area has become an international arena in which Russia attempted to play the role of a mediator in conflicts (Morozova 2009: 671). The CIS, which included all former Soviet republics (except the Baltic states), was in fact a transitional stage whereby Russia managed

to keep its hold over the USSR's nuclear arsenal, but also permanent membership in the UN Security Council and the USSR's assets, embassies, and infrastructure abroad (Trenin 2009: 7). From 1993 until 1999, when Putin came into office, Russia had been keeping up the pretence of being a superpower, although the state's power and influence had been at their lowest. In this period, Russia sought to balance or at least restrain the US influence in the region (Kuchins & Zevelev 2012: 154; Razvani 2020: 9). However, the event that forced Russia to change its strategy in terms of the Caucasus was the NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia (Karagiannis 2013: 84; Hughes 2013: 994; Zellner 2006: 393, Fabry 2012: 667). This event made Russia realize how democratic states can even wage wars for their own benefit under the guise of concern for human rights (Wolff & Peen Rodt 2013: 814). Furthermore, after the bombing and subsequent expansion of NATO to Europe (accession of Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic), for the first time in the past 250 years, Russia stopped being the European superpower. It was nothing more than a former Soviet Union (Trenin 2009: 9; Marten 2005: 189; Kazantsev, Rutland, Medvedeva & Safranchuk 2020: 3). After Putin's taking office, the Russian foreign policy became more coherent and constant. It was embodied in the centralization of the Kremlin's power as well as in the subordination of other states in the region, including those in North Caucasus, to Moscow's will. Moreover, starting in 1994, the West (the USA and the EU), driven by economic interests, began to venture into the Caucasus and strive for influence in it, such as signing of an agreement between Azerbaijan and 10 large corporations that allowed the exploration of Azerbaijani part of the Caspian Sea. When Putin came to power, the Kremlin has had no other choice but to pursue a more consistent policy towards the Caucasus (Abushov 2009: 197).

3.1 Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia)

To understand Russia's foreign policy towards Georgia, and the entire Caucasus in general, through the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it is necessary to first discern the causes of dispute in these two *de facto* statelets. As one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union,

Georgia consisted of two sub-units - Abkhazia and Adjara - which both had the status of Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republics, as well as the autonomous region of South Ossetia (Sotiriou 2017: 2).

In April 1922, South Ossetia gained the status of an autonomous region (hierarchically lower in status than Abkhazia and Adjara as Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republics) as a minority in Georgia. According to the 1989 census, less than 100,000 people lived in South Ossetia, of which 66% self-identified as Ossetians and 29% as Georgians (Tuathail 2008: 673-674). South Ossetia was an autonomous region of the Georgian SSR from 1936 to 1991, and according to a 1988 report, 86% of Ossetians did not speak the Georgian language (Sotiriou 2017: 2). During the late 1980s, a movement called the South Ossetian Popular Front (*Ademon Nykhaz*) emerged, a network of Ossetian nationalists who sought unification with North Ossetia, as well as an upgrade in status from autonomous region to Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, making it an integral part of Georgia, but with the possibility of potential future secession. The Georgian parliament accepted the request on November 10, 1989; however, the decision was revoked the very next day (Tuathail 2008: 676; Cooley & Mitchell 2010: 61). Georgian national leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia (*Звиад Гамсахурдия*) led a protest towards Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, opposing the regional parliament's law pertaining to the Ossetian language, under the false guise of defending the Georgian people. The road to Tskhinvali was blocked by Ossetian nationalists and protesters where they confronted Gamsakhurdia supporters; many people suffered injuries (Karagiannis 2012: 77). Since then, the territorial integrity of Georgia has been a matter of dispute (Tuathail 2008: 676). In October 1990, Gamsakhurdia was elected leader of Georgia and, with the goal of enforcing the slogan "Georgia for Georgians", he deprived South Ossetia of its autonomy, which culminated in the open conflict of 1991 (German 2016: 157). Fearing an outbreak of local strife, along with the election of Eduard Shevardnadze as President of Georgia in March 1992, prompted a more peaceful approach leading to a peace agreement on June 24, 1992. Subsequently, peacekeepers from Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia were deployed along the conflict zones (Karagiannis 2012: 78; German 2016: 157); furthermore, in July 1992, an OSCE mission

with the aim of establishing facts was sent to South Ossetia (Nishimura 2007: 32). Shevardnadze was persistent in his intentions to restore Georgia's territorial integrity but having refused the use of military force for that purpose, the South Ossetian clashes became a frozen conflict (Karagiannis 2012: 78).

Between 1922-1931, Abkhazia had the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), after which it was united with SSR Georgia and gained the status of an Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic from 1931 to 1991. Following the unification of Abkhazia and Georgia, a repressive and discriminatory policy was used against the Abkhazian people, with the aim of dismantling their cultural identity. The media using the Abkhazian language were shut down and the use of Abkhazian in schools was replaced by Russian or Georgian. The implementation of this approach ceased after Stalin's death, but it still made a substantial impact, given that 75% of Abkhazians (from approximately 220,000, according to estimates) spoke Russian fluently, while the number of Georgians speaking Russian in Abkhazia was 56%. Such a policy gave rise to Abkhazian nationalism, which had been, since the 1930s, more focused on the fight for secession from Georgia than concerned by Russia's domination. The arise of the "People's Parliament" in South Ossetia led to Abkhaz nationalists establishing the Abkhaz Popular Forum ("Aydgylara") through which they appealed to Moscow in order to protect Abkhazian interests (Sotiriou 2017: 2-3; Kereselidze 2015: 311). Secessionist movements in Abkhazia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region sought the right to self-determination, but this was not in accordance with the USSR constitution (Coppieters 2018: 996-997). Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the leaders of Abkhazia demanded secession from Georgia and the restoring of Abkhazia's status to what it was before 1931. Subsequently, in August 1990, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia declared the sovereignty of the republic (Murinson 2010: 8). Georgia declared its independence on March 31, 1991, invoking the 1921 Constitution, according to which both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are inseparable parts of Georgia (Sotiriou 2017: 3). This brought on the re-introduction of the 1925 Constitution in Abkhazia wherein the country was in a special union with Georgia, but which still enabled secession from both the USSR and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal

Socialist Republic. The crest and the flag were accepted, and the state was renamed from the ASSR of Abkhazia to the Republic of Abkhazia. Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba (*Владислав Ардзинба*) stressed that this should not be seen as an act of secession; however, it still led to the invasion of Georgian troops on August 14, 1992, which started the war in Abkhazia (Murinson 2010: 8). Georgian troops held the capital of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, under occupation for almost 14 months, until a surprise attack in September 1993 that allowed Abkhaz forces to penetrate, resulting in a mass exodus of Georgians from Abkhazia (Fawn & Cummings 2007: 84). Georgia was convinced that the Abkhazians could not wage war without external support and logistics, namely, without Russia's help. Because of this, Eduard Shevardnadze accused the Russian Federation Army of supporting Abkhazia with the intention of suppressing the independence of Georgia and supporting the separatist intentions of Abkhazia (Fawn 2007: 132). In October 1993, Shevardnadze surrendered to pressure from Russia and agreed to open military bases and ports, after which Abkhazia and Georgia signed a truce. Shevardnadze also overturned the position and approach of his predecessor Gamsakhurdia, which enabled Georgia to join the Commonwealth of Independent States on October 8, 1993. In return, fearing a complete disintegration, Georgia expected Russia's help in curbing secessionist disputes on Georgian territory (Fawn & Cummings 2007: 85-87; Fawn 2007: 136). It should also be noted that the international fact-finding mission during the conflict in Georgia confirmed in the "Tagliavini Report", that South Ossetia and Abkhazia had the right to self-determination, not only as ethnic minorities but also based on objective characteristics such as common language, culture, and religion, as well as the stated intention to form their own political community. At the same time, the report states that the right to self-determination does not imply the right to secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Markedonov 2015: 198-199).

Still, Shevardnadze was dissatisfied with Moscow's support in his intention to regain sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and from 1995 onward he began to seek support and partnership with the United States and NATO to balance out Russia's influence over the region, which was seen as the primary source of instability in the

region (Devdariani 2005: 167-173). In 1997, Georgia applied for NATO membership and provided shelter to Chechen refugees and fighters. After the OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999, Russia's influence over the region diminished even further and prompted them to remove all military bases from Georgian territory, including those in Abkhazia, as Georgia suspected those bases had provided support for separatist regimes. Moreover, at the OSCE summit, an agreement was reached between Georgia, Azerbaijan and the United States on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which would bypass the existing Novorossiysk pipeline, to transport energy resources from the Caspian basin to the European markets. The balancing efforts of Georgia and Azerbaijan in the late 1990s led to the emergence of the GUUAM regional alliance (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan (which left GUUAM in 2005), Azerbaijan and Moldova). This alliance was perceived by Moscow as an instrument for limiting Russian influence in a zone that traditionally belongs to Moscow, aided by the West (Abushov 2009: 197). Georgia left the Collective Security Treaty in 1999, which was later reorganized through Vladimir Putin's initiative into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Kazantsev, Rutland, Medvedeva & Safranchuk 2020: 9). Russia, dissatisfied with pro-NATO slogans and Shevardnadze's refusal to help Russia in the conflict with Chechnya, implemented more severe measures. Beginning in 1999, Russia changed its isolationist stance toward South Ossetia and Abkhazia, opening borders with Abkhazia, ignoring the embargo, and supporting the employment of Russian reserve personnel and retired veterans in South Ossetia or Abkhazia's security structures. Since 2000, Russia has established a visa regime for Georgia, at the same time assimilating the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by giving them Russian passports. This was painted as a humane gesture that would enable the people to travel. This way, Russia managed to retain the right to intervene in both *de facto* states in the event of a military action by Georgia (Abushov 2009: 199).

The 2003 Rose Revolution brought Mikheil Saakashvili to the helm of Georgia. During the election campaign, Saakashvili advocated for strengthening Georgia's relations with Europe and the United States, promising to reunite the country through the reintegration of South Ossetia (Killingsworth 2012: 229; Tuathail 2008: 681). Initially,

Putin supported the regime change in Tbilisi, hoping that this would improve bilateral relations between Georgia and Russia, but his hopes were short-lived, and Putin soon turned against Saakashvili. From the Russian perspective, the rosy revolution was not a real democratic event, but instead a well-coordinated operation from the West, with its goal of isolating Russia (Nodia 2012: 722; Abushov 2009: 199; Karagiannis 2012: 78). Not only did Saakashvili openly point out that he was pro-Western, but he also, in exchange for American help and support in Georgia's application for NATO membership, sent 2,000 Georgian troops to Iraq, making Georgia the third largest country in terms of troop numbers in the war, right behind the US and Britain (Tuathail 2008: 682). In May 2004, Saakashvili forced Adjara leader Aslan Abashidze to resign, reintegrating Adjara into Georgia, which was not opposed by Russia. Saakashvili hoped for a similar scenario in South Ossetia but had to face a different situation in June 2004 when a minor conflict broke out along the Georgia and South Ossetia border. Georgia encountered a fierce Russian opposition, both military and political. Gennady Savchenko, an emissary to the Foreign Ministry of Russia, said Russia respects the principle of territorial integrity, however, in the case of Georgia, territorial integrity is more of a possibility rather than a political and legal reality (Abushov 2009: 199; Karagiannis 2012: 78). Georgian officials have repeatedly stressed that they plan on continuing to fight for their territorial integrity, but in the meantime, bilateral relations still lie between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as Georgia and Russia.

The unilateral declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo on February 17, 2008, indicated what kind of year it would be, putting new pressures on already existing hotspots throughout the Caucasus (Cheterian 2012: 703). Western officials (who recognized the Republic of Kosovo) said it was a unique case, but in light of the recognition, statements were issued by the leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia stating that they would soon ask Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations as well as other international organizations to recognize their independence (Caspersen 2013: 929). In April 2008, a Russian warplane shot down a Georgian drone in Abkhazian airspace, followed by many accusations from both sides and

creating a war climate between the two countries. This event revealed Russia's sensitivity to any kind of military incursion on Abkhazia, and Russian officials have frequently pointed out that they will defend their citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at any cost, by force if necessary. On April 18, 2008, Vladimir Putin gave instructions on establishing official relations between Russia and the two *de facto* states, thus letting Georgia know that their reintegration into Georgia is not a possibility (Abushov 2009: 200; Karagiannis 2012: 79). Georgian forces prepared for war weeks before the conflict began, taking strategic positions around Tskhinvali, deploying their troops and weapons throughout the region and redeploying peacekeepers within the conflict zone (Antonenko 2008: 23). Namely, during July 2008, numerous military exercises were held: the US and Georgia cooperated under the name "Current Response 2008", while Russia performed "Caucasus 2008". In late July, a series of bombings in Tskhinvali killed several Georgians, sparking a revolt by Ossetian separatist groups which began attacking Georgian villages and military facilities in South Ossetia. During the night of August 7, Georgian forces attacked Tskhinvali, taking control of much of the city, killing many civilians and several CIS peacekeepers who were being stationed there ever since the last war. The response of the Russian troops followed approximately 12 hours after the start of the Georgian offensive, with air and infantry attacks. On August 9, together with the Abkhaz allies, they opened another front in the Kodori Valley, and shortly afterwards they entered the western part of Georgia and captured the port of Poti. By August 10, they had taken control of Tskhinvali and launched attacks against the Georgian army, which had begun retreating to its home country. The following day, Russian troops bombed and occupied an essential part of Georgia, including the city of Gori. On August 12, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev issued a statement saying that the goal of the Russian military operation to force Georgia into peace had been achieved, and that the decision to suspend operations had been made, thus ending the five-day war (Killingsworth 2012: 229; Karagiannis 2012): 79). Essentially, Georgia's efforts to re-establish control over South Ossetia had provoked Russia into a military invasion. Considering that Russia had been giving passports to the citizens of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for years, they

used that as their reason and motive for launching a military operation on the territory of Georgia. After securing the region, Moscow went a step further and formally recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26, 2008. According to *Izvestiya*, the war was seen as the most significant feat undertaken by Medvedev's mandate, which marked Russia's comeback as a global player. The unilateral declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo was also used by Russia as an excuse for the military invasion to punish Georgia for joining the NATO alliance, but also as a demonstration to the West that the Caucasus is a region which "belongs" to Russia (O'Lear 2011: 270; German 2012: 1654).

After the war had ended, Russia updated its legislation, granting to the president the authority to deploy Russian troops outside Russia under the pretext of defending the "honor and dignity" of Russian citizens throughout the post-Soviet countries. Under a law passed on August 11, 2008, Russian military units can be used outside Russian borders in cases when it is necessary to retaliate against attacks on Russian troops, prevent or retaliate against military aggression in another country is necessary, act against piracy and ensure the safe passage of ships, and defend Russian citizens outside Russian borders. This law was designed to be the legal basis for aggressive actions by the Russian military, such as a future attack against Georgia, but it would also provide a basis for the use of military force against any country from the Baltics to Central Asia under the veil of defending the honor and dignity of Russian citizens (2013: 6).

Abkhazia and South Ossetia occupy a unique position in the post-Soviet area. No other political entities in the region have deeper and more extensive linkages with Russia, which makes them *de facto* Russian protectorates. Russia is crucial for their survival, as one of a small number of states that recognizes their independence. Abkhazia was recognized by seven countries (Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Syria), and South Ossetia by only five, which are, besides Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and Tuvalu. Russia has developed a strong mechanism of dependence and coercion in relation to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which is reflected through seven types of linkages: economic, intergovernmental,

technocratic, social, informational, civil society, and finally institutional linkage and parallelism (Gerrits & Badder 2016: 298).

Russia supports the economies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by being their main economic partner – Abkhazia's largest and South Ossetia's only partner. In addition, the most important economic and infrastructural facilities are owned by Russia. Intergovernmental and technocratic linkages can be seen in Russia's issuing of passports to citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia over the course of many years, which further gives Russia the right to intervene in any attacks on its citizens. Furthermore, under Russia's patronage, several summits of the four unrecognized countries of the post-Soviet region – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria – were organized. On August 26, 2008, Russia officially recognized the independence of the two states, and signed the agreements on coordinated foreign policies and a common defense space. Technocratic linkage is evident in the fact that most elites and citizens of the two states got their education and training in Russia. Social, informational, civil society, and institutional linkages are more than obvious, considering that the laws in the two *de facto* states are almost identical to those in Russia, as well as in the forms of institutions and structures that exist and function in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia Russian is almost universally used as the official language, Russia offers scholarships and academic exchanges, and Russian television and media are dominant and widely available, which helps promote Russian as the majority language (Gerrits & Bader 2016: 298 -306).

4. Discussion

The foreign policy of the Russian Federation towards Georgia, the Caucasus, and the entire region can be seen as compliant with John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive structural realism. Namely, through the attitude of the Russian Federation towards Georgia, starting from the collapse of the Soviet Union until the war in 2008, the basic principles of Mearsheimer's theory can be clearly observed. Although we can reasonably assume that it has unipolar ambitions, the Russian Federation is very well aware of the "stopping power of water" as defined

by Mearsheimer, and therefore strives to establish regional hegemony, in which it has achieved great success. Although survival is the fundamental goal of every state, which was clearly seen in Russia after the disintegration of the USSR, a great power such as Russia will undoubtedly strive to become even more powerful, since the accumulation of power (to the detriment of other states) is the best path to achieving a high level of self-security and a high level of hegemony in the region. In addition, great powers are rational agents that act in a way which, in the anarchic international community, gives them a better chance of survival and a higher position in that community. Russia implemented its neo-imperial regional project in the Caucasus step by step, waiting for the right opportunity to act. Georgia's rapprochement with the US and the EU posed a threat to the hegemony of the Russian Federation in the region, so Russia began to naturalize the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, the best chance to achieve regional hegemony was through the unilateral declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo and Georgia's intentions to unite the former territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Having started (and won) the five-day war in 2008, which largely neutralized the influence of the US and the West, Russia made a definite comeback as the leader in the region that has traditionally been seen as its own.

5. Conclusion

After the disintegration of the USSR, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation went through several phases, which included a brief turn towards pro-Western liberalism. Over the years, Russia's foreign policy became focused towards achieving neo-imperial ambitions in the European-Asian region. During the 1990s, decades of inter-ethnic conflicts intensified, resulting in the secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in which Russia saw the opportunity to expand or re-establish its influence in the now post-Soviet space. The Caucasus region was rife with instability and separatist tendencies after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States wanted to expand its influence in the region, offering Georgia (as well as Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and the Baltic

countries) economic growth and military security. Due to the colored revolutions, primarily the Rose Revolution and the arrival of Mikheil Saakashvili to the scene, Georgia turned to NATO membership with the ambition to reintegrate the former Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republics and autonomous regions. After the initial success with Adjara, Saakashvili hoped to see an equally easy success in South Ossetia (and Abkhazia).

However, over the years, Russia began issuing passports to citizens from the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, making them naturalized Russians, thus giving the Russian military the right to intervene in the case of the Georgian military invasion, as was the case in 2008. In the Russo-Georgian war, Georgia was defeated, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia got what they wanted - their (*de facto*) independent states. Russia got the opportunity to show the world that it would not hesitate to use force to defend its interests. This was particularly directed towards the US (and the EU) to show them who the real leader in the region was and to retaliate for the unilateral declaration of independence of the so-called Republic of Kosovo, as well as for the bombing of FR Yugoslavia in 1999, which Russia opposed and was exempt from making (and implementing) that decision.

The question remains what Abkhazia and South Ossetia gained from their independence and what their future orientation will be. The people of the region gained their independence, but they have been recognized by only a few (not very powerful) states in the international community, apart from Russia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are dependent on Russia to such a degree that they are *de facto* Russian protectorates. Without Russian economic and social support, it is doubtful whether they would be able to survive, in the political and military sense. Both states are under constant pressure from Georgia and isolated from the world: their citizens are unable to travel anywhere (except to their "mother country" Russia), and international businesses are unwilling to open their offices there, both for security reasons and legislation issues, given they are not unrecognized. Both states' economies and businesses are heavily dependent on Russian trade and support. Therefore, it is more likely that their future status will be resemble Northern Cyprus than the Republic of Kosovo.

Ultimately, Russia's protective attitude towards these states should not be seen as any special concern for the local population, but as Russian neo-imperialist ambitions towards the region. This is mainly reflected in staving off anti-Russian sentiment in the region, the 2008 war with Georgia being a prime example. This war was a very calculated move, which Russia had been preparing for years. According to Mearsheimer's offensive realism theory, Russia took advantage of the favorable situation and entered the war, emerging as a victorious leader in the region. Consequently, it was well-equipped to orchestrate the events in the region in the way most suitable for increasing its influence and power in the international community.

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