

## Georgia's Russia Strategy in the Framework of Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy

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### Introduction

Despite positive developments in recent years, diplomatic infrastructures still tend toward masculinized norms, homo-social environments, and gendered divisions of labor (Stanzel, 2018). Although the legal frameworks in gender equality were established, gender balance, equal representation, and participation in every sphere of society is still an issue, especially in the developing countries and challenging regions, such as South Caucasus where alternative approach is needed to initiate inter-ethnic dialogue to decrease the level of aggression (Cárdenas, 2019). The recent research studies indicate that enhancing the analytical assessment of cross-national trends and highlighting variations of pro-gender norms could positively affect the relationship between gender and foreign policy. International affairs and foreign policy have become more “women-friendly” areas, which is quite significant considering the states are usually characterized as patriarchal, hierarchical, and oppressive power structures overlooking the feminist political agendas (Aggestam & True, 2020). The research studies illustrate the positive effects of women’s participation and involvement in the foreign policy by generating less aggressive policies and more sustainable peace settlements. However, these efforts should have continuous characteristics, as well as strong embeddedness in order to provide sustainability in the long term (Aggestam & True, 2020). Furthermore, the researchers argue that the activeness of women in public life, in particular as political representatives, results in more gender-inclusive policies in government agendas (Iyer et al. 2011). Goldstein (2001) challenges the role of gender in war and peace by arguing the gender variable as a crucial notion in foreign policy. He includes the cultural aspect into the gender phenomenon while discussing peace and conflict matters. Therefore, a reexamination of security studies through a feminist perspective would change the perception of power transition theory, arms control, and statecraft (Sjoberg, 2009). Considering the recent events in South Caucasus, ethnic conflicts, and tension between neighboring countries, looking at a problem from an unfamiliar perspective could be beneficial.

## Feminist Foreign Policy

One of these alternative perspectives is Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), which was first adopted by Sweden in 2014 and then followed by Canada, France, Mexico, and others (Thomson, 2020). Even though there is no agreed definition for the notion, it has been theorized that a feminist foreign policy should be based around a normative argument centered on a feminist ethics of care. Additionally, it emphasizes the reflection of feminist lens to development, trade, diplomacy, as well as bilateral and multilateral relations by protecting women's rights, enhancing female participation in public and political life, and empowering women's economic involvement (Zhukova, Sundström, & Elgström, 2022). The Swedish model of FFP has three (some interpretations say four) pillars that promote gender equality and wider inclusion of women in executing foreign policy actions, which are rights, representation, resources, and realities (George, 2022). Although the new Swedish government revoked the Feminist Foreign Policy in 2022 by indicating that it will not pursue FFP while continuing support the gender equality, the reversal of the policy is not possible due to its effects on diplomacy and cabinet composition, as well as aid spending and investment.

## Georgia's Foreign Policy

The current Georgian foreign policy strategy has been stuck in a complex geopolitical curse of the South Caucasus due to its post-Soviet legacy, economic dependence on Russia, unstable and insecure domestic circumstances, as well as its transition attempts towards the West. The country faces a very challenging future after the invasion of Ukraine, considering the occupation of 20% of Georgian territory by Russia (Karelska, 2022). The main threats to Georgia's instability are the hotspots inside the country, such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are governed by de facto regimes supported by Russia, and recent Russian migration due to Putin's so-called partial mobilization, which could cause civil unrest. While the country is struggling to have a balanced approach between Russia and the West, the current government failed to fulfill the country's commitment to become an EU member state, even though the majority of the people are pro-Western and view Russia as the main threat to the country (Gente, 2022).

## Feminist Foreign Policy and Russia

A distinct section of the *National Security Concept of Georgia* (NSC) illustrates Georgia's foreign policy strategy on Russia and the emphasis on the significance of this relationship. The description of Georgia's Russia policy focuses on principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty in the context of equality. Therefore, the strategy encourages dialogue to achieve a peaceful and cooperative environment with a neighboring country currently occupying 20% of internationally recognized Georgian territory. The NSC further supports the transformation of the Russian Federation into "a stable, democratic country that respects other countries' sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic values, and market economy principles" (National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011, p. 2). This section includes the Georgian integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions and its benefits for Russian national interests and its southern borders.

Understandably, Georgia did not update the NSC after newly developed regional and global events accordingly. However, Russia's permanent threat has remained unchanged over the last three

## **Madadli, Georgia and Feminist Foreign Policy**

decades. The NSC is supposed to be a road map for strategic foreign and security policy on bilateral and multilateral levels. The concept does not fully cover the imperialist movement of Russia, but instead blames the secessionist movements in Georgia on Russia's support for "aggressive separatist movements" (MacFarlane, 2012). While emphasizing the terrorist threat from Russia, the NSC does not include any countermeasures regarding the matter, such as changes to visa policy or stricter border controls. The efforts to maintain balance towards the West and Russia, diminish the importance of the document and undermine Georgia's national interests.

### **The efforts to maintain balance towards the West and Russia undermine Georgia's national interests**

The FFP does not refuse the use of force in the case of military intervention or war. However, during the absence of active armed conflict, it suggests alternative policies to pressure or influence the aggressor. In the framework of military strategies, FFP recommends having more women in the armed forces and a defense ministry under female leadership (Zilla, 2022). During the ceasefire period, FFP advises strategies, such as economic sanctions and migration policy, to minimize the influence of the aggressor (Cole, et al. 2022). In the case of Georgia, there is a need for additional economic partners to reduce economic dependency, which Russia uses as a leverage for political pressure. According to a recent study on trade between Georgia and Russia, tourists from Russia, remittances, foreign direct investments, and registration of Russian companies in Georgia, economic dependency of Georgia on Russia could pose a threat to Georgia. (Transparency International, 2022). Furthermore, Georgian public has been persistent in its calls to cut the economic ties to Russia. Though such a course is neither easy to implement nor necessarily prudent, FFP suggests diversification of the partners, meaning concluding free trade agreements with other strategic partners, even though the benefits might only be seen in the long term. Additionally, the government could restrict state subsidies, such as grants, to those businesses which increase dependence on Russia. Such economic sanctions would aid not only the economic, but also the political security of the country.

In Georgia, the attitude towards Russia differs from region to region. According to a recent public opinion survey (2022), the majority of Georgians believe that the attitude towards Russia is the most significant issue which drives Georgians apart. Georgians also consider Russia as one of the main obstacles to NATO and EU integration and feel that the country would benefit from these organizations more than from cooperation with Russia. Conversely, ethnic minorities do not consider Russia a threat (NDI, 2022). The current government policy on Russia supports economic ties and trade with Russia, and has allowed more than 6,000 Russian-owned companies to be registered in Georgia since the beginning of the war in Ukraine (Kross, 2022). However, the majority of the survey respondents believes that Russia is a military threat and a risk to the country's security and future (NDI, 2022). Thus, soft foreign policy designed for Russia cannot be effective since it does not have public support. The FFP includes the involvement of not only women, but also the public in the implementation of foreign policy to further the power of the public will and democracy. The Everyday Peace Indicators in conflict-affected communities of Georgia (2022) show that survey respondents from Sukhumi (Abkhazia) see peace as a complete elimination of the threat of possible attacks from Georgia and association with the Russia Federation. Fear of war and more intervention from Russia shape the minds of citizens in terms of security and stability in the region. However, people who live near the Administrative Border Line (ABL) with South Ossetia (2010), both Georgians and Ossetians, see Russia as the main cause of the conflict and blame Russia for increased tensions and sparking

of violent confrontations between the warring parties. Survey respondents believe that security and sustainable peace can be achieved with a withdrawal of the Russian army from the internationally recognized territory of Georgia.

One of the main arguments of the Russian aggression, which is used in the war against Ukraine as well, is increased Western influence in Georgia, which presents a threat to Russia (Chotiner, 2022). Therefore, Georgia should pursue a more cautious strategy to avoid a standoff with Russia as an excuse to prevent the eastward expansion of NATO. FFP highlights the importance of cooperation and sustainability in building partnerships. Georgia could expand its collaboration in the regional context, following the EU and NATO integration blueprint. In other words, Georgia could initiate a regional association with neighboring countries to expand the number of its partners and allies, strengthen the regional cooperation and upgrade bilateral cooperation to a multilateral level. With dual-integration directions pursued by Georgia, antagonization of Russia would be diminished and at the same time, there would be an alternative to Western integration. For instance, according to a recent study, Georgians consider Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine as the most significant partners after the EU and the United States (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2021). This could be one of the reasons to revive and expand the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM (the acronym stands for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) to build a common platform for mutual threats and risks while balancing its relationship with the West and Russia (Zhunisbek, 2020).

**There are good reasons for Georgia to revive and expand the Organization  
for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), a common platform for  
Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova**

The shaping of Georgia's foreign policy towards Russia should include public opinion, including the opinion of IDP (internally displaced persons) communities, which are concerned about the proximity and capabilities of Russian military bases, but about the economic dependence of Georgia's economy on Russia. Economic security has an influence on the country's foreign policy strategies towards Russia. Russia's negative influence on confidence-building processes between conflict-divided societies establishes serious obstacles to face-to-face interactions that could bring about a peaceful resolution to the various conflicts. The challenge in foreign policymaking for Russia originates from diverse perspectives on "national" security. For instance, for people from Zugdidi, Tbilisi (IDP communities) and Gori, a possible danger comes from Russian occupation, while people from breakaway regions are concerned about security and uncertain conditions due to Georgia (Murusidze & Chankvetadze, 2022). According to a recent public opinion survey in Georgia, while the majority of Georgians accepts Russia as a main threat to the security of the country, ethnic minorities are less likely to call Russia a threat (CRRC Georgia, 2022). Public opinion regarding economic ties with Russia is not in favor of Russia either, with support for deeper economic relations with Russia further decreasing after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Also, the attitude towards Russia among respondents from IDP communities was affected by the perceived damage which done by Russia to the relations between different ethnic groups in Georgia.

### Conclusion

As explained in this short paper, threats to peace and security in Georgia consist of the involvement of an outside power (Russia) and a domestic challenge (ethnic groups of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). The NSC of Georgia presupposes a non-aggressive approach towards Russia for defusing of tensions and creation of a peaceful mechanism to provide for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the occupied territories (MFA Georgia, 2022). Georgia implements anti-terrorist and anti-radicalization policy in order to neutralize the threat of terrorist attacks launched by the Russian Federation from the occupied territories. Because of economic dependence, Georgia has been struggling to initiate a decisive and robust foreign policy in the form of sanctions or migration policy. Ironically, while trying to achieve political security and avoiding provoking Russia, Georgia endangers its economic and social security. Implementation of feminist foreign policy and expansion of regional integration could provide alternatives to the current approach.

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