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Ukraine and Georgia against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian War. Two different players or a matter of separate times and/or other factors?

Introduction

Ukraine and Georgia are two different players or a geopolitical configuration. Major objective of the paper is to study parallels and divergences between two modern post-Soviet countries – Ukraine and Georgia, which are in the forefront of not only major geopolitical, but in reality first of all, it seems like – of the key civilizational confrontation we are facing globally nowadays, i.e. with the imperialistic Russia, attempting to rebuild its former area of influence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and even earlier – feudal times, therefore, competing for the world dominance with its own overtly brutal and thus, not very much compatible with the modernity, – anti-Western, and specifically, anti-American agenda.

In the article, we plan to address one crucial question. Can comparatively much greater and far impactful regional actor, and currently, against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Europe, in fact – the newborn player of global importance as it appears, considering first of all its potential for containment of Russia, even though with also the help provided by its foreign partners – Ukraine on one hand, and on the other, much tinier South Caucasian state – Georgia with significant as well location as a core of a micro region where Europe meets Asia, be considered as essentially analogous or opposite to each other through analyzing substantial points of likeness and unlikeness between these two countries?

While attempting to make a quite detailed comparison between Ukraine and Georgia against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine, we assume that there are more similarities between these two countries, rather than differences. In the paper, we have employed several research methods greatly utilized in social sciences.

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To start with, the article is based on the comparative analysis to show the commonalities and dissimilarities between two post-Soviet states – Ukraine and Georgia. Along with the above-mentioned, observation of phenomena of our major interest and empirical method have also been applied.

Ukraine and Georgia: can they be compared?

In order to address the research questions and objectives of the paper, there is an obvious need to directly identify, examine, and analyze as a minimum – the key similarities and differences between the two post-Soviet republics: Ukraine and Georgia.

Similarities

When looking at what makes Ukraine and Georgia seem quite alike, particularly, while taking into account the most topical momentum – the current Russian-Ukrainian War, there can be elaborated the following points claiming the evident likeness between the two countries:

- Ukraine and Georgia – both are the post-Soviet countries, which have been positioning themselves as the most active and strongest adherents of the path towards Westernization, i.e. joining EU and NATO as in fact main objectives for the final success, development, modernization, and wellbeing of these countries. The states started evidently striving towards their Euro-Atlantic integration that has almost always undoubtedly meant, and is certainly meaning nowadays the clear anti-Russian signal colliding with the blatantly unfolded and easily identifiable ambitions of the former Soviet leader-country for restoring if not literally the USSR, at least the similar influence in the contemporary era. Ukraine and Georgia have declared about their pro-Western aspirations loudly almost around at the same time (as parts of the so-called colour revolutions, the Rose Revolution took place in November of 2003, while the Orange Revolution – from November of 2004 to January of 2005).
- Overall, Ukraine, as well as Georgia, has a history of continuous internal clashes between the pro-Russian and pro-Western political forces or those (self) identified as such.
- Two most distinguished leaders of the two countries, quite atypical and extravagant in many ways, – Mikheil Saakashvili and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, look sufficiently alike, especially in their greatly visible, vocal, and in some cases, more radically widespread and promoted intentions regarding joining the Western world. Not rarely, these two leaders, associated with each other not only in their native countries, but in Saakashvili's case, also related to the Ukrainian politics as many of the former Saakashvili's Georgian government members have been recruited from the South Caucasus into the Ukrainian administration after the United National Movement (UNM), Saakashvili's party lost Georgia's Parliamentary Elections in 2012. Drawing even more parallels between Saakashvili and Zelenskyy cannot be avoided additionally due to their very special roles for very special times of the wars against the same enemy – Russia.

- Different times and/or other important exogenous, and not endogenous, factors like much united and purposeful, thus more powerful Western world vis a vis far fragile Russia, in fact – even though already multi-polar world order, but dominated by one Western superpower in 2008, when the Russian-Georgian August War broke out, along with more confident post-Soviet states and their leaders looking for the simpler integration with the West, – have been decisive contributors. During the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War, there are being faced far complicated circumstances attributed to the existing, established multi-polar world order run by diverse weighty actors with fresher and more difficult goals to achieve, and contradictions to resolve around. At stake definitely is the American and EU-guided Western superiority vs. the Eastern ambitions pushed heavily currently by Russia, but undoubtedly even much more broadly shared and supported, if not determined, by some other considerable actors, especially, – China, and a number of other countries as well.

Differences

In parallel with considering aspects of the significant similarities between Ukraine and Georgia, below we highlight the factors that bring out much of the dissimilarity when we try to compare the two states:

- In Georgia's case, the confrontation with Russia, although not always overtly enough, but started to take place since the early years of gaining independence (the Civil War in Georgia, the Abkhazian and the so-called South Ossetian Wars of the 1990s, then August of 2008 in the so-called South Ossetia again). At the same time, Russia has annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula more recently, i.e. in 2014.
- Different sizes of Georgia and Ukraine by their areas and populations; Georgia is a much smaller country with the area of 69,700 km² [Britannica 2023a]. (the country is 122nd in a list of the world's countries and their dependencies by land, water, and total area, ranked by total area) [Britannica 2023c], while Ukraine represents the second-largest European country after Russia, which it borders to the east and northeast. The area of Ukraine is 603,549 km² [Britannica 2023b], and the country is 45th in the same list of the world's countries and their dependencies by land, water, and total area, ranked by total area. [Britannica 2023c], Ukraine has been the seventh-most populous country in Europe [World Population Review 2023], with a population of around 43 million people [Britannica 2023c]. In contrast, Georgia has a population of 3.7 million people [Britannica 2023a].
- Ukraine, being part of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), is much closer to the EU and NATO areas, rather than Georgia. This can still potentially play a role for the relevant organizational membership aspirations of the two countries in further as well.
- The major difference in the given context now seems to be the nature, scale, intensity, etc. of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War, with still unprecedented international responses, reactions, and measures taken in the post-World War II era.

The current European war indeed plays a game-changer role not only in the geopolitics of the region – CEE, but also in the international politics overall. At stake can be Russia's first of all, self-perceived and self-designed world dominance prospects built upon still stronger trust in, and in many cases, even unquestionability of the role and weight of hard power in international politics and its applicability, as well as ownership and still important capability of controlling diverse natural resources that are at the disposal of the country with the traditional imperialistic ambitions, vs. the existing US and EU global order.

Conclusions

When making a thorough comparison between Ukraine and Georgia vis a vis the ongoing war in Ukraine, there are evidently more qualitative similarities between these two countries, rather than differences. We arrive at such conclusions as we, at the same time, keep hearing pretensions from the part of Ukraine and its current leadership towards the Georgian Dream government of Georgia that their, in fact Caucasian or South Caucasian counterpart, is failing in regards of accomplishing the Georgian state's aim about entering EU and NATO, and being in certain favorable for their personal gain, – negotiations with Russia and Vladimir Putin's administration or their allies in business or elsewhere instead.

Based on the factual analysis, it is definitely clear that Georgia has started its antagonistic self-defense from Russia much earlier rather than Ukraine, and Georgians, their governments, but people itself first of all, have experienced greater and bitter confrontation with the Russian imperialism already since quite long historical periods. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War, a real game-changer in the post-World War II Europe and/or the world, seems too bigger a challenge of totally different scale and weight to logically be faced by a country of 10 times larger with its area and population, rather than by a country of 10 times smaller with its area and population. In Georgia's case, the last war with Russia lasted for a few days in August of 2008, and it was just of absolute necessity to somehow stop the warfare as soon as possible in order to preserve the small Caucasian state and nation, which was managed due to the effective mediation of particularly – EU. While, on the contrary, Ukraine still keeps impressively resisting the already years old warfare with Russia. The capacities of these two countries in comparison, are evidently different. Accordingly, there is no doubt that as have been mentioned earlier, Ukraine stands as a true game-changer for the world politics, not only in the relatively narrower context of the geopolitics of CEE.

Taking into account the differentiations considered above, among which the distinct capacities of the two countries along with their divergent geographical locations and/or similar geopolitical significance even though of varied scales – contribute crucially, still different times and/or other important exogenous, and significantly not endogenous, factors like much cohesive and determined, thus stronger Western world vis a vis much weaker Russia, in fact – even though already multi-polar world order, but dominated by one Western superpower in 2008, for the times of the Russian-Georgian War, along with more optimistic post-Soviet states and their leaders hoping

for the easier association with the West, have played bigger roles, rather than there are being witnessed as of now, i.e. during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War, the conditions of the formed multi-polar world order we are universally living under, built-up of different decisive players with newer and more complex ambitions and rivalries raging around. At stake definitely is the American and EU-led Western dominance vs. the Eastern global interests put forward by Russia now, but basically driven by some other actors as well, like particularly, China, and potentially, some other countries too.

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Abstract

In order to diagnose which kind of political processes are taking place specifically in terms of geopolitics of the Central and Eastern Europe or broader post-Soviet/ post-socialist region having potentially global repercussions, the paper aims at finding out what are the major similarities and differences between Ukraine and Georgia amidst the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War. In particular, we need to identify if much bigger and more significant regional or already due to the ongoing war – the world competitor – Ukraine on one hand, and on the other, much smaller South Caucasian state – Georgia with also crucially important location as a center of a micro region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, are in fact qualitatively analogous or very different players taking into account at least main contemporary commonalities and distinctions characteristic and topical contemporarily for these two countries.

Keywords: Georgia, a Matter of Separate Times, Russian-Georgian War, Russian-Ukrainian War, Ukraine

