

**Foreign policy of the Russian Federation: focus on the post-Soviet area
(1991 - 2000)**

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Abstract: *The given work focuses primarily on researching the political situation following the collapse of the USSR and Russia's attempts at consolidation in the last decade of the 20th century. The approach to the subject is based on the theory of realism, examining the subject from the perspective of the Kremlin's interests in certain geographical areas and its mode of interaction with states in those regions. Thus, each region has represented and continues to represent a strategic area of interest for both Russia and other regional or global powers. Consequently, various strategies are anticipated, initiated, or carried out in approaching a particular state or group of states collectively. However, all these have also had a rather negative effect on the policies promoted by Moscow, especially in the case of certain states such as Azerbaijan. Moreover, certain events in the post-Soviet political arena have demonstrated the Kremlin's weakness in stabilizing situations that have spiraled out of control.*

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Introduction

The foreign policy analysis of the Russian Federation has always been an extensive topic of research and has been constantly approached by various researchers and analysts. The interest was even more pronounced after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine.

Evidently, after the breakup of the USSR, the Russian Federation placed itself in a rather uncomfortable position, being surrounded by a lot of new states, 14 in number, which forced a political reorientation, in terms of collaboration from equal to the newly emerged states. For this reason, one can state that in the context of 30 years since the breakup of the USSR, the Russian Federation, as the successor, had focused its attention on the post-Soviet space through several political, economic and social channels. The purpose of this research is to highlight the main directions of the Kremlin's foreign policy in the last decade of the 20th century.

For starters, I will delimit the three directions geographically, as to mislead and show the differences in making political decisions:

- I. European (Baltic countries, Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova),
- II. Transcaucasian (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Chechen Republic) and
- III. Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan).

All three areas are very important for the Russian Federation for political-military, economic and social reasons. As to Russia's foreign policy, the last decade of the 20th century should not be seen as imperial or dictatorial. The reason for this specific attitude towards it, as witnessed in the internal problems of the Russian state itself, will be illustrated further in my research.

I will be taking into account not only the ambitions of Moscow, but also those of the new state leaders and the society of their states. I will highlight from the beginning that the rhetoric of many of the newly created states has imposed certain problems for Moscow in its search for a common language of cooperation.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation had trapped itself in its own past and Lenin's own socialist creation. The problem of the new political system in Moscow does not differ, for the most part, from the communist system, whilst also it is aware of its own problems; three more years would pass before a new constitution and new legislative bodies would be created to set the entire Russian state in motion. Until then, the Russian Federation would focus on domestic politics, at the same time trying to play the role of the "*good Samaritan*" externally, trying to improve the world situation and the general outset created by the communist regime in the previous years. This number of years gave the new states a period of time to create their own vision, rhetoric and ideology, uninfluenced by Moscow. This would later cause both political and social distancing.

Through all of the above I will be making some historical analogies between the rhetoric of the Russian Federation, the USSR and the Russian (Tsarist) Empire. These analogies will provide a better understanding of the

work. At the same time, the given work will be based on different primary and secondary, domestic and foreign sources. All the sources used in the work will serve as an aid for a harmonization of ideas and providing an overview of the situation as a whole.

An attempt to revive the USSR under a new democratic form?

First of all, in order to support a link between Moscow and the other states, the Kremlin had to create certain international organizations. The first organization was the Commonwealth of Independent States (hereafter CIS), created in 1991 and it intended to provide an alternative to the European Union, an analogy of the CIS with the USSR can be envisaged. The second organization is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (better known as CSTO), created in 1992, its purpose being seen in collective defense and as a counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization block (NATO), being an alternative to the Warsaw Pact.

According to the words of mr. Nazarin Sergiu: *"And although the CIS has proven to be an amorphous and ineffective hybrid, in the absence of a system of responsibilities for the fulfillment of assumed obligations, it continues to retain its priority in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation for strategic, economic and human reasons."*²

As for the international organizations established by the Russian Federation, they are expected to play a much more important role in the future.

² Nazarin Sergiu, *Federația Rusă în contextul proceselor politice internaționale contemporane*, Teză de doctorat, Chișinău, 2004 – [Nazarin Sergiu, *Russian Federation in the context of contemporary international political processes*, PhD thesis, Chisinau, 2004].

Each state on its own would decide to cooperate with Moscow in its own way. On the other hand, the CIS provides a platform for direct communication between leaders and a prerogative to support states in domestic economic relations. Such somewhat democratic control offered a possibility of surveillance.

Both agreements would evolve over several years, although the stages were entirely predictable. All the movements in the arena of international politics between the former Soviet republics were completely dictated by the same personnel who in one way or another were trained and raised by the communist system. The reason why other countries signed these agreements can be understood in the context of the tensions created. Thus, we arrive at the previous idea that all the presidents of the newly formed states came from the former communist political environment. A large part of them were trained and educated in Moscow. This required the new leaders of the states to direct their vision for a collaboration with a well-known regional actor. The evolution of the partnership being another matter, it differed from state to state, but the most important focus for the period of the 1990s was largely occupied by the cooperation between the Russian Federation and the former Soviet republics.

CIS represents, as the "Agreement on the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States" as itself declares, a strategic partnership in the economic and political fields, between the main founders: Republic of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The CIS automatically led to the definitive breakup of the USSR and the imposition of a new international community in a more democratic way, to which other states in the post-Soviet space will later join. Another fact which

warrants attention are the following words within the agreement: *"On the basis of the common historical character of our peoples and the ties that have developed between them, taking into account the bilateral treaties concluded between the High Parties Contracting Parties desiring to build democratic states governed by the rule of law, intending to develop their relations on the basis of mutual recognition and respect for national sovereignty ..."*³

We can distinguish the fact that the three founding states wanted a continuation of the already existing previous relations, obviously peacefully cooperating, in the closest possible way. But it can be highlighted that, apart from the actual organization, Moscow would negotiate separately (bilaterally) with the Minsk leadership regarding the creation of a new type of alliance, which will lead to the creation of the Union State at the end of the second millennium.⁴ As for Ukraine, there are many divergences; it does not compare to the Republic of Belarus for both political and social reasons.

In the case of the Republic of Belarus, political power has been taken over since 1994 by the current president, Alexander Lukashenko, who imposed an authoritarian leadership, but many researchers consider Lukashenko's regime as an authoritarian one with democratic aspects.

Ukraine, for its part, for essential reasons had a much different development, following the democratic model and offering greater freedom to society. The clear example of ideological diversity was expressed by the former president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, in the TV program *"One to One"* (June 1,

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ Unitary State - Political, economic, social, military alliance between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus.

1997) said that the divergences between Russia and Ukraine are constantly visible, even during the signing agreements or treaties, they were not respected by any of the parties.⁵

As for the other countries that had joined the CIS, those would be: the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan and Turkmenistayn (*observing member*)⁶. Some of these countries would later withdraw from the organization for obvious reasons, such as Ukraine (2018)⁷ and Georgia (2009)⁹.¹⁰

As for the CSTO, this organization took its roots as early as 1992 on May 15, when the "*Collective Security Treaty*" was signed¹¹. The main theme of this collective security bloc would be addressed later, as it is also a problem for the policies promoted by Moscow. The CSTO currently includes the following states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and

⁵ ВИДgital ViD, *Один на один 1997 (01.06.1997)*, YouTube, 2017 – [VIDgital ViD. (2017, October 20). *One on One 1997 (01.06.1997)*, YouTube, 2017] -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rta7wghmEZE>

⁶ Observer member since 2005, the reason for the definitive non-involvement in the organisation can be seen in the non-ratification of the agreement.

⁷ Офіційний портал Верховної Ради України, Новини, *Пленарне засідання Верховної Ради України (відео)*, 2022 - [Official portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, News, *Plenary session of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (video)*, 2022] -

<https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/219491.html?search=%D0%A1%D0%9D%D0%94>

⁸ Annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation.

⁹ Захаров Владимир, *Грузия вышла из СНГ*, МГИМО, 2009 – [Vladimir Zakharov, *Georgia has left the CIS*, МГИМО, 2009] - <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/118960/>

¹⁰ The Five-Day War (Georgian War) between Georgia and separatist forces (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) supported by the Russian Federation.

¹¹ Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности, *Меморандум о повышении эффективности Договора о коллективной безопасности от 15 мая 1992 года и его адаптации к современной геополитической ситуации*, 2012 - [Collective Security Treaty Organisation, *Memorandum on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty of 15 May 1992 and its Adaptation to the Current Geopolitical Situation*, 2012]-

https://odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/memorandum_o_povyshenii_effektivnosti_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezопасnosti_ot_15_maya_1992_goda_i_eg/

Tajikistan. The following states were also part of the organization: Azerbaijan (1993 - 1999 – The exit took place due to the lack of coordination between Baku and Moscow regarding the situation around the Republic of Artsakh)¹², Georgia (1993 - 1999)¹³ and Uzbekistan (1992 – 1999¹⁴; 2006 - 2012 - the exit from the organization takes place due to the problematic discussion regarding cooperation with Afghanistan)¹⁵.

Eastern Europe– Belarus, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova

As I stated, the first part I will be focusing on Moscow's foreign policy regarding the European area. The most obvious challenge for the given region is the different evolution of relations between Moscow and each individual state. Accordingly, the main partner state of the Russian Federation after the breakup of the USSR was and is, as of now, the Republic of Belarus.

After the collapse of the USSR, political-administrative problems arose in several states, which provided the Kremlin with an effective lever to act on its new neighbors, through active involvement in the political life of the given states.

The Republic of Belarus, in turn, was seen as Moscow's most appropriate partner for several reasons. This is not due to the remaining communist political model, but to a common historical ideology. Starting with the Russian Empire,

¹² Н.С. Ниязов, *ВЗАИМОТНОШЕНИЯ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА И ОДКБ В 1994–2011* гг., в ВЕСТНИК ТОМСКОГО ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА, 2011, №4(16) - [N.S. Niyazov, *IMPLEMENTATION OF AZERBAIJAN AND CSTO IN 1994-2011*, in VESTRIC OF TOMSK STATE UNIVERSITY, 2011, No. 4(16)] - <https://vital.lib.tsu.ru/vital/access/services/Download/vtls:000789075/SOURCE1?view=true>

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ И. Карташов, *Узбекистан заявил о выходе из ОДКБ*, Российская Газета, 2012 – [И. Kartashov, *Uzbekistan announced its withdrawal from the CSTO*, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2012] - <https://rg.ru/2012/06/29/uzbekistan-site.html>

the territories of the state of Belarus began to be fully integrated into the composition of the state of the empire, completing the total integration only at the end of the 18th century, through the partition of Poland in 1795¹⁶. The same culture, language, way of thinking and other socio-cultural elements favored the accommodation of the society itself. The coming to power of the communists and the reform of the state, led to a political reformulation in the space of the former Tsarist Empire. The provision of its own administration, but controlled by Moscow, laid the foundations for the creation of a new society.

In turn, the independence of Belarus is seen as a desire of the elite rather than the people, who woke up overnight in a new state. Paradoxically, the leadership in Minsk was quite loyal to the Kremlin and during the 1990s Moscow would create an official alliance with Minsk, created on the basis of several bilateral treaties¹⁷, which in the future would leave its mark on the history of both states and lead to the creation of the Union State. Like the CIS and CSTO organizations, the alliance between Russia and Belarus would develop over the years, beginning in 1995 and ending in 1999, where the alliance's final foundations are laid. The pact, obviously, represents an alliance of necessity more

¹⁶ *Россия – Беларусь: из истории взаимоотношений*, Президентская Библиотека Имени Б.Н. Ельцина – [*Russia - Belarus: from the History of Relations*, Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library] - <https://www.prlib.ru/collections/1879500>

¹⁷ *История Союзного государства*, Посольство Республики Беларусь в Российской Федерации - [*History of the Union State*, Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Russian Federation.] - https://russia.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/sojuz/#:~:text=%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80%20%D0%BE%20%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8%20%D0%A1%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%BD%0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B0.%D0%91%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%8C%20%D0%BE%D0%BE%20%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8%20%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%20%D0%BE%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9

on the part of Moscow. The Kremlin was looking for a much closer land route to the Kaliningrad region.

Therefore, another context can be added, oriented towards a geo-strategic vision represented by the Republic of Belarus, on whose territory is the only land route to Europe (not crossed by rivers or mountains), located between the Daugava River (which passes through Latvia and Belarus) and the Dnieper River (which passes through Ukraine and Belarus). The only strip of land passes through the corridor formed between the cities of Vitebsk - Orsha. Under the given conditions, the Republic of Belarus represents the most important strategic bridge of the Russian Federation in the direction of the European plain.

Moving on to the relations between Moscow and Kiev, we see a complete difference from the previous relationship between Moscow and Minsk. This is characterized by several problems, the main one being seen in the Ukrainian elites and the history of this state. First of all, we can highlight the fact that Ukraine would not go the route Belarus took and would not sign treaties of alliance and cooperation, and moreover would not ratify the agreement on the CIS Charter, which obviously meant a disagreement between the states. In particular, current events have revealed a leadership problem in Kiev; in other words, after the collapse of the USSR a Pandora's box was opened, revealing a real problem with previous decisions made by the Moscow leadership during the communist period.

However, Moscow forced Kiev to sign the *Budapest Memorandum*¹⁸ from 1994. According to the memorandum, the following states: the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, guaranteed the territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine on the condition that it returns the Soviet nuclear weapons stationed on its territory.¹⁹ It was clear that at the time of signing the memorandum, no one foresaw the emergence of a conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. However, Ukraine's surrender of its nuclear weapons to Russia was a major victory for the Kremlin. From independence until the early 2000s, Ukraine and the Russian Federation were perceived both externally and internally as allied states.

Since the Republic of Moldova does not have a direct border with the Russian Federation, Chisinau is not seen and has not been seen by Moscow as a major enemy or an extremely powerful adversary. Again, to maintain its influence over Chisinau, the Kremlin would use the confrontation on the Dniester between Tiraspol and Chisinau to form political leverage over the years.²⁰ Added to this is the leverage effect in the energy sector, largely created during the Soviet period. For the most part, with the exception of the 1992 Dniester conflict, Russian foreign policy does not focus on Chisinau, nor was it considered in the

¹⁸ Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, *Меморандум о гарантиях безопасности в связи с присоединением Украины к Договору о нераспространении ядерного оружия*, *Международный договор*, 1994 - [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, International Treaty, 1994] - <https://www.mid.ru/upload/medialibrary/fe3/%D0%BL.%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BC.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Elena Nistor, *Războiul de pe Nistru: cauze, actori, consecințe*, în *STUDIUM: Revista studenților, masteranzilor și doctoranzilor în istorie*, 2017, nr. 10 - [Elena Nistor, *The War on the Dniester: causes, actors, consequences*, in *STUDIUM: Journal of students, masters and doctoral students in history*, 2017, no. 10]/

plan in this regard. The Dniester Moldavian Republic represents in itself a coordination bridge between Moscow and Chisinau. This frozen conflict is a way of influencing the given region.

As for the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), here the foreign policy of the Russian Federation failed. First of all, it took shape in the social and historical conflicts between the Baltic states and the Russian Federation. According to surveys conducted in 2000, all three independent states had a *negative attitude about Soviet socialism and a return to it*.²¹ As stated from the beginning, the historical context and the ideological confrontation would lead to the formation of a new society, based on other principles and morals in the Baltic states, which would automatically lead to a distancing from Russia. Despite the given fact, the parties have signed certain treaties since the proclamation of independence, called "*Treaties on the basis of inter-state relations*".²² Otherwise, the politics between the Baltic states and the Russian Federation during the 1990s is characterized as stagnant, the complexity of the situation being exacerbated by the fact that the countries were starting to join the NATO bloc, which would obviously lead to a deterioration of bilateral relations between states.²³

²¹ Татьяна Игнаточкина, Очир Манджиков, *Россия и страны Балтии*, Россия В Глобальной Политике, 2003 - [Tatiana Ignatochkina, Ochir Manjikov, *Russia and the Baltic States*, Russia in Global Politics, 2003] - <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/rossiya-i-strany-baltii/>

²² Электронный фонд правовых и нормативно-технических документов, *Договор об основах межгосударственных отношений Российской Советской Федеративной Социалистической Республики и Эстонской Республики от 12 января 1991* - [Electronic Fund of Legal and Regulatory-Technical Documents, *Treaty on the Basis of Interstate Relations between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the Republic of Estonia of 12 January 1991*] - <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/1901980>

²³ С. С. Бойков, *Evolution of Russian foreign policy towards the Baltic States at the present Stage*. Post-Soviet Issues, 2020, No.7(3) - <https://doi.org/10.24975/2313-8920-2020-7-3-389-406>

The Caucasus – a buffer zone between the Russian Federation and the Near East

As for the states in the Caucasus region, focus should be drawn to the geographical and social problems of the region as a whole, which from the very beginning would be exploited in the relations between the Kremlin and the states in the region. From Ivan the Terrible to the present day, the region presents an area of major interest from several points of view. Some of the arguments given, which were mostly highlighted by the two world wars, were military control of communication and transport arteries, thus having control over the entire region²⁴. The aspirations for liberation and independence led to quite large sacrifices behind these conscious desires.

The year 1991 offered a huge chance for the 3 newly formed states, however, this area became a buffer that separated NATO (Turkey) and the Russian Federation. Apart from the geographical problem of this territory, there is also another issue outlined at the ethnic-cultural level, especially the division between the Armenian and Azeri, Abkhaz and Georgian, Ossetian peoples. The small enclave states, within others, created during the USSR, had a major impact in the regional politics of this territory, starting from 1991.

From the three official states - Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia - to the three unrecognized states - Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Artsakh, they interconnect the interests of each individual actor. The situation should be looked

²⁴ И.В. Бочарников, *Кавказская политика России в X–XX веках*, в Научно-исследовательский центр проблем национальной безопасности, Москва, 2013 - [I.V. Bocharnikov, *Caucasian Policy of Russia in the X-XX centuries*, in Research Centre for National Security Problems, Moscow, 2013].

at as a whole, especially when it comes to the relations between the three states and the conflicts between them, only later bringing into the equation the interest of Moscow and its interest to keep the conflicts in a frozen state. Only first I will be drawing attention to another player, already non-existent in the region, which had left a rather bloody imprint on the entire Russian Federation, the Chechen Republic of Iziceria.

The declaration of independence of the Chechen Republic of Icikeria can be seen as a blow to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. The future of this state would set a precedent that could lead to a demand for independence from other entities of the Russian Federation.

I would like to point out that the first campaign against the Chechen Republic of Icikeria, represented a total failure of the Russian military forces, especially after the loss of control over the city of Grozny. It is unusual that this loss forced the Kremlin leadership to look for ways to resolve the conflict peacefully. Under the given conditions, on August 31, 1996, the *Khasavyurt Agreement* was signed, ending the military operation and the withdrawal of the Russian military from the republic.

The agreement provided for the cessation of fire and the de-escalation of the situation in the region, while at the same time it provided for the creation of new principles to clarify the relations between the two states; one of the points of these principles stipulated the following: *An agreement on the basis of relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Icikera, established in accordance with the generally recognized principles and norms of international law, is to*

be concluded before December 31, 2001.²⁵ This directly points to a possible rekindling of the conflict, turning it from frozen to hot.

It only represented peace for a short time. The official status of the republic was still quite fragile, due to the non-recognition of any other international organization (only the leader of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, recognized the republic, but at the time of recognition, for the beginning of 1992, in Georgia was under a coup d'état)²⁶. Such an international political settlement gave the Kremlin freedom domestically to create a new strategic plan and avoid previous mistakes.

The second military campaign against the republics began on September 30, 1999. According to official data, the leadership in Grozny lost control of the army and terrorist groups.²⁷ The campaign itself lasted for 9 months, but officially ended on 16 April 2009, following the completion of the anti-terrorist operation. Despite this, there were still numerous terrorist formations in the region waging guerrilla warfare.²⁸

Another problem in this space is represented by the quasi-states that were unrecognized at that time, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both states declared their

²⁵ В.П. Романов, *ПРИНЦИПЫ определения основ взаимоотношений между Российской Федерацией и Чеченской Республикой*, БИБЛИОТЕКА ХРОНОСА - [V.P. Romanov, *PRINCIPLES for determining the basis of relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic*, CHRONOSA BIBLIOTECA] - http://hrono.ru/libris/lib_r/wh_book28.php

²⁶ *Кто признал дудаевскую Республику Ичкерия*, Рамблер/Новости, 2018 - [*Who recognised Dudayev's Republic of Ichkeria*, Rambler/News, 2018.] - <https://news.rambler.ru/other/40962060-kto-priznal-dudaevskuyu-respubliku-ichkeriya/>

²⁷ Aleksei KUDRIAVTSEV, *WAHHABISM: RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS*, Central Asia and the Caucasus - <https://ca-c.org/wahhabism-religious-extremism-in-the-northern-caucasus/>

²⁸ *В Чечне после отмены режима КТО произошло боестолкновение*, Кавказский Узел, 2009 - [*There was fighting in Chechnya after the cancellation of the KTO regime*, Kavkazsky Uzel, 2009] - <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/153047>

independence after the collapse of the USSR. Obviously, such a unilateral decision was not in agreement with the leadership in Tbilisi. It would also lead to some ethnic conflicts and mass cleansing.²⁹

The context of the conflict was the integration of the territories into the Georgian state and the end of separatism. In order to end the military conflict and not to lose their desired independence, Georgian military forces were stopped by a counter-offensive by Abkhaz military forces, supported by Chechen mercenaries. The Kremlin intervened in this war, officially to stop the bloodshed in the region, the reason being also the significant non-participation of Russian troops apart from humanitarian missions. Moreover, Moscow has positioned itself as a mediator between the two states, offering a platform to regulate the problems that have arisen.³⁰ The given actions represent a freezing of the conflict for an indefinite period, which would be seen later.

In the case of Georgia, the Russian Federation had been deeply involved in resolving the internal situation, where an uprising broke out as early as 1991 (after independence). Following multiple battles both internally and against separatist republics, Georgia's defense forces were no longer capable of fighting on two fronts, which directly forced the then-president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, to ask the Russian Federation to intervene in the conflict and help Georgia avoid imminent defeat. Moscow, seeing this as a clear possibility to

²⁹ Tracey German, *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests*, in *Russie Nei Visions*, IFRI, 2006, No.11 - <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russieneivisions/abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-collision-georgian-and>

³⁰ Х.Д. Гицба, *Война в Абхазии в 1992-1993 гг. и политика России*, в ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ: НАУЧНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ, 2017, № 5 - [H.D. Gitsba, *The war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993 and Russian policy*, in HISTORICAL JOURNAL: SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, 2017, No. 5].

realize its plan of influence over Georgia, proposed the latter to take part in the CIS. Georgia, having no other way out of the situation, supported the idea, thus giving the Russian army a military base on its territory.³¹

Military confrontations continued, but on a much smaller scale, finally ending with the signing of the *Moscow Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces of 14 May 1994*³²³³. As for the period up to the 2000s, it remains quite tense for the region. Speaking of the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, the situation closely resembles the actions surrounding the Abkhaz issue.

As for the regional issue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, here the Kremlin's role is seen primarily as a negotiator and peacemaker. The geopolitical struggle in the given region was fought between the Russian Federation on one side and Turkey on the other, both playing the role of intermediaries and supporting its ally.³⁴ Because of this, Moscow's problem lies particularly in the fact that it does not have a direct border with Armenia, which makes it difficult to provide military aid to the latter. The main problem in the region being seen by

³¹ В. Колбаиа, И. Хаиндрава, Н. Сарджвеладзе, Е. Чомахидзе, А. Гегешидзе, *ГАРАНТИИ ПО НЕВОЗОБНОВЛЕНИЮ БОЕВЫХ ДЕЙСТВИЙ: ОПАСЕНИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ГРУЗИНО-АБХАЗСКИХ ВЗАИМООТНОШЕНИЙ*, GFSIS, Тбилиси, 2009 - [В. Kolbaia, I. Khaindrava, N. Sarjveladze, E. Chomakhidze, A. Gegeshidze, *WARRANTS FOR UNRECOVERY OF BATTLE ACTIONS: Dangers in the context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Relationship*, GFSIS, Tbilisi, 2009].

³² Orig. - Соглашение о прекращении огня и разъединении сил, подписанное в Москве 4 апреля 1994 года

³³ Civil Georgia, *Московское соглашение о прекращении огня и разъединении сил от 1994 г.*, 2008 - [Civil Georgia, *Moscow Ceasefire and Separation of Forces Agreement of 1994*, 2008] - <https://civil.ge/ru/archives/172279>

³⁴ Ш.Н. Саламов, *КАРАБАХСКИЙ КОНФЛИКТ: ИСТОКИ - ПРИЧИНЫ - ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ*, Бишкек, 2018 – [SH.N. Salamov, *KARABAKH CONFLICT: SOURCES - CAUSES - CONSEQUENCES*, Bishkek, 2018].

both sides, in the existence of the Republic of Artsakh, both Yerevan and Baku saw the given region as a part of its territory.

As a result, the entire region remains a politically unstable area with three frozen conflicts, in which Moscow managed to play directly through the interests of each state, which would also lead to a deterioration of political ties.

Central Asia – an area of major interest to world powers

Looking at Central Asia and the states of the region, it should be noted that the interaction of newly formed states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tadjikistan with the Russian Federation was seen from the beginning as rather unipolar, in the sense that the leaders of these states were, in a word, loyal to the Kremlin. The main problem arises in the relationship between each individual state.

The words of Maria Lipman (Russian political scientist and journalist), say the following: *Independence fell on the countries of Central Asia like a snowball: at first, the citizens of the newly formed countries could not understand at all what was happening and why the usual Soviet order had collapsed suddenly. In that initial period, it was not clear on what basis the new statehood in the region would be built; will the local (Soviet) elites be able to retain power or will they be overthrown by new forces; local secular regimes will remain; to whom will they direct their foreign policy?*³⁵ In the first stage after the breakup, society was in a perplexed state.

³⁵ Мария Липман, *Центральная Азия и внешние державы*, Pro et Contra, Москва, 2013 - [Maria Lipman, *Central Asia and External Powers*, Pro et Contra, Moscow, 2013] - https://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProEtContra_58_all.pdf

The new leaders, the confrontation with the opposition and other problems have propelled a very harsh policy of the leaders in the region, especially in the case of opponents: *Nursultan Nazarbaev dealt harshly with political opponents; Islam Karimov was credited with brutally suppressing the popular uprising in Andijan. In Turkmenistan, especially under the leadership of Saparmurad Niyazov, the political regime became a surrealist anti-utopia. Tadjikistan's leader, Emomali Rahmon, came to power following a civil war between clans. Although his experience as a Soviet manager (at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union he was director of the Lenin State Farm in the Dangara district of the Tajik SSR) did not prepare Rakhmon for this challenge, he managed - with the help of Russia - to end the war and subsequently, to maintain peace in Tajikistan through repeated escalation of the conflict.*³⁶

Whilst on the topic of the Kremlin's interest in the given area, I'd like to first approach the economic and political interests. This is also where the battle for natural resources comes in: the Russian Federation is not in a position to dictate its own rules, and the surrounding states are interested in pursuing their own economic policy, calling on other surrounding states that are interested in these resources.

On the other hand, the Kremlin would rely heavily on the leaders who remain in office to consolidate its apparent economic and political dominance in the region.³⁷ At the same time, various bilateral and cooperation treaties, which I mentioned at the beginning, would be concluded.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Bobo Lo, *Frontiers New and Old: Russia's policy in Central Asia*, in *Russie Nei Visions*, IFRI, 2015, No. 82 - <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/russieneivisions/frontiers-new-and-old-russias-policy-central-asia>

Quintessentially, the states of the Central Asian region prevail over the other states listed above not only by its history but also by ethnic and social reasons totally different from the European side. While the Caucasian states seek a way out of the problematic situations by appealing to the political power of the Russian Federation and other European states, the Turkish states, apart from Tadjikistan, prefer interstate cooperation. This cooperation can itself be seen through the multiple ethnic enclaves located on the territories of other states.³⁸ The respective enclaves, in turn, imposed certain problems between the states and even led to the development of cross-border conflicts, which goes against the idea mentioned above, but given conflicts are seen as socio-economic problems and nothing more.³⁹

Talking about the bilateral relations between Moscow and each individual state, we should start with Kazakhstan – the largest state in terms of size in the region and which represents a buffer zone between the rest of Central Asia and the Russian Federation.

The main treaty concluded between Moscow and Astana provides for military cooperation between the states and commitments on nuclear weapons, located on the territory of Kazakhstan.⁴⁰ According to this bilateral agreement

³⁸ КОЧЕВНИК, *ПОГРАНИЧНЫЕ КОНФЛИКТЫ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ* [Video], YouTube, 2022 - [СОСНЕВИЧ, *Border Conflicts of Central Asia* [Video], YouTube, 2022] - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upG4sjT9y9c>

³⁹ БОЯРКИНА Оксана, *Конфликты в Средней Азии На примере Ферганской долины*, в Свободная мысль, 2017, н. 1 - [Oksana BOYARKINA, *Conflicts in Central Asia On the Example of the Fergana Valley*, in Svobodnaya Mysl, 2017, n. 1] - https://elibrary.az/docs/jurnal/jrn2017_257.pdf

⁴⁰ *Договор между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Казахстан о военном сотрудничестве*, Электронный фонд правовых и нормативно-технических документов - [Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan on Military Cooperation, Electronic Fund of Legal and Regulatory-Technical Documents] - <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/1900516>

signed on 28th of March 1994, the parties are committed to military aid, border security and such. Also in the given agreement it is stipulated that the Russian Federation, according to article no. 4⁴¹, that Moscow will repay in financial form or in some other form equivalent to the buyback of nuclear weapons. Another rather important agreement for the Russian Federation concerns the leasing of the Baikonur Cosmodrome.⁴² These and other agreements were signed and ratified between the two states required political, military and economic cooperation to be maintained at a fairly high level. In conclusion, Kazakhstan itself represents a rather fragile area for the Russian Federation from a geopolitical point of view. Because of this, the Kremlin must constantly take into account Astana's international policy.

As for other states in the region, Moscow's interests are not so significant here; totalitarian or semi-totalitarian regimes favor the harmonious construction of political elites. Economic and military cooperation normalized the situation between the new states and Moscow. It can be seen that after 1991 and until the beginning of the new millennium, a significant part of the elite supported the policies proposed by the Kremlin in their perspective.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² *Соглашение между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Казахстан об основных принципах и условиях использования космодрома "Байконур"*, Электронный фонд правовых и нормативно - технических документов - [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Basic Principles and Conditions of Use of the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Electronic Fund of Legal, Regulatory and Technical Documents] - <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/1902968>

⁴³ Калинина О. Н., Россия и Центральная Азия: региональное сотрудничество в сфере безопасности, Известия Уральского государственного университета. Сер. 2, Гуманитарные науки, 2011, № 4 (96) - [Kalinina, O. N., *Russia and Central Asia: Regional Security Cooperation*, in *Izvestiya Ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*. Ser. 2, Humanities, 2011, No. 4 (96)] - <https://elar.urfu.ru/bitstream/10995/18789/1/iurg-2011-96-05.pdf>

However, interests changed over the decade; apparently, the emergence of new local or regional powers forced a change in the foreign policy of these states. Basically, the previously mentioned international actors, such as Iran and Turkey, stand out from the rest because they have sought and are seeking geopolitical allies in the international arena to strengthen their own statehood. On the other hand, another international actor of a higher order than Iran and Turkey, namely China, is emerging in the region.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the USSR, Moscow had to rethink the main areas of interaction with its new neighbors. Since many leaders were elected by the overwhelming majority of the population, they were, in a sense, part of the previously controlled political apparatus in Moscow. For these reasons, Boris Yeltsin's policy was aimed at solving the situation in society and strengthening his capacity for power in the former territories. It is obvious that the newly formed state had two main problems. The first would be the nuclear weapons located on the territory of independent states, which endangered not only the Russian Federation, but also the entire planet. While the second problem would be as an attempt to normalize the situation around him, de-escalate and impose own policy in a new stage of history. Another variable can be added here based on finding local allies and the future creation of control points, such as Transnistria in the case of the European region, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in the Caucasus region. Central Asia has its own territorial problems and is also a sphere of influence for Moscow.

The period of the 90s for the Russian Federation represented both an internal and external struggle, Moscow not having at its disposal the multitude of levers that the USSR had. Thus, from a world power it turned into a regional power with internal and external problems, especially after the rise of NATO. Discomfort has intensified since the collapse of the USSR, as the political space at the international level has expanded, and the Russian Federation no longer has the opportunity to act in all possible ways. From this point of view, the void left by Moscow will be occupied by other regional powers, as has already happened with Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, the Baltic states and others.

This distinction between the policies of some states loyal to Moscow and others considered Russophobic is characterized by a single aspect; and here arises the basic problem of how to see Russophobia and Russophilia - for ordinary people who do not interfere in state affairs, the Russian Federation was not seen as a relevant enemy, especially in difficult periods of universal history.

To conclude this analysis, it is correct to talk about the reasons for the emergence of interstate relations. In the period after 1945 and throughout the Cold War, Moscow acted cautiously, creating economic links between the center and the periphery in various ways. Thus, many states found themselves directly or indirectly linked to Moscow in one way or another from an economic point of view. The most obvious of these links can be traced back to the creation of gas pipelines. The economy of each republic within the USSR was its own, but linked to Russian resources.

Another aspect, which strongly determined the communist period, was the formation and creation of a rather extensive bureaucracy. For this reason,

many of those who came to power after the collapse of the USSR went through the same school of thought. Under these conditions, there is a direct or indirect connection between the leaders persisted during that period. Another reason can be seen in the social factor and in the orientation towards a possible patronage of Russia for a short period of reconstruction of the respective states.