

The Prospects of ODED-GUAM Revival

*Mchedlishvili Giorgi,
The University of Georgia*

Russian war on Ukraine rendered the latter the fourth post-Soviet state – after Georgian, Azerbaijan and Moldova – that does not de-facto control the entirety of its internationally recognized territory. Since the mentioned states have all been members of the once active international organization ODED-GUAM, their common security challenge might revive a currently dormant partnership. But the domestic circumstances in some of the countries, as well as unfavorable regional and international junctures all but exclude meaningful partnership at the moment.

The annexation of Crimea in March and the subsequent crisis in the Eastern Ukraine that continues to this day confronted Europe with a very significant security challenge and underscored the weakness of not only Ukraine, but of the West as well. The latter lacked the political will to stand up for a country, which only months before that had unequivocally turned to the West and unseated a corrupt pro-Russian leadership. To this end, Ukrainian society snubbed a lucrative Russian offer of USD 15 billion aimed at turning Ukraine away from signing EU's Association Agreement.

And yet, when it came to paying a heavy price for its pro-Western choice, Ukraine ended up all by itself against an assertive and vindictive Russia, as its Western partners contented themselves with voicing "grave concerns" and suboptimal sanctions against Russia, which so far have been strengthening Moscow's resolve more than have harmed its economy.

Russian aggression proved particularly humiliating for the United States and the United Kingdom – the very states that signed, along with the Ukraine and the Russian Federation the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, whereby they pledged an immediate assistance to Ukraine in case the latter becomes the victim of aggression (Budapest Memorandum, 1994).

The dramatic events of 2014 have put Ukraine into the group of other three post-Soviet states that have parts of their territories occupied. And this is not a coincidence that these four states – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova – have been the member-states of an informal grouping and later international organization by the name GUAM (G-Georgia, U-Ukraine, A-Azerbaijan, M-Moldova), which was created in 1997 with strong US backing. The very idea of this organization crystallized as the four future member-states tried to develop a mechanism to weaken the overbearing influence of the Russia Federation and the determination of the latter to derail the cooperation of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries with the West (Shelest, 2013, 138-139).

More generally, the creation of GUAM – then a quadripartite grouping – in 1997, on the sidelines of the Council of Europe Summit in Strasbourg was an eloquent reflection of the split that was taking place in CIS at the

time. The division was between the countries that preferred (or were forced to choose) comprehensive cooperation with Russia, including security, and which consequently joined the Russia-led CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and the countries who prioritized Euro-Atlantic institutions over Russia as their potential main partners.

The leaders of the countries as well as their foreign ministers held frequent meetings among themselves as well as with Western supporters, thus raising the international profile of the group. The importance of GUAM in mid-2000 is best attested to by the irritation it was causing in Moscow, which openly branded the format as the “anti-Russian belt” (OON stanovitsja arenoj bor'by Rossii, 2006). The activities and initiative of the political leadership of the four countries came to fruition in 2006, when it was officially upgraded into an international organization ODED-GUAM (Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM) (Istorija GUAM, n.d.).

Surprisingly, having gained the status of an international organization, GUAM has since gradually lost most of its renown and international stature and has all but disappeared from news headlines and international summits, for a number of reasons. Suffice it to say that in two recent collections of scholarly articles, *South Caucasus: 20 Years of Independence* (2011) and *The South Caucasus 2018: Facts, Trends, Future Scenarios* (2013), published by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Konrad Adenauer Foundation respectively, there is virtually no mention of GUAM – an eloquent attestation to its waning significance.

But fact that Ukraine joined the unenviable group of countries who experienced direct aggression of a foreign power has revived the idea of regional cooperation in the face of common challenge. So far the notion of GUAM's revival has not transcended scholarly debates and analysts' inquiries, but it might make sense to assess the odds of resumption of erstwhile intense activities of the four countries, united by common challenges (Mezhdunarodnyj kruglyj stol, 2014).

It is important to keep in mind that it is the unity of purpose and similar foreign policy orientations that makes an efficient region, along with favorable international context, as many foremost scholars of Regionalism agree on (Fawcett, 2013). In 1997, when GUAM was

conceived, both factors seemed to have been in place. By the mid-1990s understanding of the geostrategic importance of the South Caucasus region has gradually sunk in with the top US policy-makers, which manifested itself in strong US backing for major energy projects, first and foremost Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline that subsequently contributed to strengthening of Georgia's and Azerbaijan's statehood (LeVine, 2007). At the same time, US-Ukrainian relations were also running high under the Clinton Administration, which by 1994-1995 had abandoned the "Russocentric" approach of his predecessor, George Bush (Senior). An eloquent manifestation of these intensified relations was their elevation to the status of "strategic partnership" in 1996 (Dybovyk, 2006). Similarly, deviation from Bush Seniors's Russocentrism improved relations between Washington and Chisinau as well.

At the same time, as was already mentioned, all four republics were extremely resolute in their determination to shed Russia's political and economic domination. This very combination of strong US backing and unity among constituent states explains the relative strength of GUAM in its early years.

So, it is important to find out whether the factors ensuring GUAM's efficiency are in place today. First, let's study conducive the international landscape is for GUAM's revival. If the United States (chief supporter of the grouping in the 1990s) and the West in general were the unrivalled leaders of the world, economically, politically and ideationally, today its preeminence and capacity for leadership is far more questionable. Granted, the United States announced that the three GUAM countries – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – will be no-member recipients of American military assistance thus boosting their defense capabilities (White House, 2014). But this pledge of support is unlikely to deter the potential Russian aggression, as has been already evidenced in Ukraine lately. This is a stark contrast with the late 1990s and early 2000s, when strong backing on the part of Washington was a quite sufficient deterrent.

And the second reason is a common vision of the four GUAM countries, which is woefully absent. Importantly, it is absent in Azerbaijan, arguably GUAM's economic and energy muscle, since creation of energy

corridors bypassing Russia were conceived to be a potent means to enhance the countries' political independence. If in the early days of GUAM all four countries were determined to westernize, this no longer can be said of Azerbaijan. Joining the Non-Aligned Movement seriously weakened Baku's pro-Western impetus, which was already marred by the constantly deteriorating Human Rights record (Mazziotti, M. et al, 2013). Even though Baku is still trying to push for extension pipelines, like TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) and TANAP (Trans Anatolian Pipeline), with its significantly weakened pro-Western leaning the country will not be so tenacious in pursuing these alternatives, all the more since they are all but dead after Russia's recent decision to drop the South Stream and sell more gas to Turkey (Kosrunskaya, 2014).

As one can see, neither an international setting (politically weak West) nor foreign policy goals' alignment favors the transformation of GUAM into a viable international organization.

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