

Kyiv Post. Independence. Community. Trust.

Opinion » Op-Ed

A decade of challenges for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova

Dec 19 2007, 22:42

More unites GUAM members than does the CIS

By Taras KUZIO

The four nations of the GUAM regional organization – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova – celebrated their 10th anniversary in an event held at New York University. The event was co-organized by NYU, the GUAM country UN missions and the Center for US-Ukrainian Relations. Two of the member countries' ambassadors, the deputy Georgian ambassador and other senior members of the four countries' UN delegations attended the one-day seminar that was planned to discuss different aspects of GUAM

Discussions to establish a regional group in the CIS began among Azeri and Ukrainian diplomats in Vienna in 1995 and the organization was officially launched in Strasbourg in 1997. Two years later Uzbekistan joined GUAM at the Washington summit was set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding NATO.

Uzbekistan suspended its membership in GUAM in 2002 and formally withdrew from the organization in May 2005 after the international outcry over the Andijon massacre of protestors. Uzbekistan had become increasingly uncomfortable at the growing emphasis on democratic development in GUAM.

In 2006, GUAM renamed itself GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM ODED) and established its headquarters in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev was the GUAM ODED first secretary general. The Kyiv office of GUAM became operational in January 2007 with a relatively small budget of \$500,000.

GUAM countries were brought together by security concerns and common views of the undesirability of transforming the CIS into a supranational organization. Three of the GUAM members have frozen conflicts from the late Soviet era (Transdniestria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh) while Ukraine has Crimea, an area with an ethnic Russian majority and restive Tatars.

Three of the GUAM members also have Russian military bases on their territories. Russia agreed to withdraw its bases from Moldova and Georgia at the 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul, but has continued to renege on this agreement. The Russian Black Sea Fleet has an agreement to remain in Crimea until 2017. NATO enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine would therefore bring in two countries with Russian bases, a new development for NATO.

In the EU, integration proceeds in a two-track way with members seeking different levels of integration; one group, deeper with the Euro and a Common Security and Defense Policy, another, seeking to maintain greater national sovereignty over monetary and fiscal policy as well as continued reliance on NATO as Europe's primary security institution.

The CIS is the same as the EU with a fast-track integration group centered on Russia, Belarus, Armenia and the Central Asian states who are members of the CIS Collective Security Organization.

GUAM represents the slow-track group with its members either seeking NATO membership (Georgia, Ukraine) or deep levels of cooperation through the Partnership for Peace Program (Azerbaijan).

A major issue discussed during the one-day New York conference was integration of two of the GUAM members into NATO - Georgia and Ukraine. This would be the most difficult enlargement that NATO had faced, as NATO would cross the "red line" of what Russia considers its sphere of influence, the CIS. Besides Russian military bases in both countries, Georgia also has two frozen conflicts. The bases are not seen as an obstacle by the US, as they relate to bilateral Georgian and Ukrainian agreements with Russia. In the case of the frozen conflicts, NATO views are divided over whether bringing in Georgia would speed up a resolution of the conflicts or permanently freeze them in Russia's favor.

The conference focused on how the frozen conflicts could be re-defined from cases of 'separatism' to 'terrorism.' Russia was able to convince many countries that Chechnya was a case of international terrorism and this became one factor that improved relations between Russia and Turkey. One speaker argued that Russia has suffered from both terrorism and promoted terrorism in frozen conflicts (as well as in the murder of regime opponents abroad). The Moldovan and Georgian frozen conflicts are further examples of externally inspired terrorism. The Azerbaijani ambassador argued that Nagorno Karabakh was different in that this was a case of a neighboring state annexing territory.

Through continuing to economically subsidize the frozen conflict zones, and by illegally giving their citizens Russian passports, Russia is also contributing to soft security threats to Europe. All of the frozen conflict enclaves are kept afloat by illegal activities that include the distribution of military equipment, narcotics, people and other contraband.

These soft security threats make it imperative that the EU follows the US lead in devoting greater attention to GUAM. The US has supported GUAM since its inception through diplomatic and financial support. The EU has largely ignored GUAM and fails to send its diplomatic delegations to attend GUAM summits.

A speaker at the conference proposed that GUAM act in the same manner as earlier regional organizations, such as the Visegrad group, when dealing with the EU. GUAM countries are included in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) initiated in 2003–2004, but the ENP includes countries that are eligible under the 1957 Treaty of Rome for EU membership (i.e., the GUAM group) and those who are not (i.e., Northern Africa and the Middle East).

The conference argued that GUAM should seek to obtain an ENP+ Privileged Partnership that differentiates them from non-geographic European members of the ENP. The Azerbaijani delegation pointed to the similarities and dissimilarities of frozen conflicts in GUAM and those in the Balkans. In the western Balkans the EU introduced Stabilization and Accession Agreements (SAA) in 1999–2000 with the aim of inducing the countries to not return to civil war. Macedonia became a candidate country for EU membership in 2001

not because it had accomplished any reforms, but as a way of inducing both sides to the civil war to turn to peace negotiations. Three GUAM countries experienced similar conflicts as the western Balkans, but the EU has not offered them SAAs.

GUAM has developed the GUAM+ (Plus) forums with the US, EU and Japan, whose UN diplomatic representations attended the conference. GUAM has strongly lobbied for the “internationalization” of the frozen conflicts to bring in the EU and UN. The Georgian and Azeri delegations to the conference stressed the importance of the EU increasing its intermediary presence in their two frozen conflicts in the same manner as the EU has intervened in the Transdniester conflict.

The pending Kosovo declaration of independence came up on a number of occasions as a step that could encourage Russia to use Kosovo as a precedent for the frozen conflict enclaves in GUAM. Views were divided as to whether Russia would go down this route because of its own separatist conflict in Chechnya. NYU Associate Professor Joshua Tucker suggested that Russia preferred “ambivalence,” as this would give it greater ability to achieve its strategic goals. Another speaker pointed out that if Kosovo was to be a precedent for the frozen conflicts, then the same precedent could apply to Turkey, Canada, Spain, France and Belgium. The Turkish diplomatic representation promised to raise this issue with Russia.

In May 2006, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced plans to establish GUAM peacekeeping forces, which became formalized three months later. In September 2006, the first meeting of GUAM security services and law enforcement officials met in Baku to discuss a common strategy to combat terrorism.

An intriguing question discussed during the conference was the possible addition of Belarus as a fifth GUAM member. Seton Hall University Associate Professor Margarita Balmaceda argued that Belarus was forced to adopt a more multi-vector foreign policy after relations with Russia deteriorated during the 2007 gas crisis. If Belarus was to join GUAM, the organization would include a corridor of countries stretching from the Baltic to the Black Seas that would greatly enhance the success of the energy corridor.

Finally, GUAM was positively contrasted to the CIS. The former was portrayed as a forward-looking organization still in its infancy, whereas the CIS was an organization united on the basis of the past. More unites GUAM members than does that of the 12 countries of the CIS. Inter-GUAM and inter-CIS relations are also very different, as seen in how Russia has used the energy weapon in its relations with Belarus and Ukraine, a very different strategy to that of Azerbaijan taking up the shortfall in the supply of gas to Georgia caused by its inability to pay Russia's massive increased gas prices that were raised to Western European levels.

Dr. Taras Kuzio is a Research Associate in the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University.
tkuzio@gwu.edu