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# Stuck on the threshold

## Why won't NATO allow Georgia through its open door?

*Read this article in Russian.*

It's been 10 years since the NATO Bucharest Summit issued its final declaration agreeing that Georgia and Ukraine should become members.

To this day, the two countries have only received aspiring member status. This means they could be granted a Membership Action Plan (MAP), something which still hasn't actually happened. But that still doesn't guarantee them NATO membership.

Over the past decade, military-political cooperation between Georgia and NATO has followed the maxim, 'more NATO in Georgia and more Georgia in NATO', a phrase first coined by James Appathurai when he was the alliance's special representative to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC) which opened in 2015 is part of this initiative. It envisages the permanent presence of NATO military instructors. Measures such as these are aimed at bringing Georgia closer to that 'cherished day' when NATO welcomes it as a member.

## Russian resistance

Yet, despite this deepening partnership, NATO has still not allowed Georgia across its threshold. One of the main hurdles is the ethnic conflict in Abkhazia and former South Ossetia, in which Russia is deeply involved. Following the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, Moscow decided to recognise the independence of Georgia's separatist regions and deployed Russian troops there.

If Georgia joined NATO, it would inevitably provoke conflict with Russia. The alliance would be duty-bound to intervene, possibly invoking article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states that an attack against one NATO ally is an attack against all of its members.

This has not stopped the US lobbying to speed up Georgian accession. That was recommendation of a recent report by the conservative Heritage Foundation. According to its author, Luke Coffey, Georgian officials say privately that they would accept a NATO membership arrangement that excluded the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and former South Ossetia from the Article 5 security guarantee, at least on a temporary basis. Tbilisi has already committed to 'non use of force' in the occupied territories. Such an arrangement, says Coffey, would remove the greatest barrier to membership.

## All for one and one for all

Coffey's recommendations have garnered mixed reactions from Georgian political elites. Detractors know that excluding Abkhazia and former South Ossetia from any membership agreement could spark a public outcry.

In any case, excluding the occupied territories from Article 5 will be easier said than done. For a start, NATO hasn't issued any document supporting the non-use of force pledge, and Georgia has refused to sign such an agreement with Abkhazia and former South Ossetia. Even if it did, the regions may prefer isolation, safe in the knowledge that NATO will not be able to lay a finger on them or force them to return to Georgia. What is more, other ethnic minority regions may start demanding similar special treatment.

It's also unclear which regions of Georgia's sovereign territory would actually be covered by Articles 5 and 6. More than 30 per cent of its border with Armenia and Azerbaijan is not demarcated – and neither is its border with Russia.

And what of other aspiring members like Ukraine? Would Ukraine really agree to join NATO, without Articles 5 and 6 being extended to Crimea and Donbass?

Unsurprisingly, Coffey's recommendations have met with scepticism, including from Jamie Shea, NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges. Shea dismissed the report as intellectual prattle, saying countries either join the Alliance whole, or not at all.

For the moment then, Coffey's recommendations are no more than food for thought. However hard Georgia knocks at NATO's door, it hears the

same old message: ‘Access Denied’.

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