

## Neutrality - the Paradoxical Choice of a Vulnerable Small State

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According to realism, one of the most influential theories of international relations, the national interests of each state in the international relations system are situated along a spectrum. The starting point of the spectrum, analogous to a vital interest, is self-preservation; at the opposite end, lies the ambition for world domination. States' interests ally and are contingent on their size and capabilities. In a world of an international anarchy,<sup>2</sup> one entity might strive solely for survival, while another aspires to global dominion.<sup>3</sup> As a rule, small states in the system maneuver in a way to cater the critical interest of self-preservation. Consequently, the foreign policy choices of a small country are often determined not solely by its genuine desires and aspirations, but by the unfortunate fact that it must safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Alexander Rondeli,<sup>4</sup> often referred to an old Georgian expression - "This life is a ladder, some ascend some descend, and some - fall," – while evaluating the capacities and aspirations of a small state. What actions should a small country take to avoid descending the ladder of progress? How should Georgia, a small country that has repeatedly grappled with the issue of self-preservation and preservation of sovereignty, act? How should it prioritize and fulfill its goals to remain on this ladder? Perhaps, this is a critically important question, and in the pursuit of an answer, the citizens of this country have frequently discussed the possibility of its neutrality at different stages of history.

We believe that the citizens of Georgia discerned early on and chose European integration as a vital, one might say, alternative avenue for self-preservation and progress for the country. This aspiration was later formalized as the Euro-Atlantic goal of the country. However, in the face of numerous challenges that arose during the process, conflicting attitudes towards this aspiration have surfaced. Essentially, this resistance has manifested in two directions: alignment with the northern neighbor and the inclination towards neutrality; sometimes, these two directions are not mutually exclusive.

In consideration of the fundamental instinct of self-preservation, and concurrently, in response to the ongoing discussion on the subject of neutrality within Georgian reality, this document aims to comprehensively analyze the issue of neutrality, presenting both its advantages and disadvantages.

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<sup>2</sup> According to realism, this is the same as the state of nature in the absence of an overseeing authority, war of all against all.

<sup>3</sup> Rondeli, Aleksandre. 2006. SAERTASHORISO URTIERTOBEBI. TBILISI: Me-3 GANAKHLEBULI GAMOTSEMA

<sup>4</sup> The founder of international relations as a scientific discipline in Georgia.

Moreover, we endeavor to illustrate the paradox of choosing neutrality in a context where the state lacks full control over its own territory and must "co-exist" with an enemy's army and endure creeping occupation. Additionally, we hope that this paper will make a modest contribution to the broad scientific debate in the field of international relations that began during the World and Cold Wars and continues actively in the post-Cold War era. The primary question in this discourse is: how does neutrality ensure security, and is it equally accessible to all countries?

### Neutrality - concept, forms, conditions, and challenges

According to Britannica, neutrality is the international legal status of a state that arises when the country refrains from participating in any way in an ongoing war between other states. The state must continuously maintain an impartial attitude towards the warring parties, and this restraint and impartiality must be recognized by the parties involved in the war. This recognized status of international law establishes certain rights and obligations<sup>5</sup> between the neutral state and the warring parties.<sup>6</sup> According to the encyclopedia of international public law, the concept of neutrality is the legal status of a state that does not participate in hostilities between other states, and this non-interference is facilitated by the warring parties.<sup>7</sup> The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences also suggests that neutrality has roots as old as the state and war between states, as there have always been countries and state units that did not want to participate in ongoing wars, and at the same time, there were countries that respected this choice.<sup>8</sup> According to each of these definitions, it becomes obvious that neutrality must be recognized by the belligerents. It is this condition that most of the time prevents states from achieving neutrality. Neutrality, when the belligerent party(ies) are not interested in it, becomes an unattainable state, existing only on paper.

When a country aims to gain the international status of neutrality, it cannot be achieved solely by its individual desire. The guarantor of neutrality, at least as a declarer, should be stronger than the aspiring neutral state (usually the leading countries of the region). History provides many examples where the desire for neutrality remained a mere wish, like in the case of Hungary in 1956. After an anti-Soviet rebellion, Hungary declared its desire to become a neutral state, although this idea received no support from any of the leaders of the Cold War camps—neither the Soviet Union nor the United States of America. Consequently, Hungary's wish remained a wish, and the country, situated within the

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<sup>5</sup> The aforementioned rights and duties in international law are largely regulated by the Declaration of Paris of 1856, the 5th Hague Convention of 1907 (Neutrality in Time of a Ground Warfare) and the 13th Hague Convention of 1907 (Neutrality in Time of a Naval Warfare).

<sup>6</sup> Britannica. Neutrality in International Relations. Via URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/neutrality> (25. 07.2022).

<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia of Public International Law, Vol. 4. 1982. North-Holland Publishing Company.

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. Neutral States. Via URL: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/neutral-states> (25. 07. 2022).

Soviet sphere of influence, saw not only its foreign political aspirations but also its sovereignty becoming fragile. Shortly after this announcement, Soviet forces suppressed the Hungarian anti-communist movement with force and re-established the Soviet regime in the country.<sup>9</sup>

The notion that achieving neutrality requires the consent and willingness of other great powers and/or belligerents is not a new concept to the world. Its historical roots can be traced back to ancient Greece. In the analysis of international relations, especially from the perspective of the realism paradigm, scholars often refer to the works of Thucydides, considered one of the founders of classical realist ideas. A critical moment for understanding the concept of neutrality in Thucydides' "Peloponnesian Wars" is the "Dialogue of Melos," which clearly illustrates that one-sided neutrality is not only unattainable but also hinders the state and consumes valuable time that could be used to find allies.

Melos was a colony founded by the Spartans in ancient Greece, later gaining independence from the metropolis. In a departure from the population of other islands, during the Athenian wars of conquest, the Melians chose not to join the Athenian Empire, initially maintaining a stance of neutrality and refraining from assisting any side (nor seeking allies). However, as events unfolded, the Athenians disregarded their neutrality and declared war, compelling the Melians to openly confront Athens. Prior to the war, a dialogue took place between Athens and Melos, illustrating the unattainability of neutrality when a more powerful entity does not recognize one's neutrality and impartiality.

*Melians: "So [that] you would not consent to our being neutral, friends instead of enemies, but allies of neither side?"*

*Athenians: "No; for your hostility cannot so much hurt us as your friendship will be an argument to our subjects of our weakness and your enmity of our power."*

*Melians: "Is that your subjects' idea of equity, to put those who have nothing to do with you in the same category with peoples that are most of them your own colonists, and some conquered rebels?"*

*Athenians: "As far as right goes they think one has as much of it as the other, and that if any maintain their independence it is because they are strong, and that if we do not molest them it is because we are afraid; so that besides extending our empire we should gain in security by your*

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<sup>9</sup> Rondeli, Aleksandre. 2009. PATARA KVEKANA SAERTASHORISO SISTEMASHI. SAKARTVELOS STRATEGIISA DA SAERTASHORISO URTIERTOBATA KVLEVIS POND. ME-2 GANAKHLEBULI GAMOTSEMA

*subjections; the fact that you are islanders and weaker than others rendering it all the more important that you should not succeed in baffling the masters of the sea.”<sup>10</sup>*

In addition to the concept of neutrality, this excerpt from the "Melos dialogue" underscores a critical aspect of the realistic view of international relations: the immense challenge, and at times the impossibility, of maintaining independence and sovereignty when a state stands alone against a great power that regards the smaller state as within its sphere of influence, viewing the smaller state's freedom as a sign of weakness.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of neutrality and the associated practices have continually evolved, developing, and taking on different characteristics over time. It is essential to discern between *non-alignment*, *isolationism*, *a neutral position*, and *a permanent neutrality*.<sup>12</sup> The latter encompasses legal neutrality (a status recognized by international law), traditional neutrality (not formalized by an international act but deeply ingrained in the country's history and tradition), and de facto neutrality (where a country declares neutrality even if not legally recognized and lacking a consistent tradition).<sup>13</sup>

*Non-alignment*, the same as the non-alignment movement, emerged as a response to post-Second World War developments. Countries in decolonized regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America sought political independence and chose not to align with either of the Cold War blocs. Concurrently, they advocated for peace consolidation and took proactive measures to prevent the Cold War from escalating into armed conflict. The Non-Aligned Movement was initiated in 1955 by the leaders of Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia.<sup>14</sup> Notably, states with non-aligned status often establish regional collective security organizations to bolster their peaceful foreign policies. These organizations act as guarantors of the non-aligned countries' commitment to a peaceful course in international relations. Non-aligned states refrain from allowing foreign military bases on their territories, abstain from participating in existing military-political alliances, and maintain a unified stance on contentious international issues. Despite this, non-aligned states do engage in international peacekeeping missions and are members of United Nations peacekeeping forces (such as in the Middle East, Cyprus, and Yemen).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Art, Robert, and Robert, Jervis. 2015. *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*. Iliia State University Publishing

<sup>11</sup> Simpson, Archi W. 2018. *Realism, Small States and Neutrality*.

<sup>12</sup> Lyon, Peter. 1960. *Neutrality and the Emergence of the Concept of Neutralism*. *Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics* 22, No. 2. Via URL: [Neutrality and the Emergence of the Concept of Neutralism on JSTOR](#) (26. 07. 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Agius, Christine and Karen Devine. 2011. *Neutrality: A really dead Concept? A Reprise*. *Cooperation and Conflict* 265-285.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. 2012. *History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement*. Via URL: <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAligned+Movement> (26. 07. 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Aleksidze, Levan. 2015. *TANAMEDROVE SAERTASHORISO SAMARTALI*. TBILISI: IURISTEBIS SAMKARO

At first glance, non-alignment seems to be an intriguing concept in international relations, but it grapples with significant challenges. The essence of this movement was to reject a world divided into blocs and to advocate for peaceful integration. However, member states sometimes aligned with either the United States of America or the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Inter-member conflicts have arisen; for instance, Iran and Iraq, Pakistan and India have engaged in armed conflict. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan deepened ideological divisions among member countries, splitting the movement into factions—some considered the intervention acceptable, while others did not. The end of the Cold War rendered the Non-Aligned Movement obsolete, losing its relevance. Today, it primarily serves as a platform for summits among third world countries.<sup>17</sup> The diminishing relevance of non-alignment is evident through the case of Belarus—the membership in the movement did not deter Belarus from aligning with the eastern counterpart of the North Atlantic Organization (NATO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), established by Russia. CSTO, akin to NATO, opposes the foundational ideas of the non-alignment movement. Furthermore, Belarus's recent alignment with Russia during the conflict initiated by Russia in Ukraine underscores the waning influence of the non-alignment movement.<sup>18</sup>

*Isolationism* is a distinct form of foreign policy orientation that entails a state's withdrawal from the ongoing processes within the international system. It advocates for minimizing foreign relations, whether they are political, military, or economic, while emphasizing the self-sufficiency of the country through the utilization of its own resources.<sup>19</sup> One of the most significant manifestations of isolationism in world politics is reflected in the foreign policy of the United States of America from its founding up to World War II. During this period, American policy did not possess a global character, and the internal discourse of the United States primarily revolved around the nation's efforts to distance itself from wars and conflicts in other regions.<sup>20</sup> The initiation of this policy dates back to the 19th century, following the tenure of the 5th president of the United States, James Monroe, who introduced a doctrine famously known as the Monroe Doctrine. Its primary objective was to diminish European influence in North and South America, halt European colonialism in the Western

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<sup>16</sup> Keethaponcalan. S. I. 2016. Reshaping the Non-Aligned Movement: challenges and vision. *Journal of Global South* 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Rauch, Carsten. 2008. Farewell Non-Alignment? *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*. Via URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep14485.1> (25. 07. 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Reuters. 2022. Belarus leader stands with Russia in campaign. Via URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-leader-stands-with-russia-campaign-2022-07-03/> (26. 07. 2022).

<sup>19</sup> NPLG.gov.ge. Isolationism. See: <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=6&t=4387> (27.07.2022).

<sup>20</sup> Rondeli, Aleksandre. 2006. SAERTASHORISO URTIERTOBEBI. TBILISI: ME-3 GANAKHLEBULI GAMOTSEMA

Hemisphere, and concurrently distance America from events unfolding in other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup> The erosion and ultimate reversal of America's policy of isolationism commenced during World War I and were officially concluded when the United States, as a global political player, became physically involved in World War II. It is worth noting that Japan adopted a policy of isolationism during the 17th and 19th centuries, as did Nepal in the 19th and 20th centuries, and North Korea, Burma, and Albania during the 1960s to 1980s. In the contemporary era of globalization and a multipolar system, isolationism has been recognized as a politically or economically unsustainable orientation and has become a chapter of history.

*A neutral position* is a restrained attitude and policy adopted by a state regarding a specific issue, conflict, or war. A state with a neutral position in one conflict may be involved in another one simultaneously. This position is developed at a particular time concerning a specific issue and is typically derived from the country's national interests, much like other aspects of its foreign policy. A notable example of this is Georgia's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Georgia maintains good-neighborly and close partnership relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia. Simultaneously, it supports peace in the region and does not display significant favor towards any of the parties involved in the Karabakh issue.

*Permanent neutrality*, in the realm of international relations, is often referred to as the product of a small country's "selfish" national interests. These interests stem from the aspiration to attain sovereignty, territorial integrity, and an independent foreign policy. Permanent neutrality signifies a distinctive international legal status recognized by other states, where a country commits to perpetual neutrality, abstaining from involvement in existing and prospective conflicts. Moreover, a state declaring permanent neutrality is not permitted to renounce this status unilaterally. A neutral state is obligated not to instigate armed conflicts, and it must possess the capability to safeguard its neutrality and independence autonomously. Additionally, it cannot undertake any commitments that would encroach upon its political or economic independence. Several conditions must be met for a country to obtain the status of permanent neutrality. The neutral country should not be a significant object of another state's policy, and none of the major powers should regard it as within their sphere of influence. The country should possess the ability to defend itself, have clearly defined and internationally recognized territorial borders, and exercise authority over its entire territory. Internally, a high degree of unity and cohesion should exist within the country.<sup>22</sup> In general, permanent neutrality can serve as a robust safeguard for a small country, as demonstrated by its effectiveness in ensuring

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<sup>21</sup> Britannica. Isolationism. Foreign Policy. Via URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/isolationism-foreign-policy> (27. 07. 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Rondeli, Aleksandre. 2009. PATARA KVEKANA SAERTASHORISO SISTEMASHI. SAKARTVELOS STRATEGIISA DA SAERTASHORISO URTIERTOBATA KVLEVIS PONDJI, ME-2 GAMOTSEMA.

Switzerland's security during the World Wars. However, regrettably, not all small countries possess the same prerequisites for neutrality as Switzerland does.

After the end of the Cold War and thus, the soft bipolar system, neutrality became a kind of dying concept, for a number of reasons (at least, numerous of researchers in the field think so).<sup>23</sup> The first important reason was that those countries, that presumably should have been good examples of measuring the degree of success of neutrality, began to look for a new security umbrella.<sup>24</sup> For these authors (it became more evident in practice later), the accession of Ireland, Austria, Finland, Sweden and later Malta to the European Union was perceived not only as a step to improve economic well-being, but also as a process of searching for an umbrella organization of security, which, although did not claim for guaranteeing military security, created the perception of unity, which was so necessary for Europe, tired of constant wars and tense for that period.<sup>25</sup> Another reason why neutrality is considered an archaic guarantee of security in security studies is the changed notion of security in modern times. The war has gone beyond its tradition definition and forms, and new threats, such as terrorism, have appeared.

Following the terrorist attack on 9/11 in 2001, the defense and security strategies of the world's major powers underwent a significant shift towards countering terrorism. The global community came to realize that they were confronting a novel, distinctly different form of disrupting peace. This form of disruption did not adhere to traditional international principles associated with warfare, including the sanctity of neutrality for neutral countries. The imperative to unite in the fight against terrorism, with a substantial contribution from the EU, challenged the reserved positions of neutral nations. It compelled them to confront fresh challenges with a new security outlook, necessitating greater cooperation, openness, and alignment with non-neutral powers. Consequently, this shift made the concept of neutrality more susceptible and exposed its vulnerabilities.<sup>26</sup> The same can be said about other modern threats, for example, cyber-security, which is practically impossible to achieve as a result of independent work of only one state and requires a cross-country collaboration.<sup>27</sup> The emergence of these challenges has led advocates of neutrality to question the efficacy of traditional neutrality. Even in a society with a rich historical culture of neutrality, such as Switzerland, these challenges have spurred discussions about its potential revision. The turning point came in

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<sup>23</sup> Dahl, 1997; Dorfer, 1997; Penttila, 1999; Jop and Ojannen, 1999; Ries, 1999; Forsberg, 2000; Forsberg and Vahtoranta, 2001; Sivonen, 2001; Winnerstig, 2001; Honkanen, 2002; Bailes 2006; Ferreira, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Goetschel, Laurent. 1999. Neutrality a Really Dead Concept? *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, 115- 139

<sup>25</sup> Agius, Christine and Karen Devine. 2011. Neutrality: A really dead concept? A reprise. *Cooperation and Conflict* 46, No. 3. Via URL: '[Neutrality: A really dead concept? A reprise on JSTOR](#)' (28. 07. 2022).

<sup>26</sup> Agius, Christine and Karen Devine. 2011. Neutrality: A really dead concept? A reprise. *Cooperation and Conflict* 46, No. 3. Via URL: '[Neutrality: A really dead concept? A reprise on JSTOR](#)' (28. 07. 2022).

<sup>27</sup> IBM. 2020. To combat cross-border cyber threats, cooperation is key. Via URL: '<https://www.ibm.com/policy/to-combat-cross-border-cyber-threats-cooperation-is-key/>' (28. 07. 2022).

February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, sparking a full-scale war against the sovereign country. This invasion significantly undermined the influence of the liberal paradigm in the global system. The international community began to worry about a potential return to state-centric dominance by major powers. This shift directly impacted the already fragile state of neutrality. For instance, traditionally neutral countries like Finland and Sweden initiated the process of integrating with NATO. These ongoing processes underscore that, despite having the necessary prerequisites, the concept of neutrality struggles to withstand the pressure posed by modern challenges. Figuratively speaking, it's akin to barricading an iron door for safety while anticipating a bombardment.

In conclusion, neutrality does not come into existence unilaterally and cannot be effectively practiced based solely on the will of a single country. Instead, it is the result of a collective agreement, recognized by all countries or, at the very least, supported by other major powers who act as guarantors of neutrality (a notable example is the London Conference and Agreement of 1839, which recognized Belgium as a sovereign state and granted it permanent neutrality, with England serving as its guarantor. This was a significant acknowledgment of collective efforts to ensure peace. However, history has shown that violations of neutrality can occur, as exemplified by Germany's breach of Belgium's neutrality in 1914, leading to England, as Belgium's guarantor, declaring war on Germany).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, there are crucial preconditions that underline the concept of neutrality. A neutral country should not be subject to the policies of another state, and none of the major powers should view it as within their sphere of influence. A neutral state must possess the ability to defend itself, maintain internationally recognized territorial boundaries, and exercise control over its entire territory. Moreover, from an internal political perspective, there must be a high degree of cohesion and unity within the country. These preconditions emphasize the importance of both external and internal factors in establishing and maintaining a neutral status effectively.

Up to date, the following states have declared neutrality: Switzerland (since 1815), Liechtenstein (1868), Sweden (1919), Vatican City (1929), Ireland (1939), San Marino (1945), Monaco (1945), Mexico (1945), Japan (1947), Costa Rica (1949), Austria (1955), Finland (1956), Singapore (1965), Malta (1980), Panama (1989), Moldova (1994), Turkmenistan (1995), Serbia (2007), Rwanda (2009), Uzbekistan (2012), Mongolia (2015).<sup>29</sup> The concept of neutrality varies across different countries, showcasing a diversity of approaches. In some cases, neutrality is affirmed through international legal status, as exemplified by Switzerland. Others uphold a tradition of neutrality without a formal international status or declaration, as seen in Finland. Additionally, some countries

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<sup>28</sup> Nilesh, Preeta. 2014. Belgian Neutrality and The First World War: Some insights. *Indian History Congress*. Via URL: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/44158486#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44158486#metadata_info_tab_contents) (28.07.2022).

<sup>29</sup> World Population Review. Neutral Countries 2022. Via URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/neutral-countries> (28.07.2022).



declare their neutrality but are simultaneously members of organizations that may contradict the classical notion of neutrality, as observed in Uzbekistan. As the former president of Finland, Urho Kekkonen, once remarked, there are as many types of neutrality in the world as there are neutral states.<sup>30</sup> This statement holds true when considering the specific circumstances and context that influence a country's choice of neutrality. However, it's essential to recognize certain patterns; if these patterns are not met, the status of neutrality may become a facade and a form of self-deception.

To comprehend these patterns, it is crucial to examine a practical example of neutrality and assess the period when a specific country declared it. Many authors emphasize the significance of context and time in determining a country's foreign policy, particularly in choosing neutrality. Switzerland, being the first and most successful example of neutrality, is selected as a case study due to its historical prominence in this regard. For comparative analysis, we will focus on Moldova, which, although lacking the international legal status of neutrality (similar to Sweden and Finland), has been a de facto neutral country since 1994, a status affirmed by its constitution. The case of Moldova holds significant relevance for the Georgian reality, given the shared historical past (Soviet Union) and similar foreign aspirations (European integration), especially considering that neither of the states has full control over its territory.<sup>31</sup>

### Switzerland

Switzerland holds the distinction of being the world's first country to achieve neutrality through international consolidation, gaining consent from all leading states of the international system at that time. This remarkable achievement took place at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, following the tumultuous era of the French revolutions and Napoleon's wars of conquest. During this congress, European states collectively agreed to establish a new security architecture for the continent, and Switzerland's declaration of neutrality received support from the Congress. In the realm of neutral states, Switzerland's policy and role stand as the epitome of success. Authors often describe Switzerland as the "outlier" when evaluating its neutrality in the broader context. This term implies that Switzerland deviates from the norm in a positive manner due to its exemplary approach to neutrality. Switzerland's success in establishing a model of neutrality can be attributed to three key factors. Firstly, it lies in the deep integration of defense forces into the Swiss way of life, ensuring an independent self-defense capability. Secondly, it is rooted in a high degree of conviction within both the domestic and international community regarding the merits of neutrality as a collective benefit,

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<sup>30</sup> Rondeli, Aleksandre. 2009. PATARA KVEKANA SAERTASHORISO SISTEMASHI. SAKARTVELOS STRATEGIISA DA SAERTASHORISO URTIERTOBATA KVLEVIS PONDJI, ME-2 GAMOTSEMA.

<sup>31</sup> In the case of Georgia, we mean Abkhazia and Samachablo, and in the case of Moldova, the frozen conflict of Transnistria.

leading to domestic and international public consolidation. Lastly, Switzerland's 200-year history of consistently upholding and referencing Swiss neutrality in international law conventions and customary law, dating back to the 16th century, has cemented its tradition of neutrality.<sup>32</sup> For centuries, neutrality has been an integral part of the Swiss identity, its recognition by the Congress of Vienna was an international declaration of the long tradition that Switzerland carried throughout its existence - it did not engage in conflicts, did not conduct a policy of conquest, did not have disputed territories. Although, for example, many Swiss governments have expressed their desire for European integration, as it would simplify several practical issues.<sup>33</sup> However, it was still very difficult to put this issue to a referendum, since the Swiss identity is largely covered by the idea of neutrality.<sup>34</sup>

The practical demonstration of Swiss neutrality emerged during the crucible of the First World War. Switzerland swiftly mobilized an army of half a million, effectively deploying it along all its borders. This swift mobilization sent a clear message to the belligerents: Switzerland could defend its neutrality autonomously. The nation asserted its stance, explicitly stating that it had no intention of engaging in the conflict to favor either side. Instead, it positioned itself as a mediator, willing to facilitate negotiations should the warring parties opt for a peaceful resolution at any stage. While Switzerland faced limitations in playing a diplomatic role, primarily due to the parties' lack of willingness, it effectively transformed into a base for humanitarian missions. The warring factions soon recognized the value of Switzerland's neutral ground. Consequently, Switzerland maintained its neutrality throughout the conflict and, following the end of the First World War, upheld all conditions of its neutrality. Its commitment was reaffirmed and bolstered with additional guarantees for future neutrality, notably through Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>35</sup>

World War II was a new test for the Swiss neutrality. As war approached, Switzerland informed the belligerents that it intended to stay neutral and to be a country that would "alleviate human suffering during a wartime".<sup>36</sup> At the onset of the conflict, Switzerland swiftly mobilized a formidable army and declared its readiness to defend its neutrality through military means if necessary. In contrast to the First World War, Germany's stance on Switzerland's neutrality during the Second World War was a subject of controversy. Initially, Germany respected Swiss neutrality. However, after the fall of France

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<sup>32</sup> Dreyer, John and Neal G. Jesse. 2014. Swiss Neutrality Examined: *Model, Exception or Both*. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 15, 3.

<sup>33</sup> It can be said that even many member states are not as informally integrated into the EU as a non-member Switzerland.

<sup>34</sup> Morris, Kate and Timothy J. White. 2011. Neutrality and European Union: The case of Switzerland. *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution*. Vol. 3 (7). 104-111.

<sup>35</sup> Dreyer, John and Neal G. Jesse. 2014. Swiss Neutrality Examined: *Model, Exception or Both*. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 15, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Chevallaz, Georges-Andre. 2001. *The Challenge of Neutrality: Diplomacy and the Defense of Switzerland*. Maryland: Lexington Books.

in the summer of 1940, Germany decided to invade Switzerland. Before engaging in active military action, Germany imposed economic sanctions on Switzerland, causing shortages of essential consumer goods. During this period, Joseph Goebbels, an influential ideologue of the Third Reich, declared their intention to transform Switzerland into a National Socialist country. Nonetheless, the German war campaign in the east played a significant role in reconsidering this objective. Germany realized that launching a war against Switzerland, particularly given the ongoing and costly war against the Soviet Union, would be highly challenging. Moreover, the threat of retaliatory Swiss sanctions further dissuaded aggressive actions. Although it became evident that Germany no longer intended to pursue aggressive actions against Switzerland, Switzerland remained fully prepared for a comprehensive defensive war until April 1945, ensuring it could safeguard its neutrality effectively.<sup>37</sup>

During the Second World War, akin to the First World War, the belligerent nations utilized Switzerland's territory as a buffer zone for political and humanitarian discussions. Once again, Switzerland demonstrated its capacity to autonomously defend its neutrality, reinforcing this established tradition. This experience further solidified Switzerland's commitment to maintaining neutrality. In the subsequent Cold War era, Switzerland remained steadfast in its policy of absolute neutrality, mirroring its stance during the preceding 45 years. It refrained from aligning with either the United Nations or the European Union. Simultaneously, Switzerland emerged as a crucial diplomatic hub for the East-West blocs. The nation facilitated continuous meetings between the opposing sides, symbolizing its dedication to fostering dialogue and resolution in the international arena. Additionally, Switzerland's robust banking system and its commitment to security became highly attractive to various actors in the realm of international relations.<sup>38</sup>

In the post-Cold War period, marked by the establishment of a new world order and evolving global threats, Switzerland began to gradually adjust its approach to absolute neutrality. A significant step in this direction was taken in 1997 when Switzerland initiated closer cooperation and integration with the European Union. Additionally, Switzerland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program, driven by motives such as participation in humanitarian missions, enhancing regional stability in Europe, engaging in arms control, and contributing to the fight against terrorism. This willingness to collaborate was exemplified in actions such as opening air, land, and rail routes for NATO troops during the Yugoslav conflicts in 1995 and sending a small military contingent for the Kosovo mission in 1999. Further, in 2002, Switzerland became a member of the United Nations.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dreyer, John and Neal G. Jesse. 2014. Swiss Neutrality Examined: *Model, Exception or Both*. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 15, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Mockli, Daniel. 2011. Neutral Switzerland and Western Security governance from the Cold War to the global economic crisis. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, 4. 282-304.

<sup>39</sup> Dreyer, John and Neal G. Jesse. 2014. Swiss Neutrality Examined: *Model, Exception or Both*. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 15, 3.

The transition away from strict neutrality and the pursuit of a new "European image" raised questions about the functionality of traditional neutralism in modern times. Some authors argue that even in an ideal scenario, neutrality gradually erodes, losing its original essence and relevance. Although Switzerland hasn't succeeded in convincing its population to join the European Union, its shift away from neutrality is undeniable. The reluctance to join can be attributed to the high degree of cantonal<sup>40</sup> independence and the constructivist theory that perceives neutrality as an integral part of Swiss identity. Recent global events, particularly Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have further highlighted Switzerland's inclination to temper its strict neutrality. The head of the security service police of the Swiss Ministry of Defense, Paelvi Pulli, stated that Switzerland might consider cooperation with NATO member states, including joint exercises and replenishing military supplies. Pulli noted that Switzerland might incorporate nuanced interpretations in its understanding of neutrality, especially since the issue of NATO integration has been a topic of ideological discussion within Swiss society.<sup>41</sup> Switzerland is closely observing the integration processes of two other historically neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, into NATO.

While Swiss neutrality is seemingly evolving, it remains unparalleled globally. Switzerland has remarkably upheld the fundamental tenets of neutrality, owing to its longstanding tradition in this regard, widespread acknowledgment from all global actors, strategic timing of its declaration during the Congress of Vienna amidst the reshaping of Europe, and its demonstrated ability to independently defend this neutrality, as even the Third Reich refrained from challenging Swiss neutrality. Swiss neutrality has left an indelible mark on European diplomacy, making it a unique case. Attempts to replicate Switzerland's neutrality without considering the specific time, context, and events would oversimplify the issue and could lead to misguided expectations among "newly neutral" states when making critical decisions. Consequently, advocating the perspective of "If Switzerland is neutral, let us be too" is an oversimplified and inappropriate approach, disregarding the intricacies of historical and geopolitical contexts.

### Moldova

On July 19, 1994, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova approved a new constitution, marking a significant moment when the State of Moldova declared its permanent neutrality. Unlike Switzerland, Moldova lacked a tradition of neutrality and even the experience of independence and sovereign governance. At the time of this declaration, Moldova did not possess any of the prerequisites

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<sup>40</sup> Administrative units of the Swiss Federation.

<sup>41</sup> Reuters. 2022. Analysis: Neutral Switzerland leans closer to NATO in response to Russia. Via URL: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/neutral-switzerland-leans-closer-nato-response-russia-2022-05-15/> (29.07. 2022).

necessary for asserting permanent neutrality, as clearly defined in the case of Switzerland. Notably, Moldova lacked the tradition of neutrality, the ability to independently defend its neutrality due to economic, political, and military vulnerabilities, and crucially, it did not have domestic or international consensus. Moldova did not receive international recognition and the status of neutrality. Moreover, its borders were not universally recognized, and it struggled to exercise sovereignty and power over its entire territory. Most significantly, it lacked a guarantor of neutrality and was within the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Given this lack of prerequisites, the logical question arises: why did Moldova declare neutrality, and what did this status, enshrined in the constitution, improve for the Republic of Moldova?

The inclusion of provisions on permanent neutrality in the constitution by the political leadership of the Republic of Moldova at that time served several political purposes. Firstly, emphasizing neutrality was a defense strategy of the Moldovan government against opposition from within the population, which demanded a Euro-Atlantic course and viewed the government as a pro-Russian regime. This move aimed to neutralize suspicions from the pro-communist section of society and a considerable portion of the non-Romanian speaking population. These groups were concerned that Moldova's relations with the West would damage ties with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on one hand and, on the other hand, potentially lead to a division along the lines of the Romanian-speaking part of Moldova. Additionally, the declaration of permanent neutrality was an attempt to send a clear and convincing signal to the unrecognized Transnistria regime. The intention was to convey that engaging with the West did not imply "Romanization" and an attempt to resolve existing internal ethnic conflicts with Western military intervention. Lastly, it aimed to craft a government image that had seemingly figured out how to ensure the country's security without severing ties with Russia (a message to pro-Russian society) and with the West (a message to pro-Western society).<sup>42</sup>

The most dangerous and direct threat to the security and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova remains the breakaway Republic of Transnistria and the presence of Russian military forces on Moldovan territory. This situation emerged as a direct consequence of the Kremlin's new imperialist policy, particularly in areas it deems "strategically important".<sup>43</sup> An attempt by the authorities in Chisinau to leverage their neutrality status to encourage Moscow to withdraw its occupying troops and expedite a political resolution of the dispute with the Tiraspol administration ultimately failed. One of the underlying objectives behind declaring a state of permanent neutrality might have been the desire

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<sup>42</sup> Moşanu, Viorel. 2000. The Neutrality Policy of the Republic of Moldova - What Chances for the Future? *Südosteuropa* 49, 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Vahl, Marius and Michael Emerson. 2004. Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict. Via URL: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/6196> (29.07.2022).

to engage in any potential future military conflicts without the need for foreign troops to be stationed on Moldovan territory. However, in practice, there has been no precedent to suggest that this approach can lead to the desired outcome of foreign troop withdrawal and the restoration of sovereignty over the entire Moldovan territory. Therefore, pursuing this form of neutrality as a means to achieve these goals proved to be futile.<sup>44</sup>

The Transnistrian conflict indeed presents a significant challenge to Moldova's ability to maintain a neutral status. The persistent risk of the frozen conflict escalating into active hostilities, potentially involving not only Tiraspol but also Russia, places Moldova in a precarious situation. This jeopardizes the principle of neutrality, as a neutral country should not engage in military actions outside its borders or supply weapons to warring parties. The presence of the Russian military and the potential involvement of external actors further exacerbate the complexity of the situation. The lack of complete control over all military forces on Moldovan territory, as demonstrated during the 1992 civil war, raises concerns about the country's ability to uphold its neutrality in the event of a military confrontation. The transformation of Transnistria into a hub for illicit activities, including arms and drug trafficking, underlines the challenges Moldova faces in maintaining its neutral status. The region's instability and criminal networks pose a significant threat to Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is a well-known fact that in 1993 the separatist government of Tiraspol sent a rather large group of soldiers to Moscow for training, which appeared to be the group of volunteers that later participated in the war in Abkhazia against the regular army of Georgia.<sup>45</sup>

Considering the main factors of neutrality, and foremost, according to the first fundamental requirement of neutrality, a neutral country should not engage in military action outside the territory of its country (defensive war - a war to protect neutrality), meaning that it should not supply any warring party with weapons either. However, in the summer of 1994, just a few months after declaring the neutrality, official Chisinau approved 4 MIG-29 jets for sale to the armed forces of Yemen, where a bloody civil war was raging.

In November 1997, as reported by the Pentagon, 21 MiG-29 jets sold by Moldova could potentially be used by Iran for transporting nuclear material. The U.S. perceived the potential sale of these military aircraft as an act promoting international terrorism. Even though this accusation was baseless, given the fragile nature of neutrality, it is conceivable that Moldova's declaration of neutrality would be viewed seriously by the major world powers. Moldova's bilateral agreement with Russia was considered a violation of the conditions of neutrality too. On February 10, 1995, the President of Moldova at that time, Mircea Snegur, signed the Protocol of Friendship and Cooperation between

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<sup>44</sup> See also Moşanu.

<sup>45</sup> Moşanu, Viorel. 2000. The Neutrality Policy of the Republic of Moldova - What Chances for the Future? *Südosteuropa* 49, 9-10.

Russia and Moldova. According to Chapter 3 of the agreement, the parties committed to assisting each other, including by military means, if a foreign power took aggressive action against one or both of them simultaneously (it is noteworthy that the Russian Duma did not ratify the agreement at a later stage). However, the mere fact that the Moldovan side signed it clearly demonstrated how vulnerable the idea of Moldovan neutrality was, along with the official position of Chisinau and its understanding of the notion.<sup>46</sup>

To conclude the preceding analysis on the viability of Moldova's neutrality policy, it is beneficial to explore the levels of analysis proposed by Swedish researcher Olav F. Knudsen. Knudsen delineates the independent variables that impact a small country's decisions regarding foreign policy, defense, and security courses.<sup>47</sup> These variables include: *geostrategic location and importance of the small country* - perceived from the perspective of a great power, particularly Russia in this context, Moldova's importance can be understood in three ways: 1. Russia aims to fully align Moldova with its interests. 2. Russia desires military bases across the entire post-Soviet space, including Moldova. 3. Russia seeks to deter the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). The second determinant is *the level of confrontation among great powers*. For Russia, given the expansion of NATO (with Romania already being a member), having numerous springboards for military deployment becomes crucial. In this context, Russia has been relatively 'successful' in various regions, like Georgia (Abkhazia, Samachablo), Ukraine (Crimea, and now Donbas), and Moldova (Transnistria), effectively serving as mechanisms for potential 'blackmail.' Thirdly, another determinant is *the phase of the power cycle in which the nearest great power operates*. It's challenging to precisely assess Russia's current power phase, but it is evident that Russia is neither as weak as it seemed post-Soviet Union collapse, nor as dominant as it projected during the Munich Security Conference in 2007. The invasion of Ukraine clearly signaled Russia's ambition to forcefully regain lost power after the Soviet Union's dissolution and position itself at the center of global power. *Historical memory* also plays a role in shaping a small state's relationship with a neighboring great power. Moldova harbors mistrust towards Russia due to centuries of Russian geopolitical interests in the Balkans, historically at the expense of the Romanian people who have often been victims of Russian hegemonic ambitions. Lastly, *the stance of another neighboring state towards a great power*, considering its size, potential, and geopolitical location, further influences Moldova's perspective. Ukraine's pursuit of NATO membership and Russia's destructive war against Ukraine make the idea of neutrality as a guarantee of security appear outdated from Moldova's standpoint.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Napieralska, Anna. 2012. Russian-Moldovan Relations after the Collapse of the Soviet Union. *West Virginia University*.

<sup>47</sup> Knudsen, Olav Fagelund. 1996. *Analysing Small-State Security: The Role of External Factors*.

<sup>48</sup> See also Knudsen.

Today, Moldova finds itself closer to the European Union (EU) than ever before. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and its declared pro-Western stance, Moldova has been granted candidate status for EU membership, aligning itself with Ukraine. Given Russia's revisionist aspirations, particularly in light of demands from Finland and Sweden—nations with a strong tradition and capability of neutrality—to join the North Atlantic Alliance, and Switzerland's evolving stance towards suppressing its neutrality, coupled with the historical shortcomings of neutrality, it is reasonable to expect that Moldova, on its path to European integration, will abandon the notion of neutrality, which exists only on paper, and seek closer ties with NATO.

### Conclusion

In the discipline and practice of international relations, neutrality is viewed as a foreign policy choice made by a small country, primarily motivated by the desire to preserve its sovereignty and security by distancing itself from conflicts. In the realist paradigm, a small country's instinct for self-preservation often leads to adopting a low-profile foreign policy and staying as inconspicuous as possible on the international stage. However, a small country falling under the influence of a major power's grand vision often finds itself unable to maintain an independent, 'sole' foreign policy and must seek powerful allies.

The theory and practice of international relations recognize various forms of neutrality, but they strictly define the criteria for choosing neutrality. Without meeting these criteria, neutrality remains a mere formal state written on paper and an illusion of a country's self-deception.

To achieve genuine and effective neutrality, a country must possess a tradition of neutrality, garner broad domestic and international public consensus, not represent a significant object of another major state's policies—essentially avoiding a geostrategically 'marginal zone.' The country should also have the capability to independently protect its sovereignty and neutrality, exercise full control over its entire territory, and secure recognition of neutrality from the world's leading actors, or at least obtain a guarantee of neutrality from major power(s). Otherwise, neutrality becomes a futile exercise and an illusion that the country can evade current or future foreign threats.

Presently, there are 21 neutral states in the world. However, most of them are self-proclaimed neutralities and struggle to meet the necessary conditions. Even countries that were successful in establishing effective neutrality, such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland, are now reassessing their positions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine this year further eroded the already declining concept of neutrality, compelling neutral countries to reevaluate this policy—Sweden and Finland are seeking NATO membership, and Switzerland is increasingly discussing interpretations of neutrality within the framework of Western security guarantees.



In this document, we not only analyze the general problems associated with the concept of neutrality but also compare successful cases, such as Switzerland, with unsuccessful ones like Moldova. It is evident that even successful neutrality faces significant challenges, while failed neutrality can easily be dismissed as a utopia. Since adopting neutrality in 1994, Moldova has failed to address any of its underlying issues—its territorial integrity remains compromised after 28 years, foreign troops still occupy its territory, and the threats from Russia have not diminished; in fact, they have escalated.

There is little reason to believe that Georgia exhibits a better practice in the context of neutrality than Moldova. In terms of meeting the conditions for neutrality, Georgia finds itself in no better position today than Moldova did in 1994 or the ancient Greek state of Melos. Moreover, in 1918, Georgia declared itself a neutral state through the Act of Independence, but this declaration did not prevent Russia from annexing the country in 1921 and asserting Georgian territory as a Russian province. Considering both historical events and current developments in Georgia and the world, the danger is real. Failing to recognize this danger and not seeking alliances puts us in no better position than the people of Melos. Embracing neutrality when unable to meet any of its conditions, especially in a changing world order, is a paradoxical choice for a small, vulnerable country.

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