

## THE AUGUST CRISIS IN THE CAUCASUS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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Until the summer of 2008 the situation in the Caucasus was determined by the balance of power and parity between the main actors—America and Russia; there were other actors as well—the European Union, Turkey, and Iran. It was Georgia that wanted to defrost the situation in order to change the format of the peacekeeping operation and join NATO. Control over the breakaway regions and the status of the region's leader were its final aims.

The United States and the EU (NATO) would not have objected to a change in the balance of powers: not satisfied by a situation in which they had to trim their ambitions to suit the interests of others, they believed that the level of their presence in the region was inadequate. The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia served as defrosting instruments: for a long time the situation around them was teetering on the brink of war. In pursuance of their short-term interests the outside players were deliberately shortening the road to NATO for Georgia.

Until 7-8 August, 2008 Georgia's chances of being included in MAP (the Membership Action Plan) were determined by the Bucharest summit, which postponed the final decision until December 2008; it also promised that both aspirants—Georgia and Ukraine—would eventually be admitted. The

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Atlantic Alliance, however, was divided over the issue: unlike the United States and New Europe, Old Europe took into account Russia's position and the Caucasian realities, which are far removed from NATO standards.

Georgia's attack on South Ossetia pushed the situation beyond the point of no return: irrespective of what Russia could or should have done no status quo could be restored and the exacerbated problems could not be settled.

For more than 15 years Russia has been strictly observing the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity and fulfilling its peacekeeping functions under the 1992 Dagomys Agreement on the Principles of the Settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict, one of the factors of regional peace and security.

It set up Joint Peace Keeping Forces (JPKF) in the conflict zone and created a Joint Control Commission (JCC) for the sake of the conflict's peaceful settlement strictly within the law. Based on the principle of the territorial integrity of states the document referred to the U.N. Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. Kosovo's independence, recognized by many Western states and described as a unique decision inapplicable to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, did not shatter Russia's determination to respect Georgia's territorial integrity.

In an uphill effort to bring the sides' positions closer together Russia lost about 120 peacekeepers from among the CIS peacekeeping forces in the zone of the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict and sustained considerable material losses. CIS peacekeepers fell victim to those who in an effort to defrost the conflict and resume hostilities staged terrorist attacks on the territories of the break-away republics. Someone supplied them with weapons and let them across the border and back: this can be described as encouragement (or, in legal terms, complicity) by the Georgian official structures.

During numerous and prolonged talks the Russian side invariably insisted on the obvious: to achieve a settlement the sides should remove all doubts about the sincerity of their intentions. Tbilisi, in turn, invariably came up with vague statements when asked by Russian diplomats whether Georgia was after the territory or the territory along with its population. It ignored Moscow's invitation to sign an agreement on the non-use of force, which could have played a positive role or could have removed at least some of the sides' phobias, thus making the talks much more constructive. The Georgian leaders thought and planned differently: in August 2008 they finally settled on the use of force.

Back in 2004 the South Ossetian conflict was much closer to a settlement than any of the post-Soviet conflicts. On 20 May, 2004 the Georgians, however, halted the positive developments by moving the police, internal security troops, and later the army into the conflict zone outlined by international agreements and controlled by JPKF. One-sided actions designed to build up Georgia's military presence in the conflict zone flagrantly violated the 1992 Agreement on the Principles of the Settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict and the 1996 Memorandum on Measures to Ensure Security and Reinforce Mutual Confidence between the Parties to the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict. This added tension to the already tense situation, caused deaths, and could have developed into what we saw in August 2008 but for the peacekeeping efforts of Russia and the United States. The peace process, however, rolled back.

In disregard of the relevant international agreements, U.N. resolutions, and its own obligations Georgia behaved more or less similarly in relation to Abkhazia. On 25-27 July, 2006 it moved its troops into the upper part of the Kodori Gorge, which Resolution 1716 of 13 October, 2006 and others of the U.N. Security Council described as a flagrant violation of the Moscow 1994 Agreement on Ceasefire and Separation of Forces.

In 2008, when Georgia used military force, the United States, while refraining from direct involvement, moved to Tbilisi's side in the information war.

The statements issued by the Georgian leaders suggest that it was the West (or, at least, the United States) that provoked the clash. On 25 November former Georgian Ambassador to Russia Erosi Kitsmarishvili appeared before a temporary parliamentary commission set up to investigate the August events to testify that President Saakashvili had wanted this war; several officials insisted that the United States and President George W. Bush had personally supported the attack on Abkhazia. The former Georgian ambassador said that it was Georgia that had started the war.<sup>1</sup> On 13 August President Saakashvili announced that he held the West, which “had failed to see through Russia’s intentions to occupy Georgia,” “partly responsible” for the outcome.<sup>2</sup> The next day he was even more explicit: “The United States insisted that it was nothing but a game on Russia’s part and that if it crossed the line it would have committed a big mistake. The West underestimated Russia on this point. I think that America should organize resistance of Western countries. They have many levers they can use to stop Russia. America’s prestige in the region is at stake. The United States is gradually losing its post-Cold War authority. This is a tragedy.”<sup>3</sup>

President Saakashvili was obviously pushing Washington to much more resolute actions against Russia. There is another aspect: the centerpiece of his address completely refuted the repeated assertions of American officials that the military operation against South Ossetia came as a complete surprise and that they had done everything in their power to prevent it.

Significantly, the Georgian attack began on the day when, 13 years earlier, Croatia had successfully completed its Operation Storm to retake Serbian Krajina.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried, who appeared on 9 September, 2008 before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, testified: “On the night of 7 August... the Georgians told us that South Ossetians had fired on Georgian villages from behind the positions of the Russian peacekeepers. The Georgians also told us that Russian troops and heavy military equipment were entering the Roki Tunnel border crossing with Russia. “We warned the Georgians many times in the previous days and weeks against using force. On 7 August we warned them repeatedly not to take such a step.”<sup>4</sup> The American diplomat obviously preferred the Georgian version that Russia had stirred up the crisis by moving its forces into South Ossetia. An analysis of the Georgian media, however, reveals a different story.<sup>5</sup>

On 7 and 8 August there was no mention about Russian troops in South Ossetia; the media was merely holding forth about the need “to restore constitutional order” in South Ossetia. Nothing was said about Russians who needed to be pushed back. The arrival of Russian troops in South Ossetia came as a complete surprise for the Georgians. It was only at about 04:00 p.m. on 8 August that the Security Council of Georgia announced that “it would declare war on Russia if information about Russian tanks in South Ossetia is confirmed.” Dana Rohrabacher, member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Deputy Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight, who in his statement referred to American intelligence, refuted the Georgian version of the Caucasian development.<sup>6</sup> On 11 September Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, who appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee, confirmed Congressman Rohrabacher’s words.

The Georgians insisted that in the small hours of 8 August they had moved in to rebuff the Russian troops pressing into South Ossetia. In fact, the hostilities began much earlier:<sup>7</sup> in the after-

<sup>1</sup> [<http://vz.ru/politics/2008/11/25/232587.html>]; *Kommersant*, No. 216 (4033), 27 November, 2008; *Izvestia*, No. 222, 27 November, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1041170.html>], 13 August, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> [[www.regnum.ru/news/1041323.html](http://www.regnum.ru/news/1041323.html)], 14 August, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> [<http://www.state.dov/p/eur/rls/rm/109345.html>].

<sup>5</sup> See, for, example: *Svobodnaia Gruzia*, Nos. 67-68, 9 August, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> [<http://www.rian.ru/world/20080909/151121908.html>].

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Dzugaev, “Ocherk i razmyshlenia po goriachim sledam nedavney voyny,” *Kavkazskiy ekspert*, No. 4 (12), 2008, pp. 9-12; “Khronika piatidnevnoy voyny v Gruzii v avguste 2008 g.,” *Kavkazskiy ekspert*, No. 4 (12), 2008, pp. 51-59.

noon of 1 August one man was killed and one wounded when an Ossetian checkpoint was fired upon. In the small hours of 2 August heavy artillery opened fire on Tskhinval: six were killed, 13 wounded. Evacuation of children began. On 5-6 August Georgian troops stormed, without much success, the Priss Heights on the eastern fringes of Tskhinval; on 7 August fighting broke out for the heights in the villages of Nuli and Mugut (the Znauri district to the west of Tskhinval). On the same day, shortly before midnight, Georgians opened artillery fire on Tskhinval supported, some time later, by 27 Grad missile launchers and Georgian aviation. Early in the morning of 8 August Georgians (approximately 12 thousand) burst into the city's southern part. By midday, with half of the city already captured, the Georgian units began to run out of steam. Those who tried to enter the Ossetian capital in the north using the Georgian enclaves of Tamarasheni and Kekhvi as toeholds failed. There was fighting on the southwestern fringes of the city in the village of Tbet. It was only by 05.00-06.00 p.m. that the Russian forward detachments reached Tskhinval. At night heavy artillery shelled the city to help the troops storm Tskhinval on the morning of 9 August. By the morning of 10 August the main forces of the 58th Army and the 76th Pskov Airborne Division of the Russian Federation drove the Georgians away.

The Georgian military operation in South Ossetia was obviously planned well in advance with several factors taken into account: the Georgians counted on a surprise attack and a potential blitzkrieg. Tskhinval and several nearest villages of the Tskhinval, Znauri and Leningori (with the center in Tsinagar) districts should have been seized in a couple of days; because of the Beijing Olympics that began on the same day it was expected that the Russian leaders would need time to move the 58th Army into Tskhinval. At first everything went as expected: on 8 August the Russian peacekeepers remained passive—they could only defend themselves. The South Ossetian forces were disorganized while their combat readiness left much to be desired; nearly the entire South Ossetian government was at a loss.

Had Georgia's expectations been realized the movement of Russian troops into the breakaway republic on 9 or 10 August and their advance to Java would have been useless. The loss of Tskhinval would have doomed South Ossetia: it is unlikely the city could have been stormed again, this time by the Russian troops. In this situation jubilant Tbilisi could have altered the format of the peacekeeping operation and negotiated other changes. The fate of Abkhazia would have been sealed. By the same token it would have acquired MAP and moved nearer to NATO membership.

This never happened thanks to Russia's fairly prompt and timely response. The Georgian side still had a chance of realizing its minimum demand—internationalization of the present format of the peacekeeping operation. In this case, too, South Ossetian independence would have been doomed. To move in the desired direction it was necessary to remove the Russian troops from South Ossetia and, at some time in future, from Abkhazia.

On 12 August France brokered the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan: its six points ruled out the use of force; hostilities should be halted; the population should receive free access to humanitarian aid; the Georgian troops should return to the barracks while the armed forces of Russia should be withdrawn to the line preceding the hostilities. The Russian peacekeepers should take additional security measures before international security mechanisms were set in place. In the earlier version Point 6 spoke of the need to begin international consultations about the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the measures required to ensure their security. Later the Georgian side insisted that this point be corrected at the beginning of the international discussions on the security of these two states. This turned out to be an important amendment.

It should be added that the loosely worded document permitted numerous interpretations: "the line preceding the hostilities" stirred up disagreements: Russia's opponents wanted to push them back to Russian territory. Russia, in turn, stuck to the letter of the document and treated the Russian peacekeepers as armed forces that should remain in the Zugdidi District of Georgia in the number deter-

mined for the peacekeeping contingent. It was equally unclear what sort of “additional security measures” were meant.

In an interview to Reuters a French official who had taken part in the negotiations on 12 August and who preferred to remain anonymous said that France had refused to budge under Russia’s pressure.<sup>8</sup> France, however, retreated under Georgia’s insistence. President Saakashvili rejected Point 6 on international discussions of the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He treated it as an ultimatum that he was ordered to sign or lose his post. The offending point was changed—Russia accepted the changes.

The Western capitals took this as a sign that the Russian Federation was beating a retreat: they tried to force Russia to accept the replacement of OSCE observers with EU peacekeeping forces to be stationed, among other things, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

According to Minister for Reintegration of Georgia T. Yakobashvili, the initial plan of the French foreign minister contained 4 points; later two other points were added on Moscow’s insistence.<sup>9</sup> The Georgian minister assured that Georgia had refused to sign the plan without detailed explanations about the second phrase of Point 5 (“Russian peacekeeping forces accept additional security arrangements before making international motions”). The French president supplied “a clarifying letter” which said that the measures should be strictly temporary and limited, on the whole, to the conflict zone, which was not “all of South Ossetia.” The Russian peacekeepers were not allowed to organize checkpoints—they were expected to limit themselves to patrolling and to keep away from the settlements (this could hardly be done), the town of Gori, and the central highway. The “additional security measures” were limited to the “Tskhinval zone” and did not cover Abkhazia.

Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried admitted at the hearings at the Senate Armed Services Committee that it was America that had insisted on written clarifications: “The Georgians had questions about the ceasefire agreement, so we worked with the French who issued a clarifying letter addressing some of Georgia’s concerns.”<sup>10</sup> The barely signed agreement was interpreted and reinterpreted, an inevitable result of its vague and highly ambiguous wording.

In its report “Russia vs. Georgia: The Fallout,” the International Crisis Group stated: “Western nations must eschew the worst of the Cold War mentality... The ceasefire signed on 15-16 August must be respected, and Russian troops must return promptly to the positions they held on 7 August, honoring the spirit of a loosely worded agreement.”<sup>11</sup> Georgian political scientist Malkhaz Matsaberidze agreed with this assessment of the document: “Russia interprets the points as it sees fit; the agreement between the European Union and Russia drawn in haste abounds in vague points.”<sup>12</sup>

Sergey Lavrov pointed out that the document signed by President Saakashvili differed from the document signed earlier by President Medvedev: it lacked the introduction that said that the presidents of France and Russia supported the principles enumerated below and called on the sides to sign the document. This version bears the signatures of the presidents of Russia, France, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The president of Georgia signed the document that did not bear the signatures of Sergey Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoyty. This means that the agreement acquired a “double,” probably through the services of Condoleezza Rice engaged in shuttle diplomacy.

The same anonymous French official confirmed that France had to shoulder the main burden of the talks since the United States was outside the playing field; the U.N. was divided, while OSCE was too weak. From the very beginning the French Foreign Ministry expected that a U.N. resolution would ease the progress (on 13 August French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said “we

<sup>8</sup> [<http://ru.reuters.com/article/topNews/idRUANT33355020080813>].

<sup>9</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1042523.html>], 16 August, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> [<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/109345.htm>].

<sup>11</sup> [<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5636&1=1>].

<sup>12</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1053361.html>], 10 September, 2008.

will have to go through the U.N.”), but this road was blocked. There was another eloquent detail: the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan envisaged OSCE observers in Georgia; a lively discussion of the possibility of sending EU peacekeeping forces there buried the original plan and altered the settlement format beyond recognition.

On 13 August Minister of State for Overseas Development of Ireland Peter Power summed up the meeting of the EU foreign ministers by saying that the European Union was prepared to interfere, including its presence on the spot to support the U.N. and OSCE.<sup>13</sup> In its settlement efforts the European Union proceeded from the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. It aspired to create an “international mechanism” of conflict settlement to internationalize the peacekeeping process. Georgia appreciated this approach: Foreign Minister of Georgia Ekaterina Tkeshelashvili stressed these two points in the EU documents.<sup>14</sup> Speaker of the Georgian parliament David Bakradze described the initiative to set up an international peacekeeping contingent as revolutionary and said that if realized in the near future it would cause “serious changes in conflict settlement.”<sup>15</sup> To complete the picture let me say that Peter Semneby, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza attended the sitting.

On 14 August, the day before Condoleezza Rice arrived in Tbilisi, David Bakradze told journalists that the move to the next stage (conflict settlement and internationalization) would start as soon as the ceasefire agreement was signed and the Russian troops removed.<sup>16</sup> This means that Georgia expected that troop withdrawal and the arrival of peacekeepers would be two separate stages. This was far removed from the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan; upon her arrival in Georgia the U.S. Secretary of State supported the Georgian position.<sup>17</sup> She demanded an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of the Russian troops from Georgian territory even before the international discussion of the peacekeeping operation had been completed. The peacekeeping forces should be international and neutral while the European Union should play one of the main roles in the process.

In fact, the time gap between troop withdrawal and moving in the peacekeeping forces was the watershed between the American and West European settlement conceptions. Old Europe did not want the gap; it never insisted on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia and South Ossetia—this demand was limited to the Georgia’s “core.”

The Avignon meeting of the EU foreign ministers held on 5 September decided that a group of 200 civilian observers should be knocked together in 10 days to be dispatched to the buffer zones on the Abkhazian and South Ossetian borders. Nothing was said about sending observers into these territories. America’s showed its displeasure following the Europeans’ decision to carry out international investigation to find out who had started the hostilities in South Ossetia—a small yet eloquent fact.

It was not the only one: EU leaders made several statements that betrayed their irritation with America’s diktat. According to French Foreign Minister Kouchner, the European Union and the U.S. had certain common interests and shared values despite their different approaches to many issues. According to the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Union wanted to be the United States’ equal partner. Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner commented on the statement of U.S. Vice-President Cheney that the U.S. would allocate \$1 billion to Georgia with: “Wonderful, but what difference will it make? We are also giving a lot of money for rehabilitation. This is not a competition.” It is difficult not to

<sup>13</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1041585.html>], 14 August, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1041209.html>], 13 August, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> [<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1227283.html>], 15 August, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> [<http://www.forum.msk.ru/material/news/516647.html>], 16 August, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> [<http://www.newsru.com/world/15aug2008/podpis.html>].

notice the irritation in this statement.<sup>18</sup> Having joined the settlement process as one of its active sides the European Union acquired more self-respect and gained a lot of political weight internationally.

On 8 September the presidents of Russia and France agreed on three additional points to their earlier plan:

- (1) the Russian troops should be withdrawn from the Poti-Senaki line within seven days; at least 200 observers should be brought into the zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia before 1 October, and within 10 days after this the Russian troops should be withdrawn;
- (2) the observer U.N. and OSCE missions should be preserved in the conflict zones while no less than 200 EU observers should be promptly moved into the zones adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- (3) international discussions on ways to ensure stability and security in the region, on refugee and IDP issues, as well as on all other questions placed on the agenda by the sides' mutual agreement should begin in Geneva on 15 October.

According to President Sarkozy, the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was to be discussed at the international level; he was supported by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer who said that Europe should never forget that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were parts of Georgia and added that talks had been held and peacekeeping mandates issued, which meant that the future of the regions should be discussed at the international level.

In the small hours of 9 September Mikhail Saakashvili signed the document and pointed out that "the Russian military will be replaced with international forces." The Georgian parliament was dead set against Abkhazia and South Ossetia participating as entities of international law in the talks in Geneva on 15 October. *Rezonansi*, a Georgian newspaper, wrote that the Kremlin had retreated on certain issues while the roadmap Moscow had drawn up on the eve of the French president's visit had failed. The newspaper remained convinced that it was France and its president rather than the U.S. and President George W. Bush who prevented Moscow from pushing Georgia's statehood to a complete collapse: Russia retreated to avoid the anti-Russian consolidation of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

It looked as if the new agreement had completely clarified the problem and removed all questions related to the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however this proved to be an illusion. The United States moved to the fore to revive the discussion and to undermine the Sarkozy-Medvedev plan.<sup>20</sup>

On 10 September the U.S. Department of State Spokesman Sean McCormack said at a briefing that Washington was "deeply concerned" with Russia's latest statements which meant that Russian troops would remain in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He argued that the Russian forces should be withdrawn to the positions predating 7 August and insisted that their deployment in Abkhazia and South Ossetia contradicted the ceasefire agreement. He added that by blocking humanitarian aid Russia violated another point of the same agreement.<sup>21</sup> American Co-Chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group Matthew Bryza said on 13 September that if Moscow believed that the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia had been resolved, it was wrong: they had just started.<sup>22</sup> On 16 September he argued that Russia

<sup>18</sup> [<http://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/10266.html>; <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1051465.html>], 6 September, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1053361.html>], 10 September, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> [<http://www.rian.ru/analytics/20080916/151324250.html>].

<sup>21</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1053456.html>], 11 September, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> [[http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/09/13/n\\_1269851.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/09/13/n_1269851.shtml); <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1054589.html>], 13 September, 2008.

had essentially ignored the desire of President Sarkozy, the EU, and the U.N. to defuse the Russian-Georgian tension.

In an interview to *The Financial Times* he gave in Tbilisi on 15 September before the meeting of the NATO Council NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer demonstrated his displeasure with the results of the French brokerage; he claimed that President Sarkozy had retreated too far.<sup>23</sup> The recent three points, said the Secretary General, violated the previous six and made it impossible to restore the status quo. He was convinced that the signed agreement was unacceptable. The NATO Secretary General insisted that the Alliance resolutely objected to Russia's military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Russia's decision to deploy its military contingents there was "hardly acceptable." He said that now it was extremely important for the Alliance to demand that Russia denounce its recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, otherwise the Russia-NATO Council could not be rapidly revived. On 15 August in Brussels Foreign Minister of Lithuania Petras Vaitiekūnas summed up the meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council by saying that he was satisfied that the EU position on Georgia's territorial integrity remained clear and unambiguous and that the observer mission would cover all of Georgia's territory, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>24</sup>

Tbilisi also got down to changing the new points; Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Giga Bokeria declared that under the new agreement the Russian troops would be withdrawn within a month from the entire territory of Georgia with the exception of the conflict regions after which Georgia, together with the EU, would replace the occupation forces still present in the conflict zones with real peacekeeping forces. This would launch a true peacekeeping process, said the deputy foreign minister.<sup>25</sup> He said that OSCE observers would be placed in the conflict zones as well as elsewhere.

On 16 September, when talking to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Mikhail Saakashvili insisted on unconditional fulfillment of the ceasefire agreement and, among other things, on restoration of the status quo of 7 August: "Five hundred Russian military may remain stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; all refugees should be returned to their homes; Georgia should regain control over the territories it controlled before the conflict." This meant that President Saakashvili had reconciled himself to a small Russian contingent in the "conflict regions" but wanted the Kodori Gorge and the Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia back. This meant that the revision of the 8 September agreements began as soon as they had been signed by the United States, NATO, and Georgia.

Further developments clarified the positions and aims:

1. The Russian Federation was prepared with pull out its forces from Georgian territory proper and let EU observers move in. It was not prepared, however, to accept a compromise under which it would be forced to replace its armed forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with EU observers (not to mention peacekeepers).
2. The European Union (France in particular and Old Europe in general) can accept in principle an intermediate version according to which the Russian troops leave the territory of Georgia proper and remain in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This version limits the presence of EU observers to Georgian territory. This is a temporary alternative; later the European Union plans to defeat Russia in the diplomatic game and remove the Russian troops from the entire territory of the former Georgian S.S.R. So far talks on the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been removed from the agenda.

<sup>23</sup> [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/uk/newsid\\_7615000/7615934.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/uk/newsid_7615000/7615934.stm)].

<sup>24</sup> [<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3650702,00.html>].

<sup>25</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1053855.html>], 11 September, 2008.

The European Union sees the possibility of another temporary alternative: to convince Russia, in exchange for certain concessions, to remove its troops from the areas Georgia lost in August 2008 (the upper part of the Kodori Gorge, the Georgian enclaves to the north of Tskhinval. and the western part of the Akhagori District). EU observers will take the Russians' place, however the areas will be returned to Georgian jurisdiction to be later militarized. This will weaken already weak Abkhazia and South Ossetia even more. The Europeans have not moved very far in this direction—they, and the Americans for that matter, have no real instruments for putting pressure on Russia.

3. The United States, NATO leaders, the UK, and the Euro-Atlantic forces in Europe want no compromises or intermediate or temporary alternatives. They want to see the Russian troops removed from the territory of Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia and replaced with EU peacekeepers rather than observers; the future status of both republics should be settled according to the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity and without Russia. This is what the Georgian leaders want.

During August and September of 2008, the NATO leaders repeatedly confirmed their solidarity with the United States, which wanted to see Georgia integrated into the Alliance through MAP. The fact that Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not affect the Alliance's position. With America's insistence the Alliance actively promoted and is promoting the project of rehabilitation and modernization of Georgia's armed forces. In mid-September NATO somewhat changed its position; its promises of NATO membership for Georgia became much vaguer than before.

While in Tbilisi on 15-16 September, 2008 Jaap de Hoop Scheffer announced that NATO was not indifferent to Georgia's ambitions and would help it in every way possible. He deemed it necessary to add: "Georgia will never become a NATO member directly without MAP."<sup>26</sup> He went on to say: "We are an institution based on values and when the country meets the membership criteria we won't turn its down. It is hard to say when this will happen. It will be the outcome of the country's development culminated in a political decision. Next December, foreign ministers will make an assessment regarding Georgia's inclusion in MAP.

"I truly believe that with the current level of Georgian involvement in the negotiation process on conflict areas, progress and success will be achieved." On the whole, however, the NATO Secretary General remained uncommitted.<sup>27</sup> When speaking to a student audience at Tbilisi State University he said: "While all 26 NATO allies agree that Georgia will one day be a member of the Alliance, there are different views on how fast Georgia should be admitted into our Membership Action Plan."<sup>28</sup> Jaap de Hoop Scheffer assured the students that if the reforms were carried out as they should be and if the country worked with international organizations, if it continued its settlement efforts and, correspondingly, ensured security inside and outside the country, Georgia would have the opportunity to be included in MAP. The final decision belonged to all the NATO members, concluded the NATO Secretary General.<sup>29</sup> The numerous and barely realizable conditions of Georgia's MAP create the impression that the December NATO summit will pass a negative decision.

On 18 September, at Senate hearings, Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns pointed out that neither Ukraine nor Georgia were ready to join NATO, however they

<sup>26</sup> [[http://www.ng.ru/cis/2008-09-17/8\\_nato.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2008-09-17/8_nato.html)].

<sup>27</sup> [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid\\_7616000/7616572.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_7616000/7616572.stm)]; [<http://www.vremya.ru/2008/170/4/212706.html>].

<sup>28</sup> [[http://www.newsgd.com/news/world1/content/2008-09/17/content\\_4602330.htm](http://www.newsgd.com/news/world1/content/2008-09/17/content_4602330.htm)].

<sup>29</sup> [[http://www.newsgeorgia.ru/official\\_statement/20080916/150986100.html](http://www.newsgeorgia.ru/official_statement/20080916/150986100.html)].

should be incorporated into MAP.<sup>30</sup> This program, said he, was neither an invitation nor a promise of NATO membership. The American diplomat admitted that some of the U.S. European partners, Germany and France in particular, doubted that Kiev and Tbilisi were ready for MAP. He added that nobody could predict the results of the December meeting of the NATO foreign ministers.

From the very beginning of the conflict the United States remained the main patron of Tbilisi, which flatly denounced everything that Russia was doing and turned down all suggested compromises, and Georgia's main lobbyist in NATO. The arrival of the new administration in the White House will do nothing more than moderate the aggressive rhetoric and actions. There is, however, something that cannot be ignored: nothing changed in Washington's rhetoric and actions when Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. America refused to pile new threats on the old ones.

More than that: Russia's failure to promptly recognize the two republics' independence could have invited more American pressure. In the next few months Washington will probably defuse its anti-Russian rhetoric: it has enough problems at home and abroad. In fact, on 22 August U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle deemed it necessary to say that the Georgian conflict would not irrevocably undermine economic relations between the two countries and Russia's chances of WTO membership. He added that in December the NATO Council would be guided, among other things, by Russia's willingness to honor its promises to withdraw from Georgia. On the other hand, Georgia's prospects of becoming incorporated in MAP will be greatly affected by its willingness to fulfill its obligations. The ambassador added that Russia had had the right to repel the Georgian attack on the Russian peacekeepers, something from which Washington had tried in vain to dissuade Georgia. He said further: "Although the decision should take into account the right to national self-determination, the fact to proceed from is that Georgia's territorial integrity has been recognized by international law."<sup>31</sup> It seems that the American establishment is at least divided over the issue.

New Europe is not united in its attitude toward Georgia and the August-September 2008 crisis, or towards the prospects of Georgia's NATO membership. There is an anti-Russian core that recently tried to set up a stable coalition—Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria, unwilling to pose as active fighters against "Russia's imperialism," from time to time find a common language with the core. They support the Euro-Atlantic position on Georgia for their own considerations but without outside pressure. Slovakia and Serbia prefer to keep away from the anti-Russian campaign and remain neutral.

Public opinion in the New European countries is also divided; there is no concerted anti-Russian position (with the exception of the Baltic republics and probably Poland). On 15 August, for example, President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus demonstrated a lot of independence when he said that he resolutely condemned the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, the killing of peaceful people in the region, and Russia's mass intervention. He said further that the Kosovo precedence allowed Russia to justify its intervention: the problem went beyond the "good Georgia—bad Russia" formula. The Czech president pointed out that he did not share the opinions of his Polish, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian colleagues.<sup>32</sup>

On 13 August Premier of Slovakia Robert Fico pointed out: "It was Georgia that provoked the Caucasian conflict." "I would not paint the picture in black and white as is being done today. Someone provoked the conflict and we know who it was. Then came the response and it was a strong one."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> [<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2008/09/18/524758.html>].

<sup>31</sup> [[http://www.kommersant.com/p1014311/Beyrle\\_Georgia](http://www.kommersant.com/p1014311/Beyrle_Georgia)].

<sup>32</sup> [<http://www.newsru.com/world/15aug2008/klaus.html>].

<sup>33</sup> [<http://www.newsru.com/world/14aug2008/slovakia.html>].

It seems that the forces that wanted Russia to pull out of Georgian territory had in mind NATO membership for Georgia through the intermediate MAP stage. Independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russia's military presence are the main factors that keep Georgia away from NATO.

The NATO leaders, however, had to take into account the position of France, Italy, Belgium, and some other countries that pointed to the obvious problems making Georgia's NATO membership impossible. After the August-September crisis they multiplied: Georgia no longer controls Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and it lost control over the Kodori Gorge and the Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia and the eastern part of the Leningori District. Russia and Nicaragua have already recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; over time it will be recognized by others. There are Russian military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The settlement talks were halted and are unlikely to be resumed; Georgia's military potential has been destroyed. This is absolutely clear for at least some of the European political elite.

For some time at least Azerbaijan's Euro-Atlantic enthusiasm was dampened by Russia's response to Georgia's military adventure and the impotence demonstrated by the West, particularly the United States. The statements of the Azeri leaders, the first of them by President Ilham Aliiev, came as late as 21 August and were restrained, even though they proceeded from the principle of territorial integrity. The leaders of Azerbaijan did not want to become another Georgia: they turned a deaf ear to the chorus of anti-Russian European politicians and experts who warned against Russia's attacks on Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

In the wake of U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney's visit to Azerbaijan the Azeri leaders voiced their doubts about the protecting qualities of the Euro-Atlantic umbrella. Wafa Guluzade, never a Russia lover, wrote that Azerbaijan should not draw positive conclusions from the visit.<sup>34</sup> The Americans, said he, pragmatists first and foremost, might trade Azerbaijan for Russia's support in Afghanistan and Iran. The Europeans, drawn apart by inner contradictions, frequently fail to come up with clear statements. Even if the American vice-president had offered Azerbaijan security guarantees, wrote the Azeri political analyst, they should have been dismissed as useless. What was important was the fact that Russia recognized the Azerbaijan Republic's territorial integrity and never retreated from this position.

Baku gained nothing from the August crisis, however its moderate policy saved it from losses. The August crisis, on the other hand, demonstrated that Armenia, which depended on Georgia for transit and was incapable of conducting an independent policy in the region, was highly vulnerable. The ambiguous, to say the least, position of official Yerevan during the August crisis (the president of Armenia, who is regarded as a Russian ally, expressed his condolences to the Georgian nation and hastened to visit Tbilisi) widened the gap between the political elites of Russia and Armenia.

Significantly, the Turkish leaders remained reserved probably because NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia would inevitably bring American bases to the Black Sea, tip the balance of forces in the region, and deprive Turkey of its status of the strongest naval Black Sea power. By acting wisely in August 2008 Ankara was able with relative ease to considerably strengthen its position in the region. In mid-August Recep Erdoğan visited Moscow, Baku, and Tbilisi not merely to find out what was going on but also to present his new initiative—The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.

Based on OSCE principles, the new security system was to include five countries (Turkey, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). Significantly, Iran, a no less Caucasian country than Turkey, was pointedly left out. Russia showed its interest and Georgia demonstrated its willingness to enter into a dialogue with Turkey about the regional security system. Azerbaijan also responded positively but was fairly reserved. Turkey's aim was obvious: it wanted to limit America's and the EU's direct influ-

<sup>34</sup> [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1050472.html>], 4 September, 2008.

ence in the Caucasus; all problems should be resolved locally without outside players. On 18 August in his interview to *The Guardian* President of Turkey Abdullah Gül said: “The conflict in Georgia showed that the United States could no longer shape global politics on its own and should share its power with other countries... A new world order should emerge.”<sup>35</sup>

Washington’s response was guarded; Deputy Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Matthew Bryza pointed out: “Ankara did not inform Washington about the issue and we were really surprised at the actions of our partner.”<sup>36</sup> This means that Turkey is determined to use the Caucasian crisis to fortify its position in the region and its status of a regional power center.

The Russian Federation should pursue a consistent and steady course; it should cut short all attempts at “elaborating” the agreements of 12 August and 8 September by replacing the Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with EU peacekeepers. According to the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement, Russian troops cannot be deployed in the upper part of the Kodori Gorge, the Georgian enclaves to the north of Tskhinval, or the eastern part of the Leningori District (but they can remain in the Zugdidi District of Georgia). Abkhazian and South Ossetian armed forces, however, may be stationed in these areas; there is no need to bring EU observers or peacekeepers there. This is not envisaged either by the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan or by any other international agreements. The Russian Federation does not regard the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as recognized independent countries and entities of international law to be a negotiable issue.

In view of the Caucasian context Russia should support the Turkish initiative to set up a regional organization, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (which should also include Iran), designed to trim the influence of outside actors, the U.S. and the EU in particular. The relations within the Russia-Turkey-Iran triangle should be strengthened: in fact the balance of forces and interests inside it might guarantee stability in the Caucasus.

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<sup>35</sup> [<http://www.david-morrison.org.uk/turkey-restricts-access.htm>]

<sup>36</sup> [[http://www.gab-bn.com/IMG/pdf/Re7-From\\_The\\_Balkan\\_Pact\\_To\\_The\\_Caucasus\\_Stability\\_Pact.pdf](http://www.gab-bn.com/IMG/pdf/Re7-From_The_Balkan_Pact_To_The_Caucasus_Stability_Pact.pdf)].