
Russia and the “Eastern Partnership” after the War in Georgia



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August 2009

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ISBN: 978-2-86592-567-4

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Summary

Russia's military intervention in Georgia in August 2008 sent a shock wave across the post-Soviet space, particularly the republics to the west and south of Russia. In December 2008, the European Union formalized the Eastern Partnership initiative, directed at Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In order to understand the impact of this war both on Russia's bilateral relations with these countries and on the Eastern Partnership area as a whole, this article analyzes the reactions of these former Soviet republics to the Russian offensive. Three types of response are observed: keeping distance from Russia; maintaining a balance between Moscow and the West; and, finally, changing course (from rapprochement to keeping a distance and vice-versa) vis-à-vis the former center of the Soviet Empire.

Introduction

The Russian intervention of August 2008 in Georgia symbolized for many foreign observers a return to Brezhnevian “limited sovereignty.”¹ The Russian operation was largely regarded as an attempt by Moscow to curb the centrifugal movement of one of the most pro-Western former Soviet republics, after several years of Russia seeing the growing influence of the European Union (EU), the United States (US) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) among its neighbors as a threat.² The Five Day War was a shock to the post-Soviet countries. Some felt particularly affected by the Georgian case owing to “frozen conflicts” on their territory; others were afraid that Moscow was seeking to “punish” them for their rapprochement with the West—an attempt to break away from a Russian influence inherited from the “unfinished process of the collapse of the USSR.”³ These countries on the western and southern fringe of the Community of Independent States (CIS) follow different rationales to those of Central Asia: this coherence is embodied in the Eastern Partnership initiative, formalized by the EU in December 2008, which covers six states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and which provides the framework of the current study.

With the Georgian crisis, Russia seems to have re-established its “militaristic power paradigm”⁴—an impression further accentuated by the Russo-Ukrainian gas crisis in January 2009: Moscow exerted pressure on Ukraine, staking its reputation as a reliable energy provider. These two crises—occurring within the space of a few months—raise questions about the Russian project for this part of the post-Soviet space. Are these “accidents” which will not be repeated, or part of a *modus operandi* of Russian foreign policy, showing Moscow's inability to exert its influence in any other way?

Next, we must analyze the impact of Russia's projection of power on two levels: on Russia's bilateral relations with these former Soviet

Translated from French by Nicola Bigwood.

¹ By analogy, Yu. Fedorov uses the expression “Medvedev doctrine” in “The Sleep of Reason: The War on Georgia & Russia's Foreign Policy,” *Association for International Affairs Research Paper*, No. 5, December 2008.

² See the analysis of Russian objectives by C. Kupchan, “Seven Questions: Russia Plays ‘Realpolitik with Bare Knuckles’,” *Foreign Policy Online*, August 2008, available at <www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4448>. See also R. Allison, “Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to ‘Coerce Georgia to Peace’,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, November 2008, p. 1145-1171.

³ L. Chevtsova, “Konets epohi : vpered v proshloe?” [The End of an Era: Ahead to the Past?], *Mir Peremen*, No. 4, December 2008, p. 93–104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

republics, which could now consider Russia to be a threat; and on the region itself and its position between Russian and European influences.

The war in Georgia forced the former Soviet republics to take a stand on the dispute between Russia and Georgia. Their reactions were influenced by the nature of their bilateral relations with Russia, which the crisis highlighted without radically changing. However, the events in Georgia launched a new dynamic in the region with various initiatives, both Russian (the relaunch of the peace processes in the region) and European (the Eastern Partnership).

A study of the reactions of the six states to Russia's intervention enable three groups to be distinguished: the countries that still want to gain independence from Russia (Ukraine and Georgia); those seeking to maintain a balance between Russia and the West (Armenia and Azerbaijan); and, finally, the republics whose attitude toward Moscow has changed following the crisis (Moldova and Belarus).

Georgia and Ukraine: a Shared Desire to Escape Russian Influence

The Georgian and Ukrainian situations differ in many respects but Kyiv and Tbilisi share the experience of the “color revolutions” and the desire to move away from Moscow in order to bind themselves to the West. These centrifugal movements provoke uncertainty and hostility from the Kremlin for both political and economic reasons, for these hydrocarbon transit countries are at the heart of European energy stakes.⁵ Russia sees its influence over these countries diminishing, while that of Western players (EU, NATO, US) increases.⁶

A shared desire for emancipation

From a security perspective, Georgia and Ukraine are members of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and beneficiaries of NATO’s Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) scheme. The two countries have intensified their cooperation with the Atlantic alliance since Presidents Mikhail Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko came to power in 2004 and 2005, respectively. NATO’s summit at Bucharest in April 2008 confirmed their vocation to join the alliance, without, however, giving them either an entry date or a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Ukraine regularly participates in joint exercises close to Russian military sites in Crimea; Moscow is irritated by this and is threatening to re-establish a visa regime if Ukraine joins NATO.

The reinforcement of links between Georgia and the Atlantic alliance makes the Kremlin afraid of NATO expanding to its southern borders.⁷ Resolutely determined to escape from Russia’s orbit, Georgia is banking on its increased cooperation with the US and Israel.⁸ According to Moscow,

⁵ For Ukraine, see A. Dubien, “The Opacity of Russian-Ukrainian Energy Relations,” *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 19, May 2007. For Georgia, see M. Tsereteli, “The Impact of the Russia-Georgia War on the South Caucasus Transportation Corridor,” Report of the Jamestown Foundation, 3 March 2009, <www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Full_Mamuka_RussiaGeorgia.pdf>.

⁶ According to L. Chevtsova, the Kremlin uses the West as a foil to consolidate its domestic power, *op. cit.* [3].

⁷ For details about the projects on the NATO website: <www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia/index.html>.

⁸ The cost of the US Train and Equip program is US\$ 64m (figures from the US Senate Armed Services Committee, 10 September 2008, <www.america.gov/st/texttrans-

this collaboration threatens Russia's security. This country in the Caucasus has therefore become the arena where Russian, US and Israeli interests clash.

From a politico-economic perspective, Kyiv and Tbilisi have moved closer to the EU via the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), where Ukraine seemed a more likely candidate for accession.⁹ The ENP enables both countries to escape from the sphere of economic influence inherited from the USSR, embodied by the CIS. Moreover, Kyiv and Tbilisi have distant relations with this organization: Ukraine did not sign the CIS charter and does not consider itself bound by this community, even though it takes part in it selectively.¹⁰ Georgia, which joined the CIS despite itself in 1993, left it after the August 2008 war. In addition, Tbilisi and Kyiv founded the GUAM organization in 1997 to create a counterweight to Russia.¹¹

Ukraine and Georgia, therefore, are steadfastly displaying their desire to break away from Russian influence, to the great displeasure of the Kremlin. Aside from these common points, the two countries have different relations with Russia: dissension runs deeper with Georgia than with Ukraine.

The Georgian case

Russo-Georgian relations have, on the whole, been poor since the fall of the USSR. For Tbilisi, Moscow wants to retain its influence in the country and uses the separatist territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as levers to attain its regional objectives.¹² Indeed, the Russian elite have difficulty envisaging Georgia as distanced, for the country has been bound to Russia almost continuously since 1801. In addition, Moscow justified its intervention by a possible spillover of troubles to the North Caucasus, the stability of which is precarious.¹³

english/2008/September/20080910120613eaifas0.5277368.html>). Israel provided arms and instructors to Georgia before the crisis as part of its opposition to Russia over Syria and Iran. "L'aide militaire israélienne à la Géorgie ne se répercutera pas sur les rapports russo-israéliens" [Israeli Military Aid to Georgia Will not have Repercussions on Russo-Israeli Relations], *RIA Novosti*, 7 October 2008.

⁹ On this point see K. Longhurst: "Injecting More Differentiation in European Neighbourhood Policy: What Consequences for Ukraine?" *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 32, July 2008.

¹⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian diplomat, December 2008.

¹¹ Acronym formed by the initials of the member countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). This organization, renamed GUAM—Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in May 2006, is supported by the US and aims to counterbalance Russian influence in the CIS.

¹² For an historical account of Russo-Georgian relations, see: T. German, "Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 11, June 2006; N. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS : theories, debates and actions*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 113-139.

¹³ C. King, "The Five-Day War, Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2008.

The uncompromisingly pro-Western attitude of the Georgian government, the existence of a frozen conflict and the multitude of regional stakes (economic, security-related and psychological) seem to explain Russia's attitude in August 2008. The Georgian war is, for that reason, a specific crisis—one that probably cannot be exported to other frozen conflicts.

In addition to the Russian intervention, Georgia felt Moscow's recognition of the independence of the republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on 26 August 2008 as a second attack on its integrity. Having lost around 20% of its territory, Tbilisi denounced the attack against a sovereign state and the brutality of Russian troops. Moscow maintained that it was countering genocide of the Ossetians organized by Georgia, while pointing at foreign involvement in the conflict (especially US).¹⁴ Washington and Tbilisi also accused Moscow of wanting to overthrow Saakashvili. The split between Russia and Georgia is effectively complete: diplomatic relations and air, sea and postal links were broken at the start of September 2008. Geneva negotiations over resolving the crisis remain the only channel for dialogue. The competition between Russia and the West over Georgia is likely to last, as the US announced that it would continue to support Tbilisi,¹⁵ while Russia maintains two "protectorates" in the separatist territories. As well as a shipping base in Abkhazia, Moscow intends to deploy 3,800 men in each republic.

Ultimately, the Russo-Georgian conflict is primarily a political one and is linked to Tbilisi's attitude toward foreign influence, in particular US influence. This ideological conflict seems to be difficult to resolve by negotiation: Georgia is again set in an impasse with Russia. By contrast, Russo-Ukrainian relations, although difficult, seem less compromised.

The difficult Russo-Ukrainian relationship

Unsurprisingly, Ukraine actively supported Georgia against Russia during the war in 2008. In addition to aid provided personally to Saakashvili's family by President Yushchenko, and the presence of the latter at a support meeting in Tbilisi on 12 August, Kyiv firmly condemned Russia's actions; tried to limit the movements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) from Sevastopol; and maintained that the war in Georgia had caused Russo-Ukrainian relations to deteriorate.¹⁶ Moscow qualified Kyiv's conduct as "nothing less than unfriendly" on the same day and denounced the supply

¹⁴ Part of the Russian public thinks that the US favored the war to justify the deployment of anti-missile systems in Poland. O. Antonenko, "A War with No Winners," *Survival*, Vol. 50, No. 5, October 2008, p. 7.

¹⁵ "Un milliard de dollars d'aide américaine pour la Géorgie" [A Billion Dollars in US Aid for Georgia], 3 September 2008, <www.lepoint.fr/actualites-monde/un-milliard-de-dollars-d-aide-americaine-pour-la-georgie/924/0/271162>.

¹⁶ "Ehanurov: 'konflikt v Gruzii ukhudshil otnosheniya Ukrainy i Rossii'" [Ehanurov: "The Conflict in Georgia Deteriorated Relations between Ukraine and Russia"], *RIA Novosti*, 11 September 2008, <www.rian.ru/politics/20080911/151195253.html>.

of Ukrainian weapons to Georgia, including after the start of hostilities.¹⁷ Qualified as a crime by Russia, this supply of weapons poisoned Russo-Ukrainian relations. This sparked debate in Kyiv: the opposition formed a parliamentary board of enquiry, which accused President Yushchenko of having cheaply sold off weapons taken from the Ukrainian army and of having embezzled money.¹⁸

Indeed, anti-Russian rhetoric must be placed in the context of Ukrainian political life, where each camp instrumentalizes Russo-Ukrainian relations. Thus the Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, for want of expressing an opinion over the Georgian conflict, was accused by her adversaries of seeking Russian support for the next elections. In January 2009, President Yushchenko reproached her for having concluded a gas agreement with Moscow that was unfavorable to Ukraine, while she herself denounced RosUkrEnergo's maneuvers that were supported by the Presidential entourage.

In addition, the Georgian crisis broke out at the start of the annual campaign for negotiating Russian gas prices, in which Russia's weakened diplomatic position could serve Kyiv. Ukraine therefore severely criticized Russia's intervention in Georgia. Next, by going head-to-head with Gazprom in December 2008, Ukraine very probably intended to benefit from the deterioration of Russia's international image after the war in August. More generally, the gas issue goes beyond mere energy issues. The recent gas conflict was caused by several factors: political instability in Ukraine; contention over the BSF;¹⁹ exploitation by Ukraine of Russia's damaged international image; as well as the intransigence of Gazprom—seeking to increase its revenues and call in debts in the context of the financial crisis and its own high debt burden. Indeed, being 28.5 billion US dollars in debt, Gazprom had to ask for a loan of almost 5.5 billion US dollars from the Kremlin to honor its investment forecasts for 2009.²⁰ More broadly, the interests of Gazprom and the Russian government are linked. It is not only that their elite interpenetrate but the Kremlin was hit

¹⁷ Declaration by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 2008, available at: <www.in.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/7b52686a865d7fd943256999005bcbb4/e66622f493aab739c32574c20038e5af?OpenDocument>.

¹⁸ For more on this subject, see "MID RF: Postavlyaya oruzhie v Gruzuyu, Ukraina sozdaet ugrozu miru" [The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: By Providing Arms to Georgia, Ukraine Threatens Peace], *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 1 November 2008, <www.kp.ru/online/news/159998/>. See also "Oruzhie s Lozovoy postavlyali v Gruzuyu" [Lozova Arms were Supplied to Georgia], 26 September 2008, <24.ua/news/show/id/67184.htm>.

¹⁹ Russia pays the rent for stationing BSF at Sevastopol through the gradual reduction of Ukraine's gas debt contracted before 1997. Moscow recently refused to negotiate a higher rent unless Ukraine was prepared to extend the stationing agreement beyond 2017. At the end of 2008, the debt amounted to US\$ 1.3bn and the rent (US\$ 98m per year) can only be revised after the fulfillment of the debt. "Yushchenko davit na Moskvu: stoimost' arendy dlya Černomorskogo flota mozhet vozrasti v 25 raz" [Yushchenko Puts Pressure on Moscow: the Rent for the Black Sea Fleet could be Multiplied by 25], *Newsru.com*, 1 September 2008, available at <www.newsru.com/world/01sep2008/flot25.html>.

²⁰ "Gazprom remporte une première victoire sur l'Ukraine" [Gazprom Wins a First Victory over Ukraine], *Les Echos*, 31 December 2008, <www.lesechos.fr/info/energie/4814130-gazprom-remporte-une-premiere-victoire-sur-l-ukraine.htm>.

hard by the falling prices of fossil fuels, which account for 60% of its revenue. The conflict therefore seems essentially an economic one.

The Georgian and Ukrainian crises are therefore different in nature, and not closely linked, even if Kyiv tried to instrumentalize the former to score points in the second. A sign that the Georgian conflict is probably unlikely to spread to Ukraine is that Kyiv and Moscow scaled down their disagreement over Crimea, which is home to a strong Russian minority and the BSF installations.²¹ Moscow also counts on the Ukrainian population's lack of unanimity over accession to NATO and on the divisions of the Ukrainian political class, its best asset.²²

Prospects for the future

The Georgian crisis visibly made Ukraine, Georgia and their EU and NATO partners more realistic, particularly regarding an accelerated accession process.²³ Ukraine recognizes that it is not ready, and now restricts itself to aiming for MAP.²⁴ The EU and NATO uphold Kyiv and Tbilisi's intention to join them but, having become prudent, do not want to offend Russia unnecessarily. The Russo-Ukrainian gas conflict also reinforced the EU's pragmatism: Ukraine did not succeed in either involving it in this quarrel or in obtaining its explicit support, unlike the crisis of 2006. Brussels refused to come out in favor of either adversary. NATO and the EU now hesitate to integrate countries with the potential for conflict with Russia and a weak government. This slowing down of Euro-Atlantic integration could ease tensions between Russia and these countries which, despite their vehemently anti-Russian declarations, maintain real links with Moscow.

In this way, Moscow and Tbilisi continue to uphold relations—particularly commercial ones—although Georgia had decided to reduce imports from Russia. Despite the embargo in place on Georgian wine since 2006, Moscow is Tbilisi's 5th global partner, with a trade volume of 529.8 million US dollars between January and October 2008—exactly the same as the same period in 2007.²⁵ In addition, Russian investments in Georgia are still notable in energy, finance and telecommunications.²⁶ Finally, the fact that 250,000 Georgians live in Russia forces Moscow and

²¹ Interview with a Ukrainian diplomat, December 2008.

²² According to a survey by the Institute of Society Transformations in December 2008, 59% of the population is against accession. See: <www.kyivpost.com/nation/31990/print>.

²³ According to O. Antonenko, Kyiv noticed that the “accession process entailed a great deal of risk and few guarantees,” *op. cit.* [14], p. 34. As for NATO, it is slowing down: “L'OTAN ‘fatiguée de s'élargir’” [NATO is “tired of enlargement”], RIA Novosti, 26 January 2009.

²⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian diplomat, December 2008.

²⁵ The Russian Federation's Ministry for Economic Development, <www.economy.gov.ru>.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Between January and March 2008, Russia was the 5th investor (US\$ 34m), just behind the US (US\$ 38.4m). Russian investors hold 90% of the chemical complex “Azot”, 75% of the energy company “Telaci”, and one of the foremost Georgian banks, VTB.

Tbilisi to maintain channels of dialogue.²⁷ Links are therefore sustained between the two countries, even if Georgia denies them.²⁸

In spite of an apparent deterioration, Russo-Ukrainian relations remain, in reality, quite close. In addition to the 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership, extended for ten years on 1 October 2008, the two countries sustain significant economic relations: Russia is Ukraine's primary commercial partner with a higher trade volume than Ukraine has with Asia as a whole. Between January and August 2008, Russo-Ukrainian trade represented 25.4 billion US dollars.²⁹ In addition, Moscow and Kyiv cooperate militarily: as Ukraine's first partner for arms imports, Moscow absorbs a quarter of Ukrainian sales. Ukraine is also part of CIS's integrated anti-aircraft defense system and committed, in October 2008, to developing a unified command in this area. Finally, Ukraine is a member—along with Russia and three other countries—of the Black Sea naval force (Blackseafor); it took part in the last exercise in April 2008. Moscow and Kyiv also carry out anti-terrorist naval exercises in the Caspian Sea.

Russo-Georgian relations are now very compromised, given the extent to which Georgia has become a point of friction between Russia and different extra-regional players. Russo-Ukrainian relations could develop more favorably if we consider the reality of the—excessively instrumentalized—gas conflict, the links remaining between the two countries, and the lack of pro-Western consensus in Ukraine. The Georgian conflict has not radically modified this relationship, and seems unlikely to spread to Ukraine.

²⁷ All demographic data from this article includes nationality and citizenship. Source: 2002 census, available at: <www.perepis2002.ru>.

²⁸ Interview with a Georgian diplomat, December 2008.

²⁹ Russian Federal Statistics Service, Rosstat <www.gks.ru>.

Azerbaijan and Armenia: Walking the Tightrope

The Georgian crisis has a twofold effect on Azerbaijan and Armenia. Situated in the Caucasus, like Georgia they are faced with a frozen conflict, in Nagorno-Karabakh. This territorial dispute makes the positions of Baku and Yerevan on regional issues inseparable. Thus Russia, allied with Armenia, must also manage Azerbaijan carefully. Unlike Tbilisi, Baku and Yerevan are seeking a balance between Russia and the West, but with different approaches: via a “complementarity policy” for Armenia and “multi-vector diplomacy” for Baku.

Cooperation with the West

Firstly, these countries cooperate actively with various Western players. As members of the PfP, Baku and Yerevan both have an IPAP and take part in NATO exercises, without, however, aiming to join the Atlantic alliance. In reality, Azerbaijan cooperates more closely than Armenia with the US, and is wooed by Washington for its favorable geographical situation. Bordering the hydrocarbon-rich Caspian and Iran, Baku can use this situation in its relations with Russia. Azerbaijan is host to two US radar stations and a contingent of American troops, but is careful in how much US penetration it allows so as not to become the launch pad for a possible attack against Iran.

On the political-economic level, Armenia and Azerbaijan are involved in the ENP and have joined the Eastern Partnership. However, unlike Baku, Yerevan does not want to become a member of the Union.³⁰

In addition to this cooperation with the West, the two countries maintain a balance by developing relations with Russia but with different motives and using different methods.

³⁰ Interview with an Armenian diplomat, December 2008.

The Armenian ally

Yerevan's "complementarity policy" relies primarily on an extensive partnership with Russia—unaffected by the change of Armenian president in March 2008. This policy mainly results from the blockade of the country by Azerbaijan and Turkey since 1994. Armenia maintains significant military cooperation with Moscow: hosting one of Russia's largest bases abroad (around 4,500 men in Gumri) rent free, Yerevan delegates to Russia the guarding of its Turkish and Iranian borders. More generally, Armenia considers the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), headed by Russia, as the only guarantee of its security,³¹ including against any possible aggression from Azerbaijan.³² Symbolic of the balance between military alliances, the Cooperative Longbow/Lancer (NATO) and Rubezh 2008 (CSTO) exercises took place on Armenian soil a month apart.

On the economic level, Russia remains Armenia's foremost commercial partner with a trade volume of 700 million US dollars in 2007, up 60 percent since 2005.³³ With around 1 billion US dollars invested in Armenian stocks in 2008, Russian investors control, in particular, Armenia's railways and 90% of the mobile telephone operator Armentel. Russia provides Armenia with nuclear fuel for its Metsamor power station, as well as gas. By virtue of the "gas debt for shares" agreement, Russia has taken ownership of various Armenian research centers since 2003.³⁴ Some of them, such as Yerevan's center for study and research on automated management systems, were specialized in military projects (control systems for naval forces) during the Soviet period. As a result, Yerevan accepts that the Armenian economy relies heavily on Russia.³⁵ Considered to be Russia's primary ally, Armenia is still, however, highly dependent on Georgia, through which 80 percent of its foreign trade transits.³⁶

In keeping with its foreign policy, Yerevan favored a balanced position during the Georgian crisis: on 13 August President Serge Sarkissian offered his condolences to Russia, then to Georgia the following day. Armenia did not openly support Russia and ruled out any recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence so as not to provoke further hostilities. Yerevan then condemned the use of force, maintaining that any country that increases its military budget, violates agreements over

³¹ *Idem.*

³² Declaration by Armenia's Ministry of Defense, available at <www.armenianembassy.ru/?&lang=ru&display=news&nid=109&catid=24>.

³³ "Arménie-Russie: nouveau souffle pour la coopération commerciale et informationnelle" [Armenia and Russia: a New Breath of Life for Commercial and Information Cooperation], RIA Novosti, 6 February 2008, <fr.rian.ru/business/20080206/98527573.html>.

³⁴ A. Makarkine, "L'Arménie, le plus proche partenaire de la Russie dans l'espace post-soviétique" [Armenia, Russia's Closest Partner in the post-Soviet Space], 5 January 2007, Institut Tchobanian, <<http://eo.tchobanian.org/protected/communique000100a7.html>>.

³⁵ Interview with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rech' Pospolita*, March 2008, available at <www.armenianembassy.ru/?&lang=ru&display=news&nid=64&catid=24>.

³⁶ For an in-depth study of Russo-Armenian relations, see G. Minassian, "Armenia, a Russian Outpost in the Caucasus?" *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 27, February 2008.

limitations on weapons and threatens to break a ceasefire “must receive a rapid and firm response.”³⁷ This ambivalent discourse can be interpreted equally as castigation of Georgia and as a warning to Azerbaijan.

Armenia seems to have benefited from the Georgian crisis: it was able to sustain good relations with the two belligerents, even offering them its mediation.³⁸ It could also benefit from the blow to Georgia's reputation as a trustworthy country for foreign investment and the transit of fuel. Previously, the West, Baku and Ankara had favored transport solutions bypassing Armenia: the EU and US are now considering the Nabucco pipeline's passage through Armenia. Therefore, one of the effects of the war in Georgia, reinforced by the financial crisis, is the return to greater realism in economic projects, with the dropping of projects that are “first and foremost ideological, and economically dubious.”³⁹ Finally, Yerevan now finds itself slightly less isolated, with the recent start of normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, encouraged by Russia.⁴⁰

Hence the Georgian crisis enabled Armenia to strengthen its links with Moscow, which recognizes more than ever that this country is its staunchest ally in the Caucasus. Yerevan's political balance seems more legible than that of its Azerbaijani rival.

Azerbaijan

In contrast to Armenia, Baku's “multi-vector policy” seems to aim more at escaping Russian domination. Admittedly, Moscow and Baku have a strategic partnership, particularly in the military field, as made concrete by a declaration of 3 July 2008.⁴¹ Russia rents Azerbaijan's missile-tracking radar at Gabala, which Vladimir Putin proposed to put at US disposal in 2007, to avoid the deployment of radar in Eastern Europe. Russia and Azerbaijan carry out joint military exercises in the Caspian Sea, even though Russia's *Caspian Force* project, launched in 2004, seems to have stalled. In practice, Russo-Azerbaijani relations are primarily economic: trade represented 1.7 billion US dollars in 2007, increasing by 56 percent

³⁷ Address by President Serge Sarkissian before the United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 2008, <www.un.org/ga/63/generaldebate/pdf/armenia_en.pdf>.

³⁸ Interview with Serge Sarkissian, *Regnum*, 19 November 2008, available at <www.regnum.ru/news/1086190.html>.

³⁹ Interview with a researcher of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), December 2008.

⁴⁰ For more on this subject, see G. Minassian, “Grandes manœuvres au Caucase du Sud” [Great Maneuvers in the South Caucasus], *Politique étrangère*, No. 4, 2008, p. 775-787.

⁴¹ Website of the Russian Presidency, “Deklaratsiya o drouzhbe i strategicheskome partnerstve mezhdou Azerbaidzhanskoj Respublikoj I Rossijskoj Federatsiej” [Declaration on the Friendship and the Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation], 3 July 2008, <www.kremlin.ru/events/articles/2008/07/203572/203565.shtml>.

from January to September 2008.⁴² Russia is Azerbaijan's primary commercial partner, which offers prospects for Russian capital in automotive fields, aluminum and telecommunications. Lastly, the two countries are linked by the presence of 800,000 Azerbaijanis in Russia—the largest immigrant community in the country.

Despite these links, Baku wants to retain its independence vis-à-vis Moscow—a desire that has been particularly acute since mid-2007, when Azerbaijan began exploiting the Shah Deniz gas field. From being one of Russia's clients, the country has become a vendor and even potential rival to Moscow. In order to avoid exporting Azerbaijani gas via the future Nabucco gas pipeline, Russia offered in mid-2008 to buy the gas at a European rate, with more favorable contracts than those offered by the EU. Now armed with an energy lever, Azerbaijan has asserted itself. From November 2007 onward, Baku has expressed its discontent with regard to Russo-Armenian relations and Russia's lack of interest over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In the past, Azerbaijan wanted explicitly to show its autonomy vis-à-vis Moscow by co-founding GUAM. In 2006, when Moscow cut off Tbilisi's gas supply, Baku supplied Georgia. Mikhail Saakashvili maintained that “the Georgian people will never forget this” and dubbed Azerbaijan “guarantor of independence” of his country.⁴³

However, Azerbaijan hardly responded to the events in August. President Aliyev remained at the Olympic Games in Beijing, with his ministry of foreign affairs contenting itself with reiterating the principle of intangibility of Georgia's borders. Only Mubariz Gurbanly, Deputy Executive Secretary of the party in power, qualified the Georgian military action as “justified.”⁴⁴ Although the war did not radically change Russo-Azerbaijani relations, Russia considers Azerbaijan to be an unreliable partner, likely to be the next state in the Caucasus to swing toward the West if Georgia were to join NATO.⁴⁵

Without significantly changing Baku and Yerevan's bilateral relations with Moscow, the Russo-Georgian war instead accelerated trends that were already perceptible before August 2008. On the other hand, its effect on the frozen conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh is notable.

⁴² “Russie-Azerbaïdjan: des échanges en forte progression” [Russia and Azerbaijan: Exchanges Progressing Strongly], RIA Novosti, 16 September 2008, available at <fr.rian.ru/business/20080916/116842790.html>.

⁴³ “Sosedni Gruzii: do i posle ‘pyatidnevnoj vojny’” [Georgia's Neighbors: before and after the ‘Five Day War’], 22 August 2008, <www.dialogs.org.ua/issue_full.php?m_id=13373>.

⁴⁴ “Vlasti Azerbajdzhana podderzhivayut Gruziiyu v konflikte s Yuzhnoj Osetiej” [Azerbaijani Authorities Support Georgia in the Conflict with South Ossetia], 9 August 2008, available at <www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226899.html>.

⁴⁵ According to analysis by V. Zaharov, “Politika NATO v gosudarstvakh Zakavkazya i problemy bezopasnosti Rossii” [NATO Policy in the Trans-Caucasus States and Russia's Security Issues], *Mir Peremen*, No. 4, December 2008, p. 6.

Relaunching the peace process

Situated within Azerbaijan's borders, Nagorno-Karabakh seceded during the Armenian-Azerbaijani war of 1994. The Armenian majority proclaimed the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), supported by Yerevan, cutting off around 15% of Azerbaijan's territory. Since then, the issue has formed the basis of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, with Baku accusing Russia of supporting Armenia. Yet the crisis in Georgia has shown that a "frozen conflict" could degenerate into armed confrontation. This is why Armenia immediately wanted to avoid any conflagration. Firstly, it discouraged any hope of recognizing NKR; secondly, it took preventive diplomatic measures by highlighting the parallels between Georgia and Azerbaijan: the same nationalist rhetoric over the regain of separatist territories, the same spectacular increases in military budget, etc.⁴⁶

Azerbaijan, for its part, understood that aggressive discourse could result in open conflict. Yet Baku probably could not count on either Russian support—Moscow being allied with Yerevan—or on support from the West. The latter, critical of Baku's human rights breaches, is not ready to consider Azerbaijan as a "brave little nation, [...] a tiny little democracy,"⁴⁷ comparable with Georgia. In addition, Ilham Aliyev was not very willing to launch into an international confrontation ahead of the presidential elections of October 2008, for a military defeat would have meant his fall from power.

Russia, for its part, recommitted itself to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Moscow's motives are a cause for debate: according to some, Moscow takes part in negotiations to slow them down in order to serve its own interests, as the controlled instability of the Caucasus prevents the states in the region from joining NATO and the EU.⁴⁸ Others think that this Russian initiative is part of a plan to exclude extra-regional players from the peace process in the Caucasus.⁴⁹ The relaunch of the process primarily enables Moscow to avoid getting involved in a second conflict but also to "redeem" itself by ostensibly promoting negotiated solutions. Talks therefore resumed: on 2 November 2008, Presidents Sarkissian and Aliyev met in Moscow and signed a joint declaration, for the first time in 14 years. The time seemed favorable for the two Presidents,

⁴⁶ Between 2004 and 2008, Georgia's military budget increased from US\$ 90m to US\$ 1bn. "Chem voyuet Gruzija" [Why Georgia is Waging War], Rosbalt.ru, 11 August 2008, available at <www.rosbalt.ru/2008/08/11/512568.html>. In the same period, Azerbaijan increased its budget from US\$ 150m to US\$ 1.3bn. See "Ilkham Aliev schitaet nuzhnym dovesti voennye rashody Azerbajdzhana do 2 milliardov dollarov" [Ilham Aliyev Deems it Necessary to Bring Azerbaijan's Military Spending to US\$ 2bn], Interfax Az, 15 April 2008, available at: <www.interfax.az/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19455&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=9>.

⁴⁷ J. McCain, with regard to Georgia; speech from 12 August 2008, available at <www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2008/08/12/mccain_we_are_a.html>.

⁴⁸ S. Grigorian, Svobodanews.ru, 2 October 2008, <www.svobodanews.ru/transcript/2008/10/20081002141745013.html>.

⁴⁹ G. Minassian, *op. cit.* [40].

both elected in 2008, have the advantage of a certain freedom of action for the next two or three years.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interview with an Armenian diplomat, December 2008.

Moldova and Belarus: Changing Course

Before August 2008, the two countries maintained well-defined relations with Russia: rather poor for Moldova, confronted with a frozen conflict to which Moscow is a party; rather good for Belarus, long considered the CIS country closest to Russia. However, the war in Georgia apparently changed the order: Moldova moved closer to Russia while Belarus distanced itself.

The Moldovan rapprochement

Russo-Moldovan relations have been contentious since 1992, when the self-proclaimed republic of Transnistria escaped Chisinau's control.⁵¹ Moscow helps Transnistria by keeping a force of around 1,500 men there, of which 350 belong to a peacekeeping force imposed upon Moldova. The Russian presence and reintegration of the separatist republic are issues that have tainted Russo-Moldovan relations, pushing Chisinau to diversify its alliances. A founding member of GUAM, Moldova is also a member of the PfP, signed an IPAP and taken part in NATO exercises. Nonetheless, it has consistently stressed that it does not want to join the Atlantic alliance.⁵²

Russo-Moldovan relations became particularly strained at the end of 2003, when the Moldovan President Voronin refused to sign the Kozak memorandum under pressure from the West.⁵³ This document, drawn up by Russia, foresaw a confederal organization for Moldova with Moscow acting as guarantor. Russia imposed an embargo of crucial agricultural exports products—including wine—upon Chisinau from March 2006. Yet Russo-Moldovan relations gradually improved from mid-2007: Moscow lifted the sanctions in October 2007, in return for Moldova's promise to resume talks over Transnistria. Then the Moldovan government, while still pursuing its rapprochement with the EU that began in 2005 (an accession application was submitted to Brussels in December 2008), turned toward Russia during 2008. In May, Russia said that it would guarantee Moldova's territorial integrity if the latter would give up joining NATO and distance itself from GUAM. At the end of May, Chisinau adopted a law forbidding the country

⁵¹ C. Urse, "Solving Transnistria: Any Optimists Left?" *Connections*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Spring 2008, p. 57-75.

⁵² Interview with a former OSCE advisor in Moldova, December 2008.

⁵³ D. Lynch, "Shared Neighbourhood or New Frontline? The Crossroads in Moldova," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 2, April 2005.

from joining a military alliance, and Vladimir Voronin did not attend the GUAM summit in July 2008.

In this context, the Georgian conflict had a twofold impact on Moldova. Firstly, Chisinau increased its rapprochement with Moscow. Admittedly, Chisinau declared that it was against the independence of the two separatist republics in Georgia: the Ossetian and Abkhazian examples were not to spread to Transnistria. This irritated Moscow⁵⁴ and toughened the attitude of Igor Smirnov, de facto President of the Republic of Transnistria. Yet Chisinau pledged friendship to Moscow by suspending its involvement in GUAM on 13 October, on the grounds that the organization was “[run] against other states” and that “no project had been carried out successfully [by it].”⁵⁵ The second effect of the war in August was the resumption of the peace process in Transnistria, under the aegis of Russia. After 25 August, Dmitry Medvedev received Vladimir Voronin in Sochi and declared: “The events in South Ossetia have shown just how dangerous the potential for confrontation inherent in frozen conflicts is. It’s a serious warning for everyone. I think that in this context we should look into other conflicts.”⁵⁶ Voronin, for his part—perhaps seeking Russian support for the legislative elections in March 2009—called on Russia to “take the initiative and control the problem in Transnistria.”⁵⁷

Effectively, Russia is reinvesting in the peace process. It forced Smirnov to lift his moratorium on negotiations imposed after the war in Georgia. The agreement in principle on resuming talks shows a step forward for a process that had been frozen until then. Russia could therefore show, firstly, that it was promoting peace and, secondly, reintroduce a new version of the Kozak plan, despite its declarations of intent over the need for the “5 + 2” format of the OSCE.⁵⁸ By calling this format into question once again, the meetings between Voronin and Smirnov on 24 December 2008 and 18 March 2009 reinforced Russia’s position as mediator.

In the current configuration, therefore, Moscow seems rather unlikely to repeat the Georgian scenario in Moldova, but instead is imposing active diplomacy, based on mediation and peaceful conflict resolution—while also inviting reflection on European security architecture.

⁵⁴ A source from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs qualifies Vladimir Voronin’s declarations as “unfriendly.” “Moment istiny dlya prezidenta Voronina” [The Moment of Truth for President Voronin], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 September 2008, <www.ng.ru/cis/2008-09-02/8_voronin.html>.

⁵⁵ “Blokirovanie Moldaviej dokumentov GUAM—luchshe, chem vyhod iz sostava etoj organizacii” [The Blocking of GUAM Documents by Moldova is Better than Leaving the Organization], *Regnum.ru*, 13 October 2008, <www.regnum.ru/news/1069163.html>.

⁵⁶ “Medvedev i Voronin obsudili pridnestrovskuyu problemu” [Medvedev and Voronin Discussed the Transnistrian Issue], *Moskovskij Kosomolec*, 25 August 2008, <www.mk.ru/26430/26430.html>.

⁵⁷ “Moldavie-Transnistrie: la Russie doit participer au règlement de la situation (Voronin)” [Moldova and Transnistria: Russia Must be Involved in Settling the Situation (Voronin)], RIA Novosti, 13 October 2008, <www.fr.rian.ru/world/20081013/117696657.html>.

⁵⁸ Interview with a Moldovan diplomat, December 2008.

Belarusian surprise

Belarus is reputed to be Russia's closest ally in the post-Soviet space. Trade with Russia—Minsk's primary commercial partner—accounted for 49.2% of Belarus' foreign trade, or 26 billion US dollars, in 2007.⁵⁹ On the military level, both countries belong to the CSTO and have created a "regional command force" to share procedures, officer training and military-scientific research. Every year, Russian academies train around 200 Belarusian servicemen, at Moscow's expense. As for Belarus, it hosts a radar station and a command station for ballistic missile submarines. Lastly, the two countries are considering creating a joint air defense command.

More generally, Minsk and Moscow have followed a regional integration process since 1996. The Union State of Russia and Belarus should, in the long term, have a single leadership and currency, a constitution and armed forces under joint command.⁶⁰ Yet integration is blocked by disagreements over the nationalities of the heads of future unified institutions. The adoption of a constitution has been pushed back several times, with each party accusing the other of infringing the equal treatment of economic players. The process is, therefore, proving to be erratic.

However, the two countries rely upon each other, especially internationally: Moscow supports the Belarusian regime against accusations of dictatorship from the West, and Minsk supports Russia against the deployment of US anti-missile systems in eastern Europe, for example.⁶¹ These relations only ever became really strained in 2006, over the issue of the price of Russian energy supplies to Belarus.

Under these conditions, Belarus' reaction to the events in Georgia is surprising. In fact, it took a statement from the Russian ambassador in Belarus, surprised about Minsk's "discreet silence" over the Russo-Georgian conflict, for Alexander Lukashenko to offer his condolences to Moscow on 13 August. The Belarusian President then stated that "Russia had no other choice" in Georgia, but did not recognize the independence of the two self-declared Caucasian republics. Instead, he seemed to want to gain time, saying that he wanted to await the opinion of the Belarusian parliament and an official request from the Ossetian and Abkhazian authorities.

In fact, Russo-Belarusian relations are developing visibly, although Belarus contests this.⁶² In this way, Minsk seems to want to come out of its isolation: Lukashenko and his parliamentary president Vadim Popov

⁵⁹ Site of the executive committee of the Vitebsk region: <<http://vitebsk.vitebsk-region.gov.by/ru/news/republic/?id=1372>>.

⁶⁰ Interview with a Belarusian diplomat, December 2008.

⁶¹ V. Silitski analyzes the reciprocal support of the two countries: "Belarus and Russia, Comrades-in-Arms in Preempting Democracy," *Political Trends in the new Eastern Europe: Ukraine and Belarus*, Carlisle, US Army Defense College, June 2007.

⁶² Interview with a Belarusian diplomat, December 2008.

declared, in October, that relations with Georgia must be developed. The Belarusian leader, in an ambiguous interview in the *Financial Times*, called on the West to counterbalance Russia in the post-Soviet space.⁶³ Above all, Minsk is moving closer to the EU: on 13 October 2008, Brussels lifted the restriction on visas for 41 Belarusian leaders, including Lukashenko, and the two parties are planning the conclusion of commercial agreements. According to Lukashenko, Belarus “flies with two wings: Russia and Europe.”⁶⁴ Still in October, the President made a surprise visit to Moscow, followed by a report from the Union State of Russia and Belarus’ Council of State session. This session was meant to examine several key issues for greater integration in the Union. The Union State could serve to “launder” Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose accession is technically possible, before any possible attachment to Russia. This requires that Belarus recognize their independence, thereby giving Minsk a lever vis-à-vis Moscow.

The events show Belarus’ desire to respond favorably to the EU, which wants to disconnect Minsk from Moscow. However, the Georgian crisis is embedded in a complex Russo-Belarusian relationship, characterized by permanent bargaining. Showing its independence over the Georgian issue and responding to European advances, Minsk wants to gain the advantage over Moscow, particularly in negotiations over Russian gas supplies. Today, Belarus appears to be a less reliable partner for Russia as its elite are so unpredictable. Nevertheless, these elite are still not very respectable to the West and therefore need Moscow’s support. The Eastern Partnership could benefit from Belarus’ need to open up—particularly in economic terms.

⁶³ S. Wagstyl “‘Last Dictator’ Looks West But Feels Potency of the East,” *Financial Times*, 19 September 2008.

⁶⁴ “Lukashenko otrastil kryliya” [Lukashenko Stretches his Wings], *Vzglyad*, 20 October 2008, <<http://vz.ru/politics/2008/10/20/220991.html>>.

Conclusion

Russia's intervention in Georgia enables four lessons to be drawn regarding Russia's relations with its neighbors in the Eastern Partnership.

Firstly, the war of August 2008 did not radically alter Russia's bilateral relations with these former Soviet republics. Instead, it increased existing trends without breaking objective links between Moscow and these countries. The conflict in Georgia—essentially a political one, limited to Russo-Georgian disputes—probably does not herald a generalized recourse to pressure in Russian foreign policy. The responses to the crisis were also conditioned by other factors, particularly energy-related: this explains Ukraine's demonstrative reaction and the more unexpected response from Belarus.

Next, the crisis demonstrated the post-Soviet states' autonomy vis-à-vis Russia, made concrete by their refusal to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This could be considered as a failure in Russian diplomacy, but also as a sign that today Moscow has neither the will nor the power to exercise control over its neighbors. Nevertheless, it also shows that Russia—incapable of attracting other countries into international organizations—has a limited soft power capacity.

Thirdly, the post-Georgian crisis period is marked by new Russian diplomatic ambitions, characterized by involvement in the peace processes in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, and by Medvedev's proposals for a new European security architecture. To what end? Moscow wants to reduce the damage to its image caused by its manifestation of hard power in August 2008, and to continue its competition against the US for influence in the post-Soviet space. This demands a return to the international system as a "responsible stakeholder," particularly in view of the diplomatic and financial cost of the Georgian conflict, against the backdrop of the economic crisis. For these reasons, new armed adventures now seem unlikely, but the crisis could exacerbate Russia's intransigence on the economic level, as shown by the January 2009 gas crisis with Ukraine.

Lastly, this crisis had a particular impact on the post-Soviet space, which seems to have gained a new dynamic. Firstly, with regard to frozen conflicts: although Georgia's separatist territories are at an impasse, the regulation of other conflicts (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh) is once again making progress after several years of stagnation. Moreover, by showing that violence has not disappeared from the region, the crisis had a dissuasive and stabilizing effect, particularly on Azerbaijan. Secondly, in response to Russia's diplomatic reinvestment in the area, the West has demonstrated a renewed effort—especially via the Eastern Partnership.

Proposing a new multilateral framework, the Partnership should rival that of the CIS and lead the countries concerned to rethink their position between Russia and the West. This raises the risk of creating new tensions with Moscow, which is struggling to put forward an alternative to the European model.