

Peace and Security in Europe: 12 Years of Georgia's Struggle for De-Occupation

On August 7, 2008 Russia embarked on a full-scale military aggression against Georgia in an attempt to redraw borders through force and strike a blow to the international rules-based order. For five days, Russia and Georgia engaged in a war which killed and wounded hundreds and caused immense destruction. The devastating effects of the war are still felt across the region today.

To mark the anniversary of Russia's invasion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, in partnership with the Middle East Institute's Frontier Europe Initiative, hosted *Peace and Security in Europe: 12 years of Georgia's Struggle for De-occupation*. Over two high-level sessions, the webinar assessed the legacy of the 2008 war, focusing on the long-term impacts on Euro-Atlantic security and implications of an unresolved Russia-Georgia dispute for peace and security in Europe.

Session one: Euro-Atlantic security: Legacy of the 2008 war

- H.E. David Zalkaliani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgia (keynote speaker)
- Hon. Adam D. Kinzinger, US Congressman; Co-Chair, Georgia Caucus, U.S. House of Representatives
- H.E. Marina Kaljurand, Member of the European Parliament; Chair, Delegation for Relations with South Caucasus, European Parliament
- H.E. Manuel Sarrazin, Member, Alliance 90/The Greens, German Bundestag
- H.E. Irakli Beraia, Chairperson of the Foreign Relations Committee, Parliament of Georgia
- Ms. Heather A. Conley, Senior vice president, Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, Center for Strategic and International Studies (moderator)

Session two: Is the European peace project thinkable without security on its Eastern Flank? Georgia in focus

- H.E. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; chief negotiator, Geneva International Discussions
- Neil Melvin, Director, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute
- Dr Florent Parmentier, Secretary General of Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), Sciences Po; Founder of Eurasia Prospective, Paris
- Liana Fix, Programme Director, International Affairs, Körber-Stiftung
- Olivier Vedrine, Professor; Director of New Europeans; Editor-in-Chief, Russian Monitor (moderator)

Session one: Euro-Atlantic security: Legacy of the 2008 war

Remarks

H.E. David Zalkaliani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgia

The minister reflected on it being 12 years since Russia's invasion of a sovereign country and attempt to redraw borders – an aggressive stance that destabilized security in the region. In spite of this, the minister was proud to note that Georgia has become a success story in European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, noting the visa free regime and free trade agreement with the EU as well as being an aspirant partner of NATO while contributing to global security. The minister also noted that against all odds, Georgia has shown democratic progress in terms of governance, constitutional reform, rule of law, and human rights.

The minister discussed Georgia's conflict resolution policy and adherence to the Geneva International Discussions (GID). He said that Georgia remains steadfast in its commitment to peace and security and compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, despite Russia showing no willingness to engage in meaningful progress. He used the Georgia Peace Initiative as an example of Georgia's commitment to building trust through reconciliation engagement.

Finally, the minister remarked on the importance of a consolidated international approach to serve as a deterrent factor. Georgia seeks the greater engagement of international friends to make decisive steps and urged that the conflict should stay high on the European security agenda. With every year that Russia's pressure on the Eastern Flank increases, it is more crucial that EU and NATO prioritize security on Europe's Eastern Flank.

Hon. Adam D. Kinzinger, US Congressman; Co-Chair, Georgia Caucus, U.S. House of Representatives

The Congressman argued Georgia should be a full member of NATO and said the fact Georgia is occupied should be an impetus (rather than deterrence) to membership. He noted that Georgia is among the strongest partners to the US in the war in Afghanistan and will continue to be an important partner in the future. He concluded by saying the US Congress, Senate and President stand firmly with Georgia.

H.E. Marina Kaljurand, Member of the European Parliament; Chair, Delegation for Relations with South Caucasus

The MEP discussed the conflict from an EU and European perspective. She noted that Western Europeans can grow tired of discussing Eastern Europe given there are so many problems at home but argued that we must keep Georgia and other Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries high on the agenda. She said it is crucial to continuously remind MEPs that the European Parliament is in strong support of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and noted that the Delegation for Relations with South Caucasus issued a joint statement with the Foreign Affairs Committee to reiterate these principles.

The MEP discussed Russia. She argued that the international community cannot change the aggressive and unpredictable Russia. She also suggested it was a mistake for the EU to return to normal relations with Russia before Russia fulfilled its obligations under the Ceasefire Agreement.

The MEP said Georgia is a top EaP country and said occupation has made Georgia's aspiration towards EU and Euro-Atlantic integration even stronger. She emphasized the need to continue on the path of reform through fair and peaceful elections in Georgia later this year, suggesting these elections will determine the future of the country.

H.E. Manuel Sarrazin, Member, Alliance 90/The Greens, German Bundestag

The MdB suggested Germany had underestimated what was happening in Georgia in 2008, but there is now a different perspective. He said the Russia-Georgia conflict should be a top priority, but this is difficult with Ukraine and the Middle East also on the agenda. He also said it was important to highlight Georgia's success story.

The MdB reiterated that the international community needs a new approach towards Russia and that Russian foreign policy must be firmly addressed.

The MdB concluded that the German elections will be important; the country needs to elect people who have heart and understanding for the region.

H.E. Irakli Beraia, Chairperson, Foreign Relations Committee, Parliament of Georgia

The member argued that 12 years of security, military, and humanitarian challenges should be seen within a wider definition of Russia's hybrid tactics.

The member explained that today, two regions of Georgia are fully militarized with bases, large-scale military exercises, 10 000 Russian troops and testing of the latest offensive weapons. All of this occurs in direct violation of the Ceasefire Agreement.

In 2019, occupied forces encroached one mile into Georgian territory, bringing the situation closer to a resumption of hostilities. The member argued that this kind of hotspot represents a destabilizing factor for European security as a whole and should be seen as part of Russia's wider strategy, rather than an isolated case. He noted that Russia is pushing forward with annexation in full disregard of international law, seeking integration into Russia's political, economic, and military systems.

The member discussed the humanitarian plight of those living in occupied territories. He said people are struggling with unbearable conditions – torture, restrictions on freedom of movement, illegal detentions, demolition of property – while Russia pursues a more aggressive policy of ethnic discrimination and violations of human rights. He said hundreds of thousands of IDPs have been expelled due to ethnic cleansing and Russia is impeding the work of international observers and human rights bodies. The member argued that COVID-19 has intensified disinformation and borderization. He said Georgia was committed to its Peaceful Conflict Resolution Policy, meaning reconciliation and confidence-building while improving conditions of those on the other side through trade opportunities, access to education, healthcare, and social benefits.

The member asked for stronger engagement and a result-oriented stance from the international community, especially the EU. The issue of Georgia should feature high on the international agenda and should be raised with Russia constantly. Russia will only comply with the Ceasefire Agreement if international pressure is constantly applied.

The member concluded that the only answer to occupation is a strong Georgian democracy, high standards for human rights, recognition of every ethnicity and individual, a strong economy, and full integration into the EU and NATO.

Questions

How do we move this agenda forward beyond discussion? How can we be more concrete in solving the challenge?

H.E. David Zalkaliani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgia

The GID format is important and based on three pillars: implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement; introduction of international security arrangements; and the return of IDPs and refugees. There have been more than 49 rounds of talks within GID with the co-chairmanship of EU, OSCE, UN and participation of US but it is extremely difficult to move forward because Russia is not complying. The only effective format is GID, but GID cannot be seen as isolated from the wider Russia picture. We need more united efforts from the international community.

How can the EU raise this issue higher on the agenda?

H.E. Marina Kaljurand, Member of the European Parliament; Chair, Delegation for Relations with South Caucasus

The European Parliament can continue to raise questions, have discussions, adopt amendments but there also needs to be pressure on the Commission side and from External Actions Services. All meetings with Russia should start or end by mentioning territorial integrity – we cannot get tired of this discussion. The present regime is difficult, but this doesn't mean we shouldn't continue mentioning Georgia. We haven't exhausted all policies on the table.

Reflections on Georgia's upcoming elections?

H.E. Irakli Beraia, Chairperson, Foreign Relations Committee, Parliament of Georgia

Georgia's top priority is a strong democracy. Democracy is the only correct answer to occupation, disinformation and hybrid warfare. This will also increase the attractiveness of Georgia for citizens on the other side of the occupation line. Georgia is pursuing an ambitious political agenda focused on democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Every local, parliamentary and presidential election in Georgia has been conducted with better democratic standards than the previous. Autumn is an

important test for Georgia – these elections must be held to the highest democratic standards the country has seen yet.

Session two: Is the European peace project thinkable without security on its Eastern Flank? Georgia in focus

Remarks

H.E. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; chief negotiator, Geneva International Discussions

The Deputy Minister noted that after 12 years, there are still no incentives for Russia to move forward on a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Russia continues to take destructive steps and has not sent signals that it is willing to make progress. We are in a deadlock, particularly in relation to the Ceasefire Agreement. When Georgia raises issues within the GID format – the humanitarian situation, IDPs etc. – Russia deflects attention or opts out of the negotiation process.

The Deputy Minister noted that the Ceasefire Agreement is not a perfect agreement, it's simply returning to the status quo of before 2008. But implementation of the Agreement is the cornerstone of a peaceful conflict resolution. Russia signed a legal obligation to the international community but is undermining this Agreement and showing it doesn't respect its international obligations, especially in terms of security.

The Deputy Minister urged stronger engagement from the international community and consistent reminders to Russia of its obligations. He said we must remind Russia that without a proper peace process in Eastern Europe, Russia will not be considered a responsible member of the international community.

Neil Melvin, Director, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute

Melvin discussed the role of the UK in European security, especially in the context of Brexit. With Brexit, the UK is aiming to craft a role for itself outside of the EU while remaining committed to European security. The UK has launched an integrated review on foreign defense and security policies (tied to a spending review) and has made departmental changes. What has emerged is a clearer national perspective.

Melvin explained that following WWII, there were three pillars to UK foreign security policy: Euro integration, commitment to the transatlantic relationship through NATO, and commitment to global multilateralism. The second two pillars will remain in place while the first is set aside.

Melvin noted that we are starting to see shifts in the European security model. For example, the E3 format with the UK, France and Germany (which has subsequently expanded out). These formats are a flexible, problem-driven way of managing international security issues, including when there isn't

European consensus. It is worth considering how these mini-lateral, flexi-lateral formats, which are non-competitive for NATO, can address Black Sea security issues.

Melvin suggested the UK will maintain solidarity with the Black Sea region and continue to develop good relationships, especially with Georgia and Ukraine. The UK will maintain a commitment to the established principles of European security, territorial integrity and to solving regional conflicts. Turkey remains an essential part of Black Sea security and the UK should help mediate Turkish relationships.

Melvin argued we need an effective European response to the geopolitical environment, one that is less reactive and takes more of a leading role. New formats are an opportunity for Europe to become a more strategic actor. Meanwhile, US focus on Europe is likely to diminish as the UK takes on a greater role, especially in terms of Russia as a whole.

Dr. Florent Parmentier, Secretary General of Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), Sciences Po; Founder of Eurasia Prospective, Paris

Parmentier discussed the parallels between Moldova and Georgia. He said the main difference is that Moldova does not want to pursue a pro-NATO policy, although does have a clear pro-EU agenda. Another difference is that there is now hope in terms of military cooperation to change the situation on the ground. For Moldova, more NATO troops won't change the status quo in the way Moldova wants it to change. Moldova wants to create new business links with Transnistria.

Parmentier explained that many Moldovans believe that while it's important to reunite the country, this should not be done in a way that separatists would have a strong platform and voice in a new state. It's ambitious to think that Moldova can be seen as a place with workable solutions that can be adopted elsewhere. Russia wants to maintain leverage in Moldova so while reunification is possible, Russia would keep influence in Transnistria. The question is: Does Moldova reunite with Russian influence or develop a pro-EU approach and then try to find support.

Questions

Is a peaceful resolution interdependent with other conflicts in the EaP?

H.E. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; chief negotiator, Geneva International Discussions

All conflicts are interrelated in the sense that the major source is from one center – Russia. When talking about conflict in Ukraine, the South Caucasus, Transnistria, all of them feature the same similarities and are part of the same hybrid strategy of Russia. It's possible they are also managed and orchestrated by the same people in Russia. While the international community discusses each conflict in isolation, Russia views them as part of one strategy to undermine the European security architecture.

Neil Melvin, Director, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute

The conflicts are interrelated, but at the same time each have their own dynamics and local issues. We have reached a point where we need a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond the European security sphere. For the UK, Brexit may provide a new dynamism around European strategic security that enables the country to look more comprehensively and take more robust action (beyond reliance on sanctions and declarations).

Is one solution a new Normandy format that includes Moldova and Georgia?

Liana Fix, Programme Director, International Affairs, Körber-Stiftung

Following Ukraine, Georgia was pushed down the agenda. From a Berlin perspective, leadership abilities are overstretched and while there is willingness and capacity for conflict mitigation in Ukraine, there may not be enough for Georgia and Moldova. There is fatigue in Berlin, with some asking, 'what can we still do and how much can we invest?'

Do we need a reframing of the Geneva International Discussions?

H.E. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; chief negotiator, Geneva International Discussions

Georgia does not participate in dialogue with proxy regimes, especially within the GID format. The GID was created to implement the Ceasefire Agreement; the fact that Russia brings representatives of its occupation regimes demonstrates that it is undermining the process. Russia wants to talk about everything except implementing the Agreement.

There are two components to Georgia's peace policy: one is dealing with Russia and its occupation forces on-the-ground and the other is engagement with the population of occupied territories (outside of GID). In parallel to the efforts for de-occupation, Georgia is committed to a reconciliation and engagement policy, aimed at the de-isolation of these communities and building links across the dividing line, community to community.

Neil Melvin, Director, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute

The GID format can be frustrating and slow to make progress, but it's important the format continues. The GID provide a way to hold Russia accountable for conflict and for those suffering, the format is a way of addressing some of their concerns. But it's unlikely a solution will emerge from these formats. We need a combination of strengthening deterrence mechanisms and finding strategic opportunities when Russia is forced to do a deal in some way (i.e. when Russia is overstretched, domestic instability). Negotiations on their own aren't enough but are fundamental in between the other elements.

Greater involvement from the EU and France in creating incentives for Russia to implement the Agreement facilitated by the former French President?

Dr. Florent Parmentier, Secretary General of Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), Sciences Po;
Founder of Eurasia Prospective, Paris

While critics say President Macron is naïve, we need to engage *and* deter to manage Russia. If we are not satisfied with the status quo, we must consider alternative options. Macron's policy change is subtle rather than a U-Turn. His view is that we should speak with everyone and find ways to move further, but his policy won't deliver overnight. For the sake of European collective security, we must find a center of gravity between deterrence and engagement.

Liana Fix, Programme Director, International Affairs, Körber-Stiftung

There is a 'wait and see' approach in Germany, with the belief that everyone has already tried to reset relations with Russia and there's no reason it will work with Macron. But it can't hurt, as long as Macron stays with sanctions. What's interesting is that Macron sees Russia in a more geopolitical context – outreach to Russia is an attempt to bring Russia back from China.

Neil Melvin, Director, International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute

The UK is skeptical about Macron's initiative. While welcoming of Macron's raising of the Russia-China relationship, there is also a danger that this plays into Russia advocating for the great powers dividing the world amongst themselves (spheres of influence). We need to be clear what dialogue with Russia is about and where the red lines are.

Dr. Florent Parmentier, Secretary General of Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), Sciences Po,
Founder of Eurasia Prospective, Paris

Sanctions, sovereignty of the Eastern Partners, and security within Europe — these are the red lines.

H.E. Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia; chief negotiator, Geneva
International Discussions

There was skepticism and fear within Eastern Europe that Macron's engagement with Russia might be at the expense of the interests of Eastern European countries. But I see it also as an opportunity. In 2008, France played a special role in mediating the Ceasefire Agreement between Georgia and Russia as an EU President Country. The obligations under the Agreement undertaken by Russia were promised not only to Georgia but also to the EU and France. So, we expect talks with Russia will include implementation of its obligations.