

GEORGIA-RUSSIA: IN SEARCH OF CIVILIZED RELATIONS

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The relations between Georgia and Russia, which can hardly be called well-ordered, have escalated beyond the bilateral level to become a problem that has caught international attention. Some forces are trying to profit from the

present state of affairs, while others are doing their best to bring order to bilateral relations. To achieve this we should go to the root of the current tension. It is highly tempting to find a scapegoat, but I cannot describe myself as an impartial

observer qualified to do this. It is equally wrong “to spread the guilt between the sides” and boast of an objective and unbiased approach. I have undertaken here to discuss the key issues responsible for the current situation and the far from simple quest for a model of civilized relations.

Relations Based on Accusations

The time has come to bury the past and take a look at the post-Soviet period, during which, it must be said, Georgian-Russian relations have been neither normal nor civilized. Russia is convinced that Georgia’s efforts to move closer to the West, its close contacts with the United States, and its loudly announced intention to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures are nothing more than manifestations of its hostile anti-Russian policy. Georgia is firmly convinced that Russia has not yet abandoned its imperial designs in the republic and is guilty of double standards: while paying lip service to Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, it is not only actively supporting the breakaway regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, but also intends to annex both regions.

The publications (mainly those that appear in both countries) on Georgian-Russian relations brim with mutual accusations and reproaches. To sort things out, we should first discuss the main stereotypes and myths: to achieve civilized and rational relations we should expose and push them aside.

“Ungrateful Georgians” and the “the enemy disguised as a friend.” The following opinions in Russia have survived the death of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union to be reproduced in our time:

- Russia saved Georgia from aggressive Muslim Turkey and Iran; but for Russia, Georgia and the Georgians would have perished;
- Georgia joined Russia on its own free will; it was never annexed. Russian politicians were especially irritated by the statement by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, who likened the two centuries of Russia’s domination in Georgia to the Tartar-Mongol yoke, the hardships of which have not yet been forgotten in Russia.

The above causes a lot of irritation among the Georgians: the Georgian czars did ask Russia, another Christian Orthodox country, for help to drive the enemies back and to unite Georgia. Instead, in 1801, in flagrant violation of the agreement, Russia annexed Georgia; later, in 1921, Soviet Russia occupied the Democratic Republic of Georgia and made it part of the Soviet Union.

“Bad” Georgians in Russia’s history. The Russian media are fond of accusing Stalin and Beria of making Russia a totalitarian state; the pair of them are held responsible for the repressions against the Abkhazians, Meskhetian Turks, Chechens, and other nationalities. Some lay the blame for the totalitarian empire on Stalin; others believe that Shevardnadze was responsible for its end. In both cases, Georgia is seen as the main culprit. There is the opinion that by supporting the Abkhazian separatists, Russia “was taking revenge on the very much hated Shevardnadze, who destroyed the Soviet Union.”

Some of the Western media seem to accept this thesis. A Western journalist, who used to write a lot about the relations between Georgia and Russia, pointed out: “Stalin, who was a Georgian, made Abkhazia part of Georgia.” What is “Soviet Abkhazia” and what happened earlier? The author seemed to ignore that “Stalin, who was a Georgian,” was among those who occupied and annexed the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

Georgia is a “failed state.” The Russian political circles are firmly convinced that Georgia is an artificial structure “within the borders outlined by Soviet power,” an ethnic mosaic, to be more exact. It survived as an administrative unit in the empire, but it is hardly viable as an independent state and may even fall apart.

This is one of the pet ideas of Russia’s imperial thought of today; it serves as the basis for all sorts of geopolitical projects mainly responsible for Russia’s aggressive treatment of Georgia.

In Georgia, this and similar statements are taken as another sign of Russia's hostility toward Georgia. Today, there is no serious political force on the Georgian scene that could support Russia, not the West.

The separatist regimes as a means of keeping Georgia in check. The thesis of Georgia's "lack of vital capacity" and its unreliability from Russia's point of view are two reasons why Russia supports the separatist regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian analysts are quite open about this: the regimes are being used to bring pressure on Georgia and its policy, even though from time to time more sober-minded experts describe Russia's support of Abkhazia "as not the wisest of steps:" it drove Georgia away from Russia and added fuel to the smoldering separatist sentiments in the Northern Caucasus.

The intention to join NATO as a manifestation of anti-Russian policy. Today, Georgia is mainly accused of seeking NATO membership—something that speaks of its "anti-Russian" intentions. Georgia, in turn, looks at the Alliance as a guarantee of its security.

The "pro-Western" elites and the "pro-Russian" public. The Russian media are fond of talking about the very limited segment of those who love the West in the pro-Western CIS countries. It is alleged that pro-Western sentiments are typical of a handful of politicians with no influence with or popularity among the public. The masses, who found themselves in appalling conditions thanks to the misrule of these people, look fondly at Russia. This is one of Russia's gravest blunders: during the post-Soviet elections, those politicians who were accused of pro-Russian sentiments stood no chance. The sanctions against Georgia and escalated tension in bilateral relations merely add more points to the people at the helm. The Georgian opposition accuses the government of escalating tension in Georgian-Russian relations to detract public attention from domestic to foreign problems, thus pushing critically-minded people to cast their votes for the ruling political force.

Georgia does not want "normal" relations with Russia. From time to time Russian journalists start moaning that normal relations with Georgia seem impossible; there is "nostalgia" over the "common fraternal past," when stability and well-being were taken for granted. More likely than not, "normality" is interpreted as Georgia's close integration with Russia. In Georgia, however, people feel that it is Russia that does not want normal relations with Georgia.

These and other myths and stereotypes still loom high in contemporary politics and in the relations between the two countries.¹

Vladimir Putin as Agha Muhammad Khan

Not infrequently, the past five centuries of uninterrupted relations are evoked to explain the present developments. In recent history, however, 9 April, 1989 is the key event in the chain of events that brought the two countries to their present relations. On that day, a peaceful rally and the Soviet riot police clashed in front of the House of Government on Rustaveli Prospekt. The savage reprisal determined much, if not all, of Georgia's future and its relations with Russia.

The Russian empire, alias the Soviet Union, is held responsible for the tragedy. "The nation cherishes the memory of those who died on that terrible night at the hands of savage riot policemen as

¹ For several years now, the Russian public has been treated to negative information about Georgia spread by the political and journalist communities. There is a commonly shared opinion (53 percent of the polled) that Georgia is the most dangerous country to live in or to travel across. It is the third unwelcome and unfriendly country in the world (after the United States and China). The All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Studies obtained these results during a sociological poll of 15-16 April, 2006 in six regions of Russia from 1,600 polled (see: *Sakartvelos respublika* (The Republic of Georgia), 26 April, 2006).

heroes,” wrote one of the Georgian newspapers on the eve of the 17th anniversary of the event.² On the same day, another newspaper pointed out that even though the riot policemen were only armed with shovels and were Russians, the army “was not Russian, it was the Soviet army” and “had nothing to do with Russia and the Russian people.”³ Still, few people in Georgia are prepared to accept the thesis about “Russia subjugated by the Soviet Union.”

It is hard to say what the Soviet leaders expected to achieve by moving the army against the peaceful rally. They probably intended to scare the Georgians and discourage others with the punishment. However, this merely accelerated the processes the Kremlin hoped to stem.

On 9 April, 1989, Moscow refused to talk to the Georgian public, which wanted independence; it still refuses to talk to Georgia today. The “confrontational model” of those days still dominates the relations between the two countries. Georgia suffered a lot because of this, yet Russia failed to restore its former influence; Georgia moved further away from Russia.

The post-Soviet period of Georgian-Russian relations brings to mind another period: the late 18th century, when Iran was losing its grip on the Southern Caucasus. In 1795, in an effort to fend off the Russian Empire, Iranian ruler Agha Muhammad Khan attacked the East Georgian kingdom, which tried to protect itself with Russia’s help. Assured of Russia’s help, Georgian czar Irakly II was ill-prepared for what followed. By attacking Georgia, the Iranian shah hoped to stop Russia, the results proved to be opposite: weakened Georgia fell an easy prey to Russia, while the Iranian invasion increased anti-Iranian sentiments in Georgia.⁴ The Iranian shah merely accelerated his country’s retreat from the Southern Caucasus. Iran would have acted wiser if, unable to conquer Georgia and yet willing to keep Russia away, it had strengthened Georgia instead of attacking it—Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus would have been made harder, if not impossible.

In the post-Soviet period, Russia resembles Iran of the late 18th century: it is trying to preserve its exclusive rights in the region with inadequate means; other world actors with their own interests will never allow Russia to restore its domination. To strengthen its position Russia has opted for the measures tested by Agha Khan at one time: struggle against Georgia, support of the separatist regimes, and sanctions. The architects of this policy expected to keep Georgia within Russia’s sphere of influence and achieved the opposite result: there were no grounds for a pro-Russian orientation in Georgia, while its pro-Western orientation grew even stronger.

Strange as it may seem, Russia’s Georgian policy would have been much more successful had it abandoned the separatist regimes to their fate. This would have defused the tension; the lifted economic sanctions would have revived the importance of the Russian market—Georgia has not yet found alternative markets for its products. The very low level of confidence in the northern neighbor affects Georgia’s policy to a great extent.

How Russia Can be Forced to Recognize Its Interests

There are few, if any, people in Georgia who do not want better relations with Russia. Cultural and historical links apart, the Russia Federation is Georgia’s largest economic partner, normal relations with which would have added vigor to the Georgian economy.

² See: *Sakartvelos respublika*, 8 April, 2006.

³ *Svobodnaia Gruzia*, 8 April, 2006.

⁴ At that time, Russia was an enemy: Georgians repeatedly (in 1802, 1804, 1812-1813) rebelled against it; Iran was an even greater enemy: Prince of Kartli-Kakhetia Alexander, who fled to Iran, called on his supporters in Georgia to rebel and assured them that he would not bring Iranian troops.

Georgia wonders what Russia wants. Some of the Georgian public and politicians are convinced that Georgia should first understand what Russia wants, then do everything it wants to achieve complete harmony.

Russian politicians and analysts who speak about Georgia and the Georgian media are often insulting and aggressive. Vice Speaker of the Russian State Duma Lyubov Sliska, for example, dismissed Georgia as a small country unworthy of sorting out its affairs at the international level: “We should grow accustomed to the thought that when dealing with a country with a population of 2.5 million and no larger than a Russian province, Russia should not raise its relations with it to the international level as it does when dealing with large and serious states.”⁵ This was said at an OSCE session in reply to the statements of the Georgian parliamentarians.

In September 2003, shortly before the Rose Revolution, *The Wall Street Journal* published a fairly long list of Moscow’s demands, which ran contrary to the interests of the United States and the West as a whole: Russia wants Georgia to abandon its politically and military cooperation with Washington and NATO; to let the Russian bases remain in Georgia for an indefinite period of time; to join the Russia-controlled Eurasian Alliance and the CSTO; and to become incorporated into the Russian transport and pipeline system.⁶

In plain words, this meant that Georgia should abandon its pro-Western orientation. It should be said that Georgia tried to establish good relations with Russia and take its interests into account. In 1994, having suffered defeat in Abkhazia, Eduard Shevardnadze signed a framework agreement on friendship and cooperation with Russia, a new version of the Treaty of Georgievsk.⁷ Having joined the CIS and agreed to the Russian bases’ continued presence in Georgia, the country remained in Russia’s “sphere of influence.” In exchange, Georgia asked Russia to help it develop its own army and restore its territorial integrity. This meant that Russia should have abandoned the breakaway regions—a compromise that Russia rejected as unpalatable.

Let’s take a closer look at what *The Wall Street Journal* says. Some of the demands are obsolete: Russia removed its bases from Georgia; the same can be said about much of the rest. This means that Russia’s policy is cutting back the number of its interests, which could have been preserved through a compromise.

Today, the Russian Federation is facing a choice that will determine the future of the Caucasus: it will either continue supporting the separatist regimes and keep trying to join them to Russia, which will create more economic problems for Georgia, etc. In response, Georgia will continue pushing Russia to the north of the Caucasian Range; it is moving toward NATO and is trying to involve other states in Caucasian affairs to decrease Russia’s influence.

There is another option: Moscow will not interfere with restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity, which will settle the most painful issue of bilateral relations. Cooperation will surge ahead, while Georgia will pay much more attention to Russia’s real interests in the region.

Until quite recently Moscow was not ready to make the U-turn—in fact, it had not much time to ponder on it.

The Fresh Start that Failed

We know what Russia wants of Georgia, but the answer is hardly conducive to better bilateral relations. Some time ago, Georgia finally realized that Russia’s true interests can be described as: a

⁵ *Sakartvelos respublika*, 3 July, 2005.

⁶ See: *24 saati* (24 hours), 23 September, 2003.

⁷ Under the agreement of 1783 between Irakly II and Catherine II, the Georgian czar pledged to gear his foreign policy to Russia’s interests and take part in all the wars that Russia waged in the Caucasus. In its turn, Russia pledged to keep an armed unit (of two battalions) in Georgia, come to Irakly’s help in the event of an attack, and support his efforts to unify Georgia. Very soon, however, Russia violated the treaty by annexing the Kartli-Kakhetia kingdom in 1801.

united, strong, and stable Georgia on Russia's southern borders, rather than a hostile country drawn into conflicts. The problem is how can we convince Russia.

After the Rose Revolution, Georgia's new leaders invited Russia to start everything from scratch; they tried to convince the Russian leaders that a "united and strong Georgia" on their country's southern borders was in their interests. The Georgian side interpreted "the fresh start" as an "equal partnership" between the two countries. Georgia pledged to recognize and take into account Russia's interests in the Caucasus, if they did not contradict the republic's state interests.

The new Georgian leaders offered a plan of "wide open doors" for Russian capital in exchange for Russia's discontinued support of the separatist regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Immediately after the downfall of the Abashidze regime in Ajaria, President Saakashvili announced that the Russian capital in the region was absolutely safe and promised the same for the Russian money invested in Abkhazia when the republic returned to Georgia.

The policy that, on the one hand, offered Russia a large chunk of Georgia's economy in an effort to pacify it and, on the other, presupposed integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures proved to be contradictory to a certain extent and failed to remove the problems in the countries' bilateral relations. Most of the facilities offered for privatization were bought by Russians, while political tension continued. The issues related to the conflict regions remained pending. The West found it hard to accept Russia's economic plans in Georgia. For example, Gazprom, Russia's main political tool, wanted to buy Georgia's main gas pipeline; some people in the Georgian governments were lobbying its interests—but the Western experts and the United States were against this.⁸

Economic Sanctions Against Georgia

Those who accuse Georgia of anti-Russian provocations refer, first and foremost, to the detention of Russian servicemen suspected of spying.⁹ The critics say that the noise and PR campaign that accompanied the arrest were excessive. This is probably true—a small state should not produce a lot of noise. Russia's retaliation was inadequate in scope and duration. The sanctions are still in place; they were introduced even before the Russian officers were arrested, and were not lifted when they were transferred to Russia.

Russian politicians and experts are fond of saying that Georgia's economy depends on Moscow and that economic tools will "sober up" the country" or "bring pro-Russian people to power." The Russian Federation was Georgia's main economic partner,¹⁰ which made the blow very painful indeed.

This was a stage-by-stage process: first the visa regime, then the Russian market was closed to the main items of Georgia's export (fruit, herbs, mineral water, wine, and liquor), then the number of

⁸ Finally, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Nino Burjanadze openly announced: "Any minister who starts talking about privatization of the gas pipeline will be fired immediately," while the U.S. Administration gave the Georgian authorities enough money under the Millennium Program to restore the pipeline.

⁹ The accusations against the Russian servicemen channeled bilateral relations in a different direction. "By accusing the Russian servicemen of terrorism," wrote Russian newspaper *Kommersant* on 25 July, 2005, "Georgia no longer expected bilateral relations to improve." In actual fact, Georgian politicians said in chorus that they did not want confrontation with Russia and that they hoped the competent Russian services would help their Georgian colleagues to detain those directly involved in planning and carrying out terrorist acts in Georgia (see: *Akhali taoba* (The New Generation), 28 July, 2005).

¹⁰ Between 1994 and 2003, trade turnover with Russia rose 5.6-fold: from \$40 to 225 million. Georgian export increased five-fold: from \$14 to 75.5 million (see: *Iveria*, 6 August, 2004). On the whole, out of the total volume of exported Georgian products worth \$445 million, \$76 million went to Russia, or 17 percent of the total. Seventy-five percent of exported wine and 80 percent of exported mineral water went to Russia.

Georgians allowed to work in Russia was cut back and illegal migrants were deported. These were measures designed to create serious problems for the Georgian leaders.

The Russian, Georgian, and Western media were quite open about the final goal: removal of Mikhail Saakashvili. *The Daily Telegraph* of Britain wrote that Moscow's measures should be interpreted as an attempt to undermine Georgia's economy and remove President Saakashvili.¹¹ The plan failed: the Georgian economy survived together with the president, who became even more popular.

On 22 January, 2007, President Putin restored diplomatic relations to their former scope by returning Russian Ambassador Viacheslav Kovalenko to Tbilisi. This triggered talks in the Russian media about Russia's defeat in economic warfare. *Kommersant*, for example, wrote that Putin changed his mind about punishing Georgia because the sanctions proved useless and even made Georgia more independent: "The situation in Georgia is not as awful as Moscow would have liked it to be" and "the anti-Georgian campaign seriously undermined Russia's image in Georgia and the West, as well as the position of the pro-Russian politicians in Georgia. The population became even more resolved to join NATO."¹²

The Georgian media pointed to the country's serious losses: the deported Georgians, the Russian market closed to Georgian products, and the escalated conflicts. *Akhali taoba* wrote: "Let us hope that the return of Viacheslav Kovalenko will not be taken as Georgia's victory and Russia's retreat. We all know that this was done because of big politics."¹³

Kommersant wrote that on 13 January, 2007 the RF Security Council decided the economic sanctions were inefficient and "the Kremlin's expectations that they would precipitate the fall of Saakashvili and his Cabinet had proven wrong."¹⁴

Part of the Russian political and analyst community insists that Russia never wanted to remove the Georgian president. Sergey Markov, Director of the Institute of Political Studies, has pointed out: "The main aim of the economic sanctions was achieved." He argued that they were intended to prevent Georgia's possible military operations in South Ossetia.¹⁵ Other aims were also achieved: the detained Russian officers were freed, the defense minister who "favored a military operation" was fired, the belligerent rhetoric subdued, etc.

Chairman of the State Duma Committee for the CIS Affairs and Relations with Fellow Countrymen Abroad Andrey Kokoshin went as far as saying that the economic sanctions had wakened up the West and that "the Western partners were no longer pushing Georgia against Russia."¹⁶

Contrary to the expectations, the economic sanctions were not lifted. Experts believe that there is no hope of better relations with Russia and that both countries are suffering from this, however, Georgia was hit worse than Russia.

Former Foreign Minister of Georgia Irakly Menagarishvili believes that the confrontation is being fed not so much by the subjective factors as by both countries' highly divergent development vectors. This means that until the Caucasian region acquires its final shape, relations will remain in turmoil. The former foreign minister concluded: "Russia should accept Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice as final and immutable. Georgia, in turn, should assure Russia that its membership in NATO will not damage Russia's interests."¹⁷

Today, Russia is not ready to accept Georgia's Euro-Atlantic bias and NATO membership; domestic problems are adding to the tension between the two countries. Former Georgian Ambassa-

¹¹ See: *Akhali versia* (The New Version), 24-25 January, 2007.

¹² *Alia*, 20-21 January, 2007; *Akhali taoba*, 20 January, 2007.

¹³ *Akhali taoba*, 20 January, 2007.

¹⁴ *Kommersant*, 19 January, 2007.

¹⁵ *Rezonans*, 25 January, 2007.

¹⁶ *Akhali versia*, 24-25 January, 2007.

¹⁷ *24 saati*, 7 March, 2007.

dor to the Russian Federation Zurab Abashidze believes that in view of the coming presidential election, the Kremlin might need Georgia as an enemy. He is calling on the Georgian leaders to tread cautiously in Moscow's direction in order to prevent new crises.

There is the opinion in Georgia that the Georgian leaders are profiting from the tension to a certain extent. "The Russians need a Caucasian enemy, while the Georgians benefit from a non-European enemy. If Russia did not exist, it would have been invented," writes Ramaz Sakvarelidze. Giya Khukhashvili agrees with that: "This confrontation improved the personal ratings of Mikhail Saakashvili and Vladimir Putin, but damaged the situation in both countries."¹⁸

The economy is suffering because of the political confrontation, and Georgia's losses are much greater: the country lost a capacious market and an important supplier of raw materials.

Today, Russia is out to show Georgia its importance by using economic tools; this is done in a rude and even insulting way, which breeds nothing but the desire to move as far as possible from this country.

Georgia's Conditions for Russia's WTO Membership

Russia's WTO membership is another stumbling block in the two countries' bilateral relations: to join it Russia needs Georgia's consent, while the latter insists on Russia fulfilling its earlier self-assumed obligations to legalize the checkpoints on the Psou River (the Abkhazian stretch of the Georgian-Russian border) and at the Roksky tunnel (the Osset stretch of the same border). Today, Russia is using the points to maintain contacts with the breakaway regimes. Georgia insists that in their present form the checkpoints are illegal and that it should be allowed to send its customs services and border guards to man them. Foreign Minister of Georgia Gela Bezhushvili has promised: "By fulfilling this condition Russia will remove Georgia's objections to its WTO membership."¹⁹

The Georgian leaders are very firm: if the conditions are not fulfilled, Tbilisi will never agree on Russia joining the WTO. Russia, in turn, seems absolutely unmoved: Russia believes that it will join the WTO without Georgia's consent—the latter's position will simply be ignored. It is hoped that the United States and the West, which want to see Russia in the WTO, will put pressure on Georgia.

Some Georgian experts are puzzled by the Georgian leaders' position on Russia's WTO membership. Instead, they think, Georgia should stress the point of returning to the Russian market rather than concentrating on the checkpoints, which Russia would never accept.

The Georgian leaders intend to stick to their guns. This is a rigid position, however, it has moved the key problem to the forefront. Tbilisi wants Moscow to demonstrate with practical steps that it recognizes Georgia's territorial integrity. Whether the republic can defend its position is another matter.

"Russia Wants to See Georgia a Neutral State"

When removing its military bases from Georgia, Russia tried to obtain the promise that no foreign bases would appear on its territory in the future; the Russian leaders even wanted to include this

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ *24 saati*, 26 January, 2007.

obligation in the framework agreement between the two countries. In December 2005, a representative of the Russian embassy in Georgia told the ITAR-TASS agency that the text had been agreed upon, apart from the point under which Georgia pledged not to deploy foreign troops on its territory.²⁰ The Georgians were dead set against this, but agreed to ask the parliament to vote on a ban on the deployment of foreign military facilities on Georgian territory.

This was closely followed by a worsening of relations once more and suspension of the talks. On 6 February, 2007, after returning to Tbilisi, Russian Ambassador Kovalenko called a press conference, which was broadcast to Moscow. The most memorable of his statements was: “Russia wants to see Georgia a neutral state.”²¹ For the local experts, this sounded like nothing short of an ultimatum.²²

Viacheslav Kovalenko pointed out that Georgia had the unique chance to become a neutral state because “it has no belligerent neighbors” and went on to say: “Russia has no egotistical interests in Georgia, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia,” “neutrality should not be interpreted as restrictions on contacts with the West,” Georgia would profit from neutrality, said he, it was a great advantage, which many countries sought and from which they profited.²³

This statement, which was not accompanied by any suggestions regarding the most burning issues, caused a negative response. As long as Russia continues to support the separatist regimes and avoid any practical steps toward restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity, it will not succeed in preventing Georgia’s NATO membership. From time to time the Georgian leaders state that Georgia will never abandon its course toward the Alliance—most of the opposition agrees with them on this point.

Will Russia Take the “Risky Step”?

The developments in the Caucasus might be closely related with what happens in Kosovo. Russian officials stated long ago that if Kosovo acquires its independence in disregard of Serbia’s position, this will become a precedent to be applied to the post-Soviet conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Certain Russian political analysts have been urging the Russian leaders to do this.

Georgian experts think this might prove “too risky”—the repercussions will be hard to predict. Georgian-Russian relations will become even worse: foreign political observers and scientists agree that the peak of bilateral tension is still to come.²⁴

It is highly naïve to believe that, after taking Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region from Georgia, Russia will be pacified enough to sort things out with “the rest of Georgia” in a civilized way. The victory of Russia’s policy in the breakaway regions will totally discredit the Western orientation not only in Georgia, but also across the Southern Caucasus and will spell the defeat of American, and Western, policy in the post-Soviet South.

Had peacekeepers other than Russian been stationed in the separatist regions, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali would have been much more pliable and progress in the desired direction much more noticeable.

²⁰ See: *Rezonans*, 1 December, 2005.

²¹ “Rossia khotela by videt’ Gruziiu neytral’noy stranoy,” available at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/778077.html>], 6 February, 2007.

²² See: *24 saati*, 7 February, 2007.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See, for example, an article by Lithuanian political scientist Saulus Lebauskas, in which he predicted an armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in 2008 (*Delfi*, 21 June, 2007).