



Of neighbours, partners and EU aspirants: The case of EU-Georgia relations since the 2003 Rose Revolution

Summary

This background brief examines the relations between the EU and its eastern neighbours through a case study of Georgia. What are the underpinnings and factors driving EU policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP)? Is EU membership for these eastern countries the end goal? Georgia, a small country in the South Caucasus, has been thrust into the limelight in the wake of its 2003 Rose Revolution and its 2008 war with Russia, with implications for EU-Georgia relations. This relationship is fraught with asymmetric expectations – Georgia has been more than won over as part of the EU’s ‘ring of friends’, evident in how its leaders and people have expressed a desire to join the EU. However there is currently little if any reciprocal desire on the EU’s part, and understandably so, given the persistence of Georgia’s territorial conflicts.

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A map of Georgia showing the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (shaded) in the aftermath of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war (Source: public domain).

Cover Photo: The Rose Revolution: demonstrations at the Mayor's Office, Freedom Square, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2003.
 (Source: Government of Georgia Official Photo, released into the public domain)

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1. Reconceptualising the EU's eastern neighbourhood after 2004

Introduction

The 2004 enlargement round of the European Union was the largest in its history with ten new countries joining – Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. This was shortly followed by the accession of two more countries, Bulgaria and Romania, in 2007.

Such a rapid expansion of the EU's borders was met with the 'objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and our neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all'.² The situation surrounding the borders between Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania has often been cited in this regard. When the latter two Baltic states joined the EU on 1 May 2004, their shared borders with Belarus became an EU border, literally, in a single stroke. This had the effect of disrupting

normal trade relations and immigration flows with the implementation of new, tighter border controls as required by the EU.³

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was conceived in the lead-up to the 2004 enlargement round. This was followed a few years later by the complementary Eastern Partnership (EaP) for the EU's eastern neighbourhood – that is, the countries formerly termed the 'Eastern Bloc' and those which were formerly republics of the Soviet Union. Unlike the countries of the former Yugoslavia in South East Europe, for which separate agreements under the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) were concluded, the partner countries covered by the ENP are considered less ready for EU membership, if eligible at all.

Despite this, questions have still been raised as to whether the ENP is a programme intended to prepare some of the EU's neighbours for EU membership eventually. Such questions arise in light of Article 49 of the Maastricht Treaty, which states that any 'European country' that meets the Copenhagen criteria can qualify for EU accession. Does Georgia meet the cultural and political criteria of 'European-ness' to become a member of the EU if it indeed fulfils the Copenhagen criteria in future?

¹ Correspondence email: euclhy@nus.edu.sg. The author wishes to thank the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Annual Fund; the Government of Georgia; James Barnett and the LSE Grimshaw International Relations Club; Dr Hans Gutbrod and the Caucasus Research Resource Center, Georgia; and Dr Yeo Lay Hwee and Assoc Prof Barnard Turner of the EU Centre in Singapore. Nevertheless, the views and interpretation of events presented in this brief are solely the author's, and do not necessarily reflect the positions held by these institutions and persons.

² European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy, *The Policy: What is the European Neighbourhood Policy?* (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011)

³ Since 2004, these border issues have been specifically addressed by Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes as part of the ENP. See European Commission, Development Aid and Co-operation – EuropeAid, *Cross-Border Cooperation within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)* (http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/index_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a foreign policy tool of the EU that provides the framework for relations with 16 of its neighbours – Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

In the European Commission's own words, the ENP 'goes beyond existing relationships to offer political association and deeper economic integration, increased mobility and more people-to-people contacts'.⁴ The idea for the ENP was initiated with the European Commission's Communication on 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours',⁵ the conclusions of which were subsequently endorsed by the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003. Shortly after the ten new member states joined the EU on 1 May 2004, a Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy was released.⁶ Subsequently a review of the ENP in 2011 called for a new approach involving a push to conclude Association Agreements with countries in the eastern neighbourhood and to pursue further democratisation, in the communication document 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood'.⁷

⁴ European Commission: European Neighbourhood Policy. *The Policy: What is the European Neighbourhood Policy?*

⁵ European Commission (2003) *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104 final, 11/3/2003.

⁶ European Commission (2004) *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, COM (2004) 373 final, 15/5/2004.

⁷ European Commission (2011) *A new response to a changing neighbourhood: a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, COM(2011) 303, 25/5/2011.

While the ENP is an umbrella policy for its 16 neighbours, it operates chiefly as bilateral partnerships through Action Plans agreed individually with each neighbouring country. These Action Plans are negotiated with each country's specific situation in mind, although they are typically comprehensive agreements covering broad issues ranging from political dialogue to economic and social cooperation and also specific technical or functional issues on, development, trade, and cooperation in justice and home affairs. Subsequently, progress on the implementation of these Action Plans is periodically monitored through Country Reports prepared by the Commission.

The ENP is not intended to supersede any existing agreements signed between the EU and each partner country, such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) or Association Agreements (AA). Rather the ENP agenda is meant to be jointly advanced with these agreements where they already exist. For the countries in the Mediterranean region for instance, the ENP was an extension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (also known as the 'Barcelona Process') and its complementary network of Association Agreements, which were launched back in 1995.

Eastern Partnership (EaP)

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), proposed by Poland and Sweden and launched in May 2009, is a complementary initiative to the ENP for the six countries that are in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus which were former republics of the Soviet Union – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and the Ukraine.

The EaP is essentially the regional counterpart of the Union for the Mediterranean, itself a relaunched version of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, although the EaP does not have a secretariat like its

Mediterranean cousin. Yet another regional initiative that complements the ENP is the Black Sea Synergy, created for the seven countries surrounding the eponymous water body or situated near it.

While the ENP is principally a bilateral policy between the EU and each partner country, the EaP is predicated on a mix of bilateral and multilateral relations. The bilateral component of the EaP presents an opportunity for enhanced cooperation between the EU and six partner countries in two particular areas – the possibility for deep and comprehensive free trade agreements and for gradual visa liberalisation for citizens of the six countries.

The multilateral component is the main novelty of the EaP. From high-level summits to forums for local politicians and civil society leaders, the EaP presents opportunities for officials and experts from the EU and their six eastern partners to meet. The first meeting of foreign ministers under the EaP framework took place in Brussels in December 2009. All these initiatives have been unprecedented, insofar as the EU had not previously supported any regional grouping among the former Soviet republics, let alone initiating one.

Competing spheres of influence? EU-Georgia relations as a test case

In this brief, EU-Georgia relations will be presented as a test case for the ENP and the EaP. Despite being a small country, Georgia was catapulted to the forefront of international affairs when its five-day war with Russia in August 2008 brought relations between Russia and the West to their chilliest since the Cold War.

It examines the interests Georgia and the EU have in each other, in the face of competing interests staked by Russia on the eastern

neighbourhood consisting of its former family of Soviet republics, which it calls its 'Near Abroad'.⁸ The ENP and the EaP have had the effect of arousing Russia's annoyance that the EU is making unwelcomed inroads into its 'backyard'. For its part, the EU did include Russia as one of the 'addressees' in the ENP Strategy Paper along with the other eastern neighbourhood countries, but Russia opted instead to develop a partnership with the EU through the creation of four 'common spaces' at the 2003 St Petersburg summit.⁹

According to at least one reading however, Russia does not actually take the ENP and EaP seriously, despite Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accusing the EU of trying to establish its own sphere of influence.¹⁰ The rationale here is that Russia sees the EU as a more neutral actor in the South Caucasus than the United States or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and one that has not seriously posed a threat to Russia's policy positions on the region's conflict zones. At the same time, Russia does not want any 'encroachments' into its neighbourhood to go unaddressed.

For cynical observers, the ENP and EaP are policies symptomatic of the EU's so-termed

⁸ In Russian: Ближнее зарубежье (blizhnee zarubezh'ye), a term first used by Soviet dissidents in the 1970s and 80s, it was then used officially in the early 1990s, first by the then Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev. It is sometimes used interchangeably to refer to the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

⁹ Viz. Common Economic Space, Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, Common Space of External Security, Common Space of Research and Education. See: European Union External Action. *EU-Russia Common Spaces* (http://www.eeas.europa.eu/russia/common_spaces/index_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011)

¹⁰ Mikhelidze, Nona (2010) *Eastern Partnership and Conflicts in the South Caucasus: Old Wine in New Skins?* IAI092, Instituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

'enlargement-lite' strategy,¹¹ in which it offers the eastern neighbourhood states the prospect of political and economic alignment with the EU while playing down any hopes of actual membership. This view was confirmed with the statement by Chris Patten, the former European Commissioner for External Relations, that

*'Over the past decade, the Union's most successful foreign policy instrument has undeniably been the promise of EU membership. This is not sustainable. For the coming decade, we need to find new ways to export the stability, security and prosperity we have created within the enlarged Union'.*¹²

2. Background to Georgia

Georgia is a country of around 4.4 million people¹³ in the South Caucasus – a small but ethnically diverse geopolitical region which includes Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides these other two countries, Georgia also shares a land border with Russia and Turkey, and is bounded to the west by the Black Sea. Formerly a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, Georgia was a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

¹¹ See for instance: Popescu, Nicu and Andrew Wilson (2009) *The Limits of Enlargement-lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood*, Policy Report, June 2009, European Council on Foreign Relations.

¹² European Commission, *Wider Europe–Neighbourhood: Proposed New Framework for Relations with the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, p. 9.

¹³ This is the figure provided by the Georgian National Statistics Office for the year 2010 (http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=473&lang=eng, accessed 1/8/2011). It does not include the population of the *de facto* independent regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the combined population of which has been estimated to be approximately 250,000.

until its withdrawal following its 2008 war with Russia.

This section aims to offer a broad historical-political sketch of Georgia, so as to understand its present-day Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Brief history until 2003

The Georgian nation traces its origins to the ancient kingdom of Colchis which was featured in the Greek mythological tales of Jason and the Argonauts. The formative moment for the Georgian nation was when the Georgian kingdom of Kartli adopted Christianity as its state religion in about A.D. 330, the second nation in the world to do so after neighbouring Armenia. Over the ensuing centuries though, control over the territory of modern day Georgia switched frequently and the territory divided between several empires including the Arab, Mongol, Persian and Ottoman Empires.

From the year 1800, the South Caucasus region began to be absorbed into the Russian Empire. Georgia was briefly an independent republic from 1918 to 1921 in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Thereafter the Red Army captured Georgia, and the Bolsheviks – the predecessors of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – made it a republic of the Soviet Union. One of the leaders of the Bolsheviks, Joseph Stalin, was in fact an ethnic Georgian born in the Georgian town of Gori. As is well-known, he eventually assumed leadership of the Soviet Union.

As the Soviet Union was undergoing dissolution, Georgia declared independence on 9 April 1991. The events surrounding Georgia's independence struggle had the effect of triggering ethno-territorial conflicts

in Abkhazia and South Ossetia,¹⁴ ending in the *de facto* independence of these regions from Georgia by 1995. Whereas the Abkhaz-Georgian border was effectively closed after the ceasefire, South Ossetia's borders with the rest of Georgia were open to ordinary people while the region was guaranteed a high level of autonomy from Tbilisi. In both regions, the military of the Russian Federation, the successor state of the Soviet Union, had negotiated a role for themselves as peacekeepers under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

By 1995 Eduard Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the Soviet Union, and who is of Georgian origin, had consolidated power as president of Georgia, having removed Zviad Gamsakhurdia who led the country to independence. However the Georgia he presided over was in essence a failing state, not least with regions like Abkhazia and South Ossetia outside the effective control of Tbilisi. Even for the other parts of Georgia, Shevardnadze's authority was consolidated only through cronyism and dubious deals forged with local rulers and business elites, so as to weaken the power of warlords.

The 2003 Rose Revolution

Due to the nature in which Shevardnadze's regime consolidated its power, it was perceived to be rife with corruption over the years. In addition, basic services in the country such as health care and electricity supply were poor and underfunded. Out of this landscape, the charismatic figure of the young Mikheil Saakashvili emerged. Having served as a justice minister, he resigned in protest against the corrupt regime to establish the opposition United National Movement party.

¹⁴ North Ossetia, on the other hand, is a federal subject of the Russian Federation, just as it was similarly an autonomous republic of the Soviet Union before 1990.

In the parliamentary elections of 2 November 2003, Saakashvili and his party were the favourites widely expected to be placed first and hence form the government. That was exactly the result reported by the exit poll conducted by Western organisations and broadcasted on the pro-opposition television channel Rustavi-2. When the Central Election Commission announced its own official results that placed Shevardnadze's party in first place instead, accusations of falsification and electoral fraud were widespread.

Soon anti-Shevardnadze groups led by the United National Movement party gathered in the streets of Tbilisi to stage protests, armed with red roses that became the symbol of resistance. The movement was then dubbed the 'Rose Revolution', the first of other 'Colour Revolutions' in the region, followed with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. On 22 November as the new Georgian parliament was about to be convened, Saakashvili led the protestors from the streets and burst into the parliament chamber. In dramatic fashion, Saakashvili took to the podium as he clutched a rose and shouted 'Resign!' while Shevardnadze fled with his bodyguards. The next day, Shevardnadze resigned. His post of president was taken over by Saakashvili who won the presidential elections in January 2004.

The Georgia-Russia War, 2008

Besides mounting a massive campaign to eradicate corruption, Saakashvili's other priority in office was 'to restore Georgia's territorial integrity',¹⁵ as he declared in a key speech on the eve of his inauguration. A mediation campaign was launched to

¹⁵ Caucasian Knot (2004) 'Saakashvili takes oath on tomb of King David the Builder', 24/4/2004 (<http://georgia.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/1991>, accessed 1/8/2011).

reintegrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia through diplomatic channels.

In May 2004 Adjara – another autonomous region of Georgia, albeit one that never experienced violent conflict – was reintegrated with the rest of the country when Saakashvili managed to oust the regime of Aslan Abashidze. Saakashvili's success with Adjara purportedly spurred him to take a tougher stand on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite being warned in private by the United States not to resort to armed force.

A small series of provocations in the separatist regions eventually spiraled into a crisis of relations between Georgia and Russia, the latter being the guarantors and sponsors of the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians. Soon rumours began circulating that the Georgian military was preparing to take over the two breakaway regions by force. These rumours were buttressed by provocative military actions by Georgia and skirmishes between Georgian forces and armed local groups that had been increasing in intensity since 2006, as well as a discernible build-up in the Georgian defence spending.

As the EU-established Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) later concluded, it was the Georgian military which started shelling Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, late in the night of 7 August 2008.¹⁶ The next day, war began as Russian tanks and the Russian Fifty-eighth Army that was stationed at the Russian-South Ossetian border invaded Georgia in response. After two days of fighting, the Russian forces penetrated deeper into Georgian territory,

¹⁶ While making this conclusion, the IIFFMCG report noted that the question as to which side fired the first shot was moot, given that 'it was only the culminating point of a long period of increasing tensions, provocations and incidents'. See the full report at <http://www.ceiig.ch/Report.html>.

overrunning the town of Gori, and halting their advance just 40 miles of the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Meanwhile a second front opened up in Abkhazia in the Upper Kodori Gorge region, between Georgian and combined Abkhaz-Russian forces. On 12 August, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered an end to military operations, saying its goals have been achieved. That same day, French President Nicholas Sarkozy, acting in his capacity of the Presidency of the European Council, mediated a ceasefire between Russia and Georgia. Russian troops gradually withdrew to South Ossetia and they have since remained there.

On August 26, Moscow recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a move followed by only four other countries.¹⁷ The vast majority of United Nations member states support the territorial integrity of Georgia.

3. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation

Georgia's professed European identity has been articulated without ambiguity by Saakashvili in his statements and speeches. Since campaigning for the 2003 parliamentary elections, he has consistently spoken of Georgia's Christian roots and its 'European destiny'.¹⁸ In his inauguration speech on 25 January 2004, Saakashvili declared that

[the European] flag is Georgia's flag as well, as far as it embodies our

¹⁷ As of August 2011, South Ossetia's independence is recognised by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, while Abkhazia's independence is recognised by these four countries with the addition of Vanuatu.

¹⁸ European Parliament, 'Georgia's Saakashvili pledges peaceful solution to dispute with Russia', Strasbourg plenary session 22-25 November 2010 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/headlines/content/20101112FCS94327/7/html/Georgia's-Saakashvili-pledges-peaceful-solution-to-dispute-with-Russia>, accessed 1/8/2011).

*civilization, our culture, the essence of our history and perspective, and our vision for the future of Georgia... Georgia is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries... Our steady course is toward European integration.*¹⁹

A stroll down Rustaveli Avenue, the main thoroughfare of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, reveals the architecturally European face of the city that led to its being dubbed the 'Paris of the Caucasus'.²⁰ More strikingly, all government buildings and ministerial offices fly the EU flag alongside the Georgian flag of five red crosses, which was itself decreed as the new national flag when Saakashvili took office. Even though actual EU membership for Georgia is a distant prospect, the EU flag has become a banner of its European aspirations since Saakashvili and his United National Movement party came to power.

Realists may be led to conclude that the Euro-Atlantic orientation of Georgia's foreign policy is the natural product of the Saakashvili administration being a strong American ally. Some even allege that the Rose Revolution was covertly supported and funded directly by the United States. However Tbilisi's relations with Moscow had already encountered difficulties late in Shevardnadze's rule, not least when he welcomed US troops onto Georgian soil for the first time, on the pretext of cooperation with the Bush administration's 'war on terror' after the events of 11 September 2001. Yet others trace Georgian-Russian enmity back to the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia from 1918 to 1921, when the

¹⁹ Quoted in Müller, Martin (2011) 'Public Opinion Toward the European Union in Georgia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27:1, p. 64.

²⁰ See for instance: Georgian Association in the USA, Inc. *History and Culture* (<http://www.georgianassociation.org/HistoryAndCulture.asp>, accessed 1/8/2011).

Georgian Menshevik government was battling the Bolsheviks, or even further back to the time of the Russian Empire.

Nevertheless, tensions with Moscow were indeed accentuated after Saakashvili took office as president, through a series of manoeuvres relating to the territorial conflicts in Georgia. Georgia's increased drive to join NATO starting in 2005 precipitated confrontation with Russia. That year also saw the start of a particularly hawkish period marked by the Saakashvili administration's strong push to settle the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts on its terms, spurred on by its success in resolving the Adjara conflict.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Formed in 1949 to counter the military power of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a political-military alliance of 28 countries in North America and Europe. The organisation is premised on the principle of collective defence, in which 'an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all', and its members are thereby empowered to use armed force to restore security.²¹ When West Germany joined NATO in 1955, the Soviet Union quickly established the Warsaw Pact, a rival military alliance of the Eastern European communist states.

Since the end of the Cold War, the former signatories of the Warsaw Pact – Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and the former constituent republics of the Soviet Union Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – have joined NATO. Georgia's military cooperation with NATO had begun with peacekeeping operations in Kosovo since 1999 and in the

²¹ Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. In 2004, Georgia concluded an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO, which committed itself to defence, institutional, policy and political reforms, with eventual membership in NATO in mind.

Georgia's push for membership began in earnest at the NATO Bucharest summit held in April 2008, where it was hoping to be awarded a Membership Action Plan (MAP) along with Ukraine. However it was denied the MAP due to some opposition within NATO stemming from fear that such a move would antagonise Russia, which had indicated that NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine was a red-line issue for them. Nonetheless the summit declaration supported Georgia's and Ukraine's membership applications in principle.²²

In the aftermath of the August 2008 war, political dialogue and cooperation between Georgia and NATO have intensified, primarily through the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC). However it is now privately acknowledged on both sides that NATO membership for Georgia, despite being promised at the 2008 Bucharest summit, will be some years away, if possible at all, given the thorny state of affairs between Georgia and Russia since the war.²³

European Union (EU)

Georgia's rhetoric touching on its pursuit of EU membership to advance its goal of integrating into Euro-Atlantic structures is seen as less provocative compared to rhetoric on NATO membership. As recently as 2005, some observers endorsed the opposite move, seeing NATO membership as a stepping stone towards EU membership in following the

²² NATO. *Bucharest Summit Declaration*. 3/4/2008 (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

²³ International Crisis Group (2011) 'Georgia-Russia: Learn to Live like Neighbours', Europe Briefing no. 65.

example of Central European states like the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.²⁴ Of course the pre-2008 understanding was predicated on EU membership criteria being more stringent than NATO's. But it also missed the point that Georgia values NATO membership more, for strategic reasons, given its uneasy relationship with Russia.

Figures in the Georgian government have acknowledged that the country is not ready for EU membership, nor is their country at the heart of the EU's agenda.²⁵ It is therefore adopting a step-by-step approach, based on the current associative agreements with the EU like the ENP and EaP, tackling issues such as visa liberalisation at this stage.

The legal framework for EU-Georgia bilateral relations is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). Negotiations for the PCA started soon after the EU recognised Georgia in 1992, when the country became independent in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and against the backdrop of EU assistance to Georgia as it dealt with the consequences of its internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The PCA, which entered into force in 1999, provides for cooperation in political dialogue, trade, investment, and economic, legislative and cultural cooperation. Through the PCA, Georgia and the EU have accorded each other Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, and have agreed on the elimination of trade quotas and the protection of intellectual, industrial and commercial property rights.

²⁴ For instance, Leonard, Mark and Charles Grant (2005) *Georgia and the EU: Can Europe's neighbourhood policy deliver?* Centre for European Reform, p. 7.

²⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 'Georgian Minister Eyes EU Membership in 15 Years' (http://www.rferl.org/content/georgia_eu_membership_baramidze/9498036.html, accessed 1/8/2011). Also: author's interview with an official from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tbilisi, 4 April 2011.

Among the Georgian populace, the support for EU membership is high. In a 2009 survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center,²⁶ 79 per cent of respondents indicated they would vote for EU membership if a referendum were to be held, and only two per cent would vote against it. Over 50 per cent viewed the EU positively and indicated trust in it, the highest percentage in the South Caucasus – the corresponding figures for Armenia and Azerbaijan are around 30 per cent.

Nevertheless Georgia is not currently in accession negotiations with the EU, nor is it in any similar track like the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) as are the Western Balkan ‘potential candidate’ states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.

4. The EU’s interests in Georgia

Building a ‘ring of friends’

The EU’s interests in Georgia stem primarily from its stated – as well as unstated – aims behind the ENP and the EaP. As discussed above, the EU has aimed to prepare itself for a ‘Wider Europe’ in the wake of the 2004 enlargement process, which would entail building a ‘ring of friends’ around the EU member states – a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood... with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations’.²⁷

The 2003 Commission communication that introduced the idea of a ‘ring of friends’ did not envisage including the South Caucasus

region. By the Commission’s own admission in that document, the Southern Caucasus ‘falls outside the geographical scope of this initiative for the time being.’ But as the ENP was formulated and evolved, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia eventually became included – not as a result of requests from these countries, but as a result of the Commission’s own recommendation later. This led some to label the ENP as a geostrategic plan chiefly concerned with securing alternative energy sources and routes for Europe that would bypass Russia,²⁸ a topic that will be discussed below.

The clearest articulation of the EU’s desire to spread its ‘model’ without expanding membership was apparent in a speech by the then European Commission President Romano Prodi in 2002 which introduced the concept of ‘sharing everything but institutions’.²⁹ By extending its principles, values and standards to its neighbouring region, the EU also had border and security issues in mind.

The allusion to a ‘zone of prosperity’ inherent in the ‘ring of friends’ idea would suggest that the EU harbours a trade agenda with Georgia. Given the modest size of the Georgian economy however, trade here can only be a peripheral interest for the EU at best. In 2010 Georgia was ranked only the 81st most important trading partner of the EU-27, with EU-Georgia trade accounting for only 0.06%

²⁶ Published by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (2009), *Georgian Public Opinion - Attitudes towards European Integration - Narrative Report*.

²⁷ European Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*.

²⁸ Among others: Walski, Krzysztof (2010) ‘The European Union’s Eastern Neighborhood: the Eastern Partnership as a Strategy of EU Engagement and Security’, *Penn McNair Research Journal*, 2:1, Article 5.

²⁹ Europa (2002) ‘Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission: A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability "Peace, Security And Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU"’, Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Jean Monnet Project, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002’ (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/02/619>, accessed 1/8/2011).

of the EU's overall trade, or €1.7 billion.³⁰ Indeed, discussions on a possible EU-Georgia FTA were initiated as part of the ENP Action Plan by Georgia, whereas the European Commission initially posed strong objection to this. The Commission subsequently imposed a prohibitively demanding set of preconditions for opening FTA negotiations.³¹

The EU as conflict manager

The EU has been involved in varying degrees and means as a conflict manager in places as distant as Aceh, Indonesia, and also closer to home in the former Yugoslavia and in the Israel-Palestine conflict. For Whitman and Wolff, the EU's interests in conflict management outside of its borders whether as a mediator or a provider of humanitarian aid, stem from its aspirations to be a global security provider and the responsibilities that entails.³²

Its deeper commitment to pursuing peace in its neighbourhood comes as a natural priority. The European Security Strategy of 2003 (ESS),³³ drawn up by the then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, for the European Council, noted that 'frozen conflicts, which also persist on our borders, threaten regional stability', and that 'violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding

population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe'. Indeed the ESS made the specific recommendation that the EU 'should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus'.

Throughout the 1990s, the EU's engagement in the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia was limited to humanitarian assistance. The initial focus was on the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office's (ECHO) funding for food aid for all of Georgia (1992-5), and then progressing to rehabilitation programmes for the two conflict zones.

Since July 2003 the EU has also had an EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, whose job is to contribute towards conflict resolution in the region, such as by aiding political and economic reforms.

The EU's role after the 2008 war

After the outbreak of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war, the EU markedly stepped up its involvement in Georgia. The French presidency of the EU at that time was the key to brokering a six-point ceasefire plan agreed by Georgia and Russia. This involved shuttle diplomacy by French President Nicholas Sarkozy and the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, leading to an extraordinary European Council meeting in Brussels on 1 September, which gave full backing to the ceasefire agreement and committed the Union, 'including through a presence on the ground, to support every effort to secure a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia'.³⁴ A civilian EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was rapidly established and deployed to oversee the ceasefire agreement, commencing its

³⁰ European Commission, Trade, *Regions: South Caucasus – Georgia, 2010* (http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113383.pdf), accessed 1/8/2011).

³¹ Messerlin, Patrick, Michael Emerson, Gia Jandieri and Alexandre Le Vernoy (2010) *An Appraisal of the EU's Trade Policy towards its Eastern Neighbours: The Case of Georgia*, Sciences Po and Centre for European Policy Studies.

³² Whitman, Richard G. and Stefan Wolff (2010) 'The EU as conflict manager? The case of Georgia and its implications', *International Affairs*, 86: 1, p. 107.

³³ Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, 12/12/2003.

³⁴ Council of the European Union (2008), *Presidency conclusions', Extraordinary European Council, Brussels, 1 September 2008*, Revised version, 6/10/2008.

activities on 1 October 2008. In the ensuing settlement negotiations on the conflict called the Geneva process, which began in October, the EU continued to play a key role as co-chair of the process alongside the UN and the OSCE.

With the EU's swift action taken in the wake of the five-day war, from mediating the ceasefire to deploying the EUMM, there was widespread enthusiasm that the EU had finally 'made a real breakthrough in its credibility as an international security actor',³⁵ but this proved to be short-lived. The political momentum for a resolution of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts gradually stalled. On Russia's side, their anticipated 'flood of recognitions' of the independence of the two territories simply did not materialise.

The EUMM's work has been hampered by the fact that it has still not been granted access to the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by their *de facto* authorities. Its monitoring activities have therefore been limited to the Georgian side of the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).

The EU has also not articulated a clear definition of what 'conflict resolution' would entail exactly in the context of the Georgian territorial conflicts since 1991. Ambiguity in handling these conflicts could perhaps be a deliberate policy, given the thorny regional issues. Meanwhile there remains a broad agreement that the EU needs to continue its engagement in the conflicts, for which the prospects for resolution continue to be illusory.

The EU's energy policy

One of the top policy priorities for the EU's energy strategy is the avoidance of 'strategic dependence' – that is, to reduce dependency on one main supplier for gas and oil, and to

³⁵ Whitman and Wolff (2010), p. 93.

develop alternative energy transport routes.³⁶ Some EU member states, particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe, have an almost 100 per cent dependence on Gazprom, the Russian state-owned gas company. The EU's drive to diversify its energy sources was accelerated after the energy crisis of January 2006, when Russia shut down gas supplies to Ukraine in the midst of winter.

Georgia has no significant energy reserves of its own, but is important as an energy transit-country. The strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which has been pumping oil from the Caspian Sea oil fields of Azerbaijan to the Turkish port city of Ceyhan³⁷ by the Mediterranean Sea since 2005, runs through Georgian territory. Celebrated in popular culture through its central role in the plot of the 1999 James Bond movie 'The World Is Not Enough', the BTC pipeline is considered an engineering feat, being buried throughout its entire length of 1,768 km through rugged terrain.

A more direct route for the pipeline would actually be through Armenia. But because of the politics surrounding Azerbaijan's ongoing conflict with Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, the course of the BTC pipeline makes a detour into Georgia, thereby bypassing Armenian territory. Crucially from the EU's point of view, the pipeline avoids Russia and Iran.

There are also other massive pipeline infrastructure projects to meet Europe's energy demands – Nord Stream and South Stream, which are joint projects between

³⁶ Tsereteli, Mamuka (2004), *Caspian Gas: Potential to Activate Europe in the South Caucasus, Central Asia - Caucasus Institute*, 25/8/2004 (http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2611, accessed 1/8/2011).

³⁷ Ceyhan is the transportation hub for Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Russian oil and natural gas which are loaded on to supertankers for delivery to Europe, among other destinations.

Gazprom and European companies, and the Nabucco pipeline, an Austrian-led project with no Russian involvement – but these have been described as ‘formidable challenges to the balance of Europe’s energy policy that have gone under-reported in the press’.³⁸

With the capacity to transport one million barrels of oil per day from the Caspian Sea to the European oil market,³⁹ the BTC pipeline has had the effect of increasing the strategic importance of Georgia and the South Caucasus region to the EU. This would be a significant addition of oil that originates neither from Russia or member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).⁴⁰

It would also be prudent not to overstate the importance of Georgia’s role in regional energy politics. Indeed some observers of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war rushed to identify the BTC pipeline as the motivation for the hostilities.⁴¹ However the course of the pipeline in Georgia was literally untouched during the five days of hostilities, since it lies

³⁸ Dusseault, David (2010) ‘Europe’s triple by-pass: the prognosis for Nord Stream, South Stream and Nabucco’, *Asia Europe Journal*, 8:3, p. 383.

³⁹ 2009 figures from the energy company BP, the largest shareholder (30%) of the BTC pipeline: BP, *Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline*

(<http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9006669&contentId=7015093>, accessed 1/8/2011)

⁴⁰ Svante E. Cornell, Mamuka Tsereteli and Vladimir Socor (2005) *Geostrategic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline*, in Starr, S. Frederick, Svante E Cornell, eds. *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program (CACI-SRSP): Washington, DC).

⁴¹ For instance: Pagnamenta, Robin (2008). ‘Analysis: energy pipeline that supplies West threatened by war Georgia conflict’, *The Times*, 8/8/2008

(<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article4484849.ece>, accessed 1/8/2011); and Spiegel

Online (2008) ‘Russia Should not Have a Stranglehold on Resources’, 13/08/2008.

(<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,571855,00.html>, accessed 1/8/2011).

outside the area of the furthest incursion of the Russian army into Georgian territory.⁴² It would also have been irrational for Russia to jeopardise its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan by bombing the BTC pipeline.

5. Prospects for deeper integration

There is no clause in the ENP and EaP documents that rules out eventual membership for the EU’s partner countries. In fact the possibility for such an outcome has been kept deliberately vague.⁴³

The criteria for countries wishing to join the EU are known as the Copenhagen criteria, named after the 1993 Copenhagen European Council summit. These require the candidate country to have achieved stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competition and market forces within the EU; the ability to take on the obligations of membership pertaining to political, economic and monetary union.⁴⁴

Additionally, article 49 (formerly Article O) of the Maastricht Treaty states that ‘any

⁴² Though the BTC pipeline was shut down two days before the Georgia-Russia war erupted, due to an explosion at a segment of the pipe in eastern Turkey. This has been widely attributed to action by militants of the separatist Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) not related to the Georgia-Russia war.

⁴³ ‘The ENP remains distinct from the process of enlargement although it does not prejudge, for European neighbours, how their relationship with the EU may develop in future, in accordance with Treaty provisions’. From European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy. *The Policy: What is the European Neighbourhood Policy?*

⁴⁴ European Commission, Enlargement, *Accession criteria*

(http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 [i.e. respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities] and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union'.⁴⁵ However, the criterion as to what constitutes a European state is 'subject to political assessment'.⁴⁶

Even if Georgia were to fully meet the Copenhagen criteria and all parties agree that Georgia is indeed European, the EU would be very reluctant to admit the country, chiefly because of Georgia's unresolved territorial conflicts. With the precedence set by Cyprus in 2004, the accession of a territorially-divided country to the EU would never be allowed to be repeated. Cyprus's EU accession not only failed to resolve the dispute over Northern Cyprus, as was the intention, but it has had the effect of complicating the peace process and the EU's relations with Turkey.⁴⁷

In any case the European electorate's appetite for further enlargement is understandably low at this time of writing, with the ongoing financial and debt crisis.

⁴⁵ EUR-Lex. *Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0001:01:EN:HTML>, accessed 1/8/2011).

⁴⁶ European Parliament. *Briefing No 23: Legal questions of enlargement* (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/23a2_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

⁴⁷ For a discussion, see Tocci, Nathalie (2004) *EU Accession Dynamics and Conflict Resolution. Catalysing Peace or Consolidating Partition in Cyprus?* (London: Ashgate).

Does Georgia meet the political criteria for EU membership?

Georgia is not officially being assessed for the Copenhagen criteria since it is not currently in any accession negotiations. Nonetheless, political, economic and legislative reforms similar to the Copenhagen criteria are being monitored in the ENP partner countries by the European Commission – such as in their ENP country reports – and by independent think tanks.

Georgia has certainly seen a huge improvement in the rule of law since the days of the Shevardnadze regime. However its overall performance in the various aspects of the Copenhagen criteria today is mixed. There is even a perception that Georgia has experienced a regression in some of these measures, if they were ever properly consolidated. A recent report released by the think tank the European Council on Foreign Relations for instance, concluded that all countries in the eastern neighbourhood under the ENP have 'gone in the wrong direction' in terms of political development, with the exception of Moldova.⁴⁸

The European Commission publishes regular progress reports on the implementation of the ENP for each individual partner country. The Commission's report issued recently for the year 2010 noted that Georgia had made progress in reforming the justice system, improving the conduct of elections, increasing women's rights, carrying out constitutional reform, and in curbing administrative corruption, but also noted that the consolidation of democracy, the protection of the rights and integration of minorities and

⁴⁸ Popescu, Nicu and Andrew Wilson (2011) *Turning Presence into Power: Europe in its eastern neighbourhood*, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations.

corruption among high-ranking officials needed more effort.⁴⁹

This section focuses on the political aspects of the Copenhagen criteria – namely democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities. The economic and monetary aspects of the Copenhagen criteria would warrant a separate study, especially since the eurozone crisis at this time writing would render any discussion on them necessarily complex. With Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation in Georgia at more than 10% at the start of 2011, it has become more challenging for the country's monetary authorities to restrain from increasing base interest rates, to act in line with its commitment to macro-economic stability under the ENP Action Plan. Similarly, the legislative aspect pertaining to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* is not covered here.

Rule of law

Georgia's improvement in the rule of law since the Rose Revolution is perhaps the most successful of Saakashvili's sweeping reforms. The EU-Georgia Action Plan under the ENP puts special emphasis on the cooperation in the fields of Rule of Law and Justice, and on contributing towards security sector reform in Georgia.⁵⁰ The most well-known success story is of police reform. The old Traffic Police was entirely disbanded in June 2004, during which 16,000 officers were literally dismissed in one day. Since the Soviet era, the Traffic Police and the Ministry of Interior running it had been one of the most corrupt institutions in

⁴⁹ European Commission. *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2010 – Country report: Georgia*, COM (2011) 303.

⁵⁰ Delegation of the EU to Georgia, *Justice, Freedom and Security* (http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/projects/overview/justice_freedom_secu/index_en.htm, accessed 1/8/2011).

the country. The police maintained close links to the criminal world, and thus contributed to Georgia's image as a failing state. And because of their daily, direct contact with ordinary Georgians through their patrols and bribe-taking, they became the symbol of the corrupt and dysfunctional state loathed by the citizens.

When the replacement Patrol Police – trained and equipped under a whole new system – was deployed onto the streets within one month of the disbandment of the old Traffic Police, public trust in law enforcement agencies soared. One oft-cited survey by the International Republican Institute indicated that public trust in the police had hit 65 per cent a few months after the reforms (October 2004),⁵¹ where the figure traditionally hovered around 10 percent. The Georgian government's own figures indicate a jump from 5 to over 90 per cent in public trust in the police one year after the reforms.⁵²

Compared to police reform, the reform of the judicial system has been perceived to be less successful. Critics mainly cite the lack of judicial independence and inconsistencies in interpretation and enforcement of legislation. However recent changes such as the provision for judges to be appointed for life and the introduction of jury trials promise to improve the judicial framework.

In general, observers report that while low-level corruption in state services has essentially disappeared since Georgia's

⁵¹ International Republican Institute (2004) *Georgian National Voter Study, October 20 to November 3, 2004*. (<http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2004%20November%20Survey%20of%20Georgian%20Public%20Opinion,%20October%2020-November%203,%202004.pdf>, accessed 1/8/2011).

⁵² President of Georgia. The Office of (2005) 'President Saakashvili congratulates Patrol Police force on one-year anniversary' (http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=228&info_id=4829, accessed 1/8/2011).

anticorruption campaign began in 2004, corruption among the political and business elites is believed to be tackled selectively.⁵³ As an indication of the level of public discontent, there have been a number of violent demonstrations over the issue of high-level corruption, such as the one in 2007 cited below. Recent reports issued by Transparency International and Freedom House indicate that the Georgian law enforcement agencies are working to address corruption at the elite level, pointing to the lack of transparency in media and government financing as the main problems.⁵⁴

Democracy & human rights

Institutional reforms in Georgia have been much lauded, but critics charge that politics and power are too much centralised around the president.⁵⁵ Since the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili and his United National Movement party have dominated the political landscape, while the political opposition has been fractured. Nevertheless this state of parliamentary representation had been achieved through an electoral process described by international observers like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to be hugely improved since the Shevardnadze regime.

The low point in Georgia's democratic transition was in November 2007 when demonstrations against alleged corruption within Saakashvili's government were violently cracked down by the police. A state

of emergency was also briefly imposed. This compared badly with how Shevardnadze's government had been more restrained and refrained from the use of force against protestors during the Rose Revolution. More recently in May 2011, anti-Saakashvili demonstrations that were cynically dubbed the 'Silver Revolution', with the participation of many older Georgians who are struggling to cope with low pensions and rising food prices, were again marked by violent clashes with the police.

Since the onset of anti-Saakashvili protests, constitutional reform has been adopted to ensure a more balanced separation of powers. In 2010, the Georgian Parliament adopted amendments to the constitution that will see the political system shifting from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary model after the next presidential elections due in 2013.

The media played an important role in the Rose Revolution and in the subsequent democratisation process. Georgia's media environment broadly meets international standards today, but media independence and professionalism has been identified for improvement.⁵⁶ Each television outlet is commonly considered to be biased in favour of either the government or the opposition, but the pro-government outlets are staffed by figures with links to government bodies. For instance, a former director of the pro-government Rustavi2 currently chairs the national committee which regulates and licenses broadcasters.⁵⁷ In addition, ownership and funding of television stations suffer from the lack of transparency. The situation for print media is different however – it is widely seen as free and is more diverse than television.

⁵³ Tsitsishvili, David (2010) *Georgia: a report*, Civil Society Against Corruption.

⁵⁴ Aprasidze, David (2011) 'Georgia', in Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2010* (Freedom House: Washington, DC); Transparency International Georgia, "Corruption Perception Index 2010 released: Georgia ranks 68th," 26/10/2010 (<http://www.transparency.ge/en/post/corruption-perception-index-cpi/corruption-perception-index-2010-released-georgia-ranks-68th>, accessed 1/8/2011).

⁵⁵ Popescu and Wilson (2011).

⁵⁶ Aprasidze (2011).

⁵⁷ Media.ge, 'Former Rustavi2 Director becomes GNCC Chairman', 27/6/2009 (<http://www.media.ge/en/node/35514>, accessed 1/8/2011).

The Public Defender or Ombudsman, whose powers were increased in 2010, monitors the human rights situation in Georgia independently. The Public Defender's office has primarily raised concern over prison conditions pertaining to overcrowding and health care.

Protection of minorities

In the protection of minorities, the concern often raised about Georgia is its failure to sign or ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). The signing of the Charter represents a commitment on the part of the state party to protect and promote minority languages which are regarded to be threatened, and to enable speakers of a minority language to use it in public life.⁵⁸ On being formally admitted to the Council of Europe (CoE)⁵⁹ in April 1999, Georgia pledged to sign and ratify the Charter within a year, but has not done so to date. Whereas its fellow CoE-member neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan – which are ethnically more homogenous – have signed the Charter (additionally Armenia has ratified it), multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Georgia has not.

On the other hand, the debates surrounding the two most numerous national minorities hinge on improving their proficiency of the Georgian state language. National and international observers agree that the Armenian and the Azeri minorities which are concentrated in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions respectively need to be better integrated into Georgian society. Improving instruction in Georgian for them is a key step in achieving this, as well as to

create better job opportunities for them.⁶⁰ It appears therefore that while Georgia's adoption of the ECRML would certainly help protect the other minority languages that are in danger of erosion, flexibility and careful balance should be exercised with the situation on the Armenian and Azeri languages.

After the 2008 war, it was widely expected that the estimated 26,000 ethnic Ossetians residing throughout Georgia outside of South Ossetia would suffer from a backlash of oppression, leading to a massive exodus, much like the situation of the Kosovar Serbs after the 1999 Kosovo war. Fortunately, these fears have largely not materialised. Since the 2002 Georgian census, the population of ethnic Ossetians in the country has steadily declined with emigration primarily to Russia, but this has been linked more to socio-economic conditions rather than discrimination or oppression.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Council of Europe, Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. *About the Charter* (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/aboutcharter/default_en.asp, accessed 1/8/2011).

⁵⁹ The Council of Europe is a body entirely separate from the EU, despite them sharing the same flag. Neither is it to be confused with European Council which is an institution of the EU.

⁶⁰ Wheatley, Jonathan (2009) 'The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia: Five Years into the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili', European Centre for Minority Issues, Working Paper # 44.

⁶¹ Sordia, Giorgi (2009) 'Ossetians in Georgia in the Wake of the 2008 War', European Centre for Minority Issues #45.

6. Conclusions: three years after the war

On the recent third anniversary of the start of the Georgia-Russia war, the International Crisis Group released a briefing that characterised Tbilisi-Moscow relations to be in a state of 'total mutual distrust'.⁶² This would appear to present a tricky situation for the EU as it balances the aims of the ENP with its engagement with Russia. However the Obama administration of the United States has managed to maintain its 'reset' policy with Russia while concurrently calling for the end of its 'occupation' of Georgian territory.

The EU can do the same, not least because of the open-ended nature of the ENP and EaP. It has no wish to pursue confrontational policies with Russia such as in competing for influence in the 'Near Abroad'. Neither is there any appetite within the EU currently to consider accession for Georgia – the ongoing territorial conflicts in Georgia are the major stumbling blocks, as are the current eurozone difficulties back home. The EU as a whole has also become less enthusiastic in supporting Georgia's NATO membership bid.

On the other hand, the Georgian leadership and its public are still very enthusiastic about any prospect of joining the EU – they view the EU more positively than many EU member states do. There is nothing to suggest that Georgians are getting disenchanted with the EU, but should that ever be the case, the drive for continued political and economic reforms in Georgia could diminish. The worst possible outcome of that would be greater instability in a delicate region that has been plagued by conflict since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

⁶² International Crisis Group (2011) 'Georgia-Russia: Learn to Live like Neighbours', Europe Briefing no. 65.

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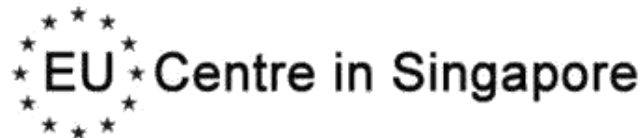
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