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The Russian Georgian War

**A trilateral cognitive institutional approach of the
crisis decision-making process**



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Chapter 1
Theoretical Background
CRISMART and the Crisis Management
Europe Research Programme¹

*Iulian Chifu**

With regard to NATO and EU expansion, effective and legitimate civilian crisis management and civil protection are becoming important items on the public policy agendas of individual nations as well as international organizations. Civilian crises can all too easily escalate into political crises or lead to the outbreak of violent domestic or international conflicts. The Crisis Management (CM) Europe program is a research project that aims to produce scientific knowledge that can be used to train practitioners to cope more effectively with national, regional and transnational crises.

Initiated in 1997 with a focus on the Baltic Sea Area, the CM Europe Program, directed by the Center for Crisis Management Research and Training (CRISMART) at the Swedish National Defense College, engages more than one hundred scholars from different parts of Europe and North America. The program systematically documents and analyzes specific cases of national and regional crises. It relies upon a contextually grounded process tracing method for case reconstruction and dissection derived from relevant literature in political science, psychology, and organizational sociology. In 2002, the Romanian research team joined this international research team and this book represents the tenth published CM Europe volume focusing on national crisis management.²

¹ The CM Baltic research program was originally established in 1997. In July 2000, it was renamed the CM Europe Programme. All reports prior to July 2000 are therefore referred to as CM Baltic/Europe reports, whereas those after July 2000 are referred to as CM Europe reports.

² In addition, volumes focusing on Poland and Ukraine are forthcoming, and one on Kaliningrad is currently in progress.

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These case studies reflect an attempt to apply a scientifically informed, systematic, and “user friendly” methodology in a uniform fashion to a set of cases focused on various policy sectors and countries. In this volume, we seek to compare the challenging events documented in the so-call “Breakthrough crisis” in order to examine the ways in which the governments and the societies from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania perceived and have coped with this crisis. The general purpose of this type of research is to encourage scientists and researchers on the one hand and a wide circle of practitioners on the other to engage more deliberately and holistically in the field of crisis management. By way of such studies, we hope to encourage greater acceptance and more systematic use of theoretical tools and research methods in the field of crisis management in general and case studies more specifically. Moreover, the trilateral approach enable us to see differences of perceptions and of systems of decision-making in crisis in the three countries as well as patterns for the decision in crisis. This, we believe, will result in the production of new and useful knowledge and will create better conditions for civil crisis planning and crisis management, both in this trilateral region and elsewhere.

The original formation of a Romanian-Swedish original research group was undertaken in this spirit, with a group consisting of professionals from the spheres of academia and national security. The cross-disciplinary nature of the group helped bridge the gap between theorists and practitioners, allowing not only for the transformation of theory into practice, but equally important, the transformation of practice knowledge into theory. The Romanian research team, in particular, hoped not only to apply new crisis management research methods and insights gained during the project in future crises in Romania, but also to exchange experiences and strengthen contacts with corresponding crisis management institutions abroad, to enhance crisis management practices in Romania to the level of the most developed EU and NATO countries, to create a more unified crisis management methodology for research on future crisis cases, and to develop new proposals and suggestions for national practices in the field of crisis management.

Thereafter, the Romanian CRISMART team, represented by the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Center, took as an objective to multiply the knowledge and the methodology by training and using it in the relation with

the countries situated in its East – the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Taking profit of the old and well established think tank trilateral group, the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Center proposed this project financed by the Black Sea Trust of the German Marshall Fund as a step towards understanding the perception of the decision makers in the region on crisis, the way they react, in order to improve the trilateral relations and to show to the practitioners of one's country which are the reactions of the others at their gestures and decisions.

Method³

The basis for the comparative analytical approach applied in this volume, is presented in Stern et al. (2002) and Stern and Sundelius (February 2002). This method entails:

- a) Detailed reconstruction of the crisis events using available government documents and reports, mass media sources (broadcast and print), previous scholarly treatments and interviews with involved decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens.
- b) Dissection of the case into a series of crucial occasions for decision – a series of pressing, “what do we do now?” problems that arise during the period of the crisis, challenging the copying capacity of decision-makers. The selection criteria for identifying decision occasions include:
 - The problems/dilemmas which most preoccupied decision-makers
 - Issues which were not emphasized by the crisis actors but which in retrospect had the potential to change the course of crisis development, or affect the management of the crisis
 - Problems that were recognized by decision-makers but coped with as “routine decisions” – problems that escalated at a later stage of the crisis, causing unforeseen problems
 - Episodes of particular pedagogical value – those that point to “best” or “worst” practices that are of interest beyond the particular case in question

³ This section borrows from Stern and Hansén (2000: 8-9).

- c) Thematic analyses of phenomena pertinent to crisis management (see the following sections on analytical themes and propositions)
- d) Comparing and contrasting findings with other cases documented in the CM Europe case bank and the international literature.

The trilateral cases will be compared with each other in order to explore the national crisis management style of each country. In addition, the trilateral findings will be juxtaposed, at the end of the work, that should include several crisis, with findings from other countries participating in the CM Europe research program. This is done in order to better illustrate the particular crisis management predicaments faced by transitional states (and new democracies) in Europe (Stern et al., 2002). With its greater focus on processes and less on structures, the CM Europe series adds to the rich literature available on transitional states (e.g. Miller, White and Heywood, 1998; Lawson, 1993; Elster, 1993; Pridham and Vanhanen, 1994). However, these volumes complement the conventional literature with examples taken from real life and extraordinary situations—when the structures are put to the test and societal hardship is a given.

A caveat of methodological character concerning the case studies in this volume should be brought up in this context. As described above, the approach provides the instruments to dissect a course of events in a very detailed way, unveiling processes on the institutional as well as individual levels. Although the politics of those countries are rapidly moving towards democratic consolidation and transparency, political life in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is still largely closed to the public and our researchers could not always pry open the ‘black box’ of decision making. That is why the approach in Ukraine and Republic of Moldova are based on a limited number of interviews and much of the empirical material was derived from media sources and official documentation. Nevertheless, these in-depth case studies of crisis management experiences in this particular case will contribute to research on developing experience based capacity building within the field.

CM Europe Analytical Themes⁴

The authors in this volume explore a number of set themes in relation to their empirical findings. The analytical themes serve as tools for the CM Europe analysts in their analysis of crisis management experiences and only a few of them will typically be applied to an individual case study. These themes have also been explored in previous CM Europe volumes focusing on national crisis management in the countries of Sweden (Sundelius, Stern and Bynander, 1997), Estonia (Stern and Nohrstedt, 2001), Latvia (Stern and Hansén, 2000), Russia (Porfiriev and Svedin, 2002), Poland (Bynander et. al. forthcoming), Slovenia (Brändström and Malesic, 2004), Bulgaria (Engelbrekt and Förberg, 2005), Lithuania (Buus et. al. 2005) and Iceland (Bernharðsdóttir and Svedin, 2004), and also in the EU (Larsson, Olsson and Ramberg, 2005). These themes are as follows:

- Crisis preparedness, prevention, and mitigation
- Leadership
- Decision units
- Problem perception and framing
- Value conflict
- Politico-bureaucratic cooperation and conflict
- Crisis communication and credibility
- Transnationalization and internationalization
- Temporal effects and crisis management
- Learning

Crisis preparedness, prevention and mitigation: This theme focuses on the extent to which crisis managers and their organizations are prepared to respond to extraordinary events. Have they experienced serious crises before? Have they cultivated an “it could happen here” attitude and prepared themselves psychologically for the rigorous demands involved in managing crises? Are there efficient and legitimate structures and plans in place for crisis management and are these easily adapted to a variety of

⁴ This section borrows from ‘CM Baltic/Europe Analytical Themes’ in Stern and Hansén (2000:9-13) and “Crisis Management Europe: An Integrated Regional Research and Training Program” by Stern and Sundelius (February 2002). This set of themes was first introduced in Sundelius, Stern and Bynander (1997).

situations? Are decision-makers able to identify potential threats and act quickly to prevent these threats from escalating? Are there windows of opportunity available in the crisis management structures and organizations studied that allow actors to limit the damage or contain the situation at lower levels?⁵

Leadership: This theme focuses on the leadership styles displayed by key actors during the given crisis situation. Leadership may be operative, in the sense of taking charge of crisis management activities and coordination. It may also be symbolic, in the sense of declaring and showing that the leading figures are participating in the crisis effort and empathizing with the victims of a crisis or those still at risk. Leadership may be concrete and personal or more abstract and distant. In deliberations, leaders may be hierarchical or collegial. Leadership should be seen as relational; as inextricably linked to those who are being “lead” and influenced by factors such as power, affect, culture, organizational structure, access to expertise, and context. Finally, leaders vary in their propensity to become involved in the details and the operative process, or to delegate and decentralize when it comes to critical decisions (see, for example, Bass, 1998; Gardner, 1995; Hermann and Hagen, 1998).

Decision units: This theme focuses on the question of how and where decisions are made in the complex institutional systems typically engaged in managing a national crisis. For example, crucial decisions may be made by a variety of decision-making groups ranging from a single individual to small groups to entire organizational networks. Decision-units can be located in different political/administrative and public/private systems and play different roles within those systems. Such units may be strategic or operative in nature and may be located at local, regional, national, or supra-national (e.g. EU or UN) levels. Decision units may also vary during a given crisis in terms of composition, mode of operation, and where they are placed, and it is not uncommon to see a certain shift of authority upwards (so called up-scaling) or downwards (down-scaling) in the escalation

⁵ On crisis prevention and mitigation, see e.g. Ender and Kim (1988), Waugh (1988) and Lund (1996). For more skeptical examinations of the potential for risk elimination and accident prevention, see Wildavsky (1988) and Perrow (1999).

process (see Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, 1963; Hermann, Hermann, and Hagen, 1987; Rosenthal, 't Hart, and Kouzmin, 1991; Stern, 1999). Finally, what are the criteria for determining which individuals or organizations will be included in (or excluded from) the decisional 'loop' and the decision unit?

Problem perception and framing: This theme focuses on the subjective and socially constructed aspects of crisis management. All actors engaged in managing a crisis will act upon a perceived picture of events, one that might not necessarily be understood and interpreted the same way by all parties involved (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, 1963; Sylvan and Voss, 1998; Stern, 1999). While problem framing often takes place at a sub-conscious level (at least with "naive" decision makers), defining the problem entails the exertion of enormous influence on choices. In the act of identifying and framing a problem, many possible alternative interpretations and prospects of action are discarded, and the way forward is narrowed. Framing is influenced both by political considerations and cognitive processes, such as analogical (historical) and metaphorical reasoning, as well as social structures such as culture, information flows, and the organizational context (Vertzberger, 1990; Larson, 1985; Khong, 1992). There are important questions to ask when it comes to why actors frame problems in a certain way at critical junctures in a crisis.

Value conflict: This theme focuses on potential tension and conflict among different values at stake in a crisis situation. An integral part of problem framing is identifying which values are perceived to be at stake in a given situation. Identifying these values is often a demanding analytical task, and it can be difficult for decision-makers to see the range of values involved in a complex issue if they do not engage in rigorous critical analysis (see e.g. Steinbruner, 1974:16-17; Keeney, 1992). Crises, by definition, present a serious challenge to fundamental values, including the preservation of human life, national sovereignty/autonomy, economic well-being, democracy, rule of law, and so forth. More parochial values, such as the personal and political future of individuals and careers, also influence the decision making process. Good crisis performance makes careers; poor performance can "break" them. Due to the stress of balancing values that are sometimes in competition with each other, decision-makers often face

painful dilemmas and tragic choices (Janis and Mann, 1977). Decision-makers may choose to ignore value conflicts or to accept them, which tends to generate unbalanced policy-making. They may choose to procrastinate and hope for better times, or they may seek to resolve the conflict and find a solution that protects those values at stake.⁶ These dynamics influence the decision-making process and eventually the crisis process itself. How do different crisis actors cope with the very real and tangible dilemmas that occur when value conflicts emerge in a crisis situation?

Political and bureaucratic cooperation and conflict: This theme focuses on the issue of patterns of convergence and divergence as well as parochialism and solidarity among actors and stakeholders during a crisis. There are a number of well-documented dynamics that tend to create and exert pressures towards cooperation and solidarity in a crisis (e.g. the “rally around the flag” effect, leader attentiveness, and “groupthink”).⁷ However, there are also a number of countervailing tendencies. Crises are often perceived as threatening situations that sometimes lead actors to engage in defensive and antagonizing behaviors. Following failures or setbacks, for example, actors often engage in “blame games” to decide who is to be held accountable for a particular problem. A crisis presents not only problems but also opportunities, and actors are often likely to end up competing with one another for credit for one or more particular outcomes. Moreover, situation and contextual factors are often influenced by personal relationships and by the strength of national cultural norms opposing opportunism in critical situations (see Rosenthal, ‘t Hart, and Kouzmin, 1991; Stern and Verbeek, 1998; Allison and Zelikow, 1999).

Crisis communication and credibility: This theme focuses on the relationship between crisis managers, the media, and elite/mass publics (see e.g. Edelman, 1988; Nohrstedt and Tassew, 1993; Nordlund, 1994; Pearce, 1995; Regester and Larkin, 1998; Boin et. al., 2005). In democratic polities, maintaining credibility and legitimacy with the media and the public is an essential task of successful governance in crisis and more normal situations alike. Crisis managers enter crises with varying degrees of credibility and

⁶ On value conflicts, see George (1980) and Farnham (1998: 26-39).

⁷ See, for example, Rosati (1981) and Janis (1982).

may gain or lose over the course of the crisis. Actors vary considerably in their approach to crisis communication. Some take a defensive/closed stance, which can easily antagonize the media and cost credibility. Others take a more proactive/open stance and seek to maintain the initiative in providing information and establishing friendly relations with the mass media. Actors also vary considerably in ways in the degree to which they coordinate crisis communication and in the information strategy and tactics developed. Similarly, some actors closely monitor how their messages are being received and act to correct problems, while others – focusing on other aspects of crisis management and distracted by stress – are oblivious to growing credibility problems. There are a number of recurring credibility “traps” – the creation of a perceived gap between words and deeds, expectations and performance – that can cost crisis management dearly, as can neglecting the symbolic aspects of crisis management (Boin et. al., 2005; Hansén and Stern, 2001; Stern 1999; 201-202).

Transnationalization and internationalization: This theme focuses on the tendency of crises to spill over national boundaries in a world that is increasingly interdependent – politically, economically, socially and ecologically. While some crises may arise within a single country, many actual and potential threats do not respect national borders. Infectious diseases, natural disasters, financial disturbances, and terrorism are just a few examples of such “borderless” threats. For this reason, coping with contemporary crises often requires transnational collaboration – ad hoc or institutionalized, bilateral or multilateral – in order to deal with these cross-border threats (‘t Hart, Stern and Sundelius, 1998; Buzan, Weaver, and De Wilde, 1998; Steinbruner, 2000; Buzan, 1991). Since crises often have international repercussions, actors participating in international affairs during times of crises may also attempt to exert influence upon the decision-making processes of countries which are not their own (Cf. Zielonka and Pravda, 2001; Keohane and Milner, 1996). In turn, the international sphere may become an arena for rallying support of certain new policies and regulatory tools (Haggard, Levy, Moravcsik, and Nicolaidis, 1993).

Temporal effects: This theme focuses upon sequencing and synchronicity – temporal effects that may have a profound effect on how a crisis is managed. Sequencing refers to the path-dependent nature of crisis decision-making. Choices made early in crises tend to constrain the possibilities for

later action and steer crisis management along a particular trajectory that may be difficult to change later (e.g. see Levy, 1991; Sundelius Stern, and Bynander, 1997; Billings and Hermann, 1998). Often feedback – especially negative feedback – from earlier decisions will necessitate additional decisions, which, together, form a sequence. Synchronicity, in turn, refers to the tendency of simultaneous events to influence each other via psychological and organizational mechanisms such as “availability”, opportunity cost, cumulative stress, and distraction (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 1963; Haney, 1997; Stern 1999). Synchronicity may appear within a single crisis (when multiple problems must be solved at the same time), between two simultaneous crises (as in the case of Hungary/Suez in 1956 and Watergate/War in the Middle East in 1973), or between a crisis and other highly prioritized coincident activities such as elections, state visits, crucial legislative negotiations, etc.

Learning: This theme focuses upon the extent to which actors are capable of analyzing their experiences and using the conclusions drawn as a basis for change. As noted above in the section on problem framing, actors may attempt to use “lessons” from past experiences (encoded as historical analogies or as experientially-based “rules of the thumb”) as a guide for current action. Similarly, actors may respond to positive or negative feedback regarding performance during a crisis, by drawing lessons and modifying beliefs and practices. Actors commonly attempt to reflect upon crisis experiences after the fact, draw lessons for the future, and formulate reform projects on the basis of interpretations of crisis experiences. Crises present considerable opportunities for learning, but post-crisis learning attempts are often undermined or even derailed by a variety of typical social and psychological dynamics that may result in distorted collective memories of the crisis in question (Porfiriev and Svedin, 2002; Lagadec, 1997; Stern, 1997b; Levy, 1994; Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991; Lebow, 1981).

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Chapter 2

A TYPICAL CASE OF STRATEGIC SURPRISE

Decision making in crisis in Georgia during the Russian-Georgian War

Iulian Chifu

The present chapter deals with the Russian-Georgian war and presents the decision making process during a crisis and the way it worked during the August crisis. For this purpose, we use the cognitive-institutional approach in a methodology by CRISMART¹. The process consists of decomposing the crisis decision making trying to figure the main perception about the crisis, the problem framing, the way that this problem framed by the decision makers is addressed, what is the plan for solving the framed problem and at what respect the solution was applied².

The Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Center is familiar with this type of methodology as it functioned as the CRISMART team in Romania, gaining more than 7 years of experience with this methodology and analyzing several examples of crisis in transitional societies³, as well as in some former soviet states⁴.

Between 15 and 18 of March, we had a series of interviews in Tbilisi with political decision makers involved in the crisis room and holding hot chairs during the crisis as well as with NGO representatives as follows:

- **Temouri Yakobashvili**, State Minister for Conflict Resolution, now State Minister for Reintegration
- **Alexander Nalbandov**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

¹ CRISMART – CRISIS Management Research and Training – a program of the Swedish National Defense College - SNDC, Stockholm.

² See Eric Stern, *Crisis Decision making. A cognitive institutional approach*, Elanders Gotab, Stockholm 2003.

³ Iulian Chifu, Britta Ramberg, *Crisis decision making in transitional societies. Romanian experience*, Elanders Gotab, Stockholm 2007

⁴ Iulian Chifu, Oazu Nantoi, Oleksandr Sushko, *Breakthrough crisis. The crisis of a quick solution in Transnistria*, Editura Curtea Veche, Bucharest, 2008.

- **Shota Utiashvili**, General Director of the Direction for Analysis of the Information, Ministry of Interior
- **Giga Bokeria**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, former President of the Parliament
- **Ambassador Alexandr Rondeli**, Chairman of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies – GFSIS
- **Kakha Gogolashvili** (Director GEPLAC) – GFSIS
- **Tina Goghelliani**, project coordinator, International Center for Conflicts and Negotiation
- **Tengiz Pkaladze**, Chairman, International Center for Geopolitical Studies
- **Tamar Chikovani** and **Soso Tsiskarishvili**, Independent Expert Club
- **Medea Thurashvili**, Analyst, Independent Crisis Group

The basic questioning plan contains 10 questions, which were adapted for the persons which were not involved in the decision making process. This set of questions is the following:

1. What are the components of the normative, institutional and functional system for decision making in crisis in Georgia?
2. How did it work in the case of the Russian-Georgian crisis in August 2008?
3. What were the Prevention, Planning and Preparedness for this particular type of crisis? If they exist, what was their content and how prepared were the decision makers for dealing with this type of crisis?
4. Perception and problem framing. How did the decision makers learn about the crisis, how did the perception of the crisis form and how did the definition of the problem evolve in time.
5. How was the problem addressed, what type solution was found. How the solution was applied.
6. Communication, public perception and the way of getting the public support. Elements of panic and the ways to deal with it.
7. What went wrong during managing the crisis?
8. Next steps: What to expect?
9. Current developments: heading towards war or peace?
10. How the US-Georgia Chart is appreciated and how much guarantee of security did it offer?

The expected result should be a good approximation of the situation and the way decision making functioned in Georgia. The approximation comes from the fact that not all the persons involved were questioned, those questioned responded selectively. We did not take into account and did not have access to the documents of the reunions where the decisions were taken, with all the debates, since these are classified documents. This would be under the jurisdiction of an inside investigation, but that was not our intention, and neither is it required in the type of research that we are conducting now.

The present research gives an idea of the way the system worked, what were the lessons learnt by the decision makers and the applied policies, transformations and changes meant to improve the decision making process for future similar situations. Another main focus of this research is the public perception about how the system works, as it is the most important part of the confidence, trust and public support for the leadership, in times of crisis.

I. NORMATIVE, INSTITUTIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL SYSTEM

1. The National Security Concept of Georgia

The National Security Concept of Georgia is the main document that establishes the tasks of the security system, and the institutional way of facing the threats and objectives to National Security. It is also the first document of this type that the country has ever had.

What is also very interesting is the way that the threats, risks and challenges to the national security are charted in this document (Chapter 4). Taking the first 6 main threats in order, 5 of them are related to “hard security”; in the sixth position we find contraband and transnational border crime, coming more from the threats to the rule of law. For the hard security threats, we find the following order: “infringement of Georgia’s Territorial Integrity”, “spillover of conflicts from another state”, “military intervention”, “international terrorism” and “the Russian Federation Military bases”.

In this respect, we can see the concern about the lack of control on the entire territory and the separatist movements that are the first threats, a subject connected to the sources of the August Russian-Georgian war. Then, second in line would be the fights from the Northern Caucasus instable area that could spillover on Georgian territory. Here we can mention the lessons learnt from the dispute about the hidden Chechen fighters in the Pankisi Gorge, but also possible fights in Northern Ossetia, Daghestan, Ingushetia or even a possible revival of the Chechen independence movement that could represent threats for Georgia. In the third position we find military intervention, another threat that could be important towards classifying the last large scale war with Russia, international terrorism and, in the 6-th position the presence of the Russian Federation's military bases that could be linked to the war, even though formally or at least in official statements, those Russian bases were withdrawn or should be withdrawn according to the 1999 Istanbul OSCE summit final declaration.

Let's take the three threats whose analysis and survey could predict the events in August and make the analysis if the August events were charted – though there was a sense and a general framework of prevention, planning and preparation for this crisis that occurred.

When speaking about the **infringement of Georgia's Territorial Integrity** (paragraph 4.1. of The National Security Concept of Georgia), it is mentioned that “Aggressive separatist movements, inspired and supported from outside of Georgia, led to armed conflicts in the country that resulted in the *de facto* separation of Abkhazia and the former Autonomous District of South Ossetia from Georgia, and loss of control over these territories by the Georgian authorities. This infringement of Georgia's territorial integrity is a major national security threat”.

The Concept foresees the threats connected to the fact of infringed territorial integrity such as up to three hundred thousand IDP's, unclear delimitation of Georgia's state borders, illegal militant groups hosted in that territory and favourable conditions to a variety of terrorist groups, contraband and transnational organized crime and systematic violation of human rights. “Consequently, the infringement of territorial integrity, if not addressed in a timely and efficient manner, may endanger the existence of Georgia as a viable state”.

So according to the strategy, there is a sense of urgency to solve the separatist situation, which doesn't mention the use of any methods "in force" or the expression "with all the means". The strategy does not see a **military threat** coming from those illegal militant groups, but identifies a threat to the public order or at least to the citizens of these separatist regions.

The spillover of Conflicts from Neighboring States (paragraph 4.2) contains some interesting assessments that involve military conflicts. "Prolonged, unresolved conflicts in neighboring states, and possible deterioration of stability in Russia, particularly in the North Caucasus, could drag Georgia into conflict", clearly a military conflict, but more with the militant groups and freedom fighters from the Northern Caucasus. It is also the case with "the Russian Federation's military presence on the territory of Georgia would be a risk factor to the stability of the country in certain circumstances", which means, in this situation, that those troops might be targeted by militant groups of the Northern Caucasus nations seeking for their independence, by dragging Georgia in such a dispute, without a proper address on the position that Georgia will have in such conflicts – nothing to do with a direct threat of a large scale invasion, aggression or act of war of Russia towards Georgian neighbor territory.

The possible threat of a military intervention is seen highly unlikely. "While the likelihood of open military aggression against Georgia is low, cross-border incursions by state and non-state actors are real, and they threaten the security of the country"(paragraph 4.3) Here are mentioned as threats to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity "systematic violation of Georgia's land, air and maritime space", and "sporadic military attacks". Once again, any military intervention is kept at the level of "illegal military and paramilitary formations in territories uncontrolled by the Georgian government and near the borders of the country" that would "considerably raise the possibility of renewed armed conflict and destabilization in Georgia".

Therefore the sources of a military intervention are placed at the level of the separatist military formations and the volunteers or kozaks formations from Northern Caucasus and the Georgian citizens threatened by it would be the ones leaving for the separatists regions, where the Georgian authorities would not be able to protect them.

The only fact that could be linked to the possible intervention of the Russian forces relates to the process of granting Russian citizenship to residents of the breakaway regions of Georgia and Russia's policy of protecting Russian citizens all over the CIS, according to the 5 principles of Foreign Policy underlined by the President Dmitry Medvedev, that becomes a real Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Russian Federation⁵. But even in this case, this would refer only to the territory where those separatists with Russian passports live in the separatist regions. Basically this "is a potential threat because, in certain circumstances, it could be used as a pretext for intervention in Georgia's internal affairs".

This last provision meant that Russia could intervene in "Georgia's internal affairs" without mentioning a military intervention. Since this is placed on the paragraph reserved to "military intervention", this could mean that Georgia could foresee the entry in the separatist regions of Russian regular troops – apart from the peace keepers, allowed according to the document of the formation of the Joint Control Commission – but only in order to "protect" the Russian citizens, not to attack or harm the Georgians from the region and by no means entering the territory that is under the legitimate administration of the Tbilisi official authorities.

⁵ At the end of August President Dmitry Medvedev announced **five foreign policy priorities**:

- Russia will „recognize the **fundamental principles of international law**“
- Russia „**does not want confrontation with any other country**“ nor does it **intend to isolate itself**.
- Russia does not accept **the current world order**, which Medvedev calls „**single-pole**,“ as it is „unstable and threatened by conflict.“ „The world must be multi-polar.“
- Russia claimed the right as an „**unquestionable priority**“ to „**protect the lives and dignity of our citizens**“ as well as its interests „**wherever they may be**.“
- Finally, Medvedev claimed, „**there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests**,“ an apparent reference to a geographically unspecified sphere of interests, that obviously includes Georgia, Ukraine, and other neighboring nations in Europe and Asia (www.kremlin.ru, August 31).

The future of international relations depended on „**our friends and partners**“ that „**have a choice**“ to **recognize Russia's rights and privileges**, it is mentioned at the end of the presentation.

Talking about the threat that represents the **Russian Federation's Military Bases** (paragraph 4.4) located in Georgia, they “are no longer a direct threat to Georgia's sovereignty”. However, until their final withdrawal, “they remain a risk to national security, and still negatively affect the security environment in Georgia”. No relation with the possible large scale or full scale invasion, aggression or attack on Georgia by Russian regular forces, especially not on the territory controlled by the legitimate authorities.

In conclusion, there was no assessment of an existing threat coming from the Russian Federation in terms of direct military operation of the Russian regular forces towards Georgian citizens from the separatist regions or outside the separatist territories. Therefore, we could not expect prevention, preparedness or planning for such operations, even though we could see such mechanisms of intelligence gathering, defense and security in place for the threat towards the Georgian population in the separatist regions coming from illegal military and non-military forces of the separatist regimes or from volunteers from the Northern Caucasus.

Two other chapters of the National Security Concept are also interesting for the August military crisis, strengthening State Defense – a prognosis and directions of further development of the Armed Forces, and the paragraph on strengthening Foreign Policy, as a part of the National Security Concept. We will not insist on the provisions related to the intelligence capabilities which are the usual ones, which could allow suitable capabilities to have the complete survey of the illegal or regular forces entering in South Ossetia through the Roki tunnel, a system that was in place and worked during the August war.

In what concerns the problem of **strengthening State Defense** (paragraph 5.2.), the directions are:

- enhancing state defense by strengthening the Armed Forces
- reinforcing mechanisms of civilian defense
- cooperating with the international community to promote world peace and security
- developing crisis management mechanisms.

For the first and third objective, the Concept mentions that “Georgia is carrying out large-scale defense reforms aimed at developing modern, efficient and sustainable armed forces in line with NATO standards. The reformed Georgian Armed Forces will have increased defense capabilities to counter military threats to national security and to participate in international anti-terrorist and peace support operations”.

So the basic assumption is that Georgia would have NATO compatible forces for dealing with its own problems and participating at the international operations. But in these provisions it is not stated that Georgia has the capabilities of countering any type of threat – and the non-identified direct threats like a full scale military Russian military operation is in no point taken into consideration. Even in the future, the provision mentions the “increased defense capabilities to counter military threats to national security” but not assuming a level that could face all the threats.

In the matter of creating a crisis management system, it is mentioned that the system “will be able to prevent and respond to crises, manage post-crisis situations in a timely and efficient manner, and ensure prompt decision-making and implementation” and it “will provide for coordinated actions of state agencies, as well as a precise delineation of functions and responsibilities of the governmental, non-governmental, international and humanitarian organizations involved in the crisis management process”.

It is about a clear perception on the need of such a system, the political will to build up such a system, that the creation of “the unified and centralized crisis management system” is underway at the National Security Council of Georgia, a system was not in place at the moment of the August crisis.

Concerning the **strengthening of Foreign Relations** (paragraph 5.5.), Georgian authorities proved that they are conscientious that the military instrument is not enough to react to all the threats and the objectives of the national security and that the diplomatic support of the partners and allies and the foreign policy should be an integral part of the security system and the system of decision making in crisis.

In the National Security Concept, the “foreign policy is one of the main directions of Georgia’s national security policy, aimed at establishing a favorable international security environment for Georgia”. In order to achieve this goal, Georgia cooperates with the international community in bilateral and multilateral formats. The prominent dimensions are:

- the Strategic Partnerships with the United States, Ukraine and Turkey, in that particular order
- the Partnerships with Armenia and Azerbaijan (considered together) then Partnership with the Russian Federation, in that particular order
- the Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region – with all the multilateral components, beginning with GUAM
- the “Inter-regional Cooperation”, a concept to underline the special cooperation in a Baltic-Black Sea approach with the Baltic Countries, with the transfer of lessons learnt and good practices for the European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The chapter on “strengthening of Foreign Relations” in the National Security Concept is an usual address of the security in the cases of little states, with powerful neighbors (especially in the post-Soviet space) where deterrence through diplomacy and foreign policy, prevention, international partnerships and guarantees of security are the main targets, together with a policy of **“stopping the foreign aggression for 48-72 hours for giving the time to the international community to react and block the aggression”**. This concept that can be found in the Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova (with all the mistakes and miss-interpretations of this document) was applied in the particular case of the Russian-Georgian war, even though Georgia did not foresee such a threat in its security concept and did not design a suitable strategy to react in the case that such a threat becomes real fact.

2. Georgian National Military Strategy

The Georgian National Military Strategy, the first such document that Georgia has ever had, “constitutes the main part of the National Security Strategy” and significantly shapes implementation of the national defense policy through 2010. It defines fields of activities of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) and plans within the short-term (2005–2007) and mid-term (2008–2010) perspective. The National Military Strategy forms the basis for

future development of an effective security system and building the GAF. Moreover it underlines the steps for enhancing defense capabilities necessary for Georgia's integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In the system of decision making during a crisis, **the Georgian Armed Forces(GAF)** have an important role. The missions and functions of the GAF are defined by the Law on Defense (III Paragraph, article #7) and include such objectives as protection of independence, protection of territorial integrity and fulfillment of international agreements. The GAF performs these functions under the direction and authority of the Ministry of Defense, according to the principles of democratic civilian control.

The **Ministry of Defense** (MoD) has the following missions:

- To give political direction and to manage the GAF development process;
- To maintain the forces in a high state of readiness;
- To carry out political decisions made by the executive and legislative branches of the Georgian government;
- To identify threats based on the current military-political situation;
- To develop the force structure of the GAF;
- To accomplish military cooperation in accordance with international treaties and agreements.

There are **five general principles** of the Georgian defense policy (title II of the Military Strategy):

1. Prevention of and Protection from direct aggression
2. NATO integration and international cooperation
3. Ability to assess strategic environment precisely
4. Provide stability in the Caucasus region
5. Contribution to the international security environment

On those five principles, the first, third and the fourth could have relations with the August Russian-Georgian war, and the second could have relations with some guarantees related to the moment when the fights resumed.

In the principle linked with **protection from aggression**, the main provisions are linked with deterrence of the aggression, “the preferred means of protection for Georgia”, through well-prepared Armed Forces and

the will of society to resist potential adversaries, “thus granting better opportunities for the peaceful accomplishment of the national interests of Georgia”. These main developments of the paragraph underline once again the public abstinence of Georgian leadership from military actions and an inclination to observe the principle of peaceful resolution of the conflicts.

The first principle, of deterrence, refers to **the ability to assess strategic environment precisely** emphasizing the non-aggressive and peaceful character of the defense concept and strategy. “Georgia must be aware of the international environment, as well as the situation in the Caucasus. National efforts are focused on maintaining the required intelligence capability at the tactical, operational and strategic level, to allocate defense resources more effectively, and to include meeting the technical challenges”. This underlines the careful address of the intelligence needs for a clear and accurate overview of the Northern Caucasus and the Northern border, of a paramount importance in the warning signals when Russian regular battalions entered the Roki tunnel.

Relating to this, the principle of **“providing stability in the Caucasus region”** is the most important related to Georgia’s direct relations with Russia. The paragraph mentioned the “primary element of Georgian defense policy” which is “maintaining stability and close political cooperation with neighbouring countries”. Moreover, the paragraph contains a formal recognition of “the legitimate interests of other states” and “seeks to maintain relationships that support security and prosperity, as well as promote respect for internationally recognized borders”. This would be a hint that, concerning military matters, there is a sense of respect and an open hand offered to Russia.

The limits of the military resources and capabilities are recognized in the paragraph related to **NATO integration and international cooperation**. Here we also find mentioned “the difficulty of anticipating in advance the nature of current threats and challenges”, a formula designating the limits of the intelligence capabilities, all these requiring “Georgia to seek close security cooperation within the international community”. Three phrases further, it is mentioned that “furthermore, Georgia faces a complex regional environment in the Caucasus with limited resources, which compels us to

seek additional security in the form of alliances and partnerships”. The solutions are both international cooperation and “the territorial defense based on the collective defense principle”, meaning seeking NATO membership.

For this purpose, Georgia is assuming its own “**contribution to the international security environment**”, by understanding that Georgia’s “long-term future as a free, secure and prosperous nation” depends largely on “an international order that is free of coercion, aggression and terrorism. Georgia recognizes its responsibilities as a member of the international community to work towards that goal”.

According to those principles, we could expect Georgia to **have suitable intelligence capabilities in Northern Caucasus**, a **defense** that could face the threats and the **possible attack from the separatists, volunteers and kozaks** from Northern Caucasus - expected only toward the population in the separatists region, especially in South Ossetia, with **no expectance of a full scale Russian troops attack** towards Georgia and **a conscientious perception of the limits of its capabilities** in facing large scale attacks on its territory from its huge neighbor.

In the IVth Chapter of the National Military Strategy, on the **key Aspects of Strategic Environment**, this reality is underlined with more accuracy than in the theoretical and introductory part. This chapter mentions that “Georgia’s current strategic environment includes a rapidly changing political landscape, rapid technological changes, a diversity of potential adversaries and **limited military capabilities**”.

In the same part there is a reference to **The Georgian Threat Assessment**, a document which provides a detailed analysis of these specific threats, to include their probability and impact. “The mission, structure and requirements of the GAF are derived from this Threat Assessment”. If there is a clear sense that “the Caucasus, especially the North Caucasus region, is highly dangerous and unstable” with “frozen conflicts and the danger of new crises occurring”, “**the probability of direct aggression against Georgia in the near future is low**”, but there are other real challenges threatening the security and welfare of the country.

In this document, the threat order is different. The first reference is to **the separatist activities** within Georgia's borders. The second one is the sixth one in the Security Concept, **Russian military bases** and, this time, there is a direct mention of **the Peacekeeping Troops within our territory** "which have a history of provoking instability in the separatist regions and remain a threat".

Moreover, even though there is no threat identified coming from the Russian military forces in great numbers in the Northern Caucasus or the whole Army of Georgia's big neighbor, Russia, as a threat, the same paragraph states that "There will always be **forces in the Russian Federation that will provide active support to separatist regimes using Russian bases within Georgia**". The document pleads for the complete withdrawal of all these types of forces from its territory and mentions that "this issue will require continuous attention".

With these provisions, it is very clear that Georgian military authorities did take in consideration the fact that the "**Russian peace keeping forces**" as well as **the remaining Russian soldiers in the military bases** could join the separatists and the volunteers from Northern Caucasus in a direct clash with Georgian forces, on the separatist territories. This means that there was a sense of planning the needed capabilities to counter this possible threat.

Under the same title in the Military Strategy, there is a full chapter related to **limited capabilities**, which could not be found in the Security Concept in this straightforward form, but more by reading in between the lines. The Military Strategy also mentions **the real stage of the preparation of the Georgian Armed Forces** – GAF to meet the tasks assigned through the Military Strategy and the Security Concept.

In this respect, the document states that "the current security requirements set **forth multiple tasks for the Armed Forces of Georgia** and require appropriate resource support to conduct military operations. The effectiveness of the Armed Forces is determined by the following three main factors: **training level, modern technical equipment and effective management system**. Attaining high levels in all three areas will be impossible without the allocation of sufficient financial and material

resources. **At present, the GAF has significant shortfalls in all three areas.** This would make it impossible for the GAF to neutralize all existing or potential threats if required”.

These clear statements are of huge importance for the development of the Russian-Georgian war, for **the perception and problem framing of the decision makers** during the whole crisis, for a correct analysis of their reactions and statements as well as for the behavior of the crisis decision making system during the August war.

Under the same title of the strategy, there is an expose on the need to join NATO, as a supreme solution and guarantee for its security and defense. This paragraph is very important for our analysis since it mentions the fact that there was **a signal of a possible threat coming from Russian regular forces** that was not quantified in the strategies as such, in order to prevent stronger reactions from Moscow, but it was taken into consideration. The fact that there were no forces to deal with such a threat is underlined in this last paragraph:

*“Another factor is also of great importance – **Georgia is surrounded by relatively strong and more capable neighbors.** Furthermore, Georgia is facing multiple kinds of potential adversaries, who have the capability to **conduct non-standard combat operations as well.** We recognize that it will be impossible to respond to all existing or potential threats. Until our country attains NATO membership, thus acquiring much firmer guarantees than it currently has, **it will be necessary to rely solely on our own forces and their ability to conduct different types of operations**”.*

This paragraph is the only one that gave us the hint that **Georgian authorities were aware that Russia** (and Turkey, qualifying theoretically for the “more capable neighbors” label) could represent **direct military threat without any suitable capability to deal with it**, in a military operation, and has the possibility to conduct “non standard combat operations”, that we saw during the August war.

The recognition of the **limited capabilities** to deal with such threats is another clear perception that influenced the reaction during the war, and the recognition of the need to “**rely solely on our forces**” challenges any assumption and parts of Russian propaganda for the EU countries about the war that claims that the Georgian authorities were expecting a direct military help from NATO or the US, that’s why they reacted in such a way, “falling in their own trap”.

3. Formal and informal decision making system. How it worked during the Russian-Georgian War.

The last two chapters helped us realize the limits and forms of the normative and institutional framework of the decision making system at the moment of the August crisis. We will go further in trying to picture the de facto behavior of these institutions and the most important decision makers during the crisis in Georgia, according the public statements, the public perception, the myths developed during and after the crisis, but also the interviews that we did with the persons that were in the crisis room.

The first stages of an institutionalized decision making system in Georgia

a. Young and inexperienced

It has to be noted the fact that we are talking about quite a young leadership, with the experience of only 5 years of ruling the country(after the Rose Revolution), that learnt mostly by doing the administration of the country and the respective institutions. No one had a real knowledge of the institution system and the functioning of the democratic system except from books or short visits to the Western countries. Some had short stages of studies in the West, but in the formal leadership as well as in the adviser ranks, few really knew what to do. Irrespective of their age, all of them were inexperienced and without a proper formal education on the tasks of their future jobs.

b. Strong, cohesive and coherent group

At the level of the decision, the group that really dealt with the crisis was represented by a dozen of people around the Presidential Office, holding

administrative positions that were not necessarily linked with the institutional structure designed to deal with a war or with a crisis of this amplitude. The positive aspect was the fact that this team was very united, with a huge level of mutual trust – very important to the domestic policy towards an extremely divided opposition, unified only by the goal to oust President Saakashvili and with a few ideas and projects of the future governmental plans, others than those already applied by the leadership in place.

c. Group thinking side effects

The negative side effect was the phenomenon of Group thinking during the crisis, when all thought the same way and supported each other's ideas, without alternative scenarios in discussion, with few fresh ideas and with a lack of censorship coming from somewhere during the discussions. In this situation, the decisions are worse than the ones that the leader will take by himself, because the general consent gave the sense of the rightful decision that a responsible leader will look upon twice if depending only on himself. This does not mean necessarily that the unanimity was there at all moments and that there were no nuances in the assessments of the facts.

d. Lack of professional expertise in the crisis room

Another important fact is the lack of the expertise in the decision making in Georgia: there is no such think as a situation room, with the use of top expertise in all the fields in real time, with professionals in all the fields ready to assist the decision makers in these crucial moments. On the contrary, there is a lack of understanding - general, with some exceptions – of the need of the institutions and the clear procedures to work during the crisis, the need to avoid improvisation and to have access, during the decision making process, at all the technical and intellectual knowledge needed.

e. First stages of a future political-bureaucratic conflict

Even though we could now find a lot of decision makers who felt that they needed a proper system, that something was missing, and almost all recognize the ad-hoc type of decisions, this was not blamed on the lack of institution building concern or on the functionalism default of some of the

existing bodies, but on the time needed to build these institutions. At some points, we could detect the fact that those persons were frightened by the idea that the decisions will be taken by some bureaucrats or professional experts in some fields and not by the formal political decision makers, or that those professional bodies needed in an operation room could influence decisively the form of the decision, if allowed to enter in the core of the debate of the politicians.

Altogether, the lessons learnt the hard way showed the real situation, since now there is a British consultancy and other international help to build up the needed consultancy and situation room for the operations and decisions in crisis. This would definitely replace the command and control center during the crisis that was mostly improvised ad hoc during the crisis.

f. Lack of strategic culture

The strategic culture was hard to be a prominent task in the first stages of the independence of Georgia, and less after the Rose Revolution. Apart from being aware of the need to join the West, EU and NATO, and the clear need of strategic partnership with the US, there was a general lack of strategic culture that directly affected the leadership involved in the crisis but also indirectly, through the reactions during and after the crisis of the opposition, the gossips spreading around and helping the enemy propaganda, the internal agenda affecting and influencing the war, including the decision making.

It is also the case of the lack of strategic culture that made some bureaucrats or people caching a piece of information that felt interesting to leak it to the public or to their neighbours, without thinking properly that it could not be true, that it was designed to be analyzed together with other sources and in a specific context, in real terms, that a piece of information leaked could lead only to panic or a false image of the crisis and would not help anyone during the crisis. This behavior is to be fundamentally revised and is a matter of culture that would be formed in time, this has nothing to do with an extreme secrecy policy or an excessive repressive system of punishing such errors, but only with the sense of team, the correct understanding of everybody's role and function and the importance of respecting the rules, especially during a crisis.

Some experts interviewed also blamed this lack of strategic culture and these details that emphasized the feeling of chaos and mismanagement on a type of “character of the Georgian people”. After the experiences in Africa, South America and some Arabic countries, it is clear that this is not the case. On the contrary, Georgians, as a people from the mountains are tough, used to go to war in harsh conditions, and this was confirmed by the high level of integration and the role in the international peace keeping operations like the most recently one, in Iraq.

g. Symbolic personal leadership in a low level of institutionalization of the decision making system

In Georgia, the general system is in the first stages of institutionalization, it is also the case for the first stages of functionalism of this system, with blockages, mismanagement and gaps in the system. The functionality of the system is far more that we could expected in 5 years of reforms, but less than what we could achieve through a systematic approach to this issue, with a clear political will to deal with this and not excessive resources involved.

The system is highly dependent on the leadership of each institution at a given moment. This made every institution highly dependent on his chief or the politician that holds the decision, at a level that in some cases it is paralyzed or at least not performing as it should in the case of the physical absence of the chief. The Georgian system is highly personalized and the personal role or mood is often more important than the first stages of a rule to move the papers and a sense of duty by the bureaucratic system. The person in charge is at all stages responsible for the functionality and effectiveness of the institution not the structure and associated mechanisms.

Both the system and institution and the bureaucrats, the Georgians working there, react with an important part of dependence linked to the personal physical presence of the leader or chief of the institution. It is also the case for the existing system that is tight to the personal presence of Saakashvili on the stage or on the TV station. If his performance is not the usual one, the system and the Georgian themselves tend to be nervous without direct explanation, but if he’s highly engaged in criticism with his usual statements against the Russians, it means that all is in order. He still plays and played during the crisis an excessive symbolic role for the whole society, whether people like him or not.

h. Ad hoc reactions taken on the spot

Another important problem of the decision making system during the crisis was linked to the decisions, taken almost on the spot, ad hoc, spontaneous in the biggest part, without a thoughtful, prepared reaction coming from an internalized procedure that was in place for some time and that everybody knew and accepted, for which they were trained and prepared. This rush, at the first stages, led to excessive voluntarism and high speed in the reactions, but in time the reactions were more moderate and elaborated, based on several information and sources and in a more analytical manner. The learning process happened at the same time with the evolution of this crisis.

i. High influence from the perceived/expected reactions from outside the system

Another characteristic that could be observed is the influence that played in the decision making the expected reactions or perceived reactions of the actors outside the system, especially from the decision making systems from US, EU and Russia. Even though there were consultations and some foreign experts helped during the crisis, there wasn't a real exchange of intelligence in the first stages of the crisis, no warning and no early reaction or response from the partner and allied countries. A low and unexpected level of implication of the EU and US was doubled by an over-involvement of Russia and a formal involvement of the international community in solving the conflict.

The expected reactions of the main players during the conflict, rather than the perceived and expected reaction once the conflict resumed, had an important bearing on Georgia's decision making system. It was not, however, mature enough and is based on improvisation too much to react according the rules, norms and procedures previously elaborated (where there was the case of such rules and procedures) and without this excessive influence of the external actors towards the decision making system.

j. Influence from the type of leadership in place

Last but not least, the decision making system was completely influenced by the kind of leadership the existing authorities imposed, but also by the

kind of system the opposition and the public perceived – one where the sense of authority played the major role, with a huge influence in the public order. This gave the impression of the public expectance, of what the public wishes and respects, but this also limited the types of behavior and the reactions of the leadership in a given situation.

This behavior and the expectances raised in the population for a solution about the division of the country raised the fury of the public when violences resumed and put extra pressure on the Government, not for beginning any war, but for having a suitable and solid defense to deal with an attack, the pressure on the leadership was to find a solution that could maintain the sense of a strong authority. This perceived pressure by the leadership was anticipated by Russia, who used it, even if it wasn't exactly planned at the first stages of the conflict.

The internal domestic situation played a role in this type of expected behavior by the population that tied the existing leadership to a solution that proves firm and decisive steps. After the 7th of November rallies of the opposition and the reaction of the police, there was a kind of insecurity felt by the existing leadership that added pressure. There was the feeling that if there is a bad management of the August aggression, they lose the aura of a tough and solid leadership, knowing what to do and how to protect Georgia and the Georgians, a situation that could lead to the loss of the political domestic power.

It is very likely that this was planned by Russia as a possible side-effect of the operations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in spite of an existing or absence of a reaction of Tbilisi: if the leadership reacts, that's a motive for a higher level operation inside Georgia, with the consequence of ousting the existing leadership during the invasion of Tbilisi. If the existing leadership does not react, that's a good motive for him to be ousted by the opposition and the population for not having an adequate response to the crisis, even though they appear as a strong leadership inside Georgia.

There is another sense of the high expectances of the public that influenced the leadership: the sense and high frequency on the media of the possible solutions of the separatist, crisis, the sense in those offers, the support of the

international community for those solutions, the previous success of this administration in solving Adjara's crisis after the Rose Revolution. In that respect, neither the perspective of failure, nor the loss of South Ossetia, and the consequent ethnical cleansing of the Georgians leaving there, were acceptable without any proper reaction of the Georgian authorities.

Institutions involved in the decision making process during the August crisis

Georgia doesn't have previous experiences of military operations up the August Russian-Georgian War, with the exception of some troops involved in the coalition's operations in Iraq. That was actually the place where 2000 of the professional Army soldiers were fighting when the conflict started. But besides that, the professional Army directly involved worked well, which is not what we could say of the civilians. The form of preparation of the population proved to be poor and useless in that particular conflict.

The place where there were no means to react proved to be the Cyber war, when the communications and also the internet server was under the direct attack on the 11th and 12th of August. If the Military and Police had the possibility to continue their communications through special means, the normal phone and internet connections where down.

Then, the informational war was pretty well fought, with the help of Western friends and partners, but the lack of resources at some point put Georgia in the position of losing this informational war in the long run. Russia succeeded to pass some of its objectives of propaganda in terms of absolute truth, especially in the sense of an equal responsibility for the war, at least from the point of view of "teasing" or "provoking" Russia, if not from the direct operational sense of the attack. This was also supported by the need and expectance of the EU and even some US officials to have proof and sense of shared responsibility and not a clear situation of aggression and guilt of only one part, Russia, which would create huge problems with the expected condemnation of this actor according the international law.

There were few means, if any, to counter the rocket war. In Georgia, Russia used the Iskander rockets for the first time, and the authorities in Tbilisi did not have any means to react since no anti-rocket system was in place, and no other improvised means could face this type of attack. It was the case with the naval attack – Georgia did not have any battle ships, but only some border guard and border police little ships, and the aviation war, where the anti-aircraft artillery played a good role but no balance air fight could be expected.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in the official Georgian documents there was no scenario of a full scale invasion by Russia, there was a lack of resources to sustain such a war and such a scenario was considered rather improbable.

The decision making system, was rather poor at the rules and procedures level, there were a few general rules in every field of activity – military, police, foreign affairs – but no specific rule or procedure for this particular or any crisis, no specific tasks for the personnel in case of such a crisis, no proper planning for a reaction in time of crisis or at least a “manual” about how to behave and how to deal in such a crisis, a document issued and approved in advance, with a proper training of the personnel of the institutions to apply this particular steps in crisis, once one such event is declared.

The formal decision making system in times of crisis in Georgia contains the Presidential Administration with its Chancellery, then the National Security Council, which reunites some key ministers and other personalities like the Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Relations, State Minister for Territorial Reintegration, the last two relevant for this particular crisis but usually not the most prominent in general crisis and in the process of taking the decisions.

In the case of the Russian-Georgian war, the main decision making bodies were the presidential Administration and the National Security Council. The decisions were taken in the Council, in a more “thinned” presence than the formal institutional composition. Other decision making units were the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also the Minister of Health for the humanitarian matters after the occupation and refugees influx.

The working system mainly respected the institutional framework, even though there was a huge and justified criticism that in those moments the person in charge in different decision making units only discussed matters with some key persons around him when taking a decision. There were simplified forms and informal gatherings that replaced the large scale of the formal decision making bodies at that level and not all the involved or designated persons were there.

The only moments when there was a sense of institutional gathering, solidarity and mutual support were the ones at the beginning of the crisis, in some sentimental and emotional moments. Those reunions were designed to mobilize everybody, and to give them an explanation of what was happening, to underline their role and to gather their contribution to the solution of the crisis. But this did not happen at all the levels and in all the institutions involved as decision making units, like in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Intelligence System was rather newly established in all its components. The former Ministry of National Security merged with the Ministry of Interior under this administration and the old revised system worked well especially in counterintelligence. The Military intelligence body was rather weak, at its first stages of development, and there were moments when the President knew more about the situation on the ground than the Minister of Defense, briefing him in the National Security Council. The Foreign Intelligence Office under the President was relatively new, and its chief was not a part of the National Security Council. It was also the case of the Direction for analysis of Information under the Ministry of Interior which was the real focus of intelligence gathering and analysis of the goings-on during the crisis.

Functionality of the decision making system during the crisis

Internal interagency communication worked rather well during the crisis even though there were moments of chaos and sometimes it was not clear who was where. Coordination was also rather poor, but not really due to the lack of inter-institutional communication but to a poor sense and information about the movement of troops on the ground. If institutions

worked well, there were moments of lack of communication between the Center and the ground forces and the 11 and 12 of August blackouts of communication during the cyber attack.

Basically, as a general observation, institutions did function, in spite of a crash and destabilization of the system expected by the Russian planners that estimated a vertical break in the power chain and the collapse of the Georgian state by institutional default. Even without proper coordination at some points, the Prime Minister's office – dealing with economic tasks, the Defense Ministry and the Army, the Ministry of Interior and the Police did their jobs.

The most unexpected task was carried out responsibly and even effectively in the given conditions, by the humanitarian side, once the IDPs came and asked for assistance, the system succeeded in functioning and even performed better than expected, another lesson of good practices that could be seen without previous planning and preparation for such a perspective as the one faced during the war. This was another point where the Russian planners waited for the Georgian system to collapse and the power to be shaken by huge demonstration of people starving or of unhappy individuals that lost everything and were homeless.

The majority of institutions and people involved at ground level and in the central command offices knew what they had to do and reacted unexpectedly well, with a good interaction especially in the first stages of the war. We could not see the lack of resources or the lack of exercise, the absence of contingency plans or procedures during the crisis, the lack of preparedness for this type of crisis and the lack of general experience and experience during a war, that usually would affect the functionality of the institutions playing here a major role. The system held together especially due to the will of the people involved in the leadership, their team spirit and mutual trust in each other.

Even concerning defense, things went pretty well, considering the existing capabilities. There were some moments and units where we could speak of performances especially at the level of the professional trained Army units. Concerning the Ministry of Interior and Police and the Ministry of Foreign

Relations there were no shortcomings that could affect the situation during the conflict, with the noticeable exception of the moment when the Cyber war showed its effects, influencing the well-being of the system for almost two days, the 11th and 12th of August, cutting all communication systems.

What went wrong? Coordination failures and improvisation

The war revealed organizational problems, technical issues (especially in the information exchange field), bureaucratic shortfalls (a lot of decisions given orally, without the proper documents, some instructions lost between papers due to the lack of a consistent and effective circulation of the papers). The lessons learnt from this crisis helped in underlining the stable and performing parts of the system, other were rewritten and help from the partners and allies was demanded in this respect.

As someone quoting von Clausewitz put it, in this war too, “there was much improvisation”. Some procedural mechanisms in place proved to be good and functional and performed well. The fact that a large scale **war was unexpected a good and credible excuse for the shortcomings**. But the sense of improvisation and the perception of chaos and lack of coordination on the ground could not be explained solely on this basis.

Taking first the National Security Council, even this body under the President did not work coherently. Apart from the two formal reunions, on the 7th of August when it took note of the first entrance of Russian regular troops through the Roki tunnel and when the Russian troops and tanks were at the gate of Tbilisi, it functioned rather randomly. Its president or chair, Kakha Lomaia appointed himself as chief negotiator with the Russian troops in Gori and was mostly away, not performing as a leader and the principal head of the most important decision making body during the crisis.

The Council performed more on the PR and communication field than as a real body for mitigation, data and information gathering, analysis and decision maker. Instead, the real decision making system was done *de facto* with the most important figures of the system, independent of their positions in the establishment, and this group performed well in spite of the impression of group thinking side effects.

Even though there were some examples that intelligence did well, since the steps were practically visible with the eye, we can say that a GIA – the Georgian Intelligence Agency, a unified intelligence institution - was missing during the crisis. Basically the better part of the persons involved in the decision making process during this crisis rejected the need of such a body, which could give the impression that there is an internal political reason behind this that we are not able to see. The intelligence came from different sources, according to the decentralized and specialized system, but it gave the sense of an unanalyzed staff with overlapping attributes and unconsolidated through professional means.

The existence of such a coordinated body could play the role that was missing - information sharing and analysis on the full range of data and intelligence - and would have helped decision makers comprehend the dimension of the Russian attack not on the 8-th of August at 4 a.m., but a day earlier, and this would have made it clear that these forces were not only designed to protect South Ossetia, but to reach a far more important objective inside the Georgian capital Tbilisi.

The system was perceived as rather dysfunctional, at some moments, by both the internally involved persons, by the people at ground level and by the public, as being rather lost and uncoordinated, conducted by just a part of the ministers and by some public figures and did not involve the real institutional leaders that had to be there according to their responsibilities and expertise and not according to their personal relation to the president or ruling party.

Another very visible and rather costly situation for the confidence in the institutions was the one when the President knew more about the situation than his ministers, with the very visible case of the Minister of Defense, when the chief of state briefed the members of the Council and not the other way around. Several times the Minister of Defense wasn't up to date with the events and also incapable of even confirming the facts and situations presented by the President. This is not to blame this person but the system that prevented him from having all the needed information for his job in due time but rather shifted the position towards the President. We couldn't say if there is formally a political domestic explanation behind that.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a huge role in the international communication and performed well during the war. Everybody arrived at work and began to work in an “open fire regime”, but with the same lack of effective procedure and training for this type of crisis. There was the sense of urgency and the self-attributed mission was to get the most of the international support through clear communication on the situation. Uninterrupted information channels were in place, and information from the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior were delivered in real time.

But our findings showed that there was not a direct coordination with the Presidential Administration or the National Security Council which made the MFA deliver through diplomatic but also open media channels all the information coming from the MoD or Ministry of Interior, without a proper selection, which meant that the MFA, the MoD or MI employees decided what information was aired. Even if we could not say that the system let out information that would not be requested or which could harm the crisis development, it is clear that the lack of a pre-established system and the lack of supervision from the a higher decision making body, replaced by direct horizontal communication, could have had a bad influence on the crisis and serious side effects.

We had the information, during an interview of a high placed source, that at some level the MFA functioned as the communication common unit for the MFA, MOD and MI, during the first stages of the cyber attack, until the server hosting the MFA site was subject to the attack too, and was moved to another more protected place. Another equally important source placed at the same high level denied such a role for the MFA. Therefore we could not assess a higher role for the MFA during the crisis than the one designated for it in the normal Georgian institutional establishment.

Prominent individuals involved in the decision making process and their roles

As we have already stated, the individuals involved in the inner circle of power, persons that were more important than the positions than they occupied, had a huge role in the functioning of the system and in the decisions taken during the crisis. A group of the closest friends of the President and the toughest people of the regime, but also some respected professionals were inside the crisis room and held things together.

In the first category were the so-called “Georgian Hawks”. With President Mikhail Saakashvili, we had in the forefront Zurab Adeiashvili, chief of the Presidential Administration – currently Minister of Justice, Giga Bokeria, Deputy minister of Foreign Affairs – former president of the Parliament and one of the most important persons of the regime, Ghivi Targamadze, the President of the Security and Defense Committee of the Parliament, but also David Bakradze, President of the Parliament and Ghiorghi Ugulova, Mayor of Tbilisi.

In the second category, but no less influential or important were Vano Merabishvili, the Minister of Interior, an extremely powerful politician and a highly respected professional, Kakha Lomaia, the President of the National Security Council, with less political coverage and less practical skills but a prominent intellectual that the president trusted.

According to our investigation, the most important persons, during the crisis, were Vano Merabishvili and Giga Bokeria. They had a major role in the most critical moments. By this observation we do not want to say that they were responsible for all the decisions and neither that at some other decision units, the leadership did not performed well. It just means that these were the people that succeeded in holding together the system and had the most foresight during the most tragic moments of the crisis.

In the whole crisis there was no panic or breakdown inside the team from the crisis room. But, as a lot of the people inside admitted, there were “nervous” and “emotional” moments with some of the members of the team. But it was not any collapse or breakdowns of any of the people under huge pressure during the decision making moments of the crisis.

There was a special public moment that has to be mentioned here. After the entrance of the Russian troops in Gori, there was a public appearance of the President Saakashvili that gave the public the perception that he was lost and panicking. It was the moment of his statement of profound concern, eating his tie. This allowed the public to say that the President lost control and this perception was accentuated by the Russian TV who had a lot of fun on his account. It was also a moment when the statement had nothing to do with the crisis and when people expected something else. He talked about his achievements, low unemployment, lower taxes and diminishing the corruption. The message did not fit and accentuated the impression of loosing control.

We do not know at this point what the real situation was, if it was a moment of panic or rather a moment of extreme concentration and concern, a moment of intense thinking on the next move. But the whole picture does not help at this particular point, and neither does the content of the speech. This was basically the moment when the presence of Vano Merabishvili, the Minister of Interior with his extremely professional and strong position and of Giga Bokeria, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs played the major role. They made this less fortunate moment of the president forgotten and the people did not sense any discontinuity in the signals sent by the leadership. President Saakashvili came back in no time to take over his role in the communication process.

Asked during the interview about this particular moment and his major role during the crisis, Giga Bokeria rejected and refused to assume a higher role than the one institutionally reserved to him and blamed it on the exaggeration and myths created around him during the 4 year time when he was leading the Parliament. He stated that the most important thing was the fact that the team worked right. True or not, the position of Merabishvili and Bokeria gave the public the perception of continuity and a firm decision making group in power and in control during the crisis from persons that did not lose confidence and did not panic during those moments. Their symbolic role was equally important, even if the functional one in the decision making process during those moments was pure fantasy, wishful thinking and myth.

Another important role during the hottest moments of the crisis was played by the communicators:

- **Shota Utiashvili**, the chief of the General Direction for the Analysis of Information in the Ministry of Interior had a huge role and gave the sense of control through his professional presentation with the map of technical details of the ongoing situation (once again, we are not sure of the content of the communication and if some elements could not be used by the enemy, but public appearances played a major role for the public perception).

- **Aleksandr Lomaia**, the secretary of the National Security Council (currently Ambassador at the UN) presented his negotiations with the Russian Army in Gori,
- **David Bakradze**, President of the parliament and **Ghiorghi Ugulova**, the Mayor of Tbilisi played their role in the communication process and gave the sense of control by avoiding the general panic and maintaining the perception that the leadership was in control at all moments.

Also there were some American experts living in Tbilisi that played their role as communicators.

A subconscious American model crisis management?

There were some moments in the management of the crisis that were well known through the way that the 9 of September crisis was managed in the US. Since we know that there was not a plan of contingency dealing with such a crisis, it should have been unconsciously taken from the public TV broadcastings or the result of ideas inspired by the same common background and feelings towards what the decision makers saw during the American crisis.

There were two obvious moments one which was the antiwar rally, in a country that did not face any pro-governmental rallies during the whole Saakashvili mandate, it was the same type of common reaction and common feeling than the one with the public common mourning after the fall of the World Trade Center that had the purpose to stop panic and to show public support of one another and for the leaders during the crisis. Second was the involvement of the Mayor of Tbilisi on the model of Rudolph Giuliani, in a crisis where he basically did not have any role, but one nonetheless and succeeded in dealing with the crisis.

There were several other more subtle moments, like public statements and open declaration in front of the major institution, like the trip of the President in Gori under fire (which could be symbolically seen as similar with George W. Bush's presence on the ruins of the WTC), the statements on the continuous war that did not end, etc. But those moments and phrases could be put in the framework of a more usual pattern of dealing with huge terrible crisis, all over the world.

II. THE STRATEGIC SURPRISE

There is an impression that Georgia - and for that matter Western countries as well, as we know it – were caught with the Russian-Georgian war, more or less, in a strategic surprise. This is where we can elaborate on the elements that lead to this situation regarding Georgia. For this purpose, we will try to underline the early warning signals, with consecutive perception and problem framing by the Georgian decision making system, and the definition of the crisis, with the ongoing shifts and transformation of the solution for the crisis.

Early warning signals

There are three basic moments of the crisis, related to the transformation of the problem. The first one is the signals that notified the warning for a future aggressive movement by Russia towards Georgia, without a proper definition, but with a more “provocative type” of military challenge, with all the signs and warnings coming to support a possible development of the military crisis in Abkhazia.

The second moment was the one closer to the moment where the military operations resumed and when there was a clear sign that the main and first target region **will be South Ossetia or especially South Ossetia**, and that the battle ground will only be the separatist regions. The third moment when it became obvious that the level of troops on the ground demonstrated the fact that they were prepared far better than the separatist regions and the fact that Moscow was prepared to move towards Tbilisi, with the consequent regime change objective or at least option.

a. The military solution towards Georgia. Abkhazia as a target

The general impression that there was a close issue that could be solved by military means in the separatist regions of Georgia came after March the 6th 2008 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia sent the CIS Executive Committee an official note communicating that the Russian Federation, “following the circumstances that have been changed”, does not feel obliged to respect the stipulations of the **Decision of the CIS Heads of States Council „On conflict settlement measures in Abkhazia, Georgia”** from 19 of January 1996.

This decision has prohibited trade, economic-financial, transportation and other types of operations with Abkhazia at the state level. Starting with this moment, Russia could freely introduce any type of products and any kind of support for Abkhazia, including military material, something which happened afterwards. This could have been foreseen and expected, some could say, after the withdrawal (or “self suspension”) of Russia from the CFE Treaty in 2007.

The 2–4 April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, was another crucial moment. Georgia (as well as Ukraine) expected to obtain the Membership Action Plan that would mean “a clear signal for Russia that NATO and the US have a clear interest in this region”. Rising the stakes would grant better visibility and fewer chances for Russia to play around, according to Georgian’s assessment. After the Summit, beginning with the 16th of April, Moscow sharply escalated tensions by establishing legal “links between” with Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a form of *de facto* annexation.

Consequently, Russia increased, during May-July, the number of troops in the Abkhaz region, including the railway troops that used for military purposes a part of Abkhazia’s railway system. Then, between July the 15th and August the 2nd, Russia launched the large-scale military exercises “Caucasus 2008”, in the immediate vicinity of Georgia’s Northern border.

The Russian Defence Ministry claims that the exercises, involving over 8,000 troops and 700 pieces of military hardware, were aimed at preparing for “special peace enforcement operations” in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the exercise, anti-Georgian leaflets entitled “Know Your Enemy” were distributed. Russian troops participating in the exercise did not withdraw from the region when the exercises ended.

b. South Ossetia in the line of fire

The moment when it became clear for the Georgian decision makers that South Ossetia could come in the line of fire was the 22–24 of July 2008 when the EU tried to hold talks in Brussels between representatives of the Government of Georgia and the South Ossetian separatists, with the participation of the Russian Federation. The separatists refused to participate, initially objecting to the title of Minister Yakobashvili – “Minister for Reintegration”, then on unspecified grounds.

Then, beginning with the 1st of August, without any pre-determined motif, the separatists began to shell Georgian villages situated between Tskhinvali and Java, some 12 big villages with 14.000 ethnic Georgians under the control of legitimate Georgian authorities from Tbilisi, protected by some 500 Georgian peace keepers and Georgian policemen.

On the 3rd of August, two other early warning signals showed very clearly that the military operation was there and that it would happen in South Ossetia. First, it was about the evacuation of the civilians, especially women and children, then a very clear statement of the separatist leader that the Georgians “will be swept” from South Ossetia.

But the most clear sign was when, on the 6th of August 2008, the separatists refused to meet Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, Temouri Yakobashvili and to negotiate or to explain the situation and their position. Then, a day later, Temouri Yakobashvili arrived in Tskhinvali and succeeded to meet only the Russian commander in chief of the Russian peacekeepers, who communicated that he is no longer under control of the separatists, he cannot intervene in the shelling of Georgian villages and recommended the Georgians an unilateral moratorium of cease fire. At this point it was completely clear that the war in South Ossetia, and perhaps something bigger, had begun.

c. Large scale military operation towards Tbilisi

In the night of the 6th to the 7th of August 2008, the first group of Russian regular troops with chars entered the Roki tunnel in South Ossetia. It was a full brigade with tanks and armored vehicles, and the Georgians got intelligence about this fact. It was very clear that those troops were not only designed to protect South Ossetian territory, or to sweep the Georgian ethnic from the region, but something more.

The Georgian intelligence already knew that there were volunteers and kozaks from the Northern Caucasus in South Ossetia and also a dissent of Russian Special Forces that changed their clothes into separatist military ones. That was more than enough to deal with the 500 Georgian peace keepers and the Georgian Police in the region, even to counter some forces added to those that Georgia already had on the ground, in order to protect Georgian villages.

When the battalion of regular Russian troops entered the Roki tunnel, it was clear that those were destined to far more ambitious objectives inside the Georgian territory. But even at this point, the full scale invasion was not yet designed. Georgian officials held an emergency meeting of the National Security Council and sent in Tskhinvali Temouri Yakobashvili for negotiations.

The actual proof of a full scale invasion came on the night of 7/8 of August at 1.07 a.m., when there was clear and solid intelligence that a new Russian regular force entered the Roki tunnel and that this huge ground force, supported with airplanes and helicopters, was prepared to go deep into the Georgian territory, to take Tbilisi and to change the regime.

Perception and problem framing

For each moment of the crisis there were different perceptions and consequent problem framing issues, with errors in the perception of the situation.

a. Kosovo Independence opened the Pandora box

The first moments when it was clear that Russia will play a hardball in Georgia was at the moment when Kosovo declared its independence and the consequent recognition by some of the Western European states and the US. In spite of the fact that there were clear statements that the Kosovo case was unique, Georgian authorities were sure that Russia was going to use this moment and that the tense relations with Georgia offered the suitable occasion to deal with their separatist regimes.

Basically, Kosovo's independence opened the way and offered the opportunity for a "solution" in the separatist regions of Georgia. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin already clearly stated that Russia will use this precedent. But this reaction was, at the first moments, a type of step by step approach, a creeping annexation of the two territories, before the NATO Bucharest Summit, with a sense of testing the reaction of the West, to realize how far they could go.

After the steps taken by the Russian Duma in terms of recognising the two separatist territories as independent states, it was clear that such a step could occur, but it was not possible as long as Russia did not control all the territory of the two separatist territories. For this matter, the most obvious target was Abkhazia, since there was only the small Kodori Gorge inhabited by the Georgian population, under the legitimate control of the Georgian authorities.

The other part of the assessment of Georgian authorities, based on their perception and problem framing, was about the differences between Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Even historically, Abkhazia was an autonomous region, with a direct and unlimited access from Russia, when South Ossetia was a district, isolated from Russia for almost 8 months a year.

Then, it was a question of differences and costs between the two gestures: when South Ossetia was to be recognized, that would not be in order to form a common state with North Ossetia – isolation, different ethnical bases, rivalries – and historically it had a more important sense of statehood than South Ossetia, which would mean that the recognized independence would create costs and requests of independence from the part of Northern Ossetia too, with a domino effect in Northern Caucasus.

Last but not least, 30% of South Ossetia was under the control of legitimate Georgian authorities, had their leadership in place and the region inhabited by the Georgians was not clearly defined: besides the Akhagori Western part, mostly inhabited by Georgians, the western part was a puzzle of Georgian, South Ossetian pro-Georgian and South Ossetian pro-separatist villages. It was then impossible to have a distinct part of South Ossetia contiguous, inhabited only by the separatists, to be recognized. This gave the Georgian authorities the impression that nothing will happen in South Ossetia apart from provocations and the usual fire cross fire.

b. Russians will not dare challenge the Occident

The Bucharest NATO summit was perceived as a huge defeat for Georgia, even though the final document granted, for both Georgia and Ukraine, that they will be NATO members. Georgians saw the final declaration as a kind

of abandonment on behalf of some EU countries and a signal that could be read by Moscow as a kind of “carte blanche” to do whatever they needed, including in Georgia, because NATO will not intervene. But there was a ray of hope from Washington, who strongly supported the MAP for Georgia and Ukraine.

There were two rounds of meetings between Saakashvili and Putin and the discussions followed the “Cyprus model” for Georgia, referred to by the former Russian President. That is why Georgian authorities expected a creeping annexation of Abkhazia, maybe the entrance of troops in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the conflict at that stage.

There was also the perception that the West could deter and block any direct action and, if it was the case of crossing the “red line” by the Russians, there would be a strong reaction from the US and the EU once warned about this perspective. In this respect, the warning system in place, the Georgians believed that if they have a quick way of direct communication to the Western Chancelleries, to NATO and the EU, any military action could be stopped by the intervention of the Western friends and partners.

The absence of the MAP in Bucharest was seen as a warning, especially because of the signal of division of the Alliance and the EU. But the visit of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Steinmeier in Abkhazia, Tbilisi and Moscow, with his settlement plan, as well as the visit of the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in July and her messages, were both perceived as clear signals for Moscow and that it would not be any aggressive moves. The assumption proved to be false.

There was another perception of the Georgian authorities that proved to be false. Since they do not have any direct relations with Moscow, Georgian authorities rely on the partners and friends from the Western countries to survey Moscow and give a suitable warning signal when Georgian territory and the peace in Southern Caucasus are at risk. But the holiday season and the lack of attention or even the difficult path information travels to get to official levels prevented a timely warning.

c. Ossetia, not Abkhazia on the line

The perception of a war in Abkhazia came in the 1st of August, after the shelling of the Georgian villages. On the third day it was crystal clear that this was the moment the Georgian authorities were fearing and that it would happen in South Ossetia, as a primary and principal target. At that time most of the decision makers, the President, the Minister of Defense, the President of the Parliament and others from the inner circle of decision, were out of the country. This alongside the fact that 2000 of the best Georgian troops were in Iraq at the time, was the most solid evidence that there was no Georgian plan of attack.

The problem of perception and framing, on this stage, was not identifying that South Ossetia was the primary target. It was very clear that the Dmitry Sanakoev administration was successful, and that Edouard Kokoiti, the separatist leader, was losing ground. The South Ossetian population left Tskhinvali to move some kilometers away in Tamanrasheni, the newly build capital of South Ossetia under the Georgian control. The personality of Sanakoev, former member of the separatist administration, played a major role in this endeavor.

The Georgians should have expected the first hit here, in South Ossetia - another year outside the Russian Federation tight control (so after the month of September) South Ossetia could be completely lost for the Russian backed separatist authorities for another 8 months, some 8000 paramilitaries Russian citizens with their families would be left alone and isolated in Tskhinvali, without any source of income and means of living. The side effect of Georgian's important steps in taking control of South Ossetia should have made it clear that was the primary target, when in Abkhazia separatists controlled almost all the territory.

d. The limited option: a strong reaction

The Georgian authorities were also caught in a domestic game that limited their options, in their own view. After the events of November 7th 2007, with riots on the streets and clashes between the opposition and the police, with a proved involvement in the manifestations by the Russian intelligence services, President Saakashvili resigned and organized snap elections that he won on the 5th of January.

Legitimizing the leader again after the challenges of November was a clever option. But it did not solve the problem. The extra-parliamentary opposition, that did not have a democratic area to express itself, continued the pressure and challenged the existing leadership continuously. This situation gave the authorities the impression that any step back from strong positions could be used in the internal political fight as a weakness that could be exploited. That was why the decision to protect the Georgian villages was made, at the cost of stepping with extra troops inside South Ossetia.

e. Last chance before the war: warning the West

The Georgian authorities perceived the need to warn the West who, they hoped, would intervene and stop any military action even at this stage. On the 5th of August, believing that the western partners and friends did not have a clear picture of what was happening at ground level, the Georgian authorities decided to find a direct way to show everybody the actual struggle.

That was why all the Western Ambassadors, NATO and EU states alike, those who were in Tbilisi at that moment or their replacements, were all invited and brought to the fighting line next to the Georgian villages to see the shelling. The idea was that the ambassadors would come to Tbilisi and send home reports of what was happening and that this would be the most credible warning for these countries. Unfortunately, either the reports came too late or the diplomats in charge were on holiday, or even Moscow did not take into account the Western warnings or concerns. The fact is that the course toward war remained the same.

President Saakashvili then tried a different approach – reaching president Medvedev. It was also the result of a misperception, since the Georgian chief of state believed that either Medvedev would step back, once exposed and called directly by his Georgian counterpart, or that the troops would really respond to him. Three days on the run he tried this preventive action in order to stop the operations in South Ossetia and to prevent the escalation of the conflict but he could not reach the Russian President by any means.

f. Saakashvili as a target

President Saakashvili knew that he was a target for some time. His direct and very loud anti-Russian statements were clearly perceived as reasons for the Russian leadership to try and replace him. Vladimir Putin refused to

meet him for some time, and the Dmitry Medvedev coming to power was not a guarantee of a fundamental change of option toward dialogue.

Then, on the day of the opposition's rally in November 2007, there was clear intelligence that proved those actions against his position as President were supported by the Russian authorities. We could add to these some direct calls received by President Saakashvili from Russian officials that warned and asked him to leave power. Once it was certain that President Saakashvili would not give up his position, there was an impression that a direct operation could be deployed for ousting him.

Once the second group of Russian armoured troops entered the Roki tunnel, in the night of 7/8 of August, it became clear that those troops were not equipped for the war in South Ossetia, or to protect the "internal border line" zone, but for a full scale invasion inside the Georgian territory with the direct objective to replace President Saakashvili and his regime and to install a "more responsible" President in Tbilisi, as Russian authorities clearly put it.

That is one of the explanations, together with the internal domestic challenges to his power, that put president Saakashvili in the position of the desperate decision to counter-attack, on the 7th of August after 23 hours. The objective was to take Tskhinvali quickly enough and to get to Java, the town at the last point were the narrow passage into the Caucasus Mountains ended, so that to provoke a jam to the Russian Armored column.

The perception was that if the Russian troops would not be stopped as close to the Roki tunnel as possible, they could reach Tbilisi earlier than the West could react. President Saakashvili felt that he could be in the situation either to flee Tbilisi and his country, or to face the possibility to become Putin's Saddam Hussein, being "hung by the balls" in the Red Square, as the former Russian President put it during his meeting with president Sarkozy, after the crisis.

Here is the place to mention the fact that in the middle of the war time, the presence in Tbilisi of the leaders of the friendly states, together with the presence in Gori of President Saakashvili together with the French Foreign Affairs Minister, Bernard Kouchner, as well as the visit of the Romanian President Traian Bănescu, all were perceived as moments of strong support for Georgia that blocked the advance of the Russian troops, the bombings and prevented the entrance in Tbilisi. All the leaders involved are considered to be instrumental for the stop of the operations towards Tbilisi.

Conclusions

Regarding the perception and the context of the situation, there were basically two misperception mistakes that occurred: the lack of prevention of a possible large scale war with Russia, which was the Strategic Mistake that led to the strategic surprise, and the fact that the West will block any attempt of Russia to use force in Georgia, or at least had the means to stop the military operations once knowing about them. In this second part, Georgian perception was just half wrong, because the West reacted and succeeded to stop the Russian march towards Tbilisi.

Another mistake was linked with the secrecy and abstinence requested by the West at the first stages of the crisis that prevented Georgian officials to publicly state that a battalion of Russian Troops entered the Roki tunnel in the night of 6/7 of August. The misperception that it would escalate the conflict and that this behavior would calm and appease the Russian leadership proved to be wrong, and it came at some costs, when Georgia “was found guilty” by some media of beginning the military operations especially because Russia denied this part of the reality and challenged the Georgian statement by using exactly the absence of this public statement.

This misperception and lack of reaction led to the fact that mobilization began very late⁶. It was also a combination of the consequence of the previous misperception and another one, the fact that Georgia will get the German support (visible through Steinmeier’s visit) once they will respect the advices of the German Ambassador in Tbilisi (supported by other Western diplomats) that “if you do not tease the Russians, they will not attack” and that “no concentration should happen in Gori because it could be seen as a threat and provocation by the Russians”.

These statements clearly misled Georgian authorities and prevented them from having a more effective and timely reaction, that could have enabled them to stop the Russian troops in the narrow passage in the Caucasus Mountains and prevent their entrance in the territory controlled by the legitimate Georgian authorities, before the energetic reaction of the Western leaders.

⁶ In spite of this fact, the Georgian Army fought very well. See Felix K. Chang “RUSSIA RESURGENT: AN INITIAL LOOK AT RUSSIAN MILITARY PERFORMANCE IN GEORGIA”, FPRI, August 13, 2008 but also CEPS Working Document 311 from February 2009, Stanislav Secreieru, “Illusion of Power. Russia after the South Caucasus Battle”.

Definition of the crisis

According to the perception and problem framing, the definition of the crisis was shaped in several stages. We will use the CRISMART⁷ definition as follows: a crisis for a given decision maker is **a sudden perceived change of the existing situation** that

- represents a **threat to the basic values**
- introduces a sense of **urgency**
- introduces a sense of **uncertainty**.

From this point of view, it was very clearly a crisis, at all the stages, in the very pure sense:

- there was a threat to basic values once the Georgian villages from South Ossetia were under open fire, with a clear threat to their life and to their belongings, together with an attempt to challenge Georgian leadership either to react on the spot, or to fail and to be ousted from power by the opposition. Then, in the second stage, there was a clear sense of losing South Ossetia via an ethnical cleansing process that would create some thousands IDPs that would then lose all their belongings, with the aftermath costs in domestic policy. In the third stage, it was about the fall of Georgia as a state, the full stage Russian-Georgian war, and the threat to oust the legitimate power or even to capture, humiliate or to kill President Saakashvili and to put in place a pro-Russian administration that will end Georgian independence and even statehood.
- the sense of urgency was obvious at any moment
- the sense of uncertainty came from the development of ground operations, the lack of nuances in the intelligence and the unexpected different reactions of the Western countries.

III. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In this part we will apply the methodology by analysing the decision making process from different angles. This is related to the definition of the crisis/of the problem, the way that this crisis was addressed, how the solution looked like and how much the decision makers and the bodies involved in applying their decisions succeeded in solving the problem, the way it was perceived and framed.

⁷ See Eric Stern, *Crisis Decision making. A cognitive institutional approach*, Elanders Gotab, Stockholm 2003.

1. Prevention, preparedness and planning for diminishing the effects: „A day too late, a dollar short”

It is obvious, according to the assessment of the official documents already presented, the institutional framework and functionality, that the Georgian establishment and institutions were not prepared to face this kind of attack. There was a sense of urgency in getting basic capabilities to face such a military crisis, in the limits offered by the budget and the access to some capabilities. Georgia was half-way on the projected capabilities that it could afford, when the August crisis appeared. The moment when all its capabilities could be in place, the way they were framed, was in mid 2010.

The regular professional army was prepared, and functioned well in a combat regime⁸ – in spite of the lack of experience in a direct war. The American methods of training and the US assistance really made wonders. But the reform was not ready at the level of the command and control structure and there were other segments where the army preparedness was not achieved, at the requested levels, being either incomplete or even missing. In the case of the interinstitutional coordination – police, volunteers – it was close to a disaster because this has not been addressed yet. There was no coordination either – except some improvisation – between the MoD and the Ministry of Interior.

Another institutional instrument where there was no proper preparation was the basic intelligence. There was a clear impression that something was going to happen, but clear and solid intelligence in due time that could give the sense of the real dimension possibilities and objectives of the Russian troops was missing. There was no sign of the movement of troops coming from partners, even though there was a clear partnership with the US, but the main concern of the US satellite system capabilities was probably more on Iraq and Afghanistan and not on Georgia or the Northern Caucasus.

⁸ See Felix K. Chang “RUSSIA RESURGENT: AN INITIAL LOOK AT RUSSIAN MILITARY PERFORMANCE IN GEORGIA”, FPRI, August 13, 2008; CEPS Working Document 311 from February 2009, Stanislav Secreieru, “Illusion of Power. Russia after the South Caucasus Battle”; also Serghei Markedonov, “Caucasus War Breaks Old Rules of the Game”, Russian Analytical Digest, nr. 45, September 2008.

Also, there was not a proper level of the intelligence analysis (just pieces of solid analysis capabilities at the level of the MI). The result was a tendency to react at the first sign, without corroborating the available data. Precipitated reaction was dominant in the first stages of the war.

There was a clear perception that if some EU member states would have some data on the perspectives of an attack, there was no exchange of intelligence or warning due to the fact that some of these states would like to validate the positions stated at the NATO Bucharest summit, on the lines of „we told you so”.

The Georgians were completely unprepared to face a full scale invasion with several levels of attack and multiple resource war. There were no proper means for defence against chars and armored vehicles, there were practically no airplane fighters to challenge Russian air force, and the Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali twice, but were forced to leave by Russian bombardments from air – airplanes, helicopters, rockets – and not by the combined joint forces of separatists, North Caucasian volunteers kozaks, and Russian Special Forces⁹.

There was another point where the lack of expertise was obvious - the appearance of successive evacuation alarms in several institutions from Tbilisi. Around 2-3 days there were false alarms that accentuated the stress and could lead to panic at the level of some segments of the society. That is why after this moment, there was a clear perception of the need to have procedures and common levels of understanding the criteria, as well as some exercises with the people entitled to launch the alarms.

⁹ See „Russian Paratroopers in Abkhazia,” InfoRos, August 11, 2008; „Paratroopers from Pskov, Ivanovo Brought in to Tskhinvali,” Kommersant, August 9, 2008; „Russia: Paratroopers in breakaway capital,” CNN, August 9, 2008. See also Felix K. Chang “RUSSIA RESURGENT: AN INITIAL LOOK AT RUSSIAN MILITARY PERFORMANCE IN GEORGIA”, FPRI, August 13, 2008 who proves in detailed that the Russian so-called “reaction” was prepared 10–15 days in advance and that the order of the operation was delivered way before President Sakashvili thought of introducing the forces in South Ossetia to protect its citizens, on its national territory.

At the same time, there was poor if any strategic planning. In spite of the fact that there was no preparedness for this type of actions, once the first Russian battalion entered the Roki tunnel, into the Georgian internationally recognized territory, the Georgian attack succeeded to disperse this force killing some 2000 soldiers – with only 72 “civilian”, all in the conflict areas, 44 in Tskhinvali. 17 airplanes were put down by the anti-aircraft artillery, during the operations (a number challenged by the Russian sources that gave different figures).

At the same time, when the second wave of armored infantry entered in the Roki tunnel, on the night of 7/8 of August, there was a desperate counterattack aimed at stopping the troops as long as possible and as far as possible from Tbilisi. After losing a lot of time in Tskhinvali, it became clear that the Georgian forces could not reach Java, so they just made contact with Russian troops and retreated step by step, for not losing too much people.

It was very clear that the level of training, institutionalized procedures for crisis times¹⁰, exercises in real crisis situation was completely missing. The need to elaborate such procedures designed for different levels of risk and danger became obvious for Georgian decision makers after the war, at the level of different civilian institutions as well. Practical training, creation of

¹⁰ In a study on the International Expert Group of Georgia, “Legal Evaluation of the Actions of the Government of Georgia during the Events of August 2008” by Zakaria Kutsnashvili and Vakhtang Khmaladze, there is an information talking about “verbal, unpublished decrees”(p.56). Moreover, according to the study, the Georgian Army was not allowed by existing laws to defend the Georgian citizens in South Ossetia by using the Georgian peacekeepers and neither the regular troops if the attack came from the separatists formations (not a “foreign country’s forces”, that would allow a “defensive war”) from volunteer non-regular paramilitary formations or from the Russians so-called peacekeepers. If this is the case, it means that the normative basis of the particular laws who described a “defensive war” and of the use of the armed forces in Georgia is completely badly established and this should be reviewed, an unforgivable mistake of a country that could know that it could have such problems (included, by the way, as we did underline in the first part, in the threat assessment and the National Security Concept and the National Military Concept). But this is twice as important since this type of definition and rules for employing the Georgian troops is preventing them from being used in a terrorist action, if the study quoted below is correct.

clear and simple command vertical lines at all levels, the need for guarantees for stable physical communication at the technical and political level, were requested by several institutions. Moreover, there is a complete lack of planning for those moments.

The real situation in Georgia was synthesized by someone thus: “one day too late, a dollar short”. It was clear that the mobilization was ordered too late, that the Georgian troops in Iraq were requested too late to come back - there was also a discussion about the level of the contribution with the idea that maybe the Georgians offered too much, compared to other allied countries – and the funds for equipment were not enough for the threats faced and the needs of the system.

There are also other reasons. Money is not enough for an adequate level of preparedness, and there is also the need for a political agreement of the producers for some type of new equipment. And then, if the Iraqi Georgian troops would have been here and been mobilized in due time, the output of the combat on the ground would not necessarily have been different, but certainly with more casualties. We have to admit that, in such conditions, the Russian forces would need far more time to pass Java and enter in the open plain, heading to Tbilisi.

2. Conflict of values

There were several moments where different conflict of values were thrust in front of the decision makers:

- Abstaining from provoking Russia with the movement or gathering of troops and the need to be prepare to react in time for a proper defense of the country
- The need to abstain from teasing Russia by introducing extra troops in and domestic expectations to protect the Georgian citizens from South Ossetia
- Diplomatic and combat needs to conduct a proper reaction, with maximum visibility and opening a full range of options for the next moves and the internal domestic political situation that forced tough reactions aimed at supporting the image of strong control o the situation from the group in power

- Maintaining Western support versus combat and defense needs
- The need to have public support in the operations through transparency versus the operational need of secrecy in the movement of troops on the ground
- The need to maintain public support and the credibility versus the need of communicating the real situation
- Communicating the truth and the need to avoid panic
- Gratitude for EU/French presidency intervention and discontent for the unclear and costly formulation of the cease fire agreement

In all those cases, it was a difficult choice to make, and every decision came with a cost. But the hardest point in the conflict of values was the one involving President Saakashvili personally, once he realised he was a direct target and the subject of the personal hate of Vladimir Putin. At this point, he had to deal with the decision of either leaving his country in times of war, staying and facing the capture by Russian troops or the death from Russian Special Forces and even the dishonour of being captured by the Russians, face a short trial in Moscow and be hung or shot in the middle of the Red Square¹¹.

On the other side there was the idea of not communicating to the public the feeling of fear or lack of political force. Since it was about a personal threat, it was also about a personal choice. We do not know the content of the real choice of President Saakashvili, but we could see him staying in Tbilisi, going under fire in Gori, speaking in the open square in front of his citizens, encouraging them and being in the forefront of the war, assuming the responsibility of his decisions during the war and not hiding under the collective National Security Council. There is still a huge discussion about the debrief part and the recognition of his own mistakes, too.

3. Communication in crisis and credibility

The communication had several levels: intrainstitutional communication – where we had the reunions of the staff but a low level of constant understanding by everybody of how the system was held together and what

¹¹ Iulian Chifu, “Georgian lessons learnt”, Cadran politic, Bucharest, September-October 2008.

was happening at ground level – interinstitutional communication – and we had some hints how this worked in the functionals assessment and coordination. Then, it was the case of international communication, where we had an excellent performance by the MFA of Georgia with the quick visit to Brussels and the constant communication of the facts with all the channels, a fact that made them win the informational war in the short and medium term¹².

The most important part for the perception on the crisis of the public opinion was public communication, where President Saakashvili and other officials were on all the international channels when Russian leaders preferred to communicate only to their own public. But the most important part was the communication to Georgian public, raising awareness but also public support, avoiding panic and maintaining the credibility of the leadership and confidence in its actions.

Between the 8th and the 11th of August, nobody from the public really knew what was really happening. There was a sense of a constant victory, even the retreat part of the campaign presented as „regrouping”. Everybody expected that all will end well and quickly. Also a victory against the Russians was perceived, which gave a kind of euphoria to the average Georgian people.

There was a moment of doubt, when the President of the Parliament, David Bakradze made a kind of appeal to the citizens from Zugdidi – a city near Abkhazia, left alone in front of the Russian troops after the combat operations resumed in South Ossetia and the troops were relocated in the near region, in the East – asking them to act in self defense with all the means they have, including forks and other agricultural tools.

This message seems a little out of the picture, it gives to an attentive observer the vague impression that there is no prevention or coordination, that there is a lack of means to face the general large scale coordinated attack of the Russian troops. But the general public did not feel a real constant and present threat. It is possible that the average population was in the same situation of thinking that the military operations are important for South Ossetia and maybe the Abkhazian regions.

¹² CEPS Working Document 311 from February 2009, Stanislav Secreieru, “Illusion of Power. Russia after the South Caucasus Battle”.

Nobody expected the Russian invasion until the moment they saw the Russian troops, chars and armored vehicles at the gates of Tbilisi. There was not a sense of panic at any moment, probably due to the lack of information from ground level. This was also despite, or maybe because, of the constant public appearances, after the first days, of the officials, politicians and technical staff at every TV station, giving the impression that they are doing this on purpose for covering all the time on the air and not allowing other type of debates.

The bombardment on Gori was known only when some of the IDPs arrived in Tbilisi, with the rare exception of some inhabitants that have relatives in the city and were talking by phone. The most informed people were the ones with an internet connection who followed Russian sources. But they did not reach critical mass which would have lead to panic.

The messages begging with the concept of *“victory in the war”* image maintained, even after the loss of territory became obvious proof(because they revealed the real image of the Russians, that everybody could see, because it put Georgia and its war in the forefront of the international community, who intervened, because this underlines the role of the Russian troops in the separatist regions and disqualified them from their self assumed role of peacekeepers, as well as their objectives of regime change and the geopolitical reasons that made them attack Georgia) for the debate on *“who started the war/who shot first”* – where Tbilisi won in the first place the information war but lost it in the long run, because of the lack of resources¹³.

¹³ The last one dates from late March 2009, when we were writing this paper, that the EU has issued a special report recognizing that Georgia started first. The information proved to be a fraud, as you can see in the following article that we are printing here for the profound means that he has:

“MOSCOW TIMES

March 25, 2009

A Global Game of „Broken Telephone“

By Yulia Latynina

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvyy radio.

On Monday, several Russian web sites, including the liberal , posted a sensational report. „The European Commission,“ said, „having studied the circumstances and the

Today there are still people outside of Georgia that believed that Saakashvili made a mistake and began the fight, being trapped by the Russians who provoked him. But even in this situation, the worse thing was to make those persons realize what did happen and that is why they shifted to the assessment that ***“Saakashvili is guilty because he teased Russia and arrived at this stage, when he has no other choice”***. And finally, the ongoing theme of communication of the official Georgian establishment is now ***“the war did not end yet, we are still at war”***.

course of the military conflict with Russia in August of last year, has concluded that it was Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili who initiated military action.“

The site quoted German magazine Der Spiegel, which did not confirm having published such information. Instead, the magazine’s Moscow correspondent, Uwe Klussmann, wrote that the European Commission, in determining who was the aggressor, would consider Georgia’s „Order No. 2“ – issued on August 7 regarding the strike on South Ossetia – „that Russia’s secret service had intercepted.“

Order No. 2 is a well-known document, having been published as long ago as November 21 in such an authoritative source of information as Komsomolskaya Pravda. But the revelation of the order never became the propaganda coup the Russian government might have hoped that it would.

Andrei Illarionov sneered in his blog that even „five days after the document’s first publication, not a single Russian or even South Ossetian official had made any use of it.“

„With such a ‘solid document,’“ he asked, „why had nobody branded the perfidious aggressor?“

It’s simple: Order No. 2 turned out to be not only a forgery, but an utterly worthless forgery. It included a mistake that not even a 6-year-old native Georgian speaker would make, referring to the enemy of the Georgian army as „anti-separatist forces,“ when in reality separatist forces were the enemy.

And now a story published in Komsomolskaya Pravda has returned to the land of its birth through Der Spiegel, which cites a document that Russian General Anatoly Nogovitsyn quoted to the commission and angrily notes that Georgia „still refuses to show the controversial decree to the commission ... because the document is a state secret.“

This is a classic example Russia’s secret service at its best. First, it tosses out a canard in the form of a minor note in a Russian publication. Then the foreign media picks it up and quotes it in translation. The translation circulates in the foreign press, becoming so distorted with each retelling that what began as a question ends up as a statement of fact.

There have been several similar incidents related to the war with Georgia. The most infamous occurred on November 19 when Vedomosti published an article that began with the statement: „Amnesty International confirmed that Georgia initiated the August

About the loss of the informational war on long term on the dispute about who started first, there were two moments that really harmed the whole strategy. The first was classifying the entrance of the first Russian battalion column through the Roki tunnel, in the night of 6/7 of August and not communicating this to the public. The fact that the alert was not publicised created a hard moment to justify why Georgia proceeded so and not the same way that it did afterwards¹⁴. This raised the problem of credibility of who start shooting first.

The second one, a strategic mistake, too, was the one done by the chief of Georgian peacekeepers, a general who stated, once he found himself in front of a microphone, that “Georgia was restoring the constitutional order in Southern Ossetia”. This general was never instructed in these terms, nobody talked in these terms in the decision making reunions or in the crisis room, he was anyway a marginal person in the establishment, nevertheless, his statement was overused by the Russian propaganda in order to prove that Georgia pre-planned the operation and that it was the one that started the fire. This statement, together with former minister Okrouashvili’s

conflict in South Ossetia.“ That was, to put it mildly, a very loose translation of the original English text that read: „The exact circumstances surrounding the onset of hostilities on August 7 remain the subject of dispute.“

Thus, in comparison to the Vedomosti gaffe, the Der Spiegel incident takes a solid second place. But you know what the most ridiculous thing is? After Livejournal bloggers mocked Order No. 2 — which referred to South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity as part of the „anti-separatist forces“ and, citing the Georgian military, said the situation on the ground remained „unchanged“ at the moment the order was signed, even as the entire Georgian and Russian press knew that mortar and artillery bombardments had already been launched — Livejournal user ra2005 wisely noted, „Interesting, will Der Spiegel and La Stampa reprint it soon, lending it great significance?“

I wonder why that user thought that, of all publications, Der Spiegel would pick up that drivel and reprint it?

<http://www.moscowtimes.ru/articles/detail.php?ID=375650>”.

¹⁴ In a study on the International Expert Group of Georgia, “Legal Evaluation of the Actions of the Government of Georgia during the Events of August 2008” by Zakaria Kutsnashvili and Vakhtang Khmaladze, even the Georgian experts were not aware of the existence of the first attack, which was not published by the Georgian authorities at that moment. That lead to a lot of juridical complications, according to the study. Even the Crisis Group Europe Report N°195, “Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout”, 22 August 2008, didn’t notice a word about the 6/7 Russian attack, but reported everything on the night of the 8th. We’ve done the same until the interviews in Tbilisi, see Iulian Chifu, “Georgian lessons learnt”, Cadran Politic, September-October 2008.

statement that he did have plans to take Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were corroborated and put Georgia in a delicate position¹⁵

When charged in front of a Court of honour, the general claimed that he panicked and he was afraid to say that Georgia was in the process of defending itself from the Russian aggression, because he did not want to send out the message that war was starting and risk the population panicking. That's why his idea of the "restoration of the constitutional order", addressed to the patriotism of its co-citizens. The second half of the mistake was the fact that the president did not fire him on the spot, a clear political act of disapproval.

The lack of information to the internal media allowed the speculations and partial address of the conflict in the media. In the first stages, the local media was full of reports from the ground and people sent, who could also mislead the public. But let's not forget that Georgia did not have any experience of war-communication and combat operations. Institutionally, there was not a media center at the level of the Government and the red line was put in place quite late to get an idea of the developments on the ground perceived by the public, their state of mind in the occupied territory, etc.

But the establishment began to learn fast and well on the spot. This also happened to the journalists who were on the front line, who realized the error of their ways of appreciating the things after the first broadcasting sessions. They were trying to avoid panic, and to sacrifice the sensational that would sell their newspaper or TV show to something that proved to be at least as important. It was when some decision makers moved to prevent any further mistakes and went in the media headquarters to discuss directly with the journalists, reporters and correspondent that were in the first line, to explain everybody what was happening and to listen to their concerns. This was a very good idea that could be put in the good practices.

¹⁵ To these attacks we could add two others, one attributed to Amnesty International, who allegedly would confirmed that Georgia began the ostilities, and the second to an alleged report of the EU who would make the same remark, based on an alleged „Order Nr.2” of the Georgian Presidency speaking about the order to take Tskhinvali and reestablish the constitutional order. The whole story was revealed as an classic act of desinformation by the Russian secret services in “A Global Game of „Broken Telephone“”, by Yulia Latynina, MOSCOW TIMES, March 25, 2009.

Another good point was the added value of the support of the international community. Every declaration meant something, every public gesture had a role even if they came from the less effective institutions that could help in the conflict. It was the case with the UN debates, even if there was not a formal resolution of the Security Council, the OSCE resolution, the succession of several declarations which supported the people in their belief that they were not abandoned or left alone, that the Russian operations were not accepted and even, in some cases, are strongly condemned, and last but not least the qualification of Russia's "**disproportionate action**", made the job even if it was not the expected "**Russian invasion**".

Afterwards the idea of the EU monitoring mission was put forward, which proved to be not just observers, but also good and trustful agents for multiplying the news and attention given to Georgia, with an added value in terms of credibility in their respective countries. But the most important element for the Georgian establishment was the shift from the image of "internal, separatist conflict" to the "interstate conflict", which is addressed with other means.

In all this period, there was no clear sign of general panic. There were some citizens from some segments that left Tbilisi during the crisis. But there was no major panic even when the Russian troops and armored vehicles were at the gates of the city. All institutions worked, including banks which are the most sensitive to such events. There was only one evening, in the hardest moment of the crisis, when people rushed to buy food for some reserves, for 3 or 4 days.

On the contrary, it was a huge support of the population for the leadership during the anti-war rally, a situation that made criticism afterwards from the opposition, denouncing the fact that this was not the "Vietnam American criticism in the media". It was not the case, Vietnam became a problem after a lot of years of war and conflicts, not after the first days of war, and it happened at some thousand kilometers away from the US, not near the capital of the country.

4. Time effects

During the crisis, there were a lot of direct implications, but at this stage, we will focus on the effects of the existing crisis and the decision making that would have direct effects in time or for a long time¹⁶. In this respect we will underline several aspects:

- There is an impression that the separatist territories have been occupied for a long time. The recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, the two Russian military bases of around 3000-3500 men, the Iskander rocket system in place make the reversal of the situation impossible for the future to come. It is important that Georgia still conserves its legal right and sovereignty on these territories, de jure, a fact that is still an important guarantee.
- President Saakashvili and his team are not and will not be, for the time being, possible partners for Russia. As long as Vladimir Putin will keep his main position as Prime Minister and political reference for the Russian Federation, all the talks for peace or conflict settlement will be impossible.
- The OSCE and the UN have prove their limits once more in their role as security actors, once one of the actors involved in a conflict is a member of the Security Council.
- Russia will be seen as a constant threat for any post soviet state and a problem for the international community, including for the CIS and CSTO countries that felt that they could be subject to this type of behavior. Russia has won the label of a revisionist country in the international system, which did use force in order to change the European borders.

5. Lessons learnt

We have already covered most of the conclusions that can be drawn following the August Russian-Georgian War for the Georgian leadership, according to the way it reacted during this crisis. In this section, we will

¹⁶ See, in this respect, Crisis Group Europe Report N°195, “Russia vs Georgia: The Fallout”, 22 August 2008.

only focus on the lessons learnt by the Georgian leadership and the changes made to the decision making process for its improvement in future similar situations.

Firstly, there is a clear sign that Georgia needs a proper decision making system during a crisis. There are already some projects of cooperation underway to build a situation room at the national level, with the needed expertise, information analysis and intelligence room, instruments that were not in place in August. There is also the matter of proper planning, prevention and readiness, training and simulation in real situations, classical training for the people that would be involved at this level as well as a proper mechanism of debriefing for documenting the lessons learnt, good practices and establishing the needed changes in the crisis framework after each crisis. This system needs some months to reach a functional level and around a year and a half to reach full performance level.

The other very important lesson learnt by the Georgian leadership, the hard way, was the fact that friends and partners do not react in due time and do not help at any moment, in any condition, when you are in war with any type of enemy. The real world is far more pragmatic and demands first to respect all the rules and steps, to pass through all the trials and to have all the guarantees first before engaging fully in supporting you, once you really represent an interest for them, and an interest far more important than your enemy could represent.

Another lesson learnt is the fact that Georgia did not take advantage of the instruments it had once it felt that there is a real threat to its security. As a NATO partner country, Georgia could have asked for consultation in an Article 4 type of procedure with the Allies, according to the model of Macedonia during the Kosovo campaign. The allies could offer support and the simple fact of going through this process would have been a useful instrument for deterrence.

The Georgian establishment also put too much emphasis on the recommendations of its partners in the subject of maintaining the treaty that recognized the CUC-Control Unified Commission and the right of the Russian peacekeepers to be on the ground. There was a moment when

Georgia wanted to unilaterally withdraw from this agreement and to put the Russian peacekeepers out of the law, demanding afterwards their retreat.

There is no sign of a common view of the real achievements, but at least this would put extra pressure on Russia and prevent it from freely moving military forces in and out of Abkhazia and South Ossetia using the reason that it is about the change of the peacekeepers contingent. In this respect, any movement of troops could mean a real direct threat and alert everyone. At least the commanders of the future invasion would not have the opportunity, during the exercise Caucasus 2008, to enter freely South Ossetia and to see the territory where they would take the battle in a few days.

IV. THE WAY AHEAD: TOWARDS WAR OR PEACE?

1. Do we have a sustainable peace?

Here there is a common approach that the French brokered cease fire agreement is not a final document, can be broken at any point – it is already by the non-observance of the *status quo ante* situation – and is by no means a peace agreement. With the experience in negotiating with the Russians and the first rounds of meetings in Geneva, it is clear that these are negotiations for the sake of negotiations, but without any foreseeable result. There will not be any peace agreement in the years to come.

Even if there is a sense of gratitude towards President Sarkozy, for his efforts in cutting a deal of cease fire, there is also a clear sense that the agreement is in no point favorable to Georgia. On the contrary, there is a clear perception that President Sarkozy was cheated by the Russians with the two versions, in French and in Russian, but also that the French president has his part in the game, because he presented the proposal to President Saakashvili as a document agreed by the EU, which was not the case. Moreover, there was also a sense of pressure, when he stated that he will not get back to Moscow for other changes, if the Georgian President does not accept the current version.

The French diplomatic intervention of President Sarkozy, when France held the EU presidency, is seen as a “typical European style of behavior”, who’s only target is peace or at least the impression of peace, like the cease fire, for a good feeling all around and an even better PR, but not a real solution to the problem, adopting a peace agreement. The process in place is good because it can be very easily controlled, as long as the negotiations are continuing and there is no fire. But the real problem was not solved at all!

2. The US-Georgian Chart: significance and guarantees

The significance of the US-Georgian Chart¹⁷ is seen differently at different levels. If there are some middle management Georgian officials, media representatives and even the usual popular discussion that the Chart is “a guarantee that there will be no more war”, today nobody really believe this. At the high official level, the significance of the Chart is even more nuanced and treated with far more pragmatism.

For some, it is already significant, with the reserves to such a political document. Others expect the development and enforcement of future provision in several fields. Another part is looking forward to the confirmation of the present administration of the document signed by the previous one, together with the formation of the policies of Obama establishment towards the region.

The US-Georgia Chart is seen firstly as a “political and psychological document”. It is not comparable to the MAP of NATO that Georgia was waiting to receive in Bucharest, even if this is neither a guarantee in itself but rather a consistent signal of support for Georgia. It is a very important document, relevant from the moment it has been signed, it’s a commitment of the US, a “hard” document, even if there is no concrete “meat on the bones” on this framework of the bilateral relation. Everybody is waiting for a reconfirmation of the new administration which does not seem to be a problem, because there are signals that it will be done.

Everybody is aware of the fact that the US-Georgia Chart is not a document offering an “article 5” type of commitment, it is not offering direct security guarantees or support for defense, but it represents “an opportunity and a

¹⁷ See “U.S.–Georgia Security and Military Agreement in the Works” and “U.S.–Georgia Strategic Partnership to Address Georgia’s Vulnerability”, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume: 5 Issue: 241, December 18, Jamestown Foundation.

major help for institutional development”. Everybody expects the development of internationally recognised agreements, the creation of the working groups and the first working sessions with the documents in the specific fields.

The Georgian establishment already has contacts in the new US administration, there are a lot of persons already known, and there is a clear message of continuity of the US policy towards Georgia. The recent supply route for Afghanistan through Georgia and Azerbaijan is the most obvious signal.

If there is not a direct guarantee, the Chart should not be, however, underappreciated. It is about a political agreement before the implementation phase, it has a blocking effect, with a sense of deterrence in itself, a lot depending on the next steps, especially in the Defense sector. It is premature to evaluate the final form of the relationship, but the signature in itself is a good step forward for the general perception of confidence in a largely pro-American country.

3. Between war and peace

In this respect, there are also split reactions: we could say that this is half-half. But the most important part is the one related to the arguments¹⁸ and expected moves in the near future or in mid term.

THE WAR OPTION

a. Unfinished business

Some are arguing for war because **Russia did not fulfill its objectives**¹⁹: there is no way that Russia will withdraw from this situation at the present stage, which is unstable and unsustainable. They are allowing the EU game

¹⁸ See, in this respect, ICG paper nr. 51, Brussels, 26 November 2008, “Georgia, the risks of the winter”.

¹⁹ The most clear assessment of the geopolitical approach that leads to the war alternative, due to the reasons connected to Russia’s unfinished business, could be found in Harvey Sicherman “A CLARIFYING ACT OF VIOLENCE: RUSSIA, GEORGIA, AND THE WEST”, FPRI, August 20, 2008.

of the French and Czechs, but they have the Georgians in their hands from all points of view and they will not let go! Saakashvili is still there, with all that he represents in Georgia, in the region and in the world. There is also the geopolitical significance of Georgia, which raised the significance of the whole situation.

b. Avoiding the bad example

It is also the continuing threat that Russia perceives from **a rebel pro-Western Georgia** at its Southern border. The example is too obvious for the highly tectonic Northern Caucasus and Russia cannot afford this to happen. Then, it is about the costs of the whole operation: Russia invested in mobilizing and putting into action a third of its army, and assumed huge political costs at the level of the international community, without fulfilling its objectives. On the contrary, Georgia challenged it, proved to be a tough enemy and succeeded in humiliating the huge Russian Army. This fact has to be erased from the memory of everyone, because there will be no respect for Russia otherwise.

c. It is about Russia, stupid!

Another line of reasoning that goes hand in hand with the subject is the fact that **we are talking about Russia!** If it were not for Russia, if it was for a rational actor, the normal way was expected to go on the line of peace. Since it is about Russia, who has very few things to lose, who wants to be reborn as a superpower in the international world, who ignores any kind of dialogue, the military option is the principal one on the table. The irrational element in Russia's way of thinking makes Russia react differently from all the other countries, even though it realises the costs of its actions. It is also about the **personal hate of Vladimir Putin for Mikhail Saakashvili** who dared to provoke him!

d. The occupation plan

The final objective was not reached, and the Russian leadership continues to argue this in several public statements. Russian officials claim that „there is a clear wish to have a responsible government in Tbilisi”, which means that **the regime change is still on the table** and an unfulfilled objective of

the campaign. And knowing that in Georgia there is no proper pro-Russian leadership and no citizens to support such a government, it became clear that it is about **an occupation and its administration**. Which means war and the occupation of the whole Georgia as soon as possible and as soon as the opportunity appears.

e. Towards Afghanistan or Lebanon

In this sense, the direct threat is not only to the separatist regions, but to the Georgian statehood as a whole. There are several plans of **splitting Georgia into several pieces**, with a kind of Georgian confederation with a lot of autonomous regions or even the plan of the „libanisation” of Georgia, making **a civil war** with regions fighting one against the other on ethnic grounds, but also fighting for the control of the whole country.

f. It is too tempting

There are arguments saying that Russia will go to war only because it is too tempting. It is 30 km from Tbilisi, and this could solve a lot of problems, first of all blocking Azerbaijan and alternative energy routes. Then, they need a clear passage to Armenia – there are several debates in Moscow about the need for a corridor to Armenia in the framework of the security agreements in the CSTO.

g. Because they can

Another argument for the war option is “because they can”, closely followed by the argument that nobody else can prevent Russia from doing it. It is as good as all the other arguments. If there was once the perception that the West will not let Georgia being occupied by Russia, after the August war, it is a clear that no one still believes this. It is also the lack of trust in Georgia, or at least lower rates of trust in the EU, the West, NATO and even the US. There are strong and good statements of the EU and the US, they help, but those statements cannot make Russia do or abstain from doing anything. There is a sense of frustration by the lack of response to some expectancies, some hopes that the quasi totality of the Georgian population had.

The existing situation is in favor of Russia. There are no alternatives to take Russia outside of Georgian territory, there are no means and no force for that purpose. Western interventions are helping, maybe there will not be sudden moves or military actions for the moment, but the situation of uncertainty and the existing possibility of an operation at any moment is even more problematic.

TOWARD PEACE

a. Too much costs

Today Russia would continue its war, but this would mean too many costs. Moscow no longer wishes to spend its left political capital after the war in Georgia to launch a new war. It is not that it does not want, it is that it is not worth acting like this, the costs are too big compared to the benefits. On the long term, the threat persists. There is a need for a clear agreement and solid guarantees of security.

b. It depends on the US

In April, the first meeting Obama-Medvedev will take place at the G20 meeting in April. Everything depends on this meeting, on how firm the Americans will be and if they will keep the Georgian issue on the agenda of their bilateral discussions with Russia. If the Russians are testing the ground and feel that the US will not react properly, they will move forward to finish the business in the next few months.

c. Freezing the conflict at this stage

There is an argument that Russia will freeze the conflict at the level where it is now, because of the internal and economic problems. That is what they learn to do when they are weak. They will come back with the business where they left it once they will be back strong and in a better shape. If they are trying to freeze the conflict, the Georgians are trying, on the contrary, to maintain it unfrozen, on the agenda of the UN Security Council, and on the bilateral agenda NATO-Russia, UE-Russia, and especially US-Russia.

d. The frozen peace

If today the military option is improbable, it is still possible. But it is rather difficult to come back at the stage of open war, so the things are going towards a frozen peace. The insecurity climate plays its role, for Georgia, the whole Caucasus, but also for the Central Asia. The frozen peace means, however, the testimony of the military gains in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

e. Lack of preparedness of the population

There is peace because there are EU monitors on the ground, that can see what happens on the spot and they are the best communicators. Moreover, even if Russia would like to come back to the military option, it need a new important period of preparation of its own population, who will not accept very easily the assault on Tbilisi today.

f. Give the economic crisis and the opposition a chance

Because of the costs of a new military action in Georgia, there is a feeling that Russia preferred to give the economic crisis and the domestic opposition the chance to succeed in achieving the objective of ousting President Saakashvili from the power. It is easier to fire with somebody else's weapon. And it would give a sense of legitimacy, too. It is more acceptable for the West and Russia wants to offer its partners more morals, a way out and a good explanation for abandoning Georgia.

g. The time is not on our side

Finally, as time passes by, Russia will succeed to re-enter fully in business and nobody will remember the August Russian-Georgian war, the status quo is ensured and the lack of constant references to the events in Georgia would encourage Russia to come back in the military logic of a solution. In 4-5 months the step-by-step escalation of the situation could be back with a final push to change Georgia's pro-Western regime.

Chapter 3

CHALLENGES OF A “BALANCED RESPONSIBLE ANSWER” UNDER PRESSURE

Decision making in crisis in Romania during the Russian-Georgian War

Iulian Chifu

Romania was one of the countries that did anticipate the war in Georgia, as a possible threat. It also realized, on time, the moment when the war broke out, once the Russian troops were maintained in the region after finishing the Caucasus 2008 exercise, through the preparations done by the Russian troops in late July for the Black Sea Fleet in Odessa, but also the Special Forces in the military districts of Moscow and Sankt Petersburg.

Moreover, when these signals were combined with the sudden activities in Southern Ossetia it became very clear that the first attack will be in that particular region. It was clear that Abkhazia will follow, but the results of the pro-Georgian administration of Dmitry Sanakoev were clearly a hint that Russia will attempt to break the trend of reintegration of South Ossetia in Georgia by integrating the people under Sanakoev’s administration.

The isolation the Kokoiti separatist administration from the people in South Ossetia and the limitation of its real control to Tskhinvali and to the road from Roki mountains-Java-Tskhinvali-on the way to Gori was another clear sign. Basically, Kokoiti’s people and their families were the only ones staying in Tskhinvali, and they did not have any other resources to support themselves others than what they received from Russian allocations, after the Saakashvili administration succeed in stopping the smuggling of alcohol from Northern Ossetia through the Roki tunnel in Georgia – one of the main schemes of financing the separatism in Shevarnadze’s times, with the major help of the corrupt Georgian Police of that time.

There were also very clear indications that there was a need for a provocation to launch the attack on Tbilisi by the Russian regular forces, who were prepared in an excessive numbers – a third of the Russian operative Army – and this was the clear hint that it was not an operation restricted to South Ossetia. It was also clear that if Tbilisi would hold together and avoid entering in South Ossetia, it would be a strong argument for the international community against Russia, but it could also lead to the loss of both separatist territories without a fight, which would create important prejudices and problems for the Saakashvili administration domestically. This would create a strong argument for the opposition to demand the resignation of the President, again. In this respect, it was clear that Saakashvili was not able to manage in any form this provocation and that his intention would be to show that he fight for his people.

Romania had its own problems of managing the existing crisis. First it was interested that this future war would not jeopardize its interests in the region, its interests in NATO and EU, that it would not eliminate Georgia as a pro-western actor from the region, and that Romania could play its assumed role in the Wider Black Sea Area, in the energy security Southern Corridor.

But the most important challenge to Romania's diplomacy was to appear as a pragmatic, balanced, European, responsible actor, that could maintain its options and position of negotiation hard build for a future relation with Russia. There was already a scheduled visit of President Bănescu in Moscow in September 2008.

This was the biggest challenge that moved into a conflict of values at the level of the Romanian establishment, and then to an indirect blame game and a hard position through the perception of other Eastern European EU and NATO countries that "Romania shifted positions", as well as from the Eastern neighbour countries that felt that Romania did abandon the role of the "pro-American leader" in the region.

At the same time, the general feeling was that the US were uncomfortable with this extremely balanced position of Romania, that did not help at a critical point with a strong voice to condemn Russia's invasion to Georgia,

with the consecutive role in NATO and the EU of a stronger position of those two institutions. So, by being pragmatic, responsible and by adopting a balanced approach, in order to avoid limitations and maintaining the opportunities and options available, Romania took important hits in the perception and position in the international organizations by managing this crisis the way it did.

Basically there was understanding and support from the part of the EU and a clear critical position from the representatives of the region and the US. At the same time, there were extreme limitations in the timeframe and context of the crisis: a pre-electoral campaign for general elections in November 2008 prevented a lot of politicians and parties to take a clear and strong position in this conflict at the same time with the public who was already prepared for the domestic internal fight and was unable to perceive the real means of the Russian-Georgian war.

I. ROMANIAN INTERESTS IN THE BSR AND IN RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Romania has a dual interest in the Wider Black Sea Area, in promoting itself in the forefront of this issue in the European and Euro-Atlantic frameworks but also inside the mechanism of solving the frozen conflicts of the region. Its aim is to involve EU, NATO and the US in the region and to play a role in the design of the security of this area. The energy security and the Southern corridor are direct priorities of Romania, as we can see from the basic documents of this period, the National Security Strategy and the government program in Foreign policy.

In relation with Russia, there is a sense of clear lack of capacity of addressing Russia and a need to find a suitable way of dealing with this issue. This is clear from both documents already quoted, but also from the MFA documents – the 2005–2008 report on the foreign policy¹ as well as the recent document of the Priorities of the Foreign Policy of Romania in 2009². But maybe the most interesting document that was reflecting the lack of cooperation with Russia and the need for such a relation is the

¹ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

² www.mae.ro.

statement of the Romanian president Traian Băsescu at the Konrad Adenauer Seminar “NATO after the Bucharest Summit: heading towards a new transatlantic agenda” held in Brussels on the 30th of June 2008³, one month before the Russian-Georgian war.

1. The National Security Strategy

This is the main document related to the security strategy of Romania and it originated in a statement of the Romanian President in front of the Parliament, with a consecutive debate and a vote in the national Legislative body that transformed it in a law. Romania defines itself as a country at the border of NATO and the EU that has specific geopolitical tasks and attributes stemming from this position, by protecting its borders and by this fact, protecting the borders of the EU and NATO. It also gives Romania special attributes related to the non-NATO and non-EU states at the borders, in the Western Balkans and in Eastern Europe, as well as in the Wider Black Sea Region.

The Strategy already states as a threat to Romania’s security the regional conflicts – meaning the frozen conflicts and associated – in the third position after terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. The NSS mentions that “the strategic area in which is situated Romania is still rich in local conflicts, with strong implications for the regional and European peace and security. Those conflicts are the result of the dismantling of the former multinational states (the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) and those interethnic and religious conflicts have a strong political background and represent an important threat to the regional security”. These conflicts, together with the “separatist movements”, territorial disputes and instability at Romania’s borders perpetuate and are bringing other forms of violence that support terrorism.

In terms of vulnerabilities, the NSS states in the forefront, as a first element that would accentuate the threats and risks, “the accentuated dependency of vital resources difficult to access”. In realizing the purpose of diminishing the threats and risks, the NSS states that it has as direct and immediate

³ www.presidency.ro.

projects: “identifying, at the suitable moment, and counteracting, in a proactive manner, the risks and threats, prevention of the conflicts and the efficient management of the risks, of the crisis situations and of their consequences, active participation to the promotion of democracy and the establishment of the security and prosperity in the neighborhood and in other regions of strategic importance”.

As a national role in the neighborhood, the NSS states that “Romania is directly interested to play a constructive and active role, at the European and regional level, to be a bridge between civilizations, between different economic and cultural interests, for the benefit of stability and prosperity of the whole Europe”. Moreover, “the quality of member in the EU and NATO implies a gradual configuration of a specific and active role of Romania in the two organizations and the allocations of needed resources for the fulfillment of this role”.

The means to promote, protect and defend the values and interests of vital importance and achieve the national objectives are also stated in the NSS and in the first 4 they are mentioned, as follows:

- The active involvement in the international security
- The regional security and stability in the context of a new paradigm
- Assuming the role of a dynamic vector of the security in the Black Sea Region

The Vth title of the NSS is reserved to the regional security and stability. In its role of a state situated in “a geographic area of strategic importance” Romania wants to play a substantial role in the process of defining and implementing the stabilizing policies of cooperation and security assistance of NATO and the EU in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe”. Based on “its historical experience, the geographic proximity, the knowledge of the common specific values and its regional connections”, Romania has as a primordial interest in the “democratization, economic development stability and orientation of the region towards European integration”, with the increase of its own contribution and assuming a proactive role of a more important factor in the security of the region. The main regions of interest for Romania are the Western Balkans and its Eastern Neighborhood for whom Romania is pleading for a gradual process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, with a sense of regional ownership.

The entirety of the VIth title of the NSS is reserved to the Romanian position in the security and the prosperity of the Black Sea Region. Romania has a “fundamental strategic interest” in a stable, democratic and prosperous Wider Black Sea Region, and for this purpose to a stronger and more active European and Euro-Atlantic involvement in the region. The importance of the region came from the role of important transit of energy resources, but also a space of asymmetric risks and conflicts, with an important impact in Euro-Atlantic security. It is a region of strategic importance as connector to the Middle East, Caspian Region, Central Asia, with a raising role in the energy transit and the energy security of Europe. It is also a region with extraordinary threats to security ranging from international terrorism and the proliferations of WMD to local conflicts, illegal traffic of weapons, ammunitions and explosives, drugs, illegal migration and human traffic, as well as organized crime and endemic corruption.

In the region there is a huge democratic deficit, a lack of sovereign control on the territory of those states, separatist conflicts able to re-launch the violent confrontations in the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, or Southern of the Russian Federation (Northern Caucasus). The trans-border criminality is linked to the separatist regimes and “is favored by the presence of the foreign troops on the territory of the new democracies” and threatens to create instability and anarchy in some of the new states, violent actions and possible disruptions of the energy supplies.

“The Black Sea shore countries of the region must actively cooperate in order to promote confidence building measures in the region and to fulfill in good faith the obligations of reducing conventional weapons (reference to the observance of the CFE treaty revised and the 1999 OSCE Istanbul final declaration commitments) and the retreat of the military forces illegally stationed on the territory of other states” (direct reference to Russia’s troops in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova).

In the same framework some other important public positions of Romania are stated: the need for an “open geopolitical space for all allied partner and friendly countries”, also related to “the indivisibility of the entities legitimate in the region, like EU and NATO”, which means a direct

challenge to the Montreux convention from 1936 that prevents the entering in the straits of other military vessels than those of the littoral countries or a wide interpretation of the fact that by Romania and Bulgaria, basically EU and NATO are now littoral organizations in the Black Sea Region, thus able to move freely their military maritime capabilities in the Black Sea.

According to the NSS, Romania is promoting the need of a European and Euro-Atlantic strategy for the Black Sea Region, with a common EU-NATO strategy of addressing the region with the experience from the South Eastern Europe with the stabilization of this particular region. Romania also has as priorities the “harmonization of the institutional processes in the region, preventing a competition or hegemonic temptations in the region”, but also supporting the American military facilities in the region.

In terms of institutions, Romania is acting for the institutionalization of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership, promoting goals including the energy security, promoting stability and security, with a strong cooperation with the littoral countries, and the establishment of the Black Sea Development Euro-region which would enable the cooperation with the EU countries and stimulate the development of the energy and transportation infrastructure.

For the solution of the separatist conflicts, Romania will use its capabilities to maintain this issue in the political agenda of the security actors in the region and it will promote diplomatic and political means for being involved in the functionality of the mechanisms involved in the solution of those conflicts. It is also a question of the reconsideration of such mechanisms that proved to be ineffective. Moreover, there is a clear statement on the necessity of promoting a set of principles, norms and rules of conduct which will have as commitments the rejection of any kind of support to the separatist regimes and the retreat of the foreign (Russian) troops from these enclaves, the storages of weapons and ammunitions from the region should be evicted under international control as soon as possible, together with the dismantling of the paramilitary illegitimate forces of the separatist illegal regimes.

Romania wants to become a direct part involved in the processes of peaceful settlement of the conflicts and disputes “in its strategic proximity” and will support the strategic strong implication of EU and NATO in those mechanisms. For the Black Sea Region Security, Romania is also considering the energy security and the economic dimension. The main efforts will be related to the development of the energy and transport corridors able to connect, through economy and trade, the region to the Euro-Atlantic community through an extended use of the maritime and fluvial harbours and ports.

2. The 2005-2008⁴ Government programme on Foreign Policy

The 25th chapter of the Governance programme is related to the Foreign Affairs Policy. In the main objectives of the foreign affairs policy, the 3rd point (on 8 objectives) is dedicated to “building a democratic, stable and prosperous neighborhood” through several means, including:

- Supporting the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of the states from the Western Balkans
- Supporting Turkey for EU accession and the other states of the Black Sea region for European and Euro-Atlantic integration – Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan

Supporting the Eastern partnership, the Black Sea Synergy, Romanian participation in the mechanisms for solving the regional conflicts in the Black Sea Region, making the Black Sea region known as a space of strategic importance for NATO and the EU, are also part of this strategy.

In the same document, the Foreign Affairs policy is also linked with the 7th objective of promoting economic and trade interests of the Romanian state and Romanian companies including supporting the project of the energy corridor Black Sea-Caspian Sea, already included in EU’s policy towards Central Asia, in order to use the potential of a transit country of Romania and the transformation of the port of Constanța to an important logistic point. Energy security is also mentioned here, with the need to pass to the implementation phase of the Nabucco, PEOP (Constanța-Trieste pipeline) and LNG terminal from Constanța projects.

⁴ The Government of Romania. Political Programme. www.gov.ro.

Here we can also mention that in the 5th objective of the Romanian Foreign Policy, related to the bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation of Romania, in the second place the need to “promote the openness in the bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, especially in the economic field and the active contribution to the EU-Russia relations” is mentioned.

In the same context, relations with Russia were designed to be “active and pragmatic”⁵ for the “re-launching of dynamic bilateral relations”⁶. At the political level, Romania “tried to identify the means needed to constructively address the relations with the Russian Federation on regional issues”⁷ and address at the economic level “the consolidation of the relations in the energy field”⁸. In the security field, Romania “stands firmly behind the necessity that Russia should respect the commitments made at the Istanbul (1999) OSCE summit related to the retreat of its troops from Georgia and the Republic of Moldova”⁹.

II. THE ROMANIAN PERCEPTION AND THE CRISIS OF THE RUSSIAN GEORGIAN WAR

1. Definition of the crisis

The Russian-Georgian War was a crisis in the region and for the international community, perceived as such. But every country has its own perception and definition of the crisis. For Romania, there were several **values at stake**, related to the interests already presented in the documents on security and foreign affairs of Romania. But the most important challenges came from Romania’s need to present itself as a responsible actor, with a balanced way of addressing any crisis, a mature one able to answer pragmatically to any provocation under pressure.

⁵ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

⁶ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

⁷ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

⁸ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

⁹ Romanian MFA, Report of Romania’s Foreign Policy 2005-2008.

This was a crisis because all the conditions for a crisis were observed:

1. It was a **sudden change of the existing situation**. It was obvious from the “self suspension” of Russia from the CFE Treaty, the retreat from 1996 CIS commitments and the beginning of the introduction of new troops in Abkhazia and the construction of military infrastructure that the CFE Treaty was challenged, the situation of the frozen conflicts was changed, the balance of the positions in the post-soviet space was at stake, and the war was coming once violent shootings and Russian regular forces together with Georgian military forces were introduced in the conflict zone. When those troops entered in the territory controlled by Georgian legitimate authorities, we had a new problem that was not related any more to the revival of Russia and its will of proving its force, even militarily, but the issue of the first intervention of military Russia outside its territory or in the places where it has a role - self assumed or indirectly accepted by the international community - but in a place where the military intervention could be defined only as a **clear Russian military invasion**, the first one after the Cold War.

2. It represented a **threat to the basic values**. For Romania, the basic values assumed were:
 - The retreat of the Russian military troops from Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, with respect to the CFE Treaty and the Istanbul 1999 final declaration commitments,
 - Respect of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan – places with frozen separatist conflicts – and a peaceful negotiation of a solution in those conflicts
 - Respect of the CSCE/OSCE provisions and the Chart of a New Europe on the European Borders - meaning the borders of Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan, but also of Ukraine, Armenia and Belarus, and the borders of the other European countries.
 - Stability, security and cooperation in the Wider Black Sea Region where Romania wanted to play a role.
 - Democratization, Europeanization of the neighbor states including Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

- Security, stability, prosperity of the Republic of Moldova citizens, their free movement in the EU, the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the Republic of Moldova in its way to EU and NATO.
- A new dialogue and a pragmatic relation with Russia able to solve the bilateral issues, but also to give an added value to NATO allies and EU partners, with respect to the decisions, rules and consultation processes in both of the organizations.

In fact, Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence and its recognition challenged, at some level, the rules of the borders in Europe and the way they could change, in spite of the declaration of a “special case” in Kosovo (supported by ethnical cleansing and the war in 1999). That’s why Romania did not recognize Kosovo’s independence and could not do that before a negotiation and the formal recognition by Serbia. When the Russian military occupation did occur in the Georgian separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia this was a direct threat to those values. Then, when Russia entered the Georgian controlled territory, the full scale invasion was a sign of challenging the rules of the international community as such and this fact was not underlining just Russia’s use of military resources, but the invasion of a sovereign country, breaking all the rules of the game.

Then, the claims that Romania did sell weapons to Georgia, outside the international rules, accusation made by an Abkhaz leader at the same time that several similar accusations were made by Russian officials against other countries – Ukraine, the US, Israel, Turkey, etc – those were challenging Romania’s plans to reopen a dialogue with Russia – with the already planned visit of President Băsescu in September in Moscow. The presence of several chiefs of state in Tbilisi days after the conflict started put Romania under big pressure and in a conflict of values: on one side Georgia was one of the three countries – together with Serbia and the Republic of Moldova – for direct development aid, there was a sense of conserving the leadership in the Wider Black Sea Area and the strategic partnership with the US, but also the need for a cohesive EU, and of a good relation or at least of engaging Russia in dialogue and pragmatic

projects. Openly challenging Russia was a step towards breaking the relations, which was done after the NATO Extraordinary NAC and EU European Extraordinary Council.

3. It introduces a sense of **urgency**. The war, the violence, the lost of human life, the possibility of changing the Georgian regime by force, all were giving the sense of emergency.
4. The institutions asked to solve the problem were in an acute situation of **uncertainty**. This comes from the speed of the changes of the situation on the ground, but also from the lack of leadership because the formal leaders were in August holidays for EU and NATO and for a lot of the diplomacies.

2. Early warning signals

The divergences, the bad relations and harsh declarations between Russia and Georgia were very well known for some years. Blocking direct relations, no direct flights, no mail, no trade relations, all are parts of this reality. But from this point to a direct large scale war and to the stated position an intention of overthrowing the existing Georgian leadership and President in power there was a huge step forward.

For Romania, who did state its interest in a stable and peaceful Wider Black Sea Area and a negotiated solution for the frozen conflicts, the perspective of a war in South Ossetia and then a Russian-Georgian war were seen as direct threats to its interests in the region through the possibility that these developments could represent a direct change in the behavior of the actors of the region, the exchange of the peaceful instruments for a violent approach, from a harsh rhetoric to a direct use of force at a large scale in order for Russia to show its regained position of leader in the region and exclusive decision maker in the post-soviet space.

All these steps affected the situation in the direct neighborhood of Romania, in the Republic of Moldova, in its relations with Transnistria, announcing a change in the balance and a new wave of instability in the region. On the other hand, Romania was fighting for an improved pragmatic relation with Russia. And because there was a diplomatic discussion scheduled between

President Bănescu with the newly elected president Medvedev for September, in Moscow, the crisis was also evaluated from this perspective by Romanian politicians and by the Romanian diplomacy.

The events that announced the problems in the Caucasus, giving an early warning signal, were the following:

First, on the 6th of March 2008 Russia withdrew from the CIS agreements from 1996 and unilaterally renounced its commitments on economic sanctions towards Abkhazia. This step enabled Russia first to economically support the separatist region, but moreover, to “sell” Abkhazia weapons and other military material. Since Russia already withdrew/”self-suspended” itself from the CFE Treaty, this decision was a clear step towards breaking the military control regime in Europe and militarizing a conflict zone.

The second warning came on the 8th of March, when an unmanned vehicle was shot down over the territory of Abkhazia near Ochamchira. It did signal, together with another sequence of events of the same kind, that Russia does not allow any type of air surveillance for the separatist territory and that it uses its military capabilities to hit Georgian military elements over the territory of Abkhazia, even if this was formally a part of Georgian territory, because some military operations on the run had to be hidden from Georgian and international survey.

On the 21st of March, the Russian Duma requested the recognition of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia if Georgia was entering NATO. The requests of the Russian Duma for the recognition of the separatist regions were frequent because this was the place where the separatist lobbies act the best. But nobody went further with this. The gesture, however, underlined the pressure of the Russian parliamentarians on NATO which was supposed to have the summit on 2–4 of April and showed the Russian mood towards any perspective signal towards Georgia.

On the 31st of March, days before NATO Bucharest Summit, Russia sent new troops in Abkhazia. This was a direct confirmation of plans for a military action in this particular region. The final decision of the NATO Bucharest Summit on April the 3rd and the ensuing declarations of Georgian

and Ukrainian Presidents were unfortunately transparent on their behalf. Romania supported the MAP for the two countries and agreed with the decided compromise on the final declaration which guaranteed the perspective of Membership for both countries and let the decision on granting MAP to the technical, less political bodies like the Ministerial conference to assess the situation of the two countries. Moreover, Romania especially supported Georgia by helping the public PR prepared by its government, the communication and the presence of visible billboards on the road from the Bucharest Airport to the venue at the Parliament building saying „Don't forget about Georgia”.

Romania thought that granting the MAP to Georgia will first help in giving political guarantees of security to Georgia and appeasing its sense of being under threat from Russia, it would help to give a direct signal to Russia that there is both a will to have Georgia on board because its security solution supported by its population and also link Georgia to NATO rules of nonprovocative actions, peaceful solution of the disputes and needed consultation with the Allies, once there was a sense of threat. Even after the final declaration that did not grant MAP to Georgia – received as a loss by Georgia and Ukraine – Romania tried to communicate to the Georgian leadership that the declaration was of real help and that any step further or any perception of threat should be put on the table of the Alliance for a common consultation and solution.

Georgia itself felt that there was no „green light” from NATO, that „Russia comes first” for NATO and introduced the whole disappointment in its policy, moreover, the harsh declarations after the final decision were easily read by Russia as misunderstandings of the Georgian Leadership with NATO. Since the MAP was requested and not obtained by Georgia, politicians, authorities and media in Georgia already portrayed this as a „go” signal for Russia in the bilateral relations, which was not the case.

This was a clear warning for the Romanian diplomacy that Georgia feels isolated and will isolate itself more, relying only on its bilateral relation with the US, in an election year, with a president at the end of his second term.

On the 15th of April, the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo and the ensuing recognition from a number of Western countries together with the NATO division showed in Bucharest were used in to emphasize Russia’s revival, its interest and will to block any NATO presence near Georgia, in spite of the decision supported by the population of joining NATO. Vladimir Putin order the Russian Government to establish new ties and recognition of the official documents issued by Abkhazia and South Ossetia, moving towards an indirect recognition, including the establishment of consular relations with the two separatist regions.

Three days later, on the 18th of April, Georgia asked the UN Security Council to pronounce itself in the matters between Tbilisi and Moscow, a debate that took place on the 23th of April, without a visible result. Meanwhile, on the 20th of April, a Georgian unmanned vehicle was shot down by a Russian fighter over Abkhazia.

On the 4th of May, 1000 Russian troops were sent in Abkhazia to build a railway of military importance and use, when 7500 Georgian militaries were deployed at the internal informal border between the territory controlled by the legitimate Georgian authorities and the separatist region of Abkhazia. But international interventions made things stay in this position, without any military clashes, with only some exchange of fire. On the 12th of May, four foreign affairs ministers of EU countries, from Slovenia, Sweden, Poland and Lithuania went to Tbilisi in order to calm things down and try to mediate the Russian-Georgian tensions over Abkhazia. At this point, everybody could expect that fights and direct fire will resume around Abkhazia or in the Kodori Gorge.

On the 17th of May, the UN recognized in an official assessment the ethnical cleansing of the Georgians in Abkhazia. The publication of such a paper has a role in calming the tensions from Tbilisi’s part, reinforcing its long standing position on the refugees and IDPs from Abkhazia and the continuous action of the separatist authorities and Russia that prevented the return of the ethnic Georgians in the region. Moreover, on the 26th of May, UNOMIG report established that the shoot down of the Georgian UAV over Abkhazia on the 20th of April was a direct aggression of Russia towards Georgia.

In this tense situation over Abkhazia, on the 5th of June, Javier Solana, the High Representative for Foreign Policy of the EU went in Georgia and Abkhazia in order to prove EU involvement and interest in the conflict and the EU Parliament adopted a resolution on Georgia. This was a clear signal that was designed to calm Georgia's fears and to show Russia the presence and involvement of the EU in those issues in order to realize a peaceful dialogue on these matters.

Formally calming the situation in Abkhazia did not prove to be enough. On the 3rd of July two persons were killed in a long exchange of fire in South Ossetia, and the next day Tskhinvali declared „a general mobilization” in view of an imminent war. It was a clear signal that the military solution was still in place, but the place where the fights resumed was South Ossetia. Five days later, on the 9th of July, Condoleezza Rice arrived in Tbilisi and warned Russia on account of its behavior. At the same time, 1000 US troops took part in a military exercise in Georgia. Russian military airplanes breached into Georgian territory in South Ossetia and Moscow recognized this action as being “a way of cooling down Tbilisi”. A week after, on the 17th of July, the German Foreign Affairs Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier went to Tbilisi, Sukhumi and Moscow with his plan of solving the Abkhaz conflict in three stages. His plan was rejected. Two days after, a Georgian police station was under attack with grenades by the Abkhaz Militia.

On the 26th of July the Kavkaz 2008 operation began, which consisted of exercises of over 8000 Russian soldiers in Northern Caucasus with an antiterrorist scenario. Colonel Igor Konasenkov stated “the primary objective of those exercises is to assess the military coordination in case of a terrorist threat in Southern Russia as a consequence of an altered situation in Abkhazia or South Ossetia”. The military troops were prepared and trained for a possible participation to a “special operation of peacekeeping in the armed conflict zones”. At the Russian maneuvers airborne troops, airplanes, anti-aircraft capabilities, the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian one, border guard units and the units of the Ministry of Interior were deployed in the region.

This exercise was seen as a direct reply to the Sea Breeze 2008 exercise organized by NATO in Ukraine and Georgia. It proved the direct challenge

that Russia made on NATO exercises, proved its political will and the clear stance to go for a conflict. Moreover, during the Kavkaz 2008 exercises there was information that the military chiefs of units were sent in Southern Ossetia to make a recognition operation of the territory and the troops under their command did not retreat from the region. There was a clear warning that a military action will begin, that it will happen in South Ossetia first, and that the continuous presence of those troops in spite of direct support from EU, US and even German politicians for Georgian integrity and option for NATO future eventual membership, proved that all means will be used.

The retreat of Russian railway troops from Abkhazia proved that the work was done and the infrastructure prepared for the planned use. On the first of August, a vehicle with 6 Georgian police officers was targeted and blown up by the separatists in South Ossetia. It was the signal of an exchange of fire that moved, the next days, to full scale military clashes in the region, without involving other combat troops outside volunteers from Northern Caucasus, but also different types of Russian Special Troops. On the 7th of August early in the morning the Roki tunnel saw the entrance of Russian regular troops. It was the clear message that huge military clashes will follow, that were not necessarily restricted to South Ossetia, since the number of troops already surpassed the necessary for a proper defense of South Ossetia.

3. Crisis moments

- **January 20th, 2008** – The President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, states after his return from Tbilisi that Romania will support Georgia in obtaining MAP in order to adhere to NATO.
- **February 16th, 2008** – Kosovo declares its independence.
- **February 17th, 2008** – Abkhazia and South Ossetia request to be recognized as independent states.
- **March 17th, 2008** – The Georgian Minister for Reintegration, Temouri Yakobashvili, states that Romania, as a host-country for NATO Summit, can induce, even if not decisively, the decision that will be taken at Bucharest regarding granting MAP to Georgia.

- **March 27th, 2008** – President Traian Băsescu, states his support for a higher engagement of NATO in Afghanistan and for an enlargement of the Alliance, including Georgia and Ukraine access to MAP, at the NATO Summit that will take place in Bucharest, on 2nd–4th of April, 2008, according to AFP.
- **March 31st, 2008** – President Traian Băsescu, states on national television that he has conducted a campaign so that the final document of the NATO Summit will mention the Alliance’s support towards maintaining the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, mentioning at the same time that this represents the contribution that Romania brings towards its relation with the Republic of Moldova and towards solving the Transnistria conflict.
- **April 2nd, 2008** – At the common conference at Neptun, Presidents George W. Bush and Traian Băsescu also referred to the relation with Russia, mentioning that it is necessary to convince Moscow that the Cold War is over and that Russian collaboration with NATO will be in the mutual interest of both entities.
- **April 3rd, 2008** – At the Bucharest NATO Summit, the Euroatlantic aspirations of Georgia are welcomed with respect by NATO members, which also expressed their support so that Georgia should become a full rights member of the Alliance, MAP being the next step for Georgia.
- **August 8th, 2008** – Georgia’s Embassy at Bucharest informs the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Presidential Administration about the conflict in South Ossetia.

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- **August 9th, 2008**
 - Russia continues its bombing of Georgian territories; Georgia is directing its forces at its border with Abkhazia; the Georgian Parliament declares “state of war”.
 - Traian Băsescu convenes the CSAT (Supreme Council for Defense of the Country) in order to discuss the recent events in the Caucasus.
 - **August 10th, 2008**
 - The armed conflict continues on Georgia’s and Abkhazia’s territories; the Georgian troops withdraw from Tskhinvali;
 - Romania’s Embassy at Tbilisi is prepared to evacuate fifty Romanian citizens from Georgia;
 - Four young Georgians requested the Romanian authorities the refugee status, after being caught by the border police near Nădlac.
 - **August 11th, 2008**
 - The Russian attacks over the Georgian territory are continuing; Russia rejects EU’s proposals for the Georgian conflict resolution.
 - The Georgian Government appeals to the Romanian people to provide humanitarian help to Georgians.
 - Georgia’s Embassy in Bucharest requests military intervention of all friendly countries.
 - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces the beginning of the evacuation process of Romanian citizens from Georgia.
 - President, Traian Băsescu stated at Sulina that Republic of Moldova is not in danger of being in the same situation as Georgia.
 - **August 12th, 2008**
 - Georgia announces its retreat from the Community of Independent States – CIS; Sarkozy and Medvedev present a six points plan in order to stop the conflict with Georgia.
 - The second CSAT meeting on the Caucasus subject is convoked.

- The group of 15 Romanian citizens that were evacuated from Georgia is safe in the Armenian capital of Erevan.
- **August 13th, 2008**
 - Georgia accepts the peace plan proposed by France and approved by Russia.
- **August 14th, 2008**
 - The “Abkhazian President” accuses Romania of providing armament to Georgia.
- **August 15th, 2008**
 - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces that Romania’s ambassador at Tbilisi is on sick leave, in Germany.
 - Romania provided armament and ammunition to the governmental authorities in Georgia observing the international law, due to the fact that Georgia is not subject to an embargo – stated the Romanian MFA and MoD.
- **August 19th, 2008**
 - NATO’s ministers of foreign affairs met in order to reiterate their support towards Georgia; Romania’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, who participated at the extraordinary reunion of NATO’s Foreign Ministers, has expressed Romania’s concern towards Georgia’s recent evolutions and the conflict between Russia and Georgia.
- **August 20th, 2008**
 - Beginning of the flash visit of President Băsescu in the countries from the Wider Black Sea Area – Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Common press statement of the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, and the Republic of Moldova President, Vladimir Voronin;
 - Common press statement of President Traian Băsescu and President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, in Kyiv;
 - Two simultaneous rallies in support of Georgia took place, one in front of the Russian Embassy in Bucharest and the other

- one in front of the Russian Consulate in Constanța.
- **August 21st, 2008**
- Common press conference of the President Traian Băsescu and the President of Georgia in Tbilisi;
 - Georgia’s First Lady states that Romania can help Tbilisi with a strong voice in the EU;
 - Common press statement of President Traian Băsescu and the President of Azerbaijan, in Baku.
- **August 27th, 2008**
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, and the Minister of National Defense, Teodor Meleșcanu, were called in front of the Committees of Foreign Affairs and Defense of the Senate and the Chamber on a hearing about the Georgian conflict.
- **August 28th, 2008**
- The Prime Minister, Călin Popescu Țăriceanu, and the Minister of National Defense, Teodor Meleșcanu, visited NATO’s ships in Constanța. They stated that the presence of these ships in the Black Sea was planned for over one year and it does not represent a threat or even a reinforcement of NATO’s forces in the Black Sea.
- **September 1st, 2008**
- Extraordinary European Council on Georgia;
 - President Băsescu stated at the Council that Romania will not demand sanctions against Russia;
 - Press conference of President Băsescu at Brussels after the extraordinary European Council on Georgia;
 - After the reunion, President Băsescu appreciates the fact that the European states have proven solidarity by condemning Russia’s “disproportionate reaction” against Georgia;

- President Băsescu states that Russia asked Romania, in an official letter, to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Romania supports the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.
- Romanian Prime Minister, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, told to his Georgian counterpart that his country benefits from “sympathy” in the EU.
- **September 2nd, 2008** – Traian Băsescu’s speech at the meeting of the Romanian Diplomatic Corp.
- **September 15th, 2008** – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, announces at the Council General Affairs and Foreign Relations plenary session Romania’s intention to participate at the ESDP civil monitoring mission in Georgia with a unit of 20 field officers.
- **September 17th, 2008** – CSAT decision on sending the civil monitoring unit in the field, in Georgia;
- **September 18th, 2008** – The Government Decision 1130 is adopted: this represents the juridical base for the Romanian unit that will participate at EUMM in Georgia. It sets the general framework of the mission.
- **September 23rd, 2008** – Departure to Tbilisi of the unit that will participate in the EU civil mission in Georgia.
- **September 26th, 2008** – EUMM launch in Georgia.
- **October 1st, 2008** – The beginning of the monitoring missions in the field under the agreement of August 12th; all four Romanian teams go out in the field.
- **October 31st, 2008** – A monitoring EUMM team lead by a Romanian unit enters the South Ossetian territory, at Abrevi.
- **November 4th, 2008** – EUMM patrols’ first entries in the Abkhazian territory.
- **November 30th, 2008** – General elections in Romania.

4. Crisis context

The Russian-Georgian dispute was not a new found fact in August 2008 and the hypothesis of a possible military confrontation was present for some years. The fact is that the breaking up of the conflict seams to have surprised the West and, at the level of the first declarations, even Russia. In spite of the tensions and threats and exchanges of hard statements between the two parts, an armed conflict was considered to be a rhetoric instrument, since a huge number of other instruments were used in the bilateral relations.

After the first pro-democratic movements in the pre-Putin period, after his arrival to power, as president, little by little the nationalist vector took over and drove Russian Federation policy¹⁰. It is somehow relevant that in the period before Putin arrived to power, the Russian Federation proved little interest to the post-soviet space and no solid solution for those states, even though there was a constant claim that this is a kind of “backyard” where nobody was allowed to play without Moscow’s consent.

This period was one with huge economic problems for Russia, but also a period when even EU, NATO or the US did not have a proper policy. The coincidence of the revival of nationalism, of economic power, of the will to play a greater role first in the region and then in the whole world coincided with the EU and NATO enlargements that lead to a direct interest on those post-Soviet countries like Georgia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Republic of Moldova, from EU and NATO, but also a reciprocal interest from those countries for a European and Euro-Atlantic future, a fact that put the interests of Russia and NATO – in words and in deeds – and Russia and the EU – in facts, even if the words were more reserved – in a direct competition, even in confrontation at some points. But in the whole period, there was a special interest in Georgia (and the Republic of Moldova) through the separatist regions, the frozen conflicts and a military presence in those two countries.

¹⁰ Tudoroiu, Theodor, “The importance of the external powers for the security of the Balkan Space” in Cornel Codiță (coordinator), “Balkans. Exiting from the past”, ISIS, Bucharest, 1999, pg 160–162.

In 2001, the Russian Federation joined the values of the War against terror promoted by the US after 9 of September. At the first glance it seemed that this action was meant to bring together Russia and the West, but lately the effect was the complete opposite. With or without the Iraqi war, the differences became clear especially with the US, but also with NATO and the EU. A year later, in 2002, in Chisinau, the Russian Federation and a number of the CIS countries signed a Charter that gave birth to the Collective Security Treaty Organization – CSTO. The Chart was somehow similar in provisions with the one that gave birth to NATO¹¹, but far from being a copy of NATO, the CSTO proved to be more a collective security organization than one that would focus on collective defense.

The creation of the CSTO was more a very vivid proof of Russia's interest in the security matters of the post-soviet space, but also a sign of competition and alternative to NATO that Moscow felt it has to create for the CIS countries. The reasons that lead to the creation of the CSTO could be debated, but, it was obvious who was the “security provider” and who were supposed to be the “security consumers” in CSTO; the organization did not fulfill in itself this role, it could not solve the frozen conflicts or build real common capabilities for defense and/or security in the area, but represented more an instrument to bring back under the “Russian Federation protectorate” some post-soviet republics. All members of the CIS were encouraged and welcomed to join the organization.

Georgia (as well as Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova, but also other “neutral” Central Asia countries), were not part of the CSTO. Moreover, the “Rose Revolution” brought the Caucasian country closer to the road towards a pro-Western road towards the EU and NATO. In less than three years, Georgia was granted the so-call “Intensified Dialogue” status with NATO¹². The Russian Georgian relations were already tense, especially due to this fundamental divergence, but also due to the very obvious and vocal anti-Russian statements but also actions of President Saakashvili who challenged Moscow constantly. The bilateral relations were in a direction of being frozen little by little arriving at some points closer and announcing a military conflict.

¹¹ http://untreaty.un.org/unts/144078_158780/5/9/13289.pdf.

¹² http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_22173.htm?selectedLocale=en.

In 2006, Russia introduced a trade ban for the Georgian mineral water and wine¹³ – that arrived at a total blockade of the bilateral trade¹⁴, expulsions of citizens¹⁵ and to a diplomatic conflict with the retreat of the bilateral Embassies¹⁶. The armed conflict was already discussed as a possibility at that time¹⁷. In 2007 there were only minor bilateral shocks¹⁸ but no major positive evolution.

During all this period Romania was supporting Georgia through economic and trade openness, respecting its quality of a NATO and than EU member. Politically and rhetorically Romania defended the Georgian right to choose its own security solution, its road towards NATO and criticize the Russian Federation position of blocking such an aspiration on the bases of its own strategic interests and of a threat perception oriented towards the physical approach of NATO to its own borders. Meanwhile there were a significant number of bilateral visits at the highest level including the one that saluted the investment of President Mikhail Saakashvili in his second term, on 20 of January 2008¹⁹.

¹³ Osborn, Andrew, *Moscow's restaurants pay the price for Georgian wine ban*, The Independent, 6 of May 2006, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/moscows-restaurants-pay-the-price-for-georgian-wine-ban-476999.html>

¹⁴ Osborn, Andrew, *Russia steps up blockade on Georgia*, The Independent, 3 of October 2006, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-steps-upblockade-on-georgia-418502.html>

¹⁵ Castle, Stephen, *Russia tightens screw by starting to deport Georgian 'illegals'*, The Independent, 7 of October 2006, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-tightens-screw-by-starting-to-deport-georgian-illegals-419008.html>.

¹⁶ Osborn, Andrew, *Putin steps up rhetoric against 'terrorist' Georgia*, The Independent, 2 of October 2006, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putinsteps-up-rhetoric-against-terrorist-georgia-418438.html>.

¹⁷ Osborn, Andrew, *The Big Question: Could the stand-off between Russia and Georgia lead to military conflict?*, The Independent, 5 of October 2006, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-big-question-could-the-standoffbetween-russia-and-georgia-lead-to-military-conflict-418719.html>.

¹⁸ Penket, Anne, *Georgia says Russia fired missile in 'act of aggression'*, The Independent, 8 of August 2007, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/georgia-says-russia-fired-missile-in-act-of-aggression-60672.html>.

¹⁹ <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=5582&idlnk=1&cat=3>.

We have to note here that 2008 began with a major event: the Presidential elections in Georgia that represented in itself a victory for the opposition, even though it meant also that the Saakashvili regime had resources of negotiating and responding by actions to the oppositions' requirements. Those elections came after the events of 7 of November 2007 when the use of excessive force and the death in a direct clash of the opposition forces riots participants and the Police forces raised questions about the legitimacy of the regime²⁰. Advised by his pro Western councilors, President Saakashvili gave up one year of his mandate and resigned, organizing elections before the term in order to reinforce his legitimacy by a new mandate. This election round offered him an opportunity to pass a referendum on NATO's accession with the same occasion, with the consequent mutual potential of support between the two venues at the polls.

Unfortunately, his victory by a short margin²¹ was an alarm and a warning signal for President Saakashvili, but also activated the opposition and weakened his position, limiting his possibilities of reactions afterwards. The victory was, as expected, contested by the opposition. It was also a good opportunity for Russia to continue its pressure towards the frozen conflicts and make Saakashvili either to make a mistake or to prove himself less sure of his position and give the opposition the opportunity to oust him from office.

We have to recognize here that the Kosovo unilateral declaration of independence introduced a new pressure to the Georgian establishment through the repeated rhetoric of Russian political decision makers that were linking this situation to the one in the separatist territories of Georgia, in spite of the Western statements of all the leaders of the countries that recognized Kosovo and of the other countries in the region, including Romania, that Kosovo was a special case, and will not have to be duplicated in all the frozen conflicts, since the situation was completely different.

²⁰ Leading article: A president's democratic credentials are on trial, *The Independent*, 9 of November 2007, on-line at <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leadingarticles/leading-article-a-presidents-democratic-credentials-are-on-trial-399601.html>.

²¹ Ilie, Ana, "*The reelection of Saakashvili, confirmed by the Electoral Commission*", *Gândul*, 8 of January 2008 on-line at <http://www.gandul.info/lumea/realegerealuisaakasvili-batuta-in-cuie-de-comisia-electorala.html?3929;2325866>.

The NATO Summit in Bucharest where Georgia did not receive the Membership Action Plan that it wanted so much, was lectured by both Georgia and Ukraine, but also by Russia, as a signal of the divergences inside the Alliance and a “green light” that Russia came first due to the strategic relations with the Alliance. Romania made huge efforts, in its host position, to try to influence the result of the summit first²², then in order to gave a proper positive sign to the final declaration that stated without any doubt that “Ukraine and Georgia will be members of NATO”, a Thessaloniki type of guarantee for the Western Balkans in their road towards the EU applied to NATO case, a guarantee that no other states did not get, including Romania when being rejected in its first request of NATO membership in 1997 Madrid NATO summit.

Taking advantage on the situation, the Russian leaders took the option of rising the pressure towards Tbilisi by activating the separatist conflicts, provoking Georgia, enforcing their military presence in those territories when Georgia itself choose to increase by 15% its military forces²³ and move to change the Russian weapons for Western and Ukrainian ones, including from Romania²⁴. In the context of volatility in the region, this process could only lead to one type of result²⁵.

5. Perception and problem framing

The context of the crisis already imposed some very clear warnings and processes in development:

- The **Revival of Russia and a revisionist position** adopted on its role in the international community. Challenges to its post-soviet neighbours that decided to join NATO and EU.

²² <http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/basescu-ucraina-si-georgia-vor-fi-in-nato-desi-acumnu-indeplinesc-criteriile-de-map.html?1687;2517133>.

²³ Necsutu, Mădălin, *Georgians going to increase its military troops by 15%*, “Ziua” newspaper, 14 of July 2008, on-line at <http://www.ziua.ro/news.php?data=2008-07-14&id=9342&keyword=rusia+georgia>.

²⁴ Toader, Maria, “*Romania sell to Georgia weapons worthing 20 million dollars*”, “Gândul” newspaper, 16 of August 2008, on-line at <http://www.gandul.info/actualitatea/romania-a-vandut-georgiei-armament-de-20-de-milioane-de-dolarivideo.html?3927;2929307>.

²⁵ ²⁶ <http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/seful-statului-major-al-armatei-ruse-cere-nato-sa-nuinarmeze-georgia.html?3614;2637912>.

- Challenges to **European arm control rules** and to the stability of the borders of European countries.
- Challenges by Russia to the **situation of the frozen conflicts** and the **mechanisms of peaceful resolution** from a blockade role of Russia and a creative solutions search from EU and involved countries, to a **“hard line solution”** in its favor and in favor of the continuous presence of its troops on the ground, with a forcing for legitimizing their presence and of increasing their number in the separatist regions of Georgia and Republic of Moldova or in Armenia.
- Perspectives of **instability, exchange of fire** and **military local conflict** in separatist regions.
- **Deficit of democracy in Georgia** and rising miss-content of the opposition, **lack of capacity of dialogue and compromise** by acting government, relying on NATO accession as a clear guarantee and supreme achievement.
- **Political will in Tbilisi and openness to solve Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts**, as a political achievement.
- Continuous **exaggerated and extreme statements** of Tbilisi officials **towards Russia** and lack of capacity to engage a line of dialogue with Moscow.

The perception of Romania shifted during the crisis in several directions:

- a. **Full fledged aggressive revival of Russia with all means except the use of direct military force.** (Until the 1st of August)
 - general crisis of **instability and revisionism** of the borders in its neighborhood
 - **reverse of the situation of the foreign-Russian troops** on the territory of other post-Soviet states in the separatist regions and in the Wider Black Sea Region, from **illegitimacy** and a **process of retreat** according to the CFE Treaty and Istanbul commitments to a process of **finding legitimacy** and **increasing the number of those troops**.
 - use of political, energy, debt and loans policies by Russia in **regaining its control on the post-soviet space** and limiting those countries sovereignty, challenging their territorial integrity and independence, limiting their choices of a security solution and an economic and prosperity development in a NATO and EU framework.

- b. The **use of military means and provocation of a local conflict** in South Ossetia in order to **trap Georgia: (1–7 of August)**
- attract Georgia in this war, to **block any attempt of solving** the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts
 - **maintaining Russian troops, legitimizing** their stay on the ground, amplifying **Russian military presence** in the separatist territories
 - **de-legitimizing Georgian leadership** and preventing any attempt of the West of **granting Tbilisi a closer** NATO or EU related position.
 - Blocking any real “**Western involvement**” in Georgia but also **blaming Western/NATO/US involvement and responsibility** for “Georgian behavior”, military training and equipment
- c. **Full Russian military invasion** in Georgia, with the purpose of ousting pro-Western and strongly anti-Russian Government (7–20 of August)
- splitting Georgia in controlled regions
 - controlling East/West trade
 - encouraging Adjara separatism
 - controlling **BTC/BTE alternative transit routes** to the Russian transit system
 - showing a **huge military capability** and a **political will** to act in force in the post-soviet space
 - creating a “**credible threat**” in order to deal with all the other post-Soviet countries with pro-Western agendas
 - **sending a strong message** to NATO, EU, US and the Western countries on the **decision of Russia to use all means**, including military ones, in order to maintain its role in the post-Soviet space.

All these perceptions and the problems framed were **challenging Romanian long term objectives and interests in the region, and were attacking the values** that Romania stands for in the region and in its foreign and security policy. It was a clear possibility that this conflict would have a direct impact on the situation in Republic of Moldova and anyway could split EU and NATO, could create divisions and differences of views, **challenging, at all moments, Romanian security**. That was the sense of the CSAT emergency reunions and the consecutive decisions of **supporting Georgia not to become a weak or failed state**.

At the same time, it was **a sense of uncertainty** and a **need of common assessment** of the countries from the Wider Black Sea Area. In this respect, President Băsescu made a two day visit in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, a visit established on the spot, a clear proof for the need of dialogue and shared position by all those states, but also a sign of **Romania's assumed** (and also recognized role) of **responsibility** in the region. Exchange of views, need of common conjugated efforts, preparing a legitimate intervention in order to help shaping the EU and NATO position toward these events, these were the main objectives of this trip.

6. Addressing the crisis and defining a solution

The first way of addressing the crisis came from the need of **a coherent assessment** of the situation. In this respect, Romania convened the extraordinary National Security Council on the 9th of August and activated the exchange of information and intelligence in the EU and NATO frameworks.

The second principle was **a common EU and NATO reaction** to the conflict. Romania was playing the role of putting Eastern/New Europe together with Western Europe and harmonizing the positions. It was why Romania did not participate at the meeting of Eastern Europe Presidents in Tbilisi during the conflict.

The third principle of a solution was **not to antagonize Russia *without a clear and tangible objective and result***, but, at the same time, to use all the means and public statements to really **define the non-acceptability of the means and solutions** found by Russia to its defined and perceived problem.

“Disproportionate answer” instead of ***“Russian invasion”*** qualification of Russia's military operations inside Georgia was the result of both the will of **a fair cut of a red line** shown to Moscow, but also a result of Saakashvili's **excessive voluntarism and impatience**. The decisions of **suspending “business as usual” with NATO and EU** were consonant with Romanian's position. The other decisions regarding **the support for Georgia** and the consistent message toward **Russian way of promoting its interests** in the region were also welcomed.

Forth, Romania decided **to support every EU (or NATO) solution of ceasing fire** (even if it was not consulted and the result contained a lot of mistakes and easy developed traps for the original unprepared, inexperienced French mission in Moscow) knowing that **EU unity was requested** and that President Sarkozy’s and French Foreign Minister’s trip in Moscow and Tbilisi **succeeded at least to stop the fire**, and that a clear negotiation could not take place with Russian troops at some kilometers from Tbilisi.

Fifth, **Romania supported the EU mission in Georgia** in order to monitor the retreat of the Russian troops, to look and inform on the situation on the ground and **to prevent any further acts of hostility and violence** in the region. Romania contributed with troops on the ground and with humanitarian aid.

In parallel, Romania faced first signs of the crisis of **a blame game** for arming Georgia, the debut of a crisis of the **war refugees**, but also a first rumor of **a credibility and image crisis** related to its **“betrayal”** for not joining the other East European leaders on the esplanade in front of Georgian Presidency during the war, but also for **“making its bilateral policy with Russia”** when stating in public, after the bilateral visit in Georgia in the series around the Black Sea Region, that President Saakashvili should find a way for a direct dialogue with Russia after the war.

Romania had a straight answer to all these alleged challenges by its **direct contribution in supporting Georgia in the EUMM and the humanitarian aid**, as well as **politically**, by **supporting the balanced position** in EU and NATO decision bodies. Moreover, once the “business not as usual” rule was introduced, President Băsescu **renounced his long term hardly planned visit in Moscow from September**, in order to align Romania to all the decisions of the Alliance and of the EU. But all these solutions did not solve the main problem that the crisis raised, and **the causes of the crisis** were not removed from the ground and a new re-launch of the hostilities could be back.

7. Decision making occasions

1. *On the 8th of August 2008 – Georgian Embassy in Bucharest informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration on the Conflict in South Ossetia*

REACTION: 9th of August 2008 – The first extraordinary reunion of the Supreme Council for Defense of the Country – CSAT

The purpose: to evaluate the evolutions in Georgia and their impact on the security and stability of the region.

PUBLIC POSITION ADOPTED:

- reaffirming the need to respect Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity;
- appealing to the involved parts in the conflict to prove responsibility and to cease the hostilities, in view of creating the suitable conditions for negotiations that would guarantee peace and stability in the region
- Romania will join the international community in order to identify a political solution to the Georgian crisis.
- The institution of the Romanian state will be prepared for the evacuation of the Romanian citizens from Georgia if the situation will require this solution.

The first reunion of the CSAT was characterized by the under-representation of the members since Prime Minister Călin Popescu Tăriceanu and the Economy and Finance Minister, Varujan Vosganian, as well as the Chief of General Military Staff, Gheorghe Marin²⁶, were in holidays as well as the chiefs of the internal and external intelligence services who were represented by their deputies. We can also see that the decisions adopted in this reunion were mostly designing an official position. Moreover, Romania already stated that its position will be in line with the EU and NATO common positions and actions.

²⁶ For details see the press release after the CSAT reunion on 9 of August 2008, www.presidency.ro.

2. *10th of August 2008 – Four young Georgians filed for the refugee status in Romania.*

CONTEXT: Four Young Georgians requested refugee status when they were caught at the Romanian Western border, at 500 meters from Nădlac and Hungary territory. Those four had between 23 and 26 years and were trying to illegally cross the border in order to arrive in the Shengen space.

REACTION: Even though this case was easy to solve according to the Romanian and European law, this fact raised questions about the possibility that a refugee wave could hit Romania once the war was continuing or a Russian backed authority would replace Saakashvili administration by force, which would lead to a refugee crisis in the region.

3. *11th of August 2008: The Government of Georgia appealed to the Romanian people to help with humanitarian aid the Georgian people and the Georgian Embassy in Bucharest asked for “the military intervention of the friendly countries”*

REACTION: On the 12th of August 2008 the second reunion of the CSAT

The purpose: analyzing the last evolution of the conflict in Southern Caucasus, especially the humanitarian situation in the region.

POSITION ADOPTED:

- CSAT decided to send humanitarian aid to Tbilisi (medicines, sanitarian products);
- The final statement mentioned the concern for the security of the region and the need to observe the Sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia;
- Romania joins the EU and NATO, contributing with its own expertise for promoting a negotiated solution in Southern Caucasus.

At this second reunion of the CSAT, the full and nominal representation of the bodies that were members of the Council was present. There were no important decisions except for the humanitarian aid, which meant that the

discussions were reserved more to the assessment of the situation and to the result of the consultations with the NATO allies and partners from the EU²⁷.

The second request of military support was obviously not addressed since it seemed unrealistic and completely out of order. This type of request formulated in public by the Georgian Embassy was a mistake and raised huge questions on the capacity of the Georgian establishment that instructed its diplomats to understand the consequences of such a gesture. First it could not help in getting a military support even if a less sophisticated diplomacy would receive this direct call. Second, it put the host country in a delicate situation towards Russia since this type of request is made only to a partner which whom you have old and solid agreements long before the war resumed.

As we could see from the public statements, both reunions of the CSAT were used for formulating a position and presenting a support at the level of declaration for Georgia and less to an open and active line for solving the conflict. This meant that all the decisions in this sense were not considered to be of public use, even though the huge level of communication with the Allies and partners was obvious.

4. *14th of August 2008: The Abkhaz leader, Seghei Bagapsh, accused Romania of selling weapons to Georgia*

REACTION: 15th of August 2008 – The Romanian MFA issued a statement recognizing that Romania did export small arms and weapons to Georgia, but in perfect legal conditions.

POSITION ADOPTED:

- The Romanian MFA recognized selling weapons and ammunition of infantry to Georgian authorities, with the observance of the international legal provisions, in a moment when Georgia was not subject of any embargo

²⁷ For details see the press release after the CSAT reunion on 12 of August 2008, www.presidency.ro

- Romania sent the weapons „respecting the UN Chart, the international regime of sanctions and the principles of the Code of Conduct of the EU regarding the exports of weapons“, stated, Cosmin Boiangiu, the MFA spokesperson. The exports were made based on individual licenses, in commercial conditions, and were not a part of a shipment of the Romanian state, in other conditions.

5. *19th of August 2008: Emergency reunion of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the NATO member countries*

REACTION: participation of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu.

POSITION ADOPTED:

Lazăr Comănescu expressed the Romanian extreme concern for the recent evolutions in Georgia and for the conflict between Russia and Georgia. He reinforced Romanian position for the necessity of observing Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Romania joined the general support for the assessment and formula of a “disproportionate use of force” by Russia and for the downgrade of the relations of the Alliance at the level of “can not do business as usual” with Russia.

6. *Stabilizing the region. Assuming regional responsibilities in the Wider Black Sea Region*

REACTION: The round of visits of President Traian Băsescu, between 19–22 of August 2008, in Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

The purpose:

- discussing the situation in Georgia and the region;
- developing the cooperation in the Black Sea Region through regional cooperation and the involvement of the important multilateral relevant actors like the EU, NATO and OSCE.

POSITION ADOPTED²⁸:

- From Romanian point of view, as well as for EU and NATO, the territorial integrity of Georgia is essential and must be maintained at least at the juridical level, if at the practical level this perspective seems lost for the moment;
- The first priority was the enforcement of the agreement of cease fire signed between the French president, Nicholas Sarkozy, head of the country that ensures the EU presidency and the Russian Federation, on one side and Georgia, on the other side;
- Traian Băsescu appealed to all the chiefs of state from the Black Sea region for a balanced and wise attitude for allowing the future developments in that matter to be positive;
- Georgia is supposed to find formulas for beginning direct negotiations with the Russian Federation;
- Romania stated that it will join Turkey’s initiative for creating a force to discourage and deter terrorism, WMD proliferation in the Black Sea Region. Basically Romania unblocked the “Black Sea Harmony” Operation (that was held still until 2005 because its position of challenging the Montreux 1936 Convention or giving the interpretation that all NATO and EU countries should be able to enter with military vessels the straits, in the Black Sea, since both EU and NATO are littoral organizations in the Black Sea. Turkey, and for the matter Russia rejected both the revision of the convention and the interpretation presented by Romania);
- Romania and all countries visited expressed the hope that all energy projects would be pursued in spite of the Georgian conflict;
- Traian Băsescu suggested the other chiefs of state to join and adopt as official positions of their respective countries the Resolutions of the exceptional EU Council of the Foreign Affairs from the 13th of August 2008 and the Resolution of the Exceptional North Atlantic Council adopted at the level of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the NATO countries on the 19th of August 2008.

²⁸ For the details see the statements of the Romanian President after the official meetings with the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Turkey and Azerbaijan, from 20, 21 and 22 of August 2008, www.presidency.ro

What we can see is the need for a regional consultation on this matter, the need of a common position and the lack of differences of opinion in these subjects between Romanian position and the positions expressed by the other states.

7. The problem of the convergence of the internal domestic position on Georgia and the parliamentary oversight on foreign affairs and security issues.

REACTION: 27th of August 2008 – Mircea Geoană, the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate organized a common hearing of the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Security Commissions with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu and the Minister of Defense, Teodor Meleșcanu.

PUBLIC POSITIONS:

- Mircea Geoană accused the reserved and weak reaction of the authorities;
- Lazăr Comănescu stated that at the Foreign Ministers of the EU and NATO from the 13th and the 19th of August 2008, Romania has a substantial contribution for the final position and the form of the document;
- Teodor Meleșcanu stated that Romania proved, on this occasion, that it has an important capacity of monitoring, warning and foreseeing the situation.

The discussion continued behind close doors. In spite of the election campaign that was about to begin, the external issues did not become a subject in the domestic policy and there was a common unified position of all the parties and all the Romanian institutions, related to the instruments of action used in the process of solving the Russian-Georgian crisis. The only slight difference was more a media signal related to the election campaign pursued by the Social-Democrat leader Mircea Geoană, subject to the long term contest in his own party and accused of being “too soft, too weak, too diplomat” by his colleagues.

8. *1st of September 2008: Reunion of the Council of the EU*

REACTION: President Traian Băsescu participated at this reunion.

POSITION PRESENTED:

- The disproportionate position of Russia in its military intervention;
- Condemnation of the unilateral recognition of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia independence by Russia;
- The final solution for South Ossetia and Abkhazia must observe the principle of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries including Georgia and of the inviolability of the borders;
- EU countries should prove solidarity in the form of condemning Russia's disproportionate reaction;
- Traian Băsescu announced that Russia asked Romania, in an official letter, to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

9. *15th–16th of September 2008: The reunion of Foreign Affairs Minister of the EU*

REACTION: participation of the Romanian Foreign Minister, Lazăr Comănescu

POSITIONS ASSUMED:

- The Romanian Minister announced the intention of Romania to participate with a fully operational unit of 20 persons in the civilian ESDP monitoring mission in Georgia;
- Romania is analyzing its concrete possibilities to participate to the post conflict reconstruction efforts in Georgia.

On September the 17th, a CSAT decision of sending the unit was taken and the next day the Government issued the decision HG 1130 that represents the basis for preparing and sending the Romanian team for the EUMM in Georgia.

8. The practical step: applying a solution. Adapting to the practical challenges and timely reactions

Besides the political support and the constant support inside the EU and NATO, Romania did have direct practical and visible contributions to the conflict. We have to mention that beginning with 2007, when Romania joined the EU, Georgia was put as an option in the first group of states (together with the Republic of Moldova and Serbia) that will benefit from the official assistance for development from the Romanian state²⁹.

Romania gave in 2007 from its budget for Assistance for development – ODA – a total contribution of 500.000 EURO for several development projects in Georgia by the international organizations in the UN system:

- The World Food Program of the UN – Georgia – „Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation”- 100.000 EURO
- The UNHCR – Program for refugees and IDPs in Georgia - 100.000 EURO
- A contribution of 300.000 EURO for UNDP for projects like:
 - i) social development (150.000 EURO) – ”Regional Development in Kakheti Region”;
 - ii) economical development (150.000 EURO) – the project „Economic Development in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara”.

During the military operations in August 2008, Romania began, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a campaign of humanitarian emergency assistance meaning:

- an emergency humanitarian help of 1,3 million EURO from the Reserve Fund of the Government.
- an allocation of 150.000 EURO approved by the Romanian Government, from the budget for the assistance development of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs meaning 100.000 EURO through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and 50.000 EURO through the World Food Program. In the framework of the Donor Conference for Georgia, Romania announced an assistance of 400.000 EURO for the co-

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, site www.mae.ro, The political relation between Romania and Georgia.

finance of the European Commission projects and 1 million Euro contribution scheduled for 2009, for financing projects in the infrastructure³⁰.

III. THE DECISION MAKING SYSTEM

1. Normative, institutional, functional aspects

The constitutional and legal stipulations acting at the time of the crisis clearly present Romania's position towards the Wider Black Sea Region, the frozen conflicts, the separatist entities and the respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries in this region. Even Romania's national security strategy, the country's most important document approved in Bucharest for drawing security priorities, has the same opinion and assumes a special role for Romania in this area.

The essential matter was and is an overlap of competencies and the large number of institutions involved in foreign policy. In this regard, Romania has a President with foreign policy attributes (who draws the general framework for the country's foreign policy), the Parliament (with its foreign policy commissions and ability to ratify all international treaties and agreements) and the Government led by the Prime Minister including the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a specialized foreign policy organization.

Fortunately, the present crisis was perceived as a concern of security and the body requested to deal with this kind of matters is the Supreme Council of Defense of the Country - CSAT, under the authority of the President, responsible for the decision-making process on security matters.

2. How it worked during this particular crisis

The crisis came in a moment of over two years of rivalry between the President and the Government of Romania, with the consecutive change of several ministers of Foreign Affairs and the postponement of the appointment of some of them, an interim period when the Prime Minister

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, site www.mae.ro, The political relation between Romania and Georgia

assumed the mandate and a lack of support from the President. This type of situation raised the first concerns on a coherent position and about the possibility that internal rivalries could be used in the foreign affairs as was the case of the unfortunate decision of the Government party, the National Liberal Party, to begin a campaign of retreat of the Romanian troops from Iraq.

The close beginning of the electoral campaign for general elections was another bad context for the decisions that could harm the unity and alter the debate on the solution in Georgia. It was not the case since at this point the Minister of Foreign Affairs was a career diplomat accepted by the President, and the Minister of Defense was also a career diplomat and former Minister of Foreign Affairs. This helped preventing any differences of points of view, except for the moment when the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Mircea Geoană tried to take advantage of these matters when convening the hearings of both ministers on that matter. This proved to be more of a solution to find him in the mainstream of the discussions around this issue and less a political will for a different type of solution in the crisis.

IV. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1. Preparedness, prevention and diminishing of the effects

In a statement from October 2004, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Mircea Geoană, underlined the importance of Georgia for Romania and for the whole geo-strategically complex around the Black Sea Region. In this statement it was mentioned that Georgia was an essential peace in the establishment of the Wider Black Sea Region and that is why Romania wished to strengthen the bilateral relation. Romania sees Georgia as a direct neighbour across the sea and that is why it decided to invest in „the democratic transformation in Georgia”³¹. “Romania accepted Georgia’s invitation for taking the initiative and leading a large operation of support for democracy and European approaches of Georgia”³² and discussed about

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release of the Minister Mircea Geoană <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=24364>.

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release of the Minister Mircea Geoană <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=24364>.

Georgia's involvement in the Process of Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe, about its European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives. For the Romanian MFA, "Georgia is a country of extreme importance. They are good friends and partners and we know that in Tbilisi, too, Romania is seen as a friendly and very loyal country"³³.

The existing crisis after 4 years of bilateral relations, raised questions on the solidity and substance of this bilateral privileged relation: at what level were the Romanian institutions and decision makers able to foresee and to answer to the events in Georgia? Have they ever been confronted with such crisis and if it was the case, how did they shape the system of managing the crisis in order to have a suitable and adapted action plan for this purpose and if they succeeded to have legitimate and effective institutions for this purpose? Are there capabilities able to identify those potential threats to act quickly in order to prevent the escalation of such threats and to find possibilities to limit the costs of such an operation?

We do not want, for sure, to blame for the whole crisis on Romania, since we are talking about Georgia, a sovereign state and about Russia, a heavy weight in strategy matters in the Black Sea Region and in the world. But we are entitled to see at what level Romania has built its capabilities to prevent, to know and to react in the fields where its interests are at stake in order to diminish the costs of such a crisis for its long term plans.

Since 2004, Romania has been a member of NATO and of the European Union since 2007. In the designed profile of the country, the added value that Romania can bring to the two organizations has a part related to its capabilities of monitoring and foreseeing the events in the Black Sea Area. According to the statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania during the hearings in front of the unified commissions for Foreign Affairs and Defense and security of the Chamber and of the Senate, Romania fulfilled its role in this direction and warned in due time its allies and partners about the actions that came afterwards, and the deep knowledge of

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release of the Minister Mircea Geoană <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=24364>.

these facts led to the reserved reaction of Romanian diplomacy in the crisis, being more active in shaping the NATO and EU common position towards this event and trying to keep Georgia in the forefront of the European and Euro-Atlantic tracks, with a speedy form of reconstruction in order to have this important actor on the stage, in spite on its continuous divergences with Russia and the *de facto* loss of the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for a mid-term period.

Since we do not have the instruments for a closer and deeper analysis of the system reaction during this particular crisis, we can just rely on the public declarations. On this issue, there was the feeling that Romania reacted very late, long after some other states took the initiative of going and supporting Georgia's leadership. This is not necessary wrong but it depends on the exact assessment of the situation. Even in this case, the form of the statements that President Băsescu took for condemning Russia's aggression on Georgia, the obvious ignorance of the principle of the territorial integrity of Georgia, the consecutive support for the negotiations between the two parts in conflict for a peaceful solution to the conflict, all were considered to be too smooth and too weak for the usual positions taken by the President in the internal domestic issues. There was a clear sense that either it was a side interest in this calm and extremely smooth approach, either other unpublicized facts were the ones that shaped Romania's reserved position.

Romania was not in the first conflict at its borders. In 1991–1992 the conflict in Transnistria and later, in 1999, the conflict in Kosovo were events that shaped Romania's ability to deal with such crises and to have a suitable institution to react. The direct explanation offered by the Romanian decision makers on this calm approach was the experience, the kind of routine in dealing with such a crisis and the fact that it was a security crisis rather than one in Foreign Affairs, but without a direct military or “hard” threat to Romania's security. In spite of any statement, it was clear that the level of involvement was also due to the precautions of not harming the bilateral relations on the making with the Russian Federation. However, Romania, together with other friends of Georgia like Sweden, Poland, Czech Republic and the Baltic states gave fervent support to Georgia in its

affirmed objective to join NATO³⁴. There were voices like the one of the Social-Democrat member of the EU Parliament Adrian Severin that observed “we are not strong enough in our alliances and we have little space to maneuver”, since Romania is incompletely integrated in the EU structures. In the case of the Russian-Georgian crisis, we could not hear any statement claiming “the importance of supporting our Georgian friends” which raised questions for a lot of partners in the region, but also across the ocean, since such moments are the ones when you have to prove the partnership and strong support for the friends and partners.

2. Leadership

The leadership in this particular crisis was ensured by the President Traian Băsescu, responsible for the security policy, together with the CSAT, the Supreme Council for Defense of the Country. Knowing the reactions of the Romanian president, it was a clear cut of extended discussions, debates and competitive assessments of the situation and of the design of the possible solutions. What we could say is that in this particular case, the institutions worked, in spite of the moderate final answer to this crisis. Moreover, the Presidential Administration consulted for the first time independent experts, academic and civil society resources specialized in this particular space.

3. Decision making units

The decision making units were the Presidential Administration, the CSAT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, the intelligence services – especially the Foreign Intelligence Service – SIE - and the Military Intelligence Direction of the Ministry of Defense. We could add the Foreign Affairs commissions of both chambers of the Parliament, as well as the Defense and Security Commissions of the two chambers.

The Russian-Georgian crisis from August 2008 represented a huge challenge for the Romanian decision makers because of the pre-election campaign for the general elections running in parallel, with a threat that bad

³⁴ „Cotidianul” newspaper, 13 of August 2008, “*The Romanian-Georgian Relation, a sign for the foreign policy*” http://www.cotidianul.ro/relatia_romania_georgia_turnesol_pentru_politica_externa-54970.html.

decisions could influence the vote and that the possible involvement of the political domestic debate in the way that parties and institutions address this crisis could harm Romania’s position.

The special pressure was on the Minister of Foreign Affairs in his first crisis, with an opportunity to reinforce this institution compromised through the huge and largely commented mistakes of his predecessor, Adrian Cioroianu. The challenge was even higher since the Foreign Affairs strategy of Romania was at stake as well as the ambitious plans of the President for the regional role of Romania.

As in the majority of the international crisis that interested Romania, one of the tasks was to protect the Romanian citizens in the conflict zone and to extract them from the region, if they want to return to the country in a safer environment. That is why the CSAT warned all the institutions of the state, since the 9th of August, to prepare to evacuate the Romanian citizens “if the situation will impose such a decision”³⁵. Such decisions were taken previously in August 2006 (Lebanon) and in December 2007 (Gaza). This was also one of the challenges for the Romania MFA since the lack of capacity to help the Romanian citizens abroad provoked the resignation of the former minister, Adrian Cioroianu just a few months before, in April. This put an extreme pressure on the MFA.

4. Conflict of values

The two most important conflicts of values were the ones involving the relations with Georgia and Russia. In the background two secondary conflicts of values were linked to the EU membership and the strategic relationship with the US. We could add conflicts of values linked with the aspirations of regional leadership in the Black Sea Area and the will of shaping a profile of a balanced and responsible EU actor.

In the first case, of the relations with Georgia, the relation is traditionally good, based on a bilateral agreement of friendship and cooperation (1996),

³⁵ Press release: CSAT reunion – 9 of August 2008, online at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/10126_ro.pdf.

with Romania being the first state to recognize Georgia's independence in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union³⁶. The strategic position of Georgia on the alternative corridors for energy transportation from the Caspian region was also rather important for both Romania and the EU. The conflict of values appeared on the matter of how to support as well as possible Georgia without harming the reconstruction of the relationship with Russia on the make. That is why Romania took a less visible position in supporting Georgia's interests, avoiding a direct support for President Saakashvili – accused especially in the EU for its share of the provocation of the conflict – and giving clear and visible support for Georgia, political and humanitarian aid, but also in reconstruction support.

In the case of the relation with Russia, it was always a problematic relation, with frequent holes and lack of direct meetings or agreements, but with a good perspective of improvement at this moment, after the NATO summit in Bucharest and the Băsescu-Putin meeting that led to the invitation for an official visit at the level of the chiefs of state in Moscow in September 2008. Russia is the main source of oil and gas for covering Romania's needs and offers the highest price for Bucharest comparing to all the other EU states. It is true, on the other hand, that Romania is the most independent country of Russia's gas since it can work on its own reserves in a crisis situation, by cutting some industrial big consumers.

That is why Romania avoided a direct and unequivocal condemnation of Russia – so that it will not harm its perspectives to improve its relations with Russia – and to avoid economical sanctions that could follow a highly critical point of view expressed. Romania stated its full support for Georgia but without openly condemning Russia, and then joined the EU common statement that criticized the “disproportionate use of force”. The support offered to Georgia was not only the political one in public statements, but also a strong one in the international organizations and also a firm one, with the humanitarian aid during the conflict (the CSAT decision from

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs – bilateral relations with Georgia, online at www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=5582&idlnk=1&cat=3.

12th August³⁷) and a financial contribution at the Donor Conference from October (1,6 million Euro)³⁸. This attitude was welcomed by the Georgian President Saakashvili, who thanked President Traian Băsescu for “the assistance offered by Romania”, on the occasion of the visit of the Romanian President in Tbilisi, on the 21st of August, granting him with the words “a very good friend and a big supporter of our country”³⁹. In the same context, the Romanian President stated that “we do support without any reservations the territorial integrity of Georgia”, in the bilateral capacity but also inside EU and NATO, the organizations that already showed their support in that sense on the reunions of the 13th and the 19th of August⁴⁰.

In spite of this very clear support for Georgia, the Romanian position was as diplomatic as possible toward the other part involved in the conflict. The official declarations avoid condemning Russia and preferred to use the EU formula for the “disproportionate use of force” after it was reached. Moreover, at the extraordinary reunion of the European Council on the 1st of September, the Romanian position was to refrain from demanding sanctions against Russia⁴¹. This moderate attitude was a part of the plan announced by President Băsescu during his statement in front of the Romanian diplomatic community on the 2nd of September, when he asked for a “pragmatic approach, de-politicization, as much as possible” of the relation with Russia⁴².

³⁷ Press release: CSAT Reunion 12 of August 2008, online at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/10131_ro.pdf

³⁸ Press release: Romania at the Donor’s Conference for Georgia, 22 of October 2008, <http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=37255&idlnk=2&cat=4>

³⁹ Press release: common press conference of the Presidents of Romania and Georgia, Tbilisi, 21 of August 2008, page 1, online at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/10144_ro.pdf.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, page 1

⁴¹ NewsIn - “Băsescu: România nu va cere sanctiuni pentru Federația Rusă și solicită UE să negocieze soluții”, September 1st 2008, <http://www.newsin.ro/basescugeorgia-summit.php?cid=view&nid=1f6158fc-82cd-4647-8911-9d1e3de>

⁴² Statement of President Traian Băsescu at the reception of the members of the Romanian diplomatic community, Citroen palace, September 2nd 2008, page 3, online at http://www.presidency.ro/pdf/date/10183_ro.pdf.

So Romania's position was of full support for Georgia – not for President Saakashvili – and avoiding any strong condemnation of Russia. This helped also to deal with EU expectations of a pragmatic approach to Russia, but also to the objective of Romania in trying to avoid the divisions inside the EU towards the Georgian crisis. This raised problems with the states that went to openly support Georgia and President Saakashvili in Tbilisi, in the main square, during the war. It was also a loss of the symbol of leadership in the minds of these countries. Even in Tbilisi this was seen as a type of betrayal, at the most important moment, and there even were questions about “Romania switching sides”.

The public statement of President Traian Băsescu, in Tbilisi, during the visit in the region - that Georgia should find ways to directly negotiate with Russia - was also seen as a “direct message to Russia” issued by the Romanian President before his visit to Moscow, in September, and Romania was accused behind closed doors in Tbilisi of “making its policy with Russia at the expenses of Georgia”, and this at a crucial moment of the war. The same approach was taken by other Eastern European states.

At one point, there was also a sense of a problem with the US. On one side we have the strategic partnership with the US, with a clear support for President Saakashvili and a difficult situation of Georgia during the war, but also of the US in an election campaign, with a President ready to leave the White House. This would require a clear position for Georgia and President Saakashvili, it would require a clear and public position for Romania as a leader in the region in replacing the limited possibility of actions of the US at that particular moment. President Băsescu was supposed to lead the group of Presidents supporting Mikhail Saakashvili and Georgia during the conflict, and issuing strong statements in clearly condemning Russia for the invasion as well as having a more visible and strong position inside the EU and NATO. It was not the case, and Romania choose to loose this image for the sake of a better relation inside the EU and for a future stable relationship with Russia. The costs of this choice will come in the process.

5. Communication in crisis and credibility

Communication in crisis has different aspects: external communication, inter-institutional communication and domestic communication of the crisis. We are also very clear in discussing only the part reserved to the

Romanian crisis and not to the direct Russian-Georgian war. President Traian Băsescu had the leading role in the communication and, basically, in the period of the crisis, no other Romanian politician or representative of any institution interfered with this communication. It was only after the war, with the hearings in the Parliament, that other actors were involved in the communication.

The only exception was the moment of the accusations on the weapons transfers to Georgia when the Ministries of Foreign Affairs – supervising the National Agency of Trade and Exports of special materials (ANCESIAC/ANCEX) – and the Ministry of Defense that had special statements and press release. This way of communicating avoided any political-bureaucratic conflict and gave a sense of unity to the general message. This also prevented us from having a clear picture of the existence of an internal inter-institutional correct and timely communication, since we do not have proofs of other statements that would reinforce or contradict those issued by the Presidential Administration.

The media took from the first moments the side of Georgia, even though the debates included persons that also used Russia’s arguments. President Saakashvili was more criticized but without avoiding underlining the impossible position he placed himself in during the crisis and the fact that he had to react. The proofs of the prepared action by the Russian troops were present and there was no discussion on the support of the Romanian citizens. The only real accusation that withstood debate was the fact that by his eternal anti-Russian vocal position, he basically put himself in the position of not having alternatives once the military operations began. But the assessments were more turned towards discussing the events and far less Romania’s position or the crisis that this provoked for Romania. The fact of days and days of the full reporting and the number of journalists on the ground proved the huge interest of the Romanians, the Romanian media and the Romanian officials for this event and the real crisis that it created for Romanian decision makers.

As to what concerns to external communication, President Băsescu was in the position to support the fact that „the strongest answer” to the Russian-Georgian war „that Europe can send is one of unity. We will do in such a

way so that the EU will answer with only one voice”, stated the President quoting the French Prime Minister Francois Fillon. In the media debate, there were also quotations of the Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, Franco Fratini stating: „I do not believe in attempts of isolating Russia. And it will not be the case since the Summit will follow the French line, shared by Italy. President Nicholas Sarkozy already excluded any type of sanctions that we would not support anyway”. There were also other opinions: Poland talked about sanctions against Russia and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated that „in the context of the Russian actions, the EU could completely review its relationship with Russia”⁴³. All these positions were presented objectively and debated at some point in the media.

Traian Băsescu insisted on the regional actor role that Romania assumed. That is why Romania proposed the EU and NATO member states a non-paper with an analysis on the situation in the Black Sea Region and a package of proposed measures in order to react to those challenges. This came after the Romanian President’s visit in the region and reflected the positions of the actors from the region, concerned with the consequences of the Russian-Georgian crisis. It stated some proposed positions like an increase of the NATO role in the Black Sea Region, accelerating the energy projects in the Black Sea Region like Nabucco – Constanța – Trieste pipeline and the whole components of the Southern corridor.

- It proposed the creation of diversified sources, in networks of a puzzle type, that were suppose to watch the conflictual environment.
- The permanent common influx of data for the diplomacies of the EU and for the region.
- Creation of some filters for protecting the sources.
- Optimizing the bodies and structures that would have to take and analyze the data.
- Building some active systems using the means of disinformation, in order to have the capacity and to influence the parts in conflict in order to lead them either to choose a peaceful solution or to cease the combat operations and to move to a negotiated solution.

⁴³ http://www.financiarul.com/articol_12353/romania-nu-doreste-sanctionarea-federatieiruse.html

But all the present and the huge efforts made by our diplomacy did not prevent Romania for entering in an area of low credibility. It happened especially because of the extreme reserve in dealing with the war, the fact that Romania did not join the countries supporting Georgia and the Georgian President during the war, that Romania did not play its leading role in the region to support the Eastern Europeans concerns towards the Russian offensive and aggressive position, for that matter, and avoided playing a similar leading role inside the EU and NATO. The public declaration in Tbilisi seems a part of Romanian politics towards Russia at the expenses of a Georgia under fire was also playing its role. Moreover, this sense of lack of credibility made Romania loose its image of the “US speaker” in the region, of the “regional leader” and introduced some time effects that we could see cumulating during the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis in January 2009.

For the Romanian public, the conflict of values and the crisis of a suitable choice that Romania faced during the crisis were not perceived, except for the debate on the position that Romania should have so that it will not harm its relations with Russia, so that it will not provoke Russia and altering its poor relations with it any further. The transparency did not hit those levels during the crisis and even the quality or the will of the experts and analysts to address this issue was not present in the whole period of the crisis and after this, in spite of the fact that the election campaign could offer a ground for these debates. Since Romania moved to a system of elections that prevented a solid debate for national and foreign issues, this debate never happened.

6. Time effects

As we already mentioned, the first warning signs about a credibility crisis of Romania as an actor, during the Russian-Georgian war, by altering the long term consecrated Romanian position – of criticizing the Russian aggressive policy in the post-soviet space, or the use of means like energy supply for political pressure – were present. Even if at this particular moment there were enough signals that could explain Romania’s nuanced position, this step could have cumulative effects in time in Romania’s

relation with the US and the EU countries from Central and Eastern Europe, but also in the relations with the countries from the Eastern Partnership. The fact that Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia was of great help for Romania since it offered a possibility of a strong condemnation and clear position against this action of Russia, who was against the basic principles of Romanian foreign policy and against its positions stated in the National Security Strategy related to the frozen conflicts, the separatist regions, and the Wider Black Sea Area. Romanian reactions to this event showed a different stance from the more evasive and extremely balanced position and actions during the Russian-Georgian war. It reinsured its Eastern partners and diffused the arguments that would foresee a credibility crisis. But the risk that repeated positions in the same direction could harm Romania are still in place and the interested countries and actors are following the developments in this direction in order to know when such events will come again.

7. Lessons learnt

At this level there were several lessons learnt after this crisis. The most important are the following:

- The nuances introduced in a declaration involving two states at war is very dangerous and is ready to put you in a difficult situation with both of them.
- The assessment for formulating a position should always be based on values and not on interests, by no means, because this could be seen as a dialogue for individual interests at the expenses of one of the actors which is in a difficult situation.
- Being a member of an Alliance or a Union is always better to establish the position inside this entity before stating an individual position. This would help in order to find the best formula and will avoid radical positions. It is true that it will not help visibility or the leadership aspirations.
- An alliance, partnership or other forms of understanding could be seen as a strong and credible solution, but nuances when dealing with the countries involved can put you in the position of being seen as an unreliable partner if there is no reaction in the worst situations. This

position could be spread easily to any such type of relations, once one is put under question.

- If the interest leads to supporting a country’s position, it will automatically mean that the support is extended to the leadership of this particular country, and the nuances and differences could come later, not in the moment of the crisis.
- In a country with a strong leadership, the nuances can be seen as a sign of weakness or of having second thoughts
- Using a constant hard tone in the communication with a particular actor could lead to difficulties to nuance your message when your interest or the reality at ground level will require them.

Chapter 4

WAR IN GEORGIA AND CHALLENGES FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Oazu NANTOI

1. Introduction

Both the Republic of Moldova and Georgia are affected by the issue of regional separatism that has emerged as a result of political processes accompanying the collapse of the USSR. It is worth mentioning that the essence of conflicts between central and regional separatist powers in the case of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia differs substantially. In Georgia, conflicts from South Ossetia and Abkhazia have distinct ethnic colouring. In the case of conflicts from eastern regions of the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria) there is no ethnically-based conflict between the population on the right and left (Transnistria) riverbank of the Nistru. On the right riverbank of the Nistru the issue of interethnic relations has lost its topicality. For example, the municipality of Chisinau alone is inhabited by more ethnic Russians than the entire Transnistria, and this is not an issue. In addition, educational institutions in Chisinau host several thousands of students from Transnistria. It is extremely important the fact that the Transnistrian conflict zone does not have a common border with Russia or a coastline. Transnistria is a narrow strip of land situated between Ukraine and the remaining territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Similarities that exist in regional conflicts between Georgia and the Republic of Moldova firstly refer to Russia's role in them. In both cases, the Kremlin has positioned itself on the side of separatist anti-constitutional regimes from the very beginning. Taking profit from the fact that the international community was surprised by the collapse of the USSR and wasn't, by any means, ready to intervene in the settlement of regional conflicts from the former USSR; Russia has managed to come into prominence both in conflicts from Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, as a negotiations process „mediator” and main “peace-maker”. In addition, in

the case of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation continues to maintain its illegal military presence, whereas the regime from Tiraspol has military potential¹ compatible with that of the Republic of Moldova. As in the other conflict zones, Russia is promoting the policy of providing Russian citizenship to local inhabitants in Transnistria. The presence of Russian citizens in separatist zones allows Russia to use this factor as a pretext to interfere into internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova, whereas in Georgia, Russia used the argument of defending the Russian citizens as a pretext to initiate military aggression.

The analysis of crisis situation related to the conflict in Georgia is impossible without the correct understanding of the so-call “format of the negotiation process”. On 21 of July 1992, in Moscow, Boris Eltsin, the President of Russia and Mircea Snegur, the President of the Republic of Moldova have signed ”The Agreement on the principles of a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova”. This document has not been signed by a single representative of Tiraspol regime. However, it mentions “three parties” that are to participate in the conflict settlement, as well as the military units of these “parties”. This results in the fact that the Russian Federation, after having committed an act of military aggression against the Republic of Moldova, has imposed the signature of a document legalizing the existence of the Transnistrian regime as a conflict “party”, together with the regime’s military troops. As a logical continuation of this conflict perception scheme accepted by Moldovan leadership and the international community, the Russian Federation during 17 years has been insisting on the fact that conflict settlement should be reached within the negotiations between the “parties”. In the situation when the Transnistrian regime was created and represented Russia’s docile tool, it is useless to expect a viable settlement of the conflict in any negotiation format within which the regime from Tiraspol is accepted as a “part” and Russia – as a “mediator”.

In 2003, having benefited from the incompetence of President Voronin and, probably, from the influence levers on him, the Russian Federation tried to

¹ Military aspect in the settlement of the eastern zone conflict in the Republic of Moldova, <http://www.ipp.md/biblioteca.php?l=ro&ppage=2&idc=34>.

impose the signature of a document known as the “Kozak Memorandum”². This Memorandum was approved by Vladimir Voronin and Igor Smirnov, the leader of Tiraspol administration, and everything was ready for its signature on 25 of November 2003 in the presence of Vladimir Putin. Only due to prompt intervention by the US, EU and the OSCE, Vladimir Voronin has rejected the idea of signing this Memorandum during the night of 25 of November. This Memorandum represents Russia’s position, since the moment Igor Smirnov was forced by Moscow to approve this document and Vladimir Putin was ready to be present at its signature. **The idea of the Memorandum is to liquidate the Republic of Moldova as a state and create in its place a non-viable conglomerate comprising ”the Transnistrian Moldovan republic”, Gagauzia (an autonomy created on the same model, but included in the Republic of Moldova) and what would have been left from the Republic of Moldova. In addition, the Memorandum stipulated the legalization of Russian military presence for a period of 20 years.**

After a break of approximately three years, Vladimir Putin allowed direct communication with Vladimir Voronin. Having benefited from it, Vladimir Voronin attempted one again to settle the Transnistrian conflict based on a so-called “package deal”. This deal was based on two principles. The first – the understanding was to be reached based on a direct dialogue between Vladimir Putin and Vladimir Voronin, without the participation of Tiraspol administration. The second – Russia was to obtain endorsement from the Republic of Moldova of the results of illegal privatisation of a range of economic units from Transnistria only after the political settlement of the conflict. The only positive moment in this attempt was that the “package deal” was based on the idea that namely Russia and not the regime from the “Transnistrian Moldovan republic” (“RMN”) is the real “part” in this conflict. But in fact Vladimir Voronin proved to be incapable of understanding that Russia’s interests are incompatible with territorial sovereignty and integrity of the Republic of Moldova and, as a result, the idea of achieving a “package deal” was doomed to failure from the beginning. Anyway, when the military conflict broke up in Georgia, Vladimir Voronin continued to mime the optimism as concerns the achievement of this “package deal”.

² Dmitrii Kozak – special envoy and authorized representative of Vladimir Putin.

The outbreak of the military conflict between Georgia and Russia represented a test for the capacity of the Republic of Moldova as a state to react to crisis situation and, at the same time, has demonstrated how the idea of a “package” deal with the Kremlin is unfeasible. In addition, the question on the real probability to start a conflict similar to the one in Georgia has emerged. At first sight, it would seem that the Russian Federation treats the case of Transnistria differently from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, the Russian Federation has never overtly announced its objectives on that respect, since it controls the Transnistrian regime. Based on the logic of Russia’s behaviour and the contents of Kozak Memorandum, it results univocally that Russia does not wish the Republic of Moldova to become a sovereign and integral state. Thus, this does not mean that Russia cannot reach the conclusion that it needs the recognition of Transnistria as an independent state and start a conflict in the Security Zone to formally justify this step.

This is where the Ukrainian factor emerges again. This is due to the fact that the attitude of Russia toward the Transnistrian issue could depend on the political processes occurring in Ukraine and on the role that could have been attributed to Transnistria by Russia in order to influence these processes. It is well-known that the Kremlin administration has perceived “the orange revolution” as a failure and, at the same time, a direct threat to Russia’s national security. Russia reacts extremely negatively to Ukraine’s intentions to become NATO member-state. Russia risks to loose control over Transnistria after Ukraine’s approach to the EU and NATO. At the same time, it could face difficulties in appointing and promoting Igor Smirnov’s successor (“president” of “RMN”), whose mandate expires at the end of 2011. In addition, the year 2017, Russia is obliged to evacuate its fleet from Sevastopol (Crimea). Currently, Russia is building a military base for its navy in the city of Novorossiysk. Therefore, there is no guarantee that Russia will not initiate harsh policies against Ukraine to keep its fleet in Crimea, including by the use of the regime from Transnistria and its military presence at the Nistru left riverbank.

As a result, Russia’s administration might treat Transnistria as an important piece and attribute Transnistria a separate role in its policy against NATO enlargement towards the East and in keeping its fleet in Crimea. In addition,

the Republic of Moldova is going to hold parliamentary elections on 5th of April 2009 and Vladimir Voronin will have to withdraw from the Presidency of the country after the expiration of his mandate. If following these elections a government will be formed and will formulate the aim to withdraw from the “permanent neutrality status” of the Republic of Moldova, with the subsequent possibility to join NATO, the probability of carrying out some tough military scenarios in the Republic of Moldova will grow substantially. In addition, the possible recognition of Transnistria by Russia will untie its hands as concerns solid political control over this territory (“Kaliningrad – 2”), including the appointment of docile marionettes in various positions within “RMN” recognized by Russia. This issue, so far, has not yet been settled up by Russia – it is certain that Igor Smirnov, who is in power from 1990, without any interruptions, cannot hold the “presidency” after 2011. Therefore, Russia does not have a safe mechanism of promoting a docile successor into this position.

The above-mentioned leads to the fact that the **probability of carrying out a scenario in the Republic of Moldova that would be similar to the one in Georgia by no means equals to zero**, whereas the behaviour of the state the Republic of Moldova, reaction of the civil society and the society as a whole to events in Georgia represents a test of state viability.

2. The moments of the crisis in the Republic of Moldova

The first symptoms of this crisis emerged on the 6th of March 2008 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia sent to the CIS Executive Committee an official note communicating that the Russian Federation, following the circumstances that have been changed, does not feel obliged to observe stipulations of the Decision of the CIS Heads of States Council “On conflict settlement measures in Abkhazia, Georgia” on 19th of January 1996. This decision has prohibited trade, economic-financial, transportation and other types of operations with Abkhazia at the state level. As a result, this was a clear signal from the Russian Federation that it gave up the common position adopted within the CIS on the relation with separatist regimes from Georgia and moved to their direct support without miming the observance of international law and Georgia’s sovereignty. It is true that on 6th of March 2008 it was still difficult to presume that Russia will resort to

an open aggression act against Georgia. The crisis ended for the Republic of Moldova on the 3rd of September 2008 when, after meeting Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian puppet Igor Smirnov, declared that Tiraspol withdrew from the moratorium on any official contacts with Chisinau and the negotiation process (as dictated by Russia) between Chisinau and Tiraspol will continue.

The armed conflict from Georgia has caused reactions from frequently opposing positions in Moldovan society among the harsh information war that has accompanied military actions. Anyway, it is obvious that the conflict between Georgia has, first of all, caused a crisis in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and Russia when no one was certain that Russia will apply the Georgian scenario adapted to regional realities in the case of the Transnistrian conflict as well. From the decision-making perspective, all three classic elements of a crisis recognizable in the events were analyzed:

Uncertainty – it was obvious that the leadership of the Republic of Moldova could not be certain that the Security Zone will not be a place of various provocations that would later become pretext for harsh actions and decisions undertaken by Russia. The armed conflict has been initiated when the Parliament and the President of the country were on vacation and there is considerable doubt on state's capacity to adequately react in such conditions.

Limited time available – events that were occurring so dynamically and surprisingly, from the beginning of the war against Georgia and until Russia has recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, that the Moldovan state did not have enough time and resources to react adequately to the emerged threats.

Important values at stake – the conflict in Georgia and the five principles of Russia's foreign policy announced by the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, have demonstrated that the Russian Federation was trying to promote the doctrine of „limited sovereignty” for CIS states which the Republic of Moldova is a part of. As a result, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation could move to tacit control over

Transnistria which it currently exerts, to its direct incorporation after its recognition as an independent state. At least some Transnistrian sources state that the decision on the organization of the “referendum” on 17 of September 2006 was taken namely in Moscow and the questions for it were formulated in Moscow as well (it has been announced in Tiraspol that approximately 97% of the participants have allegedly voted for the independence of Transnistria and its subsequent incorporation into Russia). After this, on 18 of September 2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs³ of Russia qualified this “referendum” as an act of direct democracy. At the same time, the realization of the Georgian scenario in the case of the Republic of Moldova would have ended the statehood political project of the Republic of Moldova.

3. Context

Crisis analysis requires the study of the behaviour of different stakeholders, both internal and external, as well as of the way different decision makers have acted.

Republic of Moldova – the internal situation

The issue of the relations of the Republic of Moldova with Russia, from the viewpoint of Transnistrian conflict, has existed for over seventeen years, of which the last eight years constituted the governance of the Communist Party (PCRM) headed by Vladimir Voronin. This leads to the conclusion that the capacity of the Republic of Moldova to react to crisis situations is to a great extent determined by the policy promoted by this party. And vice versa – the potential of the society, its capacity for self-governance under conditions of announced political democracy, can be estimated starting with the quality of the power formed by the society by the means of free and fair elections.

In this context, it has to be mentioned that within the election campaign before the parliamentary elections of 25 of February 2001, during which the PCRM undertook the whole power in the Republic of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin has repeatedly met Vladimir Putin in Moscow and exploited this

³ http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/29DBC7152E23A322C32571ED0055D402.

factor within the election campaign to the maximum. The PCRM promised to attribute to the Russian language the status of the second state language and to examine the possibility of the Republic of Moldova to accede to Russia-Belarus Union.

After the appointment, on 4 of April 2001, Vladimir Voronin initiated a range of actions in regard to the issue of Transnistria, being firmly convinced that the responsibility for the initiation of the conflict belongs exclusively to “nationalists” on the right bank of the Nistru River. Consequently, on 16 of May 2001, being in Tiraspol, Vladimir Voronin signed, together with the leader of Tiraspol, Igor Smirnov, five documents with extremely generous concessions in relation to the anti-constitutional regime. One of this documents, the “Protocol⁴ of the meeting of the leaders of the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria” has stipulated the “compensation of damages caused to Transnistria within the armed conflict of 1992”. This means that Vladimir Voronin signed this document considering that in 1992, the Republic of Moldova committed an act of aggression against Transnistria.

It can be stated that Vladimir Voronin, after the failure to settle the conflict by the means of a dialogue with Igor Smirnov, tried to move to a constraint policy in relation with the Tiraspol regime. With this purpose, on 1st of September 2001, the Republic of Moldova introduced a new customs seal different from the one used by the regime of Tiraspol after the signature, on 7 of February 1996, of the “Agreement on regulation of some customs issues”. Based on the provisions of this Agreement, Tiraspol was granted the right to use the customs seal with the inscription “Republic of Moldova. Customs of Tiraspol”. Some experts of the Republic of Moldova consider that Vladimir Voronin, before announcing the change of customs seal, obtained the verbal promise of Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine, to create a mixed Moldovan – Ukrainian customs along the Transnistrian part of the border (452 km). Thus, on the 1st of September 2001, Ukraine refused to allow the placement on its territory of mixed Moldovan – Ukrainian customs offices and allowed further use of the old customs seal held by the administration of Transnistria.

⁴ <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/energi16.htm>

Realising the fact that the administration of Kyiv does not intend to be involved in the application of constraint methods upon Transnistria and that the introduction of the new customs seal failed to lead to the foreseen result, Vladimir Voronin decided to settle the issue of the Transnistrian conflict by means of a direct dialogue with Vladimir Putin. The first attempt in this respect resulted in a large failure when, on 25 of November 2003, Vladimir Voronin refused to sign the “Kozak Memorandum”. This “Memorandum” aroused as a result of a shuttle courtesy between Chisinau and Tiraspol, realised by Dmitry Kozak, special envoy of Vladimir Putin. Hence, in the autumn of 2006, Vladimir Voronin decided to reach the foreseen solution based on a direct dialogue with Vladimir Putin.

The comeback to the direct dialogue with Russia meant that Vladimir Voronin realised that Russia, not the regime of Tiraspol, is the real “part” in the conflict and that any “negotiation” with the Tiraspol regime is useless. Hence, Vladimir Voronin proved to be incapable of drawing coherent conclusions of these statements and committed a fundamental political mistake when deciding that the issue of the Transnistrian conflict can be settled based on a mutual and friendly agreement between Chisinau and the Kremlin. Vladimir Voronin and his counsellors proved to be incapable of realising the issue of the Transnistrian conflict in all its complexity, to evaluate the weak points in the position of the Kremlin and Tiraspol and initiate a series of consequent and well managed actions that would lead to the misinterpretation of the regime itself and to gradual reduction of the capacity of the Kremlin to keep the situation of Transnistria under control. Consequently, since autumn 2006, the entire policy of the Republic of Moldova has been subordinated to this idea.

On the background of “shuttle diplomacy” with the Kremlin, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova has selected the tactics of “taming” Russia. The Republic of Moldova ceased to participate in the GUAM meetings, the contacts with NATO have been reduced to minimum, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova moved to the promotion of some aberrant, aggressive and demagogical policies in relation to Romania, the EU and NATO member states. The leadership of the Republic of Moldova did not even react when on 2nd of March 2008, on the territory of Transnistria the presidential “elections” of Russia were carried out similarly as on the territory of Russia, defying the norms of the international law. The PCRM

fraction of the Parliament blocked all the attempts of the opposition to react in this obvious violation of sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova on behalf of Russia.

Soon before the visit of Zinaida Greceanăi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, to Moscow, programmed for 20 of May 2008, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted urgently the National Security Concept of the Republic of Moldova. The only purpose of this step was again to demonstrate loyalty to Russia. Since the Concept stipulates nothing about the illegal placement (occupation) of the Russian troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, it is making courtesy bows before the CIS and sterilises everything related to an eventual NATO collaboration.

The reaction of a state to crisis situations similar to the one in Georgia is not reduced exclusively to the military factor. However, the events in Georgia proved that the Republic of Moldova should have the capacity to react adequately to similar challenges, as well as to be prepared for crisis situations accompanied by the initiation of a conflict in the Security Zone with the involvement of paramilitary formations of Transnistria and Russia subordinated armed units. Hence, since the initiation of efforts to settle the Transnistrian issue based on a mutual agreement with the Kremlin, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova declares that solving the conflict should be accompanied by the demilitarisation of both Nistru banks, based on the document proposed by the OSCE on 16 of April 2006. Such a “perspective” obviously provokes a demoralisation effect upon the atmosphere in the National Army.

The conflict in Georgia started at the beginning of August 2008, when the Parliament was on vacation and the President of the country was abroad on a holiday. Under the conditions when the military aggression of Russia against Georgia was accompanied by an aggressive informational war, the population of the Republic of Moldova became the target of this war. The informational space of the Republic of Moldova is dominated by Russian TV channels that have jointly promoted the image of Russia as the country that “intervened legally in order to protect its citizens”. In his turn, Vladimir Voronin created a media holding, comprising the National Public Institution of Audiovisual (IPNA), the “Teleradio – Moldova” Company, which is

entirely controlled by him. There are enough arguments to consider that mass media of this holding received the indication from President Vladimir Voronin to pay the minimum attention to the events in Georgia. In his turn, Vladimir Voronin as a head of state has never taken attitude towards the behaviour of Russia.

In other words, the state Republic of Moldova is by no means prepared to react adequately to situations of crisis, as a result of policies promoted by Vladimir Voronin during 2001–2009; the Republic of Moldova has consciously renounced anything that could serve as argument in relation to the policy promoted by Russia. The leadership of the Republic of Moldova does not even dare to formulate the threats to national security of the Republic of Moldova related to the behaviour of Russia. This occurs despite the fact that the Constitution of the country, Art. 2 (2), formulates expressly: “No private individual, national segment of population, social grouping, political party or public organization may exercise state power on their own behalf. The usurpation of state power constitutes the gravest crime against the people.” This means that the state of the Republic of Moldova either does not dare, or is incapable of defining who has usurped the power in Transnistria. Respectively, the state that is afraid to define explicitly the threats to national security is incapable of ensuring the elaboration and application of efficient policies aimed at ensuring personal security.

Ukraine’s Behaviour

The Ukrainian factor is extremely important for the Republic of Moldova, due to the fact that the Transnistrian region is a narrow strip of land between Ukraine and the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Respectively, Transnistria is also isolated from Russia. The representatives of Tiraspol administration, for instance, can reach Russia only through the territory of Ukraine. As a rule, they use the airport of Odessa. The military airport of Tiraspol is not used exclusively due to the fact that Ukraine does not allow the passing of its air space by the planes of the Russian Federation with the destination to Tiraspol.

Despite the fact that the internal political situation of Ukraine is marked by competition between different power centres, the Ukrainian state took initially a trenchant position and was equivocally for stopping the

aggression of the Russian Federation and supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. This manifested inclusively by the visit paid by Victor Yushchenko on 12 of August to Tbilisi where, together with the Presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and the Prime Minister of Latvia, he demonstrated the support to Georgia. Such a clear positioning of Ukraine could not be ignored by Russia in the case if the latter decided to accomplish in the Republic of Moldova a scenario similar to the one in Georgia.

Russia's Behaviour

Russia has sufficient levers on the territory of the Republic of Moldova to organise at any point a challenge that could lead to the invocation of the argument of necessary defence of Russian citizens in Transnistria. In reality, Russia has a military potential that includes military units formally subordinated to "RMN", much more efficient information services than the ones of the Republic of Moldova, including a forked network of informers within state structures. Russia has repeatedly attempted to obtain from the leadership of the Republic of Moldova the permission to open the consular section in Tiraspol. The purpose has been and still is very simple – to increase to maximum the number of Russian citizens with residence visa in Transnistria.

Moreover, it is obvious that Russia and Ukraine, despite the existing tensions and tough mutual declarations, are forced to maintain a dialogue on a wide range of issues as neighbouring countries (demarcation and delimitation of frontiers, issue of gas transit, etc.). Hence, there is a hypothesis that cannot be excluded, according to which at the highest level there is a non-declared agreement between Russia and Ukraine on their behaviour in relation to Transnistria. At least, there are precedents when common declarations (15 of December 2005, for instance) of the two Presidents, Victor Yushchenko and Vladimir Putin, provided arguments in favour of such a hypothesis. Moreover, the administration of Tiraspol, subordinated politically to the Kremlin, meets the policy of Ukraine as regards the consolidation of Ukrainian ethnic factor in Transnistria.

Therefore, Russia could estimate the risks of recognising the independence of Transnistria related to the fact that the EU and NATO, in partnership with Ukraine, could strangulate this regime by imposing an economic blockade.

At the moment, this situation seems to be irreversible, in the first place due to internal dissensions within the political class of Ukraine. Hence, until the expiration of the evacuation term for the Russian fleet from Crimea in Ukraine there will be both presidential elections, as well as elections in the Supreme Rada, with an impact on the situation in the region that cannot be predicted. It is certain that Russia will try to influence the political process of Ukraine, which can have repercussions inclusively upon the role of Transnistria.

Another hypothesis related to the behaviour of Russia in relation to Transnistria, is that Russia prefers to maintain this conflict conserved until the specification of the situation related to evacuation of the Russian fleet from Crimea.

Anyway, the behaviour of Russia since 1992, proves that Russia is unwilling for the Republic of Moldova to become an integral and sovereign state and does not renounce to the regime in Transnistria as a tool used with the purpose of keeping the whole territory of the Republic of Moldova under control.

EU and US Behaviour

EU presided by France has become a decisive stakeholder in stopping the aggression of Russia. There are enough arguments to consider that Russia intended to occupy inclusively Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, to remove Mihail Saakashvili from office and to bring back to power in Georgia a puppet regime similar to the ones in Southern Ossetia and Transnistria. Due to prompt intervention of the EU, of the authority of France, that held presidency in the EU at that moment, and mainly to the position of Nicholas Sarkozy, President of France, the harshest scenarios for Georgia have been avoided. Obviously, within the EU there has been and still is no unanimity as regards the appreciation of actions undertaken by Georgia during the conflict, as well as of the behaviour of Russia. The regime of Vladimir Putin has rather efficiently promoted the policy of internal disruption of the EU under many aspects, especially as regards the energy policy. Under the situation when we cannot speak about the existence of a common external policy of EU member states, the EU reaction towards the Russian aggression has not gone beyond taking attitudes and negotiating with Russia.

At the moment of the Russian aggression, the US were in an extremely unfavourable situation (probably, Russia took into consideration this factor as well as when deciding upon the moment of attacking Georgia). On the one hand, Georgia, after the “Rose revolution” of 22–23 of November 2003, constituted a model of active assistance on behalf of the US in ensuring statehood consolidation and the geopolitical role of the country. On the other hand, the US, with a President at the end of his mandate (lame duck), under the situation when the society was concerned with the presidential electoral campaign, could not intervene in order to prevent the aggression of Russia.

4. Chronology of the Conflict

Under the above-mentioned conditions it was obvious that there will emerge a crisis situation related to the interferences between Russia’s behaviour in relation with Georgia and the existing situation (unsettled conflict) in the Republic of Moldova. After Russia has proved that there were no limits and rules that it observes, under the conditions of a harsh information war and lack of credible information, it was extremely difficult to calculate the possible behaviour scenarios of Russia in relation with the Republic of Moldova.

6 of March 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia has sent the CIS Executive Committee an official note communicating that the Russian Federation, following the circumstances that have been changed, does not feel obliged to respect the stipulations of the Decision of the CIS Heads of States Council “On conflict settlement measures in Abkhazia, Georgia” from 19 of January 1996. This decision has prohibited trade, economic-financial, transportation and other types of operations with Abkhazia at the state level.

16 of April 2008

Moscow sharply escalates tensions by decreeing the establishment of legal links between Russia and the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; this is a form of *de facto* annexation of the Georgian territory and draws sharp rebukes from the entire international community—including the EU, the US, the OSCE, and others who call for the immediate reversal of this Russian decision.

May/June 2008

Russia continues to unilaterally increase its troop strength in Abkhazia, without fulfilling its legal obligation to seek the consent of Georgia; among other moves, it deploys paratrooper units, which are incompatible with the existing peacekeeping format.

July 2008

As the efforts of Georgia and the international community to advance peace proposals for Abkhazia are heading toward pace, the focus of Russian provocations suddenly shifts to South Ossetia.

July 2008

Russia launches large-scale military exercises (July 15–August 2), “Caucasus 2008”, in the immediate vicinity of Georgia’s Northern border. The Russian Defence Ministry claims that the exercises, involving over 8,000 troops and 700 pieces of military hardware, are aimed at preparing for “special peace enforcement operations” in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the exercise, anti-Georgian leaflets entitled “Know Your Enemy” are distributed. Russian troops participating in the exercise do not withdraw from the region when the exercises are ended.

22-24 of July 2008

The EU tries to hold talks in Brussels between representatives of the Government of Georgia and the South Ossetian separatists, with the participation of the Russian Federation. The separatists refuse to participate, initially objecting to the title of Minister Yakobashvili – “Minister for Reintegration”. In response, the Georgian Government appoints Mr. Yakobashvili as a Special Envoy for Conflict Settlement. The separatists once again refuse to attend the talks on unspecified grounds.

02 of August 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Transnistria has issued a statement declaring that the real aim of Georgia is “meticulously planned genocide of the Ossetian nation”.

3 of August

Russian media reports the large-scale mobilization of volunteers across the Russian North Caucasus, including pledges by Cossacks to deploy mercenary troops into Georgia.

8 of August 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Transnistria has issued a statement calling upon Russia's decisive intervention to stop "Georgian aggressors". "We cannot exclude that the leadership of RMN may not create obstacles for the departure of volunteers to South Ossetia" – added the "Transnistrian MFA".

11 of August 2008

The "MFA of Transnistria" stated that actions and declarations of certain countries and international organizations, participating in the Transnistrian settlement, process that "justifies the aggression and genocide of the entire nation and encumbers Russia with the responsibility for what is happening", forces the Transnistrian side to consider the opportunity of continuing with them in the "mediator" and "observer" functions. "Regarding that, we asked the Republic of Moldova to immediately condemn Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia" – said Transnistrian "Foreign minister".

11 of August 2008

The press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova has appeared, aligning the Republic of Moldova to the Declaration of the French Presidency of the EU on the aggravation of the situation in South Ossetia (Georgia)

12 of August 2008

The "MFA of Transnistria" released a communiqué on contacts with the Republic of Moldova. Transnistria declared that it was specifically alarmed by the fact that the officials of the Republic of Moldova have not condemned so far "Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia". Under such circumstances Transnistria declared the introduction of the moratorium on the contacts between the state agencies of the "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic" and the Republic of Moldova "until the decisive and

unconditioned condemnation by the Republic of Moldova leadership of Georgia's aggression, and the return of the Republic of Moldova to an equitable attitude towards all mediators and observers". In addition, it has been declared that Transnistria is examining the opportunity of elaborating and signing a new agreement on peace guarantees, security and stability in the region that would have entirely corresponded to the existing realities.

12 of August 2008

Visit to Tbilisi of the leaders from Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Latvia.

13 of August 2008

Prime-minister Zinaida Greceanîi takes a leave.

14 of August 2008

The Declaration of the People's Assembly of Gagauz autonomy was released and it expressed concerns relating to the "obvious genocide against the peaceful population" from South Ossetia and the policy applied by Russian administration.

19 of August 2008

In Kyiv, the GUAM Press Centre held the press conference of the Georgian Ambassador in Ukraine, M. Antadze and of V. Cecelashvili, GUAM Secretary General. It has been emphasized that Russia, through its actions, has destroyed the CIS, BlackSeaFor and has closed its own path to the WTO and lost the right to be a mediator in conflict settlement in Georgia.

20 of August 2008

Working visits of the President of Romania to the Republic of Moldova. After the meeting, the President Vladimir Voronin declared that "the conflict situation in Abkhazia" has been discussed without assessing Russia's behaviour. Traian Băsescu, President of Romania, emphasized the importance of the EU, the lack of an adequate mechanism to settle conflicts in the post-Soviet area and the fact that "Romania will be an unconditional supporter of integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova".

25 of August 2008

The Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament, has unanimously adopted an address to the President of Russia in which it recommends the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

25 of August 2008

At the “Bociarov creek” residence in Sochi (Russian Federation), was held the meeting between Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russia and Vladimir Voronin, President of the Republic of Moldova. After this, Vladimir Voronin declared that his Russian counterpart has manifested interest for the “package proposal” of Chisinau to settle the Transnistrian issue, based on the “Law on basic principles of the special legal status of the left Nistru riverbank localities”, that has been unanimously approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on 22 of July 2005. The parties have confirmed the intention to continue consultations with the participation of all stakeholders including “the Transnistrian side”.

26 of August 2008

Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russia signed the “Decrees on the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia”. In his Declaration issued on this occasion, Dmitry Medvedev stated once again that “Saakashvili has chosen genocide to reach his own political goals”, and appealed to all the countries to follow Russia’s example.

26 of August 2008

Emergence of “The Position of a Group of Experts Regarding the Impact of the Georgian Crisis on the Republic of Moldova”. It was emphasized that Georgian crisis threatens stability of many post-Soviet countries that Russia unilaterally perceives as being part of its paramount sphere of interests. These countries face separatist conflicts that have been initiated and supported politically, economically and militarily by the Russian Federation. “The armed conflict between Georgia and Russia has clearly demonstrated the role of Russia as a supporter of even direct part in these conflicts” and highlighted “the limits of the existing system for ensuring stability in the frozen conflict zones”. “Considering the important changes

appeared in the context of the international relations, the Republic of Moldova should thoroughly and comprehensively analyze the significance of these developments, assess their impact on its interests and make necessary adjustments to its foreign and domestic policies”, the report states.

29 of August 2008

The Declaration of the Government of the Republic of Moldova was issued in which the conflict from Georgia was qualified as “an ethnical one” and Russia’s behaviour was not considered. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has categorically rejected “any method of settling conflict issues by force, including achieving the territorial integrity”. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has declared that it did not consider, nevertheless, that the international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia “will not be a factor that would stabilize the situation”. The obvious lack of any relations and parallels between the created situation and the one in Transnistria was emphasized. The Declaration has stated that the regulation process of the Transnistrian conflict “has created extremely favourable premises” for its finalization and which has the political will and support of all participants in the settlement process.

31 of August 2008

Dmitry Medvedev announced the “five principles” of Russia’s foreign policy. This may lead to the conclusion that the Republic of Moldova is included by Russia into its “zone of privileged interests”. In addition, Dmitry Medvedev has declared that an absolute priority for Russia is to protect life and dignity of Russian citizens “wherever they are”.

3 of September 2008

The “official meeting” between Dmitry Medvedev, the President of the Russian Federation and Igor Smirnov, leader of the separatist regime, took place. The President of Russia has underlined the importance of “not allowing bloodshed and settling peacefully all the issues”. Igor Smirnov has declared that “at the request of Russian administration” he has renounced at the moratorium on the contacts with the Republic of Moldova.

5. Decision Making Occasions

Conflict's Premises

The decision of the Russian Federation from the 6th of March 2008, on the unilateral withdrawal from the observance of the “Decision of the CIS Heads of States Council on the conflict settlement measures in Abkhazia, Georgia”, dating from January 19th, 1996, was a clear signal that the Russian Federation prepares the ground for the promotion of a much more aggressive policy within the former Soviet area, especially in relation to Georgia. It is worth mentioning that Georgia constituted an irritating factor for Putin administration since the US invested a lot in the consolidation of the Georgian state and the geopolitical positions of Georgia.

Due to the insistence, in the first place on behalf of the US, Russia has liquidated its military bases on the territory of Georgia. Russia had to accept the repeal of the pro-Russia regime in Adjara etc. Instead, Georgia was subjected to considerable pressure on behalf of Russia, such as introduction of the visa regime, accompanied by inhuman deportations of Georgian citizens, cessation of communication by air, introduction of embargo on a range of Georgian goods, blasting of natural gas lines communicating with Georgia, etc.

If the leadership of the Republic of Moldova was capable of a careful monitoring and drawing appropriate conclusions from the behaviour of Russia in the Caucasus (large military applications in the close neighbourhood of Georgia), there would be the chance to consolidate the positions of the Republic of Moldova on Transnistria by the means of an active dialogue with the EU and Ukraine, in the first place. Hence, the insistent and awkward attempts of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova to solve the issue within a direct dialogue with the Kremlin, accentuated the suspicions of the EU and Ukraine as regards the common intentions of Chisinau and Moscow.

The Republic of Moldova also felt the consequences of the policy promoted by Russia during the period of time before the conflict in Georgia. After the beginning of EUBAM in March 2006, Russia introduced the embargo on wine import to the Republic of Moldova, which constituted a heavy strike

on economy and public finance of the Republic of Moldova. The Russian Federation provided direct financial assistance to the separatist regime, thus consolidating its position.

Moreover, between the meeting of Vladimir Voronin with Vladimir Putin at the residence in Novo Ogareovo, on 22 of June 2007, and the crisis caused by the war in Georgia, more than one year has passed. During this period, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova, meaning President Vladimir Voronin, held enough arguments to understand that any attempt to solve the Transnistrian conflict through a direct dialogue with Russia is a failure, and leads only to weakening the positions of the Republic of Moldova in relation to the policy of Russia in the former Soviet area.

It is inappropriate to analyse the Georgian conflict and the crisis caused by it starting with the moment of the initiation of military operations. Russia proceeded to military operations against Georgia also due to the fact that the leadership of Georgia promoted successfully the policy of attracting to his side the population of South Ossetia. The alternative administration of South Ossetia was created and headed by Dmitry Sanakoev; Georgia accomplished successfully a range of projects that enhanced its attractiveness for the population, controlled by the administration of Russian puppet – Eduard Kokoiti. Respectively, Russia's operation against Georgia was initiated due to the fact that the policy promoted by Georgia in the conflict zone of South Ossetia challenged the positions of Eduard Kokoiti's regime.

The leadership of the Republic of Moldova is under much more favourable conditions in relation to Georgia, in the first place due to the EU and NATO neighbourhood and the lack of common border with Russia. However, Chisinau administration proved unable to apply similar technologies in relation to the population of separatist region, despite the fact that during the existence of the Transnistrian issue, positive experience of grass root diplomacy was accumulated. But in all that period, no government of the Republic of Moldova understood the importance of the dialogue with the population in the conflict zone, the importance of the policy of providing information and alternative opinions in relation to the aggressive informational war against the Republic of Moldova initiated by the separatist regime.

Only the policy of Chisinau on supporting the villages on the left bank of the river Nistru (Dubasari district) under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Moldova and the campaign of free issuance of documents on Moldovan citizenship for the inhabitants of the separatist region played this role. Consequently, the Ministry of Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova declared that over 56% of Transnistrian population are citizens of the Republic of Moldova (this number is vehemently contested by Tiraspol regime).

On the rest, as a result of the policy promoted by Vladimir Voronin starting with 2001, the institutions of the state of Republic of Moldova have been in a process of continuing degradation. Moldovan society per ensemble has become a docile consumer of propagandistic myths launched by the presidential administration and lost the capacity to consolidate in order to protect the fundamental values that serve as grounds for any real state. Moldovan society became aware of the threat to sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova and reacted promptly in November 2003, when the political opposition and the civil society have created a common front and protested massively against the signature of the Kozak Memorandum.

Final Stage

The energetic intervention of the EU as mediator between Georgia and Russia, the EU presence in the negotiation format “5+2” and the firm position of Ukraine have created favourable conditions for the leadership of the Republic of Moldova to reject the attempts to solve the Transnistrian conflict by searching the inexistent compromise with the Russian Federation. As a rule, the conflicts similar to the one in Georgia cause a wave of emotional attitudes that, at least theoretically, open new opportunities for imposing some relatively new approaches to the issue.

If the leadership of the Republic of Moldova provided its citizens ample information on the conflict in Georgia, it would allow society consolidation and public awareness and would offer the Republic of Moldova the chance to position itself clearly in the new configuration of attitudes towards Russian policy in the former Soviet area. Basically, it could mean the reproduction of the situation before the parliamentary elections of 6 of March 2005, when Vladimir Voronin positioned himself as politician with a pro-European message that definitely opposed Russia’s attempts to influence the election process.

This political turnover of Vladimir Voronin before the elections of 6 of March 2005 deprived, to a great extent, the opposition from anti-communist arguments within the election campaign and ensured Vladimir Voronin an external political support on behalf of Mihail Saakashvili and Traian Băsescu. The signature, on 22 of February 2005, of the EU-Republic of Moldova Action Plan constituted a test for PCRM headed by Vladimir Voronin. Consequent implementation of the provisions of this Plan would mean that the PCRM renounced at the anti-democratic methods of maintaining its governance, that the Republic of Moldova, step by step, consolidates the institutions of the rule of law, that PCRM discards abusive control over mass media.

In reality, it became clear from the very beginning that PCRM with Vladimir Voronin as a leader does not intend to implement the European values in the Republic of Moldova. In the case of Vladimir Voronin everything was subordinated to the purpose to stay in power. In order to accomplish this goal, Vladimir Voronin preferred to strangle democratic values and the norms of the rule of law. This trend has not remained unnoticed by the EU, including by the diplomats of the EU member states accredited in Chisinau. Consequently, on 17 of July and 25 of November 2008, the declarations of the ambassadors of EU member states and US were made public through which they attempted to draw the attention of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova upon obvious deviations from the democratic norms of the rule of law taking place in the Republic of Moldova.

Hence, both declarations have been treated with complete ignorance by the group of Vladimir Voronin. This means that Vladimir Voronin had renounced, in fact, at the policy of accession to the EU long before the conflict in Georgia. Respectively, this was shown by the conscious rejection of the dialogue with the opposition and civil society and, implicitly, the rejection of the observation made by the EU and the US. This policy of Vladimir Voronin reduced to zero the chances to get rid of the total sub-control of Russia. Moreover, the behaviour of Vladimir Voronin demonstrated that, on the one hand, he is incapable of perceiving the issue of the Transnistrian conflict in all its complexity. On the other hand, it has become obvious that Vladimir Voronin sees the priority not in the issue of country reintegration, but in the issue of maintaining his power at all costs.

6. Analytical Themes

Preparation, prevention and reduction of effects:

The crisis related to the events in Georgia demonstrated that many key elements of the state of the Republic of Moldova exist only at the declarative level. The policy promoted by PCRM during the period of 2001–2008 “disarmed” totally the Moldovan state and the society in front of these kinds of challenges. Not being a NATO member, the Republic of Moldova has extremely poor relations with the neighbouring countries, Romania and Ukraine. After returning to power with the parliamentary elections on 6 of March 2005, Vladimir Voronin violated more and more demonstratively the norms of the rule of law and political democracy, thus willing to maintain his power after the elections in 2009. Therefore, the Republic of Moldova has no support on behalf of the EU member states and slides more and more to international isolation.

The Republic of Moldova has the experience of the armed conflict in spring-summer of 1992. At that time, both in state structures, as well as in the society as a whole, there was a mobilisation towards threats to territorial integrity of the country. The victory of the Republic of Moldova in the armed conflict with Russia also caused the bias of priorities in the Moldovan society. Hence, the state has been ignoring during these years the issue of internally displaced persons. This means that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova that risked their lives opposing Russian aggression on the left bank of the Nistru, after fleeing to the right bank of the Nistru were totally ignored by the leadership of the Republic of Moldova.

On 30 of August 1991, in Kyiv, a group of Moldovan policemen arrested Igor Smirnov, being firmly convinced that they render to justice a state criminal that threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. Hence, on the background of the processes that were accomplished together with PCRM coming to governance, these persons were forced to flee to Romania. There were purges in the force structure of the Republic of Moldova which caused the departure of persons that had actively been engaged in the fight for territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

PCRM headed by Vladimir Voronin undertook control over mass media, including the National Public Institution of Audiovisual (IPNA) of “Teleradio-Moldova” Company. Via them, PCRM promotes the “brainwashing” policy. Within this censored informational space, there are no public debates on the issue of the Transnistrian conflict, illegal placement of troops of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, risks and threats to national security and possible accession of the Republic of Moldova to NATO.

As a result of these policies, the Moldovan society, being manipulated by Russian mass media and by the media censored and controlled by PCRM, proved incapable of providing a critical appraisal of the events in Georgia and estimating the possible repercussion upon the Republic of Moldova. Consequently, only 17.7% of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova considered that the decision of Russia to recognise unilaterally the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was wrong, whereas others decided either to consider that the decision of Russia was correct (32.9%), or have never heard about this decision (9.1%), or are incapable of formulating an answer (40.3%). This means that the Republic of Moldova proved unprepared for this type of crises, whereas the policies promoted by PCRM seriously affected the capacity of the society of the Republic of Moldova to assess critically the behaviour of Russia in relation to the Transnistrian issue.

It is obvious that the appointment and perpetuation at the governance of PCRM reflects the level of civic culture of the Moldovan society and its capacity to face external challenges, to achieve genuine market economy and political democracy. This means that the society as a whole is unprepared for such challenges and in case of similar events on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, they would result in a national catastrophe.

Leadership:

President Vladimir Voronin imposed upon the Republic of Moldova an authoritarian governance system that contravenes the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and defies the elementary notions of a rule of law and political democracy. Hence, for instance, the public opinion of the Republic of Moldova, the members of Parliament, including

those from the PCRM, doesn't know yet the provisions of the "Package Deal" proposed by Chisinau to the Kremlin. This draft document was not published even after it had been submitted to Igor Smirnov during the meeting held on 24 of December 2008, in Tiraspol.

Vladimir Voronin and the overall governance defied the attempts of the civil society to contribute to the settlement of this crisis. It was also the case of some interpellations on behalf of opposition members of Parliament that stipulated the situation with the tacit recognition, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, of illegal privatisation by Russia of the strategic economic objectives in Transnistria which have been ignored.

The capacity of the society to react to challenges similar to the conflict in Georgia was determined by the level of competence and intellectual potential of a single person. Moreover, the crisis in Georgia left open the issue related to the capacity of the Moldovan society to consolidate in front of such challenges.

Decision making units:

The degree of preparedness of the state of Republic of Moldova for crisis situations may be appreciated by the analysis of the legislative framework. In this regard, it is interesting to mention the Law⁵ (No.212 dated 24.06.2004) on Emergency Situations, State of Siege and Martial War. The analysis of the provisions of this Law demonstrates that its adoption constituted a purely formal step and its contents do not ensure coherent functioning of state institutions in the situations it is elaborated for.

Firstly, the Law fails to formulate expressly the grounds for the declaration of the state of emergency, siege and war. Its contents totally ignore the existence of the anti-constitutional regime in the Eastern districts of the Republic of Moldova, including the illegal presence of the Russian troops.

⁵ Published in Official Gazette No. 132-137, Art. No. 696, 06.08.2004.

Moreover, this Law categorically fails to ensure an adequate legal framework for the state of siege and war and a coordinated functioning of the state structures.

Article 30 (Chapter IV, State of Siege) stipulates that “While instituting the state of siege, with the purpose of planning, organizing and coordinating the activity of country’s defense and ensuring state security, the Supreme Council of Security transforms itself into the Supreme Council of Defence, based on a decree issued by the President of the Republic of Moldova”. Hence, the Council of National Security, with four (!) employed servants, is absolutely incapable of ensuring planning, organization and coordination of the activity related to the country defense.

Framework of crisis development

The framework of crisis development has been determined, to a great extent, by the fact that the Republic of Moldova is an artificial state formation created in 1940 by the Soviet communist regime as a component part (union republic) of the USSR. On the current territory of the Republic of Moldova there are no traditions and historical memory of statehood. Willing to legitimise incorporation of Basarabia, made as a result of agreements between Hitler and Stalin, the communist regime of the USSR decided to create on the territory of the Moldovan SSR the “Moldovan nation” different from the one of the neighbouring Romania.

In order to accomplish this purpose, the intellectuals and public servants from the former Romanian administration (1918–1940) have been exterminated, repeated deports were organized as well as the famine in 1946–47, etc. The population was subjected to “brainwashing” practices by inoculation of “socialist Moldovan culture” and Russification. The regime of drastic population isolation of the Moldovan SSR from the neighbouring Romania was imposed.

It can be stated that this policy was successfully accomplished, since, after the collapse of the USSR, the population of Moldovan SSR neither joined Romania, according to the RFG and RDG model, nor managed to follow the example of the Baltic countries, building a viable rule of law. Moldovan society as a whole neither perceives the issue of re-establishment of state

sovereignty on the territory of the left bank of the river Nistru as a priority, nor is ready to assume responsibility for the accomplishment of this purpose.

Despite the fact that the Russian Federation committed in 1992 an act of military aggression against the Republic of Moldova that resulted in the assassination of hundreds of Moldovan citizens, despite the fact that the Russian Federation maintains illegally its troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and *de facto* maintains economically the anti-constitutional regime in Transnistria, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev are political leaders with the highest level of trust on behalf of Moldovan citizens. The overall society fails to perceive Russia as a threat and there are big doubts regarding the capacity of this society to assume its responsibility for country reintegration. For instance, Vladimir Voronin did not even feel obliged to take an attitude in public towards the events in Georgia, whereas the society accepted docilely the continuity of the show with meetings Medvedev-Voronin, Voronin-Smirnov etc.

The crisis caused by the events in Georgia revealed again the unfinished story on the issue of the Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU) Gagauzia. During the existence of this autonomy (since 23 of December 1994) it was not managed to integrate the preponderantly Gagauz population in the Moldovan society. During the parliamentary elections carried out in the Republic of Moldova, the voters from the ATU Gagauzia have often voted massively for political formations with an anti-democratic and primitive pro-Russian message. This contrast has become even more prominent against the background of the crisis caused by the events in Georgia.

On 14 of August 2008, by its Declaration, the Popular Assembly (PA) of ATU Gagauzia supported univocally the position of Russia. Moreover, within the PA meeting on 19 of September 2008, the Message of the PA ATU Gagauzia to the President and the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova was released. This document expresses full solidarity with the decision of Russia to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, whereas the leadership of the Republic of Moldova is requested to follow the example of Russia, this section of PA ATU Gagauzia demonstrated the existence of serious issues as regards the consolidation of Moldovan state and society even on the territory controlled by the legal authorities from Chisinau.

Conflicts of values

The crisis of August 2008 demonstrated once again that the phenomenon entitled “Transnistrian conflict” is a conflict between the set of values based on which sovereignty (23 of June 1990) and independence (27 of August 1991) of the Republic of Moldova were proclaimed, and the set of “values” put at the basis of the policy of “standing up from knees” of Putin’s Russia. It is obvious that society and the governance of the Republic of Moldova chose the tactics of tacit but obvious cessions in front of claims on behalf of the Russian Federation.

As a result of these cessions, the Russian Federation, by obvious legal means, undertook control over the energetic sector of the Republic of Moldova. By means of the Transnistrian issue, the Russian Federation shapes and influences the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova, in the first place the one on the relations of the Republic of Moldova with NATO and neighbouring countries, Romania and Ukraine. As a result of this conflict of values, the political project aimed at edification of the state of the Republic of Moldova remains unaccomplished and there is no certain perspective for its successful accomplishment.

Crisis of communication and credibility:

Against the background of the events in Georgia, a number of events occurred in the Republic of Moldova that demonstrated the existence of a deep communication crisis in the society. President Vladimir Voronin chose the tactics aimed at distracting the attention of public opinion from the events in Georgia. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to state that the society remained indifferent. Within the civil society, there are NGOs and experts that have repeatedly demonstrated their correct perception of the processes related to Russia’s behaviour, including in relation to Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

The armed conflict in Georgia caused intense debates within this circle. In the first place, due to the fact that it was unclear how Russia intended to behave in relation with the Republic of Moldova and the regime in Transnistria. As a result of this communication, on 25 of August 2008, the document entitled “**Position of a group of experts on the impact of Georgian crisis upon the interests of the Republic of Moldova**” was issued. On 26 of August, this document was presented to public opinion within a press conference.

The authors of the document were surprised by the reaction of most journalists to this document, which demonstrated a lack of some critical approaches within the media and public environment and total disorientation. The group of experts, the authors of the document, tried to initiate debates on it with the parliamentary political parties of the Republic of Moldova. Hence, this idea remained unaccomplished due to the lack of any reaction to this proposal on behalf of Vladimir Voronin, head of PCRM.

Only the ambassadors of the EU countries accredited in Chisinau reacted to the publication of this document. For them this document was the only reference point for the evaluation of the situation in the Republic of Moldova. At the initiative of these ambassadors, there was a meeting with the authors of the document and there was an open discussion on possible scenarios of evolution of the situation in the Republic of Moldova.

This behaviour of different stakeholders (civil society, political parties, governance, and mass media) demonstrated the profound communication crisis, its incapacity to realise the risks and threats to the country's security and consolidate itself in front of these threats.

Trans-nationalisation and internationalisation:

The "5+2" format itself speaks about the fact that the issue of the Transnistrian conflict is an internationalised one. Moreover, especially after the last wave of EU extension, the situation around Transnistria has been determined by obvious competition of the position of different stakeholders. The appearance of EUBAM along the Moldovan-Ukrainian border has become possible due to the EU (ENP) neighbouring policy and cooperation within the Brussels – Chisinau – Kyiv triangle.

It is obvious that the negotiations in the "5+2" format cannot lead to a viable solution of the Transnistrian issue. In the first place, this is due to the fact that it is based upon an erroneous perception of the essence of the conflict. In this regard, it is enough to take into account the ECHR decision dated 7 of July 2005 on the case "Ilascu group versus the Government of the Republic of Moldova and Russia". In reality, neither the regime of Russian puppets of Tiraspol, nor the population of the left bank of the river

Nistru are “parts” of the conflict, but the Russian Federation. Hence, in the “5+2” format, Russia positioned itself as a “mediator” in the process of negotiation between the “parties” and the “guarantor” of the agreements to be reached during the negotiation process.

The events of Georgia emphasised some new issues related to the “5+2” negotiation format. In the first place, it became clear that Russia wants to obtain from Chisinau the approval to negotiate the Transnistrian issue within the “2+1” format, thus isolating the Republic of Moldova from the EU and USA support. In this situation, the “5+2” format has become a shield for the Republic of Moldova against Russia’s pressure. Moreover, insisting on reaching an agreement in the “5+2” format, EU and US have the guarantee that Vladimir Voronin will avoid separate agreements with Russia as in the case with the “Kozak Memorandum” in November 2003.

The internationalisation of the Transnistrian issue, the vicinity of the Republic of Moldova with the EU and the presence of the Ukrainian factor reduced the risks for the Republic of Moldova under the conditions of the Georgian crisis.

Time effects

The crisis caused by the Russian aggression in Georgia overlapped by the willingness of Vladimir Voronin to maintain his governance at all costs after the parliamentary elections of 5 of April 2009 determined Vladimir Voronin to make substantial concessions with Russian pressure. This referred in the first place to the tacit recognition by Chisinau of the right of Russia upon strategic economic objectives located in Transnistria.

In the long run, this affects seriously the energy security of the Republic of Moldova, making it totally dependent on Russia. If imagining that the Republic of Moldova in perspective has a Government that will attack in the international courts and challenge the propriety right of Russia upon the objectives in Transnistria, the concessions of Vladimir Voronin in the autumn of 2008 will weaken substantially the position of the Republic of Moldova.

Lessons learnt

There are no reasons to believe that the leadership of the Republic of Moldova is capable of assessing the experience accumulated during the crisis period and use it for the promotion of a more efficient policy aimed at the country's reintegration. Besides the crisis period related to the events of Georgia, the PCRM had at their disposal eight years of comfortable governance, when all branches of power, mass media and economic potential of the country were controlled by Vladimir Voronin, head of this party and the country.

Despite the fact that civil society offered to the authorities different scenarios for solving the conflict (precedents of dialogues with the population of the left bank of the river Nistru, collaboration with NGOs, "3D" Strategy of conflict settlement, in 2004, etc.), PCRM proved incapable of overcoming the perception of the Transnistrian conflict based on erroneous stereotypes imposed by the Russian Federation and the mentality and level of competence of the leaders, modelled by the Soviet past.

During the crisis, the behaviour of PCRM headed by Vladimir Voronin was subordinated to the purpose of continuous miss-information of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, promotion of the policy of docile subordination to the indications coming from Moscow and continuous concession to Russia in order to ensure Russian support within the looming parliamentary elections of the 5th of April 2009.

The society of the Republic of Moldova also proved incapable of learning lessons as a result of the Georgian crisis. The attempts of a group of independent experts to raise public awareness in the Republic of Moldova upon the dangers caused by the events in Georgia had no impact. Only the diplomatic body of EU member states and US accredited in Chisinau proved interest towards this attempt to learn lessons from the events in Georgia.

7. Conclusions

- The crisis situation proved that the state of the Republic of Moldova is incapable of ensuring its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Both institutionally, as well as from the viewpoint of the spiritual status of the

- society, the Republic of Moldova constitutes an unaccomplished political project, the existence of which is determined by external conjuncture;
- The crisis situation was caused by the incompetence of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova that has not managed to ensure a minimal level of national security. As a result of the fact that a wrong way of solving the Transnistrian conflict was selected in terms of a direct dialogue with Russia, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova preferred the unilateral concession in many strategic sectors. The state of the Republic of Moldova remained absolutely unprotected in front of eventual challenges on behalf of Russia and incapable of ensuring the security of its own citizens;
 - The crisis provoked by the events in Georgia demonstrated that the current leadership of the ATU Gagauzia supported univocally the position of the Russian Federation. This leads to the conclusion that the population of this autonomy has a mentality that could be exploited in political purposes dictated externally. The adoption of the Law on special legal status of the Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU) Gagauzia on 23 of December 1994 constituted a formal step, which, since fourteen years after the adoption of the law, failed to ensure the integration of Gagauz minority in the Moldovan society;
 - Having benefited from the incompetence of the leadership of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation managed to subordinate to its own interests the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova and to consolidate its control over the most important national economy segments. Against the background of the events in Georgia, the leadership of the Republic of Moldova preferred to demonstrate its maximum possible loyalty towards Russia and *de facto* subordinated docilely to the doctrine of “limited sovereignty” expressed by Dmitry Medvedev;
 - The opinions and attitudes towards the stakeholders involved in the crisis situation are determined by Russian mass media that controls the public informational space of the Republic of Moldova. The society is manipulated and miss-informed by Russian mass media and is incapable of reacting adequately to crisis situation;

- The prevention of crisis situations in the future and the possibility of diminishing the risks are possible only by consolidating the rule of law and the political democracy in the Republic of Moldova. Efficient partnership with the EU, NATO and the US constitutes for the Republic of Moldova an efficient tool for avoiding future crisis situations, and is creating the prerequisites for a viable solution of the Transnistrian conflict by liquidating illegal foreign military presence on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Chapter 5

RUSSIA-GEORGIA WAR OF AUGUST 2008: UKRAINIAN APPROACH

Oleksandr Sushko

1. Introduction

Early in the morning, on the 8th of August, 2008 Russian troops invaded territory of Georgia. The war continued for 5 days and was stopped only after political and diplomatic interference of the European Union. On August 26, 2008 Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Following international agreements, Russia withdrawn its military units from the most of occupied Georgian territories up to October 8, but Russian troops remain stationed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia without any internationally legitimized mandate, despite obligations to return to status-quo of August 7. Georgia declared Abkhazia and South Ossetia “Russian-occupied territories“ on August 28, 2008.

Russia motivated its action with the need to “protect compatriots” (Russian citizens) living in the region of South Ossetia de-facto not controlled by Georgian central government since early 90th. However, the substance of the conflict goes far beyond the protection of local population or even fighting against not-comfortable for Russia georgian leadership by the president Mikhail Saakashvili.

The Russian-Georgian conflict turned from local territorial conflict into a geopolitical war. By this action **Russian Federation started to implement its vision of the “multipolar world”** based on the principles of “the spheres of priviledged interests”. As a result of de facto annexations of legitimate territories of Georgia – Abkhazia and North Ossetia – and the inability of the world community to restore the pre-war status quo, the state of the international system in this part of the world has evidently been changed.

The principal consequence of this change is **destruction of the consensus** existing before, as for recognition of the borders of Newly Independent States after collapse of the USSR within the limits of former administrative borders of soviet republics. This circumstance essentially worsens the prognosis of stability in the Black Sea region as a whole, and with regards of Ukraine, in particular.

Although there are no actual separatist conflicts on the territory of Ukraine, they can be activated in the future, first of all, in Crimea, with the further use of precedents set by Russia-Georgia war. Therefore, Caucasus crisis of August 2008 and its outcomes is an issue of crucial importance for Ukraine.

2. The Georgian-Russian Crisis early warning signs

NATO MAP postponed. After NATO Bucharest Summit (April 2008), when the Alliance turned down Ukraine's and Georgia's accession to the Membership Action Plan (MAP), Russian government perceived that decision as a *carte blanche* for actions to secure so called "sphere of the privileged interests" in the neighbourhood. A military action as a way to conquer Georgia became more plausible after the Georgian opposition lost presidential election to Mikhail Saakashvili in January 2008. Presidential election included a non-binding referendum on whether the country should join NATO. An overwhelming majority of 77% voted in favor of such membership which proved that Georgia is a country strongly determined to become a part of Euro-Atlantic community. This fact convinced Russia that military action is the only available way to prevent or at least to postpone for uncertain future Georgia's move towards NATO membership.

The Kremlin, which has made no secret of its antipathy for Georgia's NATO aspirations, may have been emboldened by Georgia's failure to achieve a critical step forward in the membership process. Alternately, it may have been angered by NATO's conciliatory pledge to Tbilisi and Kyiv that they would receive a MAP in future - a move seen by many as a strong gesture of support from the West.

Steven Pifer, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, currently visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, says NATO's decision may have encouraged Russia to play rough with Georgia. "I think the Russians took the wrong lessons from Bucharest," Pifer says. "There was a lot of Russian pressure and rhetoric against both Georgia and Ukraine getting Membership Action Plans before Bucharest. I have heard that Russians regard Bucharest as a success. And what you saw after Bucharest was an increase in pressure.¹"

Within the year preceeding the war, *Russia provided a number of evidences proving it is preparing to the war.*

For instance, exactly one year before invasion, on August 7, 2007 a massive guided missile hit the ground in southern Georgia without exploding. People in the nearby village of Tsitelubani saw "two planes at a great altitude", and then watched one "dive" and "fire something". Georgian investigators reassembling the weapon at the site say it was a Russian-made Raduga Kh-58, designed to hit radars.

Georgia's government is infuriated, but so is Russia's. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said on August 8 that the attack was not just a problem for Georgia, "but for European security as a whole". Moscow denies all involvement, and the Russian Foreign Ministry even suggested that Georgian jets had fired the missile just to raise tensions with Russia.

Kosovo "precedent". After declaration of Kosovo independence followed by its recognition by the most of Western states, Russian President Vladimir Putin described that fact as a "terrible precedent" that will come back to hit the West "in the face".

"The precedent of Kosovo is a terrible precedent, which will de facto blow apart the whole system of international relations, developed not over decades, but over centuries", Putin told a Moscow meeting of regional leaders.

¹ Did Russia Plan its War in Georgia? - Whitmore Brian 8/16/08 A EurasiaNet Partner Post from RFE/RL.

Russian special representative for European affairs Sergei Yastrzhembsky said later that “*The Kosovo precedent is a terrifying precedent. It in essence is breaking open the entire system of international relations that have prevailed not just for decades but for centuries. And it without a doubt will bring on itself an entire chain of **unforeseen consequences**,*” he said in televised comments. Those who have recognized Kosovo “are miscalculating what they are doing. In the end, this is a stick with two ends and that other end will come back to knock them on the head someday” he said.

Russian officials have suggested that Kosovo’s declaration could boost the independence claims of separatist regions in Western Europe. However, the main idea was to use this “precedent” in order to legitimize Russia’s efforts to undermine territorial integrity of Georgia and provide for some grounds for similar actions in Ukraine (Crimea) in the future if needed. In wider terms *Russia uses Kosovo case for the purposes of reconsidering state borders established in the former USSR after its collapse in 1991*. This trend is especially sensitive and dangerous for Ukraine on obvious reasons.

Additional troops in Abkhazia. In late April and early May 2007 Russia deployed more than 1,000 additional “peacekeeping” troops with heavy weapons to Abkhazia, without notifying Georgia or any international authority. That force included paratroopers, tanks, howitzers, and anti-aircraft batteries, in multiple violations of internationally accepted peacekeeping norms. That move raised the number of Russian peacekeepers to 3,000.

On May 30 and 31 Russia’s Defense Ministry sent railway troops into Abkhazia without informing Georgia, much less requesting its consent. The move involves some 400 personnel, mostly from the ministry’s Railway Troops and some from the military engineering troops. This deployment marks another move in Russia’s now-overt annexation and militarization of Abkhazia through “peacekeeping” and other types of troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry’s communiqué published on May 31 justifies the railway troops’ deployment by citing Putin’s April 16 presidential decree, which authorizes a wide range of unilateral Russian moves in

Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It also cites a request from Abkhaz authorities to rebuild sections of the railway. The communiqué claims that these troops are unarmed, an unverifiable claim, given that the columns of heavy transport vehicles covered their cargos while moving to the deployment area.

The Russian Ministry of Defense said on May 31 it had sent unarmed units of the Railway Forces – Russian MoD’s unit tasked with protection and reconstruction of railway infrastructure – to Abkhazia as part of Moscow’s “humanitarian assistance” to the unrecognized republic.

“Each citizen of Georgia understands very well that annexation of Abkhazia is underway in all directions, including trade, social, economic and legal ones. And now an extremely dangerous military component was added to this process,” Grigol Vashadze said. “Nobody needs to bring Railway Forces to the territory of another country, if a military intervention is not being prepared. It is impossible to assess it otherwise.”

He said that military engineers and specialists for reconstruction of roads and bridges were among the Russian Railway Forces sent to Abkhazia.

“We assess this act as one more aggressive move by Russia against Georgia’s territorial integrity. They are strengthening the military infrastructure in order to launch intervention into Georgia,” the Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister said. “It is an absolute demagoguery, when intervention into the territory of a neighboring country is being justified by humanitarian purposes, while military infrastructure is being reinforced.”²

“If we recall the fact that the Russian Federation has already brought 500 paratroopers into Abkhazia and if we take into consideration that anti-aircraft missile systems and howitzers with a range of 50 kilometer, have been brought to our territory [into Abkhazia] illegally, it is quite clear, why it [sending of the Railway Forces] is being done³.”

² Tbilisi Condemns Russian ‘Railway Troops’ in Abkhazia, Civil Georgia, Tbilisi, May 31, 2008.

³ Ibid.

Russia clearly intended to use this railroad at least in part for military purposes. Deployment of railway troops is often a precursor to offensive military moves or an indication of building up the infrastructure for long-term occupation of the territory. Railway troops are a peculiar, Soviet-bequeathed military institution, subordinated to the government as the Federal Railway Troops Service until 2004 and then incorporated into the Defense Ministry⁴.

The declared mission of the newly deployed troops was to restore and upgrade the Sokhumi-Ochamchire section of the railway. This enabled Russia to transport more tanks, artillery, and other hardware at locations throughout Abkhazia, down to the ceasefire line along the Inguri River.

According to Vladimir Socor's analysis written in June 2008, "*Moscow's move toward direct official relations with the secessionist authorities, takeover of the Georgian-owned railroad, air operations in Georgian airspace over Abkhazia, and growing military deployment are the latest steps highlighting the inter-state nature of this conflict. In this situation, Russia's "peacekeeping" and "mediating" role looks more farcical than ever*"⁵.

Some weeks before the war, Russia conducted **massive military exercises close to the Georgian border** involving 8,000 servicemen and 700 pieces of military hardware.

At center stage in those maneuvers was Russia's 58th Army, the very unit that would later play a key role in the incursion. Those exercises are just one link in a chain of incidents suggesting that Russia's military action in Georgia was planned months in advance, awaiting only an appropriate pretext to act.

After exercised finished, the staff of 58th army was not returned back to their permanent bases but stayed near the mountain crossing infrastructure, mainly Roksky tunnel connecting Russia with the territory of South Ossetia. Due to this fact Russain troops achieved Tskhinvaly just within several hours after decision on invasion had been taken.

⁴ Vladimir Socor in Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 5 Issue: 105 June 3, 2008.

⁵ Ibid.

Judging from the nature of actions of Russian troops and the Russian Black Sea fleet, realization of the military and political goals had to be achieved through fulfillment of the following strategic objectives:

- Defeat of the Georgian armed forces;
- Disorganization of military and public administration of the country;
- Establishment of the military blockade of Georgia;
- Assault of Tbilisi and overthrow of central bodies of public administration in Georgia;
- Military occupation of Georgia, establishment of control over its transport communications and strategically important objects⁶.

3. Crisis substance

Russia-Georgia was a strong international crisis, involving major global actors.

For the Ukrainian decision makers **this was a crisis** because it fill up all the conditions for a crisis:

1. It was a **sudden change of the existing situation**.
2. It represented a **threat to the basic values**: first of all, to thew principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity on the nearby state which was a political ally of Ukraine in this vitally important part of the world. It became a threat **to the security of Ukraine as it destroyed the stability in the region** and posed a potential threat to the territorial integrity of Ukraine.
3. It introduces a sense of **emergency** – all existing formats of negotiation, cooperation and legitimate peace-keeping were terminated. Foreign troops invaded deeply the territory of sovereign state with the intention of storming the capital city.
4. The institutions asked to solve the problem were on an acute situation of **uncertainty** due to the lack of political will to stop the violence and restore status-quo in Georgia and further unclear prospects for sustainable long-term peace solution.

⁶ Hryhoriy Perepelytsia. *Roles Of Ukraine And EU in the Settlement of the Russian-Georgian Conflict in the Caucasus*, EU-Ukraine Relations, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Kyiv, 2008.

4. The context of the crisis

Domestic context

Domestic context of the crisis in Ukraine is to be accessed via following important components:

- Official position of Ukraine (President and MFA)
- The role of the Cabinet of Ministers
- Opposition's opinion
- Public perceptions

Official Kyiv represented by President Yushchenko and MFA strongly criticized Russia's actions. On August 8, on the day the war started, President Yushchenko delegated his special representative, the First Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Kostyantyn Yeliseyev, to Tbilisi.

On August 9, the Head of State held telephone conversations with Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and Supreme Representative of EC on foreign and security policy Xavier Solana. On August 10, Viktor Yushchenko delegated the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Volodymyr Ogrzyzko, to leave for Tbilisi personally for consultations with the Georgian authorities.

On August 12, Yushchenko arrived in Tbilisi personally together with Polish President Lech Kaczyński, Estonian President Henrik Ilves, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and Latvian Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis. In his speech in the central square of Tbilisi, Yushchenko stated: „We came thousands of kilometers to demonstrate to the rebellious Georgian people the most sacred emotion, solidarity. It means that our hearts belong to you. Liberty is worthy of struggle. We should always remember that the Georgian nation deserves to be independent. We came to confirm your sovereignty, your independence, your territorial integrity.“

According to Hrygoriy Perepelytsya's analysis, the main tasks of Ukraine were:

- Non-admission of the storming of Tbilisi by Russian troops;
- Immediate ceasefire;

- Withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Georgia and cessation of military occupation thereof;
- Raising of the blockade from Georgia;
- Restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia⁷.

Within the line of military and technical cooperation, Ukraine granted Georgia some specimens of defensive armaments, in particular, an anti-aircraft land „BUK“ missile complex. In addition, the Russian party was notified about the right of Ukraine to close its territorial waters to warships of the RF Black Sea Fleet, which directly participated in hostilities against Georgia. Thus, Ukraine granted real military, political and diplomatic assistance to Georgia.

The actions of the Ukrainian Cabinet of ministers led by Y. Tymoshenko in the course of the conflict were first of all aimed at the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens from the conflict zone and granting humanitarian aid to Georgia at the rate of about 155 tons, in the amount of 8 million USD (comparable with EU humanitarian aid – 5 million Euro, and the USA – 10.7 million USD). The government also arranged a convalescence program in Ukraine for about 200 Georgian children evacuated from the conflict zone.

The political position of the government and the Prime Minister personally differed from the President's position – Y. Tymoshenko avoided political assessments of the war, emphasizing only that her position coincides with that of the European Union. It was used by the Prime Minister's opponents (first of all, those from the Presidential Secretariat) in order to accuse her of rousing the Kremlin.

As for the **opposition**, it took up a sharply critical position as to the policy of official Kyiv. The Head of the Party of Regions faction in Parliament, Viktor Yanukovich, was sure that the President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko had no right of „unilateral support“ of Georgia in its conflict

⁷ Hryhoriy Perepelytsia. *Roles Of Ukraine And EU in the Settlement of the Russian-Georgian Conflict in the Caucasus*, EU-Ukraine Relations, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Kyiv, 2008.

with Russia on behalf of the Ukrainian state. We may take part in its regulation merely on a peacekeeping basis. Statements of Ukrainian leaders in support of Georgia lead to extremely conflict situation with Russia.” Petro Symonenko, the First Secretary of the Ukraine, required that a criminal case be opened in connection with the Ukrainian weapons supplies to the “fledgling from the U.S. eagle’s nest”.

Questions concerning supply of Ukrainian armaments to the Georgian government are still acutely contentious. On the initiative of opposition fractions in the Parliament, a special investigation commission was created on that issue. However, its activities were extremely politicized, and management had not concealed from the beginning that the conclusions would comply with the estimates previously declared by the Russian Federation as to the unlawfulness and inadmissibility of armament supplies to Georgia. However, such assessments do not correspond with international law norms: there were and are no sanctions concerning armament supplies to Georgia. Thus, now, the fact of such supplies, and facts of military and technical cooperation of the Ukrainian armed forces with the Georgian army cannot be deemed violations of regulations on nonproliferation and export control of armaments.

Public perception. There was no unanimous reaction of the society in assessing the Caucasian conflict. Most citizens adhered to a neutral position. In accordance with a nationwide poll conducted by the National Institute for Strategic Studies on August 21–26, 2008, **41.9% of citizens were in favor of neutrality towards the conflict.** Another 20.2% considered it reasonable to support Georgia exclusively by diplomatic means, 18.3% – to support Russia exclusively by diplomatic means, 4.0% – to grant Georgia military and military-technical support, 2.9% – to grant Russia military and military-technical support, and 12.7% respondents had no clear opinion on the matter

5. International context

International context of the Caucasus crisis as viewed from Ukraine can be described in the following dimensions:

- Russian policy towards “near abroad” and Ukraine in particular

- Policy of the European Union towards the region, especially during the conflict
- Military aspects, connected to Black Sea Fleet of RF base in Sevastopol.

Russian policy. So called post-Soviet space is viewed by Russia as an area for reinstating itself as a geopolitical force. It is within this space that Russia intends to reappear as a superpower. Caucasus obviously takes a pivotal place in this space. Control over the Caucasus enables Russia to directly access, via Iran and Turkey, the Middle and Near East. Control over the Caucasus enables it to cut routes for EU and USA to the Central Asian energy resources, and deprive NATO mission in Afghanistan of the rear support.

Once in control of the Caucasus, Russia would deny the US access to Central Asia, a region extremely important for the US in energy and geopolitical senses. Both existing oil pipelines, such as “Baku-Ceyhan”, and future ones, such as Nabucco, would fall under Russia’s command. So, in effect, Russia would monopolize all Eurasian energy resources and related access routes. Georgia lies right in the center of the Caucasus, and through it run not only transport corridors, but also North-South and West-East vectors of influence.

Conceptually, Russia sees Ukraine within the sphere of own “privileged interests”; in fact, it means a modernized version of Brezhnev’s doctrine of “*limited sovereignty*”, realized after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The strategic vision of the Kremlin foresees that the sovereignty of Ukraine (and other states that do not belong to Russia’s sphere of “privileged interests”) can not be significantly wider than that of the members of Warsaw Pact prior to the collapse of “the socialist camp”. Correspondingly, the political approach of Russia towards Ukraine is built.

On September 18, 2008, RF President D. Medvedev, when receiving the credentials from the newly appointed Ambassador of Ukraine in Russia, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, in Alexandrov Hall of the Kremlin, affirmed: “The peoples of Russia and Ukraine are indissolubly tied together by true fraternal relations and special feelings of respect and mutual trust”. However, in practice, the rhetoric and policy of official Moscow towards Ukraine are fundamentally different and distant from the principles mentioned.

Back in January 2008, reacting to the appeal of Ukrainian leaders to NATO concerning the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Russia threatened: “The possible integration of Ukraine into NATO will dramatically complicate Russian-Ukrainian relations. We will be forced to take adequate measures”.

Shortly after, President Vladimir Putin defined the substance of such measures in a more detailed way; an essential part of them should be redirection of the RF missile complexes to target Ukraine. On February 12, at a joint press conference with President Yushchenko, he stated: “Russia is first and foremost concerned about the location of NATO bases in Ukraine. It is terrible to say and even think that Russian missiles in reply to such steps – technically, we cannot exclude this possibility – would take aim at Ukraine. This is what our concerns are about.”

Then, at his press conference on February 14, Vladimir Putin specified that: “our joint staff and our experts are of the opinion, that this (author’s note: Ukraine’s accession to NATO) is jeopardizing our national security... Should it (author’s note: threat) happen, we would be forced to react adequately. Then we will be forced to redirect part of our missile complexes to target the objects putting us in danger.”

The pronouncements of President Putin concerning Ukraine became widely known in the course of the top-level Russia-NATO Council on April 4, 2008 in Bucharest (within the framework of the NATO summit). Then, the Russian head of state, in addressing the US president, said the following: “George, do not you understand that Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? Part of its territory belongs to Eastern Europe, and another part, a significant one, has been given by us!”

Army Gen. Yury Baluyevsky, chief of the Russian General Staff, said that the entry of Ukraine or Georgia into NATO would lead Moscow to “undoubtedly take measures to ensure its security near the state border. These will be both military and other measures.” Foreign Minister Sergei

Lavrov likewise said Moscow “will do everything possible to prevent the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO.”⁸

A typical example of the dominating approach of the RF towards relations with Ukraine, involving virtually the entire spectrum of problematic issues of bilateral relations, is the Declaration of the MFA of Russia of September 11, 2008. In particular, it is stated therein: “We are forced to ascertain the fact that the policy pursued recently by the Ukrainian authorities should be evaluated as definitely unfriendly towards Russia”. It is mentioned in the document that Russia and Ukraine should define their approach to the future destiny of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership of 1997 by October 1, 2008. Moreover, MFA of Russia points out that the declared aspiration of official Kyiv for NATO membership “contradicts the Treaty of 1997 and the security interests of Russia”.

Russian MFA also notes that, „in the humanitarian sphere, many negative phenomena have accumulated. The matter concerns attempts by the Ukrainian authorities to revise our joint history in an anti-Russian style, making heroes of the accomplices of fascists, while the rights of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine are infringed, and purposeful policy is pursued with the aim of excluding the Russian language from public life, science, education, culture and mass media of the country“.

The political course of the Kremlin gained special acuteness in the course of and after the Caucasian crisis in August 2008.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry statement says: “The state of Ukraine, which has been supplying weapons to Georgia so that it got armed to the teeth, and with that, directly encouraging the Georgian authorities to start the intervention and ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia, has no moral right to tutor others and seek to participate in the settlement,” the statement says. Meanwhile, Russia’s media reported that the Tu-22 bomber was shot down over Georgia with the S-200 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, which

⁸ *Richard Weitz*. Is Ukraine Next? Georgian War Exacerbates Russia-Ukraine Relations. 15 Aug 2008, World Politics Review Exclusive <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/article.aspx?id=2571>.

had been allegedly supplied by Ukraine. “We know that Kyiv sold several AMD systems to Tbilisi. Among those, there could be the S-200 systems,” the source stressed.

As emphasized in the Declaration of RF MFA of September 11 mentioned above „the unfriendly policy of Kyiv towards Russia was especially pronounced in the case of Georgia’s aggression against South Ossetia: We did not hear any words of grief and compassion in connection with the death of the peaceful population of Tskhinvali and Russian peacemakers. On the contrary, the Ukrainian President tried to blame Russia for the slaughter. At the same time, in Kyiv, they persistently ignore the fact that due to their heavy armaments supplied to the Georgian army, the Ukrainian party shares responsibility for the bloodshed.”

Therefore, Russia was a most evident international player to shape an international context of the Caucasus crisis of August 2008. The substance of the crisis lies within the assertive policy of Russia to restore the role of superpower by reestablishing its “sphere of privileged interests”.

European Union’s position. The EU, despite its obvious political weight, for a long time avoided the role of active player in this part of the Eastern Europe. Inclusion of Caucasus states into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 was a first signal of growing interest; however successes of this policy are still not obvious.

Black Sea Synergy initiative launched in 2007 suffers from evident lack of resources, pro-active content and proper political will.

Eastern Partnership initiative, covering this region, is just being prepared to be launched.

In these circumstances the EU, having become the initiator in settlement of Russian-Georgian conflict, to some extent became a hostage of this conflict. Of course, having interfered with the situation in the Caucasus, the EU achieved significant success. According to Hrygory Perepelytsya’s analysis, major successes of the EU in this conflict are following:

First, the EU initiative made it possible to stop the war in such strategically important region as the Caucasus.

Second, the EU strengthened its positions in the post-Soviet territory by breaking Russia's monopoly on peacemaking activity and positioning itself as an influential security organization capable of resolving complex crisis issues.

Third, it is obvious that currently the EU has very good chances to strengthen its economic and political impact on the Black Sea region and post-Soviet European states and challenge the US leadership in this region.

Fourth, strengthening of such influence will indisputably result in enhanced security around the EU external borders in Eastern Europe.

Fifth, in pursuing its expansionist policy in the post-Soviet territory Russia will take into account the position of the European Union and sometimes agree to trade-offs. This is evidenced by the fact that after stark warnings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of France and Great Britain with regard to Crimea, Russia's officials and pro-Russian forces changed the tactics and strategy of their actions in Crimea and V. Putin had to declare that Russia has no territorial claims to Ukraine⁹.

However, in the future the EU will face serious challenges stemming from the new alignment of forces in Europe that resulted from Russian-Georgian war.

The first challenge is related to the fact that the EU lacks adequate resources to consolidate its positions in the Caucasus and European part of the post-Soviet territory.

The second challenge is that "mild force" strategy used by the EU is becoming ineffective and will fail against Russia's "rough force". Only NATO is strong enough to oppose Russia's rough force. The EU peacemaking strategy in the Balkans was successful only because NATO secured the conditions for its actual implementation. NATO neutralized any

⁹ Hryhoriy Perepelytsia. *Roles Of Ukraine And EU in the Settlement of the Russian-Georgian Conflict in the Caucasus*, EU-Ukraine Relations, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Kyiv, 2008.

manifestations of a rough force against peacemaking efforts of the West. In the Caucasus the EU is trying to act independently of NATO and, thus, runs the risk of failure.

The third challenge results from the EU dual standards to international law. Recognition of Kosovo independence by European Union deprives it of a moral right to demand from Russia the compliance with international law standards. In case of Georgia, Russia just repeated the precedent created by the EU when it recognized Kosovo's independence. This is why the EU shyly called Russia's aggression against Georgia a "disproportional use of force".

The fourth challenge is the most dangerous one. Its danger is in the fact that old EU members are ready to compromise with Russia and allow it to rein on the post-Soviet territory. In this way they create a real danger to the security of EU's Eastern members. And no wonder that these EU members demand harsher reaction from the European Union and imposing stricter sanctions against Russia. Such countries as Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and partly Romania demand the EU's rapprochement with Ukraine and Georgia and bringing international peace making forces into the security zone.

The fifth challenge is related to mismatch between EU threats and its real intentions and possibilities of fulfillment of its threats. Although EU did threaten to apply sanctions against Russia, such as expel it from the Group of Eight, refuse to sign a new agreement, and other, none of these threats has been fulfilled. And these were exactly the sanctions that Russia feared most. Such inconsistent position of the EU instills Russia with confidence that its aggressive actions with regard to neighbor states will remain unpunished. Thus, Russia receives significant advantages for expanding its geopolitical interests in Europe. It will use this weakness of the EU as its own geopolitical resource¹⁰.

Military aspects: Black Sea Fleet. As emphasized in the Declaration of RF MFA of September 11, 2008 mentioned above, "We are sure that the

¹⁰ Ibid.

presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea is a stabilizing factor in Russian-Ukrainian relations, and in the context of regional stability.“ However, in practice Black Sea Fleet (BSF) has been consistently used by Russia as an instrument of political presence and pressure on Ukraine.

Official mythology presents BSF as an integral element of Crimean identity and Sevastopol as a “city of Russian glory”. Regular military parades in Sevastopol with evident anti-Ukrainian context are conducted in order to demonstrate military power, mobilize pro-Russian sentiments in the Crimean society.

Ukraine consistently underlines that there is no intention to prolong and Agreement on temporary basement of the fleet after 2017, when it expires. On April 15, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine handed over to his Russian colleague in Moscow a Memorandum concerning the phases and order of withdrawal of the BSF by May 28, 2017 from the places of temporary dislocation thereof on Ukrainian territory. This document caused irritation of the Russian party and no negotiations on the order of withdrawal of BSF have been conducted since, yet experts maintain that a minimum of five years is necessary to withdraw such military formations along with infrastructure.

The culmination of the tensions was achieved immediately after Russian invasion to Georgia when a number of Russian warships departed from Sevastopol in order to take part in military action against Georgia. This fact was considered by Ukraine as a violation of Ukraine-Georgia Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which provide ensurance that “the territory of respective parties will not be used for aggressive actions against each other”. The Ukrainian MFA was quick to warn Russia against participating in the conflict using its Black Sea Fleet, and threatened that the ships might not return to the Ukrainian base. In its statement, Kyiv points out that Ukraine “has the right, in accordance with the international law and the law of Ukraine, to forbid the ships and vessels that may take part in a conflict to return to the territory of Ukraine till the conflict is resolved”.

On August 13 President Yushchenko imposed severe restrictions on the movement of Russian military units in Ukraine. Specifically, he directed that Russian warships, warplanes, or other military units give 72 hours’

notice before moving within Ukrainian territory. The order also applies to ships of the seeking to reenter their home base at Sevastopol. The Russian Foreign Ministry attacked the measures as a “serious, new anti-Russian step.”

Ukrainian officials claimed that the restrictions were not a direct result of the Russian military intervention in Georgia. Instead, they maintain that they had long sought to regulate more effectively Russian operations at the Sevastopol base, but that Moscow had repeatedly delayed commencing talks on the issue by arguing that it had no plan to employ the Black Sea Fleet in foreign military operations.

In response to attempts of the Ukrainian party to limit the conveyance of Russian warships participating in military operations against Georgia, the RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the Decree of the Ukrainian President concerning regulation of BSF on Ukrainian territory “inflicts one more blow against the negotiation process concerning the BSF, and, on a broader scale – the whole complex of mutual relations.” in the opinion of the Russian MFA, the innovations are aimed at creating “serious complications” for practical activities of the navy, and are in direct contradiction with basic agreements between the Russian Federation and Ukraine about the status and conditions of presence of BSF on the territory of Ukraine in 1997.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry had stated at the onset of the war that they would not necessarily allow Russian warships to return to Sevastopol if they supported military operations against Georgia. “We have information confirmed by our specialists that several vessels of the Black Sea Fleet left Sevastopol and either made their way or were making their way toward the territory of Georgia,” while in Georgia on August 10. “Obviously, if this is confirmed we will have to reconsider the conditions under which these vessels would be able to be stationed on the territory of Ukraine.”

On August 13, moreover, the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council issued a statement declaring that the presence of foreign warships in its waters “*poses a potential threat to Ukraine’s national security, particularly if parts of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet are used against third countries.*”

The conflict was partially softened only after ceasefire agreement had been signed between Russia and Georgia. However, sustainable solution regarding possible participation of Russian warships based in Ukraine in military operations against the third countries has not been achieved yet.

Therefore, for the first time of Russian BSF basement in Ukraine it has been used in military operation against the state which is friendly to Ukraine, posing by this an evident challenge to Ukrainian national security.

6. The moments of the crisis

8 of August 2008

- Beginning of the war, invasion of Russian 58th army via Rocksky tunnel;
- President Yushchenko delegated his special representative, the First Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Kostyantyn Yeliseyev, to Tbilisi;
- A number of BSF warships based in Sevastopol including Guided Missile Cruiser “Moskva”, Landing Ship “Tsezar Kunikov” etc departed towards Georgian coast;
- Ukrainian MFA issues a statement blaming “Russian Federation, which played a mediatory role for a long time in the conflict settlement, is turning into its party”.

9 of August 2008

- President Yushchenko held telephone conversations with Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and Supreme Representative of EC on Foreign and Security Policy Xavier Solana on the matter of crisis solution;
- Russian BSF ships arrived from Sevastopol started operation along the coastline, blocking Georgian ports and attacking Georgian ships.

10 of August 2008

- President Yushchenko delegated Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Volodymyr Ogryzko, to leave for Tbilisi personally for consultations with the Georgian authorities

11 of August 2008

- Ukrainian Foreign minister Volodymyr Ogryzko hold a meeting with president Saakashvili in Tbilisi. Georgian president express his gratitude to Ukraine for its “fair and clear position”;

- Russian jets began air strikes on Tbilisi, posing imminent threat of the assault of Tbilisi by Russian troops.

12 of August 2008

- Yushchenko arrived in Tbilisi together with Polish President Lech Kaczyński, Estonian President Henrik Ilves, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and Latvian Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis. President speaks at the central square of Tbilisi expressing solidarity with Georgian people.
- Russian troops together with Abkhaz military units, supported by BSF warships and Russian aviation from Abkhaz territory forced their way into the upper Kodori gorge, captured it fully and took hold of all Upper Abkhazia. Local population was forced to leave this region.
- Russian BSF warships attacked Georgian Border Police Coast Guard vessels that were not of military purpose.

13 of August 2008

- NSDC issued a statement declaring that the presence of foreign warships in its waters “poses a potential threat to Ukraine’s national security, particularly if parts of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet are used against third countries.”
- President Yushchenko by his decree implemented NSDC decision imposing severe restrictions on the movement of Russian military units in Ukraine. Specifically, he directed that Russian warships, warplanes, or other military units give 72 hours’ notice before moving within Ukrainian territory. Prime Minister Tymoshenko opposed to this decision and refused to sign it.
- In response, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karassin rendered Ukraine’s statement regarding the Black Sea Fleet “cynical” insisting that BSF will operate on existing base till 2017 without any new restrictions.

22 of August 2008

- Leader of opposition Victor Yanukovych said that President Yushchenko had no right to support Georgia on behalf of Ukrainian state.

26 of August 2008

- Leader of opposition Victor Yanukovych called to support Russian decision to recognize independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. “Ukraine must support the will of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to obtain independence” – he said.

27 of August 2008

- Prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko stressed that she personally and the Government support Georgia’s territorial integrity. In the PM’s opinion, today the European Union takes the wisest, most moderate and reasoned stand on the conflict.

2 of September 2008

- Parliament of Ukraine adopted the Resolution on setting up an Ad Hoc Inquiry Commission of The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to investigate the Facts of Delivery of Ukrainian Military Equipment to Georgia accompanied by Violations of Ukrainian Legislation and International Law.
- The parliament failed to uphold any Draft Resolution on declaration of the stand of The Verkhovna Rada concerning the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- Lack of consensus within the ruling coalition (Our Ukraine – BYT) on the matter of Caucasus conflict assessment became one of factors led to collapse of the coalition. Strong political crisis begins in Ukraine.

11 of September 2008

- Russian MFA issues a statement strongly criticizing Ukraine for its foreign and domestic policies, in particular, for its policy vis-à-vis Russian-Georgian war.

16 of September 2008

- President Yushchenko accused Russia of trying to destabilise the country after the collapse of the coalition: “I will not be an idealist who says that there are not intentions to cause internal instability in this or that region of Ukraine. Without a doubt, such scenarios exist. For some of our partners instability in Ukraine is like bread with butter.” – Yushchenko said.

16 of October 2008

- NSDC Ad Hoc Commission publishes a report which says all weapons delivery to Georgia before and during the crisis was conducted in full accordance with national and international law. Ukrainian military officers and civil persons present in Georgia at that time were not involved into military action – NSDC report says.

7. Decision making occasions

The major challenges for Ukrainian decision makers were the following:

- Reaction to the very fact of Russian invasion to the legitimate territory of Georgia.
- Reaction to the use of Black Sea Fleet warships' (based in Ukraine) participation in military action against Georgia.
- Reaction to the international efforts (mainly those of the EU) to provide for the peaceful solution.
- Reaction to the post-war consequences, primarily recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhasia by Russia.

Almost all this decision making occasions (except international efforts that were widely welcomed) revealed evident discrepancies, lack of consensus, and insufficient institutional capacity within the state authorities. Caucasus crisis became a major catalyst of severe political crisis in Ukraine which started on September 2 with the collapse of ruling coalition and was overcome only in the beginning of December 2008.

8. Thematic analysis***The leadership and the decision units***

Policy of Ukraine with regards Russia, Georgia and Black Sea region is lacking integrity and consistency. This fact was evidently detected at the moment of Russia-Georgia crisis as well.

Discrepancies are observed and even some conflicts between the president and government administration concerning such issues as the presence of the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea, assessment of the Russian-Georgian war, order of crossing of the state border of Ukraine by BSN warships, some

issues of gas supplies and power security, etc. Ukraine is far from always coming out in a united front with Russia. It weakens its positions as a state, making it vulnerable in view of the offensive behavior of the Kremlin. The Russian party usually plays with the weakness of Ukraine predetermined by tough competition between the centers of power in Kyiv.

In Ukraine, there are at least three centers influencing the policy towards Russia:

1. The President's Secretariat, National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) and the newly established Interagency strategic group for Ukrainian-Russian relations¹¹
2. Ministry of foreign affairs
3. The prime minister and her entourage

The first two belong to the presidential sphere of influence and is pursuing the course predetermined by the position of Viktor Yushchenko, although with different accents and priorities.

The President of Ukraine has traditionally been the principal moderator of Ukrainian-Russian relations on the Ukrainian side, and does not want to lose the leading role. To neutralize to some extent his own image as an "anti-Russian politician", and to form an alternative channel of communication with Moscow, he issued a Decree on establishing the Interagency strategic group for Ukrainian-Russian relations on December 1, 2008, the tasks of which included "elaboration and submission within a month of a draft of the Main Principles of a strategy for solving actual issues of Ukrainian-Russian relations and General Directions for Ukrainian delegations for negotiations with the Russian Federation; providing for preparation on a permanent basis of proposals on measures for normalizing and further constructive development of Ukrainian-Russian relations."

Raisa Bogatyryova, the Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC), the Secretary of the Ukrainian part of Ukrainian-Russian intergovernmental commission, was appointed Chief of the Group.

¹¹ This body was established after the active phase of Caucasus crisis, however it should be mentioned in order to understand better institutional and inter-personal competition within Ukraine's authorities.

Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, the ambassador of Ukraine to RF, who also holds the office of First Deputy of the NSDC Secretary of Ukraine, is entrusted with the key communication functions.

Establishing this organization is in the first place a signal for Russian partners, indicative, first, of the fact that key pragmatic questions of mutual relations are to be solved with the president of Ukraine (not the Prime Minister), second, of the tough course of MFA in relations with Russia as not the only possible manifestation of the position of official Kyiv, and the President personally. Not for nothing, the two key persons of the Intergovernmental strategic group, Raisa Bogatyryova and Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, recently were stably associated with the Party of Regions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, led before March 2009 by Volodymyr Ogrzyzko (member of Tymoshenko's cabinet, but nominated, in accordance with the Constitution, by the President of Ukraine), traditionally appears with the toughest statements and never avoids acute angles in relations with Russia. Analysis of actions and statements of MFA of Ukraine on Russian issues within the last year is evidence of this.

In the course of the Russian-Georgian war, it was the MFA that maintained an unequivocal approach of denunciation of Russia's unlawful invasion of the sovereign territory of Georgia.

On August 8 MFA issued a statement "expressing its deep concern with the situation the conflict zone", putting the blame on Russia for unleashing the war and urged an immediate withdrawal of Russia's troops from the territory of . "Unfortunately, the information we get from the battle arena proves that the Russian Federation, which played a mediatory role for a long time in the conflict settlement, is turning into its party," the statement reads.

In response to the before mentioned Declaration of MFA of Russia of September 11, MFA of Ukraine stated:

"The prospects of equal and neighborly relations between Ukraine and Russia depend on ability of the Russian party to finally realize the evident

fact that Ukraine has been an independent state for 17 years and under no circumstances will be part of the sphere of so-called “privileged interests” of any country whatsoever. The choice of Ukraine in favor of membership in EU and NATO is irrevocable. Realization by official Moscow of this objective fact would promote positive development of mutual relations.

Attempts by Russia to destabilize the situation in Ukraine through a nurtured fifth column have no future. Continuation of this course would definitively undermine the global positions of RF as a reliable partner. This, in turn, can only worsen mutual relations, which is not in line with the interests of Ukraine.

Ukraine as a reliable and predictable member of the global community will steadfastly fulfill its commitments, including those resulting from the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Ukraine and Russia of 1997. The same pertains to our obligations under covenants on the temporary presence of the RF BSF on the territory of Ukraine, the validity thereof, as is known, will expire in May 2017”.

Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko considers the Russian vector as a certain set of opportunities for demonstrating evident successes, thus strengthening her own electoral positions (including these in the pro-Russian segment of Ukrainian society). As a result, she has pursued the tactics of distancing herself from the whole spectrum of positions and decisions of the president influencing the Russian-Ukrainian agenda.

Yulia Tymoshenko has almost never pronounced anything (or did it quite indistinctly), which concerns contentious security issues, the Caucasian war, Euro-Atlantic integration, terms of withdrawal of the Black Sea Fleet, interpreting history, church etc.

After Vladimir Putin became the Russian Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko turned to creating a system of personal connections with the Prime Minister of Russia, forcing the President of Ukraine from the leading roles.

Major disagreements between the President and Prime Minister of Ukraine became evident during the Caucasian crisis, when the President demanded urgent arrangements aimed at limiting the participation of the RF Black Sea Fleet in the war against Georgia.

Viktor Yushchenko demanded that the government apply documents prepared by the the Ukrainian party about new terms of the temporary presence of the BSF in Sevastopol. There are two: “Approval of the order of coordination with competent Ukrainian authorities of redeployment connected with activities of the military formations of RF BSN beyond the place of their stationing in the territory of Ukraine”, and “Amendments of the order of crossing state boundaries of Ukraine by servicemen, warships (supply vessels) and aircraft of the Russian Black Sea Navy stationed on the territory of Ukraine.”

As Yulia Tymoshenko delayed the decision, at a session of NSDC on August 13, Viktor Yushchenko signed two corresponding decrees. The Head of State approved the order of coordination with competent Ukrainian authorities of redeployment connected with activities of the military formations of Russian BSF beyond the place of their stationing in the territory of Ukraine and the order of crossing state boundaries of Ukraine.

Officially, the decision about the obligation of the BSF to inform Ukrainian authorities on redeployments was approved in 1999. However, at the moment of crisis Kyiv has strengthened the rules, having introduced in a unilateral order not informational but an authorization-based system. All that is stipulated by the aforementioned decision of the National Council for Security and Defense of August 13, 2008 “Issues of the order of crossing state boundaries of Ukraine by servicemen, warships (supply vessels) and aircraft of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationed in the territory of Ukraine”, which came into effect after approval of the President.

There is a need to introduced an authorization-based system of crossing state borders of Ukraine by servicemen, cargo and military vessels and aircraft of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which would enable collection of impartial information on stationing of the RF BSF on the territory of Ukraine, – is stressed in the decision of NSDC approved by the President. In particular, it is stated in the Decree that “vessels and aircraft of the RF

BSN are permitted to cross the state boundary of Ukraine only after notification thereof submitted to the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine, said document shall be submitted 72 hours prior to the envisaged crossing.” The notification shall indicate number of personnel on the vessel (aircraft), and data about armaments, ammunition, explosives, and military stores available on board.

It is stressed in the decision of NSDC, in particular, that the “simplified order of crossing state boundaries of Ukraine by the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation grants the Russian party an opportunity to cross the boundary and move around territorial waters of Ukraine virtually without control and concordance with competent authorities of Ukraine.” Lack of proper mechanics for control over the activities of BSF on Ukrainian territory, as is mentioned in the Decree, “potentially jeopardizes national security of the state, in particular, in case of deployment of military formations of the RF BSF against third states.”

In case of failure to comply with these requirements, the state control authorities of Ukraine shall promptly inform MFA of Ukraine, and, in accordance with the article of UN Naval Law Convention from 1982 “may in the name of Ukraine demand that the warship (supply vessel) or aircraft of the RF Black Sea Fleet leave the inland and territorial waters of Ukraine or airspace thereof immediately.”

In turn, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko maintained that the President’s Decrees on the order of crossing borders by military vessels of the Russian Federation Black Sea Fleet contradicted the covenant between Ukraine and Russia about basing the Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine.

At the same time, the Prime Minister made Ukrainians aware of the sad experience of Georgia; i.e., “if we provoke conflict by our own hands, someone may respond inadequately.”

Moreover, she spoke out against making the Crimean people unite in protest against the actions of Ukraine, which creates “impossible conditions” for the Black Sea Fleet. “It is the first step towards making them go and receive

other passports than Ukrainian ones.” The prime Minister called this policy irresponsible.

Such rhetoric in the conditions of world crisis significantly weakened the positions of Ukraine. At the same time, the president’s circle exceeded the bounds of correctness at the end of August, accusing Tymoshenko of “high treason”, her position in the aforementioned question provoking the political crisis of September–October 2008.

As for the **decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the self-proclaimed republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states**, official Kyiv is acting on the premise that, first, the legitimate borders of Georgia should be protected; second, no proper preconditions were created on either territory de-facto annexed for a normal democratic expression of will that could be treated in terms of “right of self-determination”, whereas references of the Russia to the “Kosovo precedent” without specification of the essential substance of this “precedent” sound like political manipulation.

On the other hand, it should be mentioned that the part of Ukrainian opposition (Communist Party and big part of the Party of Regions) expressed their support for Russian decision. The declaration on this matter, calling to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states was not supported by the majority vote in the parliament. On August 26 leader of opposition Victor Yanukovich called to support Russian decision to recognize independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. “Ukraine must support the will of the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to obtain independence” – he said. This idea, however was not supported by majority in the parliament – even not the whole Party of Regions faction voted for the resolution suggesting support of Russian position.

Lessons learnt

The refusal to use force to settle international disputes and the rejection of direct conflict and military operations are part of the very spirit of the message and values born by the European Union¹². It is obviously the same

¹² Michel Foucher, Jean-Dominique Giuliani. *The European Union and the Russo-Georgian War* http://www.robert-schuman.org/doc/questions_europe/qe-108-en.pdf.

if consider Ukraine. The conflict in Georgia involves Ukraine as well as the EU directly. Its vital interests are in the balance since stability and peace are being threatened on its doorstep.

At the same time Ukraine is much more vulnerable than the EU as Russia has here some levers which are not actually sensitive for the EU, such as large Russia-oriented segment of society, dominant in the East-South and especially in Crimea; large presence of Kremlin-controlled big Russian business, wide availability of Russian-made media throughout Ukraine.

Russia continues to consider Ukraine, Georgia and other Newly Independent States as its backyard. No reasonable chances to expect change of such a perception in a foreseeable future. Use of force is supposed to be more appropriate than before instrument of Russia to operate in its “backyard” since the West has not enough political will to defend its values here more actively (for instance, by providing NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia).

Military capacity is important but not sufficient to defend effectively sovereignty and territorial integrity – well equipped, trained and motivated Georgian army proved to be unable to defend its territory even one week.

International assurances are important but not sufficient as well – Russia will not take into account its commitments (such as Budapest Memorandum of 1994 with Ukraine) if the will to use the force prevails at some point.

9. Conclusions

Caucasian crisis demonstrated obvious fragility of peace, security and stability in the Black Sea area which poses an evident threat to Ukraine’s sovereignty, and, potentially, its territorial integrity.

On one hand, Ukraine played a significant role in the conflict, trying to defend the principles of international law, providing political and political support to Georgia, which aimed to defend their legitimate borders recognized by international community.

On the other hand, the consequences of the Caucasian war, which changes the status quo in the region to a significant extent, provided for warnings regarding institutional capacity of Ukrainian state authorities to develop and implement consistent and well coordinated policy in the case of emergency.

The Caucasian crisis revealed discrepancies in the positions of Ukrainian leaders, lack of integrity, coordination of actions of the state in such a fundamental element of Ukraine's foreign policy as Russian one.

Later, these problems were detected again, in particular, on the eve and in the course of the gas crisis of early 2009, which was the toughest conflict between Russia and Ukraine within the period of independence and obviously did not improve the reputation of either state on the global scene.