EUROPEANIZATION AND (NOT) RESOLVING SECESSIONIST CONFLICTS

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The following notes are a reaction to the preceding contributions to the volume "Europeanization and Conflict Resolution" from the perspective of an author who spends most of his time in Georgia, but happened to be conducting research in Brussels.[2] While the *problematique* and conceptual framework proposed by the authors serve as a starting point for me, these notes will introduce some personal considerations to the overall discussion on Europeanization and conflict resolution rather than comment on specific points in the book. In addition to the four cases discussed in the book I will also use that of South Ossetia that was extremely topical at the time when these notes were written.

What kind of conflicts?

I will start by trying to define what *conflict* specifically means in this discussion as the definition I will use differs from that of the book. The book deals with four cases where internationally-recognized states have or may be broken up in a way that involves violence. If this is what "conflicts" are about, than achieving agreement on maintaining the integrity of the state – or, in a still acceptable case, on breaking it up in an amicable and orderly way – constitutes a "solution".

However, the book still discusses two qualitatively different types of conflict situations. In three cases: Cyprus, Transnistria and Abkhazia, we have a condition often described by the term "frozen conflict". These are cases where there has been relatively recent violent conflict over secession, with the secessionist parties being militarily successful, having established effective control over specific territories and setting up *de facto* state institutions. However, this military outcome is recognised neither by the military losers – the central governments, nor by the international community. Therefore, the conflicts are not considered resolved. The term "frozen conflict" is often criticized because no situations are fully frozen: there are important processes including acts of violence under way in the conflict areas. However, I still consider the term justified as far as all the parties involved agree not to challenge the effective regime of military-political control as shaped after the last

ceasefire, without recognising it as legitimate. Occasional violence, even if it does occur, is not meant to threaten the *status quo*. I will also use the term "post-violent conflict".

In the fourth case analysed in this volume, that of Serbia-Montenegro, there has been no violent stage and there is no pending threat of a violent solution. However, there was a hypothetical scenario of Montenegro unilaterally seceding from the rump Yugoslavia, as this state was then called, leading to another civil war. EU actions here were aimed at preventing a potential conflict rather than solving the actual one.

The authors may have had good reasons to interpret the term "conflict resolution" broadly so that it includes conflict prevention. However, I believe that a more narrow definition of the term has an important practical value here. In post-violent conflicts the intention of the international community is usually to reverse the results of war by peaceful means, while at the same time, in some sense, legitimizing their military outcomes. The secessionist entities are asked to give up 'well-deserved independence' bought by blood and sacrifice (which is a rather traditional way to gain independence). The international community further strives to reverse the results of processes of ethnic cleansing, whereas such a process is considered in the secessionist areas as a good way to get rid of a "fifth column". This does not mean, however, that the "international community" shares the agenda of the recognised states. The actual formulas promoted by the international community suggest face-saving ways to reconcile the formal assertion of the principle of territorial integrity while accepting the results of military defeat. This means that peaceful attempts to reverse the results of war may legitimize them to a certain extent.

Ideas of "common states" or very loose federations without any real control by the central government over the secessionist entity are examples of possible outcomes of such conflict resolution policies. Such formulas are also favoured by particular conflict prevention policies, as was the case with the EU policies in Serbia and Montenegro. In such situations, outside interventions have fewer impediments to overcome and there are fewer perceived injustices to be corrected. The chances of success are therefore much greater.

Conditionally and socialisation

"Europeanization" is described in the first chapter of this volume "as a process which is activated and encouraged by European institutions, primarily by the European Union, by linking the final outcome of a conflict, to a certain degree of integration of the parties

involved into it into European structures".[3] To put it plainly, the prospect of membership in European institutions, and in the first place the European Union, is supposed to transform the behaviour and attitudes of political actors involved in the conflict in such a way that a solution becomes more feasible. In principle, these institutions are offering secessionist parties an institutional framework that makes it easier for them to reach a compromise on sovereignty issues. Changes are achieved through two mechanisms: *conditionality*, that is direct demands to take specific political actions addressed to parties in conflict, with compliance being rewarded by specific benefits – typically, progress in accession to EU; and *socialization*, which is a somewhat more vague (though no less important) process of internalizing "European values" and European ways as a result of being in close contact with European actors and acquiring European-style institutions.

It seems quite obvious that the difference of impact of the EU upon candidate and non-candidate countries should be rather sharp, as the EU cannot use conditionality linked to membership in its policies toward non-candidate countries.[4] When it comes to the concept of socialization, on the other hand, the difference may be more of degree. Even weaker modes of interaction between Europe and actors in its periphery (such as through the Council of Europe, or the EU neighbourhood policy) can bring results.

There is a further important distinction to be made between candidate and non-candidate countries that is especially important for Moldova and Georgia. When it comes to promises of membership and related conditionality mechanisms, the EU is in the driver's seat. One can speak of "a process which is activated and encouraged by European institutions". It is an EU decision whether to consider a country a candidate for EU membership, and how to apply conditionality in such a case. But this is no longer true when it comes to "socialization". The requirement to have the *acquis communautaire* fully assimilated by the candidate countries does not exist with respect to non-candidate countries. Most importantly, the EU has no copyright on the definition of European identity or of European values. Neither can the EU control the national identities of other countries. Non-candidate countries can claim to have a European vocation even if the EU thinks otherwise.

While countries like Georgia or Moldova are denied the status of candidate countries by the EU (including them into the European neighbourhood strategy is a polite denial, even if this is not made entirely explicit in this policy), the EU cannot prohibit them from having European aspirations, that is a wish to join it. Both countries consider themselves to be EU candidate countries in a broader, informal sense. This implies a self-imposed imperative for

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[3] See chapter 1 of this volume,
[4] Conditionality can also be linked to other benefits like assistance programs, trade policies or political support on specific issues, but these incentives are much weaker than in respect to candidate countries.

these countries (or their governments) to Europeanize unilaterally in order to convince the EU to change its attitudes and recognise their European vocation. In these countries, Europeanization can be considered a process initiated locally, and then met with a paradoxical mixture of encouragement and discouragement by the EU: "you are welcome to Europeanize yourselves, but please do not hope you will be rewarded with EU membership". The neighbourhood policy may yet design specific mechanisms (such as individual action plans) for the EU to monitor, evaluate and encourage specific steps towards the "Europeanization" of these countries.

Why the EU cannot solve ethno-territorial conflicts

Apart from having different mechanisms, the EU impact may also have different kinds of outcomes. At a maximum, it may aspire to help *resolve* conflicts in the sense described above. Or this impact may be less ambitious: even if parties fail to solve the conflict, they still may change their attitudes and behaviour towards the other party in the conflict, and towards the issues that lie at its heart. The latter is usually denoted by a more general and vague term "conflict transformation".

The EU had a clear aspiration to have an impact on the actual conflict settlement in Cyprus. We now know that it failed. Standards of empirical research would not allow us to draw a general conclusion that the EU is bad at conflict resolution based on this single case, but it may be used for illustrating more general arguments.

Quite probably, the European Union has been the most effective peace-consolidation and conflict prevention mechanism in history. A comparison of the last half-century with the previous history of Europe suggests it is a spectacular success in this sense. However, this does not imply that it should also be good at conflict resolution. In practice, the difference between the two is the difference between hard and soft security issues. The former involves military confrontation or the direct threat thereof. Soft security mechanisms are about creating social and institutional frameworks and preventing conflicts from reaching the stage of military confrontation. Issues of borders and territorial control are traditionally hard security issues. Conflicts over them tend to lead to military confrontation or are deterred by military means. But soft security policies may prevent players from openly challenging existing regimes of territorial military-political control.

Historically, the EU has been a consumer rather than a supplier of hard security.[5] While philosophical ideas and values underpinning the EU are rather old, this project has become feasible under the specific security regime that emerged in Western Europe as a result of the Second World War. Continental Europe was then militarily dominated by outsiders, with Anglo Saxon powers to the West and Communist Russia to the East. These powers decided all hard security questions, that is, they defined how territories should be distributed among European powers. They co-opted France for political rather than military reasons, so that continental Europeans had a greater ownership of the post-war territorial order. Soon afterwards, NATO and the Warsaw Pact emerged as hard security organisations that guarded that order (having declared the "inviolability of borders" sacrosanct). Notably, NATO did not only protect Western Europe from communism, but it also prevented conflicts between West European countries – the famous dictum about keeping Russians out, Americans in and Germans down implies exactly that. The Warsaw Pact had a similar function in its part of the world.

The EU rose *after* this hard-security regime was imposed. It was designed as a permanent confidence-building mechanism that aimed at making West Europeans accept and perpetuate the post-war political order within non-communist Europe – so that eventually it would become less dependent on Anglo-Saxon military enforcement. The method of achieving this goal was indirect (this indirectness may have become the trademark of European sophistication as opposed to "simplistic" American or Anglo Saxon straightforwardness). The post-war borders in Europe did not have to be accepted because they were "good" or "just" (even humbled Germans would have had problems agreeing with that), but because in an integrated Europe all borders were to become irrelevant (or at least, much less important). The diminished relevance of nation-states and borders between them was stipulated by a commitment to common principles of free trade (at least within the EU) and democracy.

Something similar was designed in the eastern part of Europe. The Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact, and Comecon, as well as the communist ideology that underpinned them, were supposed to make people who lived in this part of the world accept the political and security order that was imposed on them by Stalin's regime and internationally endorsed by the Yalta agreements. However, communist ideology proved to be a less effective factor of legitimization than Western democratic ones, and with its crisis the whole East European edifice imploded. It left neither soft nor hard security mechanisms for people to accept the

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[5] Robert Kagan provided interesting analysis if this in his *Of Paradise and Power*: *America vs. Europe in the New World* (New York: Knopf), 2003.

regimes of territorial-political control, in the event that they considered these regimes unjust. It was in the security vacuum created in this period that a number of territorial conflicts (usually called "ethnic conflicts" in the West) erupted. That there were so few of these conflicts may actually be a tribute to the moderation and common sense of people who had to build a new political order on the debris of communism. Under the circumstances, any radical challenge to the *status quo* could have led to worst type scenarios.

Westerners often viewed the conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus as expressions of "backwardness" and "barbarity". There was much in the way that the parties to these conflicts behaved that justified such evaluations. However, the charge of backwardness was not just about sprees of indiscriminate killing, looting and raping in which semi-private post-communist armies engaged. Europeans often assumed that even concerns about territorial control, sovereignty, and nationhood were something hopelessly "backward".

However, if the importance of the nation-state in Europe has somewhat diminished, Europeans tend to neglect how and why this happened. This was not a result of a sudden mental mutation. If something is to be learned from the European experience, it is that *before* people in modern societies can *relativize* national sovereignties or feel more relaxed about them, they have to put the hard security questions of territorial control behind them. This sequence matters. Alas, these hard security issues are usually solved by more traditional methods involving the military component. This means that parties to conflict should be allowed to fight it out among themselves (and have the "civilized world" watching a lot of disturbing pictures on their TV screens and, worse still, accommodate streams of refugees), or an outside imperial power should step in and impose a solution that it deems appropriate by military means.

A comparison between the Balkan example and that of Cyprus confirms this point. The EU tried to play a role in solving conflicts in the former Yugoslavia but did not achieve any significant positive result. NATO had to step in and change the situation on the ground by military means. Actually, even NATO's intervention did not solve the most sensitive issues, such as the creation of a viable state in Bosnia or resolving the question of the international status of Kosovo. NATO did however impose a new security regime by dramatically changing the regional balance of power and creating a new system of incentives for the local political players. It was only through this intervention that the EU could become an effective political agent in the Balkans. This process replicated the story of the genesis of the EU itself: First NATO created a security shield, which permitted the EU to move under it and to start its peace consolidation efforts. Nothing similar happened in Cyprus. NATO could not act if only because the conflict was effectively between NATO members, and there was

no other hard security player who could impose a solution from the outside. Instead, the EU employed a whole arsenal of soft security policies including the most powerful incentive it could conceivably offer – EU membership. Still, it did not work.

This leads us to probably the most existential issue of the EU – that of a Common Foreign and Security Policy. One could argue that the failure of EU conflict-resolution efforts so far only means that the EU should work harder on developing its foreign and security policy instruments. It may very well be so, but there are also strong grounds for scepticism. Making power politics redundant is the core point of EU philosophy. Its greatest achievement was to do that in the relations between its own members. If it has ever had any effective foreign policy, it has been about changing other (candidate) countries according to its own image. Its new foreign policy ambition is to make its neighbourhood similar to the EU without being absorbed into the EU. However, foreign and security politics, as we traditionally know it, *are* power politics, and will remain so until the whole world becomes a replica of the EU. In this sense, the foreign and security politics of the EU may be a *contradictio in adjecto.*

EU and conflict transformation

This is not a criticism of the EU. It has itself been extremely reluctant to get into the conflict resolution business, and the experience of the Balkans and Cyprus will probably make this aversion even stronger. The policy of the EU will be that countries that aspire to membership have first to solve such conflicts. In the case of Cyprus, the EU was forced to deviate from this practice because of strong political pressure from Greece, which simply threatened to veto the enlargement of the EU to the former communist world. It is very hard to imagine what could bring the EU to take a similar strong position with regard to solving secessionist conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. This would go against the views and policies of some of the main EU member states, which do not consider such a position as being in their interest. Equally they do not believe that the EU is sufficiently equipped for such a task. As the EU is ill-disposed towards incorporating these two countries, it has a motive to refer to unresolved conflicts as a means to cool down their European ambitions, rather than to get involved in the unpromising business of solving these conflicts.

There is one more important reason why the EU would have less chance to influence the outcome of the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova even if it was willing to get involved. Secessionist entities are largely dependent on political-military patron-states. Northern Cyprus is, for instance, highly dependent on Turkey. The fact that patron-state Turkey was

striving for EU accession, by extension, gave the EU a uniquely high leverage on Turkish Cypriots and their position in negotiations. By contrast, the EU has hardly any significant leverage on Russia, the military-political patron of the Transnistrian and Abkhazian regimes.

This leaves us with a vaguer concept of "conflict transformation". As I said above, this is about changing attitudes and behaviour of parties to the conflicts while they are yet to be solved. Here, the EU has a much greater chance of having an impact. This impact may also be achieved through less specific mechanisms described as "socialization" rather than the active and targeted policy of conditionality – which makes it relevant to non-candidate countries as well. However, the main problem in this regard is not whether the EU has an impact or not, but how to single out the EU contribution from those of other outside players collectively described as "international community" or "the West". However many contrasts one may find between the positions of European players and the United States on different issues, when it comes to efforts at solving conflicts in places like Georgia and Moldova it is very difficult to discern significant differences. Western players vary with regard to how active and influential they are, but their message to the local players is quite uniform.

Their main message is that violent means to achieve political goals are not legitimate. The prohibition of the use of force to restore state unity, and the simultaneous formal affirmation of the principle of territorial integrity is, under the present circumstances – where the external parties are either unwilling or unable to enforce solutions on the conflicting parties, a recipe for the indeterminate preservation of "frozen conflicts." The conflicting parties seem to accept this prohibition. This is so not only because they fear sanctions, but because the value of non-violent means to resolve conflicts has been internalized to a considerable degree by the general public and by political elites. This is a significant shift from the spirit of heroic, romantic nationalism with its acceptance if not glorification of violence, which prevailed in these societies in the period of the Soviet break up. The public's general spirit is much more pragmatic today than it was some fifteen years ago, and it has developed a much stronger aversion to violence. No less importantly, states have increased their capacity to contain and avoid spontaneous violence.

The story of Georgia's two "revolutions of the roses" (in Tbilisi and Batumi in November 2003 and May 2004 respectively) and even more recent developments in South Ossetia in May-August 2004 illustrate this point quite vividly. In both cases, Mikheil Saakashvili, the leader of a new generation of Georgia's political elite, first in the capacity of opposition leader and later as the Georgian president, showed a willingness to take great risks. In all three cases, he tried to force leaders from power who had armed bodies protecting their positions. In all cases he pledged to achieve his goals in non-violent ways. To be sure,

whatever the rhetoric, objectively his actions implied a high risk of provoking large-scale violence. However, in Tbilisi and Batumi, Saakashvili-led forces achieved their goals without a single casualty. They have been less successful with regard to South Ossetia in their attempt to oust the separatist South Ossetian government from power. Here, Saakashvili failed to avoid military confrontation and resulting casualties. The whole logic of Saakashvili's South Ossetian campaign suggests that the non-violent rhetoric he used was not just rhetoric and that the military confrontation was more the result of miscalculation and mismanagement than a part of his strategy. As soon as he saw a possible direct military confrontation with his Ossetian and Russian opponents, he took the first opportunity of a limited military success (after Georgian forces captured a height from which Georgian villages had been shelled) to actually withdraw his forces from the conflict area and put an end to the military confrontation phase.

There are several reasons for this change. There are purely rational considerations. Presumably, the Georgian elites learned a lesson from the violent conflicts in the early 1990s, namely that military confrontation would put Georgia against not just local ethnic militias, but ultimately Russian government forces (even if indirectly), and in such a confrontation it has little chance to succeed. However, this alone is not sufficient to explain the change. Arguably, in the case of the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993, Shevardnadze would also have liked to avoid the use of force, but he failed in this because he did not have sufficient control over the semi-private armed formations and because the culture of violence was then widely spread in society. On the other hand, while the flexibility and leadership skills of Mikheil Saakashvili deserve praise, it would be impossible to avoid violence in a high risk environment of induced power changes in Tbilisi and Batumi, unless there had been a deep cultural change in Georgian society with regard to violence. These changes can be understood, on the one hand, through acquired societal experience – the negative experiences of the early 1990s brought an understandable aversion to violence, but also through political and social links to the West. Unlike the near total uncertainty of the period of the Soviet break up, there is now some kind of security regime in the South Caucasus, which presupposes Georgia's dependence on Western political support and financial assistance. This does not mean that Georgia obediently follows Western recommendations in everything, but it understands that an open orientation towards violent solutions in solving political disputes or ethno-territorial conflicts would seriously tarnish Georgia's international image and risk serious fallout with Western players.

Still, it would be unfair to say that had it not been for international pressure, Georgians would have become violent. The culture of peaceful resolution of conflicts that is

associated with Europe (synonymous in Georgian with "the West", or "the civilised world") has been internalised at least by some critically important segments of Georgian society.

The second core point of the Western message is the *deligitimization* of aggressive and exclusive ethnic nationalism. Important changes are discernible in this regard. Ethnic nationalism continues to be a potent force in Georgian society and politics – as it is in Western European societies and politics, whatever the politically correct discourse there may be. The differences here are rather of degree, and of the structure of political players. What has changed is that ethnic nationalism has stopped being the dominant political discourse. This shift started with Shevardnadze, whose supporters denounced the policies and discourse of his predecessor, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as "parochial fascism". However, Shevardnadze represented the former communist nomenclatura and the shift was perpetrated by people socialized in communist-internationalist, rather than Western-democratic, ways. Saakashvili represents a new generation that is in part socialized after communism and is, for the most part, aggressively anti-communist in its views. Saakashvili has also made national and state unity and the traditional values of political nationalism his pronounced priorities. His approach to solving ethnic-territorial issues and its accompanying discourse has nevertheless been quite different from those typical of the early 1990s.

This is especially obvious with regard to the South Ossetian conflict. In 1989-92, the conflict led to the creation of an enemy image of Ossetians as an ethnic group. Logically, thousands of Ossetians were expelled from regions of Georgia that had nothing to do with the conflict. The idea that the wishes of the South Ossetian population had to be taken into account when finding a solution for the problem of the region was hardly ever discussed. The autonomous status of South Ossetia was abolished.[6] Saakashvili made concrete steps to reverse these positions, declaring the decision to abolish the autonomy to be a mistake.[7] He announced steps to welcome the Ossetian population that had been expelled in 1990-1991 back to Georgia (Shevardnadze's government used this issue as a bargaining chip in negotiations with South Ossetia). He employed an ethnic Ossetian refugee from Georgia in a high-ranking position dealing with conflicts resolution. He started his efforts of regaining control over South Ossetia by trying to win over the Ossetian population through a set of measures such as starting broadcasting in the Ossetian language, paying pensions to Ossetian residents, encouraging people-to-people contacts, and supporting different charitable actions.

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[6] To be fair, the Georgian parliament did this in response to the decisions of the South Ossetian parliament that proclaimed South Ossetia a sovereign republic without mentioning it being part of Georgia. This, however, does not make the decision of the Georgian Parliament right.

[7] "Georgian leader says it was "mistake" to abolish breakaway region's autonomy", ITAR-TASS Tbilisi, 12 June.

The general political discourse is about welcoming "our Ossetian compatriots" back into the Georgian state rather than regaining the territory they occupy. The political discourse is based on the assumption that any settlement formula has to be acceptable to the other side. The recent escalation of the conflict in South Ossetia overshadowed these changes, but initially they constituted the core of his strategy. Saakashvili may be criticised for oversimplifying the problem and mismanaging the South-Ossetian campaign in general, but the change in attitudes and behaviour is still obvious.

The greater pluralism of attitudes towards the conflict within Georgian society has also to be ascribed to Western socialization in this area. It is linked to the *delegitimization* of ethnic nationalism. The traditional ethnic nationalist stance requires a solid consensus within each of the parties with regard to conflict-related issues. Everybody should treat the enemy the way the enemy deserves and share a resolve to achieve victory by all necessary means. Dissenters are traitors: either you are with us or against us. This attitude is more or less natural for a society at war. This is also contrary to values of modern democratic society: even a condition of war does not justify a formal or informal prohibition of the plurality of views. This may be the strongest test to distinguish a democratic society from a non-democratic one.

In the early 1990s, Georgian society only tolerated tactical disagreements with regard to tackling conflict, not discussions on fundamental issues. If part of society disagreed substantially, it was not because it questioned ethnic nationalism or its methods, but because it adhered to a different kind of conspiracy theory. For instance, supporters of the ousted president Gamsakhurdia opposed the war in Abkhazia, but they justified this by saying that Shevardnadze started a war on secret orders from Moscow in order to give Russia an excuse to cleanse Abkhazia of Georgians and to establish military control over it.

It would be a strong overestimation to say that currently there is a lively public discussion in Georgian society about how to solve the issue of Abkhazia. There is almost none. At least part of the reason may be that under conditions of a "frozen conflict" society has simply bracketed the issue and turned it over to the "international community" to solve. Arguably, there have been no discussions about the conflict because nobody knew what to do about it. Still, some groups of young politicians, NGOs and part of the media, which is the core of the new political elite has tried to explore new approaches. This level of pluralism is certainly not enough for a democratic society, but the demand for a solid nationalist consensus is also broken.

None of the influences that led to these changes are specifically European or linked to the EU as an institution. All are part of a general Western liberal-democratic consensus. As

much as Georgia puts preparation for future membership of the European Union at the top of its agenda, the EU may acquire greater power than other international players to actually influence Georgia's behaviour. However, since the EU does not want to encourage Georgia's European aspirations too much, it is unlikely that the EU will have a particularly strong influence on Georgia's behaviour with regard to conflict.

Europe can have a specific impact on attitudes towards state sovereignty. Theoretically, even a unilateral decision to seek EU membership should dampen the traditional commitment to the idea of national sovereignty, and this should encourage the search for solutions within a context of multi-layered federated institutions. This is the idea, as it is noted in the discussed book, of the EU as a framework rather than agent. However, there are no signs that the idea of Europeanization in this specific sense has had any serious impact on the attitudes of the conflict parties. The idea of the Caucasus Stability Pact, proposed a few years ago by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS),[8] was based on this philosophy. It proposed a multi-layer federal arrangement within the South Caucasus that would have to be blessed by all influential outside actors. This model was listened to politely in the region – because it demonstrated at least some interest of Europeans – but was not considered as having any practical value in the foreseeable future. The Cyprus example, again, demonstrated that this "framework" value did not work even when it promised clear benefits to both parties in the short term. The European framework, it seems, may help ethnic groups in EU member states to accept existing federal arrangements, rather than act as a helpful model to create new ones.

Moreover, the idea of the relativization of sovereignty runs counter to obvious local agendas of strengthening the state. All states in the South Caucasus suffer from insufficient state capacity, Georgia probably more than the other two. As a result, strengthening the state is – and obviously should be – a priority for governments. This is not the best environment for spreading the message that nation-states are not that important any more.

What can be said about the transformation of attitudes to conflicts and respective behaviour in self-proclaimed states? One could say there are some features of such change, but they are modest. These entities mainly differ from recognized states by being internationally isolated, though this isolation is not absolute. Leaders of *de facto* authorities have occasional contacts with representatives of Western governments. Western NGOs, mainly those involved in the conflict resolution, have established stable groups of counterparts within local societies. In Abkhazia, in particular, a local core of civil society has

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[8] See Michael Emerson et al., 'A Stability Pact for the Caucasus. A Consultative Document of the CEPS Task Force on the Caucasus', Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies, Ceps Working Documents No 145, 2000, on the Internet on http://shop.ceps.be/BookDetail.php?item_id=55.

developed around projects of cooperation with Western and often Georgian NGOs.[9] This segment is very small, but it still has a certain influence on the local scene. South Ossetia is an even smaller and isolated society than Abkhazia, and there it is difficult to speak about any *milieu* of civil society.

However, here it is much more difficult to argue that Western contacts have led to changing general attitudes to the conflict. Politically, these societies see Russia as the only political protector and are suspicious of the "international community" or "the West" whom they see as Georgia's supporters. Georgia's proclamations of its European and Euro-Atlantic orientation only reinforce these suspicions. These societies and their elites (save for a tiny NGO segment) have no incentive to follow Western ways. Moreover, their political condition draws them not just to Russia, but to most anti-Western groups within Russia, such as the military and Russian nationalist politicians.

This is not the only factor. For societies in self-proclaimed entities, past violence is associated with victory rather than defeat, therefore, despite all sacrifices; they have less ground to revisit critically their actions at this stage. Being smaller entities than Georgia makes it easier for them to portray themselves as victims and to retain the high moral ground in these conflicts – this also does not encourage looking for new ways. The situation of legal uncertainty and isolation contributes to the development of a "siege mentality" that does not help the development of pluralism, especially with regard to conflicts.

This, however, should not be understood in the sense that Abkhaz elites are culturally less "European" than Georgian elites. By the time of the Soviet break up, the ethnic Abkhaz elite was no less modernized than the Georgian elite, and in that sense it did not have fewer societal or cultural grounds to be "pro-Western" than its Georgian counterpart. The more enlightened of the Abkhaz elites – those who are more likely to greet Western visitors – are genuinely well disposed towards "Europeanizing" projects and, under other political circumstances, would certainly be no less enthusiastic pro-Europeans than Georgians. Nevertheless, political positions are defined by specific power balances and alliances rather than cultural attitudes.[10]

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[9] The British NGO Conciliation Resources has been particularly active in this respect. For an overview of their Caucasus project see their website http://www.c-r.org/

[10] This may be illustrated by the Abkhaz vision of their foreign-political preferences as described by Bruno Coppieters in the discussed book. While explaining their orientation towards Russia, the Abkhaz contend that "the fact that Russia is also undergoing a process of Europeanization has to be taken into account in an overall view of Eurasia" (p. 202). This view may be assessed as wishful thinking: in a general sense of modernisation, Russia has been 'Europeanizing' since Peter the Great's time in early 17th century, but in a more specific political sense Russia is rather drifting away from Europe and the West. This belief also illustrates that at least part of the Abkhaz society is concerned with the contradiction between the orientation of their country that is dictated by power politics, and their own pro-European preferences.

Western influences and "revolutionary impatience"

To refer to Saakashvili's latest efforts in South Ossetia as an illustration of Georgia being "Europeanized" may sound rather controversial. Many Westerners – Europeans or Americans – are quite concerned. Saakashvili is often described as an unpredictable leader who has destabilized the situation in South Ossetia without having a clear plan to solve it. While his goals are considered generally legitimate, the prevailing wisdom of foreign advisers is that the Georgian government should first focus on political and economic reforms, and only later invite the Ossetes and Abkhaz into a prosperous and democratic Georgia.

As of September 2004, Saakashvili's South Ossetian campaign appears to be his first serious failure. This failure is often explained with reference to his character traits such as "revolutionary impatience" or simplistic attitudes to complex problems. While this criticism may be justified, I would argue that Saakashvili's efforts have quite a strong logic behind them. It challenges the conventional wisdom of the international community with regard to "frozen conflicts" and ways to resolve them, but it also exposes its weakness. There is near-consensus on a scheme so that first the situation in post-violent conflicts should be stabilized and the parties should cool down. Then there should be a period of confidence-building. As a result, there will be "conflict transformation", attitudes of conflict parties will change, and only after that, under the guidance of the international community, responsible rational actors on both sides will sign a deal, legitimated by transformed communities on both sides. Any actions that undermine this scheme are assessed as counterproductive for peace, and their perpetrators are called "spoilers".

This is a comfortable utopia that runs contrary to international experience – including the recent European one. I do not doubt the sincerity and good intentions of many people who believe in such a scheme, but the main reason why it is so widely accepted is that it suits players that have an interest in preserving the _status quo_ – and this is the majority of players or "stakeholders" in these areas. It suits the "international community" that has enough headaches with ongoing "hot" conflicts. Rulers of recognized and unrecognized states, who do not have resources to change the situation, welcome face-saving ways to accept it. Local liberal-progressive elites think it strengthens their opposition to ethno-nationalist attitudes in their countries. It is most wonderful for numerous criminal and corrupt interests that take advantage of the uncertain legal status within political "black holes" of uncertain jurisdiction. Interestingly, this corrupt shadow business involves all the parties and constitutes a most effective confidence-building mechanism.

Being well socialized in Western ways, the new Georgian elites understood that these approaches constitute nothing but a justification for preserving the conflicts in the frozen stage indefinitely. If this is so, then the best chance to accelerate a solution is to instigate a crisis. Of course, a crisis creates great risks. It is very difficult to keep it within acceptable limits and not allow it to descend into large-scale violence. A player who initiates such a crisis also takes great personal political risks because he will have to take the blame if things go wrong. However, a crisis may be the way to open up new opportunities and allow actors to genuinely change their positions.

Saakashvili's actions in South Ossetia may be a result of indirect Western/European influence in other ways as well. The new government announced its ambition to join the EU, and reiterated the wish that had been formally expressed by Shevardnadze to join NATO. Neither NATO nor the EU was thrilled by this prospect. One can argue about the main reasons for their reluctance, but the first reason Georgians will hear from these organizations is about unresolved conflicts.

So, one message from the international community is: "You cannot even think about joining NATO or the EU without resolving conflicts", the other: "You have to behave in a way which everybody knows will not bring conflict resolution for a very long time". In this sense, Saakashvili's willingness to take high risks by "de-freezing" the conflicts may be a logical response to the combination of these messages.