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How Can NATO Contribute to Ukraine and Georgia's Border Security?

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Conflicts beyond NATO's borders, such as the Russian occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia and aggression in Ukraine, pose a threat to the security of NATO's eastern flank states. Therefore, NATO's ability to provide security to its members depends on the Alliance cooperating closely with its neighbours. In this respect, Ukraine and Georgia, both of which share borders with NATO members, are of special importance. NATO should build on the experience of its own members, and join ranks with the European Union in order to further support the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Georgia. Enhanced border security should be a key element of such partnerships.

According to the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept,¹ the Alliance should, when affected by developments beyond its borders, engage in attempts to enhance international security through a network of partnerships with third countries. This goal falls within the one of NATO's core tasks put forward by the 2010 NSC, that is, to build cooperative security through military cooperation. NATO, after the Warsaw summit, should further deepen relations with its immediate neighbours, including Ukraine and Georgia, which have been victims of Russian aggression. Russia has long been destabilising Ukraine and Georgia by undermining both countries' territorial integrity in order to interfere in their domestic politics. The Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, aggression in Ukraine in 2014, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and subsequent war in Donbas, have had far-reaching consequences for the security of NATO members on the Alliance's eastern flank. Hence, the Alliance should offer Ukraine and Georgia a package of practical measures to help them to protect their borders with the Russian Federation and administrative boundary lines (ABL) with Russia-occupied territories. This would not only increase their ability to resist external pressure, thus allowing them to focus more on much needed reforms, but it would also bring more security to NATO's eastern flank.

The proposed measures should be tailored to the specific and individual needs of Ukraine and Georgia. Therefore, although this paper draws on the shared experience of Ukraine and Georgia regarding Russian threats to state borders and administrative boundary lines with Russia-occupied territories out of the control of the state, it is necessary to underline not only the common features of the two countries' situations, but also the differences. Generally speaking, the situation on Georgia's ABLs with occupied territories is relatively

¹ *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, Lisbon, 19–20 November 2010.

calm compared to the daily exchanges of fire that occur in Donbas, where full-scale war is still likely. In this respect, the conflict in Georgia may be described as low intensity conflict.

What Does the Future Hold for NATO-Ukraine, NATO-Georgia Relations?

NATO's relationships with Ukraine and Georgia have been among the most contentious issues within the Alliance for nearly a decade. At the 2008 Bucharest summit, Alliance leaders failed to agree on membership for either aspirant, instead settling on a vague conclusion that both would become members of NATO through the Membership Action Plan (MAP), yet effectively blocked progress toward MAP. A few months after that decision, Russia occupied a substantial portion of Georgian territory following the war between the two countries. Since its 2014 aggression on Ukraine, Russia has illegally annexed Crimea, while its forces and equipment remain in eastern Ukraine, directing and supporting the Moscow-backed separatists. Since 2008, NATO has tried to walk an uncomfortable line, standing by its commitment to the statement that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO, while remaining unwilling to take the next step toward membership because of the changed security environment following Russia's aggression and occupation of these countries' territories.

The approach that has evolved within the Alliance has been ever-closer practical cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, while keeping the membership issue on the back burner. As a result, both Ukraine and Georgia have developed broad programmes of cooperation with NATO under the umbrella of the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia Commissions (the NUC and NGC). This presents opportunities for both countries to strengthen their relationships with NATO, although the individual activities undertaken within these frameworks fail to resolve their deeper abiding security concerns related to Russia. NATO membership, it is said, has its privileges, and the task faced by both the Alliance and these two important partners is to bolster security and keep moving toward greater interoperability and strategic understanding.

NATO has developed a number of instruments designed to bring this goal about. They include political dialogue at the highest levels, trust funds that allow NATO Allies to support partner countries in particular military fields, joint endeavours on training and exercises such as the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre, and cooperation programmes such as NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS).

Many of these programmes are, admittedly, modest. For example, the total value of SPS support to Ukraine for 2014 to 2019 is estimated at €15m, which is a drop in the ocean compared to Ukraine's real security needs or scientific potential. Individual Allies such as the U.S. also provide bilateral support directly to Ukraine and Georgia, an example of which is the \$335m in non-lethal assistance promised to Kyiv in the 2017 fiscal year. So the resources channeled through NATO do not represent the total support that Allies provide. This fact increases the Alliance's overall flexibility, in that it allows it to provide support through a variety of mechanisms, even as it makes it more difficult to maintain an overview of the scope and magnitude of such efforts.

Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and Georgia has refocused NATO on collective defence, but is a double-edged sword for the partners. On the one hand, there is a heightened recognition that Russia represents a threat to NATO's security that cannot be ignored, and a greater understanding of the challenges faced by NATO's partners in the east. On the other hand, as NATO Allies focus on increasing their defence spending (however slowly) in line with the 2014 Wales summit pledge on defence investment, and strengthen their own potential through a forward deterrent presence on the eastern flank, there is a tendency to concentrate on national and NATO goals rather than on the effect Ukraine and Georgia have on the Alliance's security.

The contribution of NATO's partners is also seen by some within the Alliance through the prism of deterrence versus dialogue. This balance is seen in some cases as a trade-off in which more deterrence means less dialogue, and more dialogue means less need for deterrence. This interpretation belies the fundamental understanding of the 1967 Harmel Report, that deterrence and security are preconditions for effective dialogue because they create the confidence that the Allies need to engage effectively in the political realm in order to make the most of opportunities to increase security through political engagement. In that sense, strong defence such as the enhanced forward presence of NATO forces in the east can enable dialogue. But, in circumstances in which Allies are once again grappling with the serious implications of their defence

posture and the potential of escalating tensions with Russia, many Allies show caution in their approaches to supporting Ukraine and Georgia.

An area ripe for greater cooperation is NATO-EU support for Ukraine. While the NATO-Ukraine Commission and the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine (along with the EU's Eastern Partnership) provide frameworks for high-level dialogue and regular, working-level follow-ups, support for Ukraine has not gained as much attention as it deserves in terms of the relationship between the two organisations. The recent improvement in EU-NATO cooperation, which is expected to be elevated in a joint statement at the Warsaw summit, could open doors for strengthened efforts to address the civilian-military security spectrum more coherently. The recently released EU Global Strategy highlights the importance of states to the east and the south, and the contribution those societies' resilience makes to Europe's security. Raising the profile of and resources for these activities will broaden the political foundations in both Ukraine and Georgia, improve institutional cooperation, and bolster cohesion at a time when the threats and challenges facing the Allies are compounded.

The Ukrainian-Russian Border: Plugging the Gaps

Devoid of natural obstacles, and crossing urbanised and densely populated territories, the Ukrainian-Russian border has been inherited from Soviet times, during which it was a *de facto* non-demarcated administrative line between the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. For a long time, Russia tried to keep open the issue of border settlement as leverage in Ukraine's politics, and the dispute culminated in the 2003 conflict over the Tuzla Island.² Thus, it was only in 2010, after Russian-backed Viktor Yanukovich came to power as Ukraine's President, that the agreement on the demarcation of the border between Ukraine and Russia was signed. The joint Ukrainian-Russian demarcation commission was then established, and field work started in 2012. However, even by the time of the Euromaidan revolution it had not yielded many results, and only some sections of the land border have been set.

Following a Russian incursion into Donbas, Ukraine decided on unilateral demarcation of the border with Russia. Consequently, 235 boundary posts had been installed on the Ukrainian side, by March 2015. In parallel, Ukraine embarked on an ambitious project of building a series of fortifications at the border with Russia, known as the "European Wall." More than 200 km of anti-tank ditches and 70 km of barbed wire fences had been built in the Chernihiv and Kharkiv regions by the end of 2015, along with more than 30 observation towers with permanent fire positions.³ The Ukrainian State Border Guard Service has also been equipped with "Triton" light armoured vehicles, equipped with reconnaissance and surveillance systems. The project, worth about \$200 m in total, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2018.

However, as a result of Russian aggression, Ukraine lost control of over 400 km of its border in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and the Crimean Peninsula has been annexed by Russia. Therefore, the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service has opened new checkpoints on the "contact line" in Donbas, as well as on the administrative boundary line between Kherson Oblast and the occupied territory of Crimea. According to the 2015 Minsk Agreement, the Ukrainian government is to take full control over the state border in Donbas once local elections are held in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and constitutional reform has taken place, providing for the special status of these areas within Ukraine. This though, will be impossible without a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops. Further mine clearance will also be necessary on these territories, and border infrastructure will have to be rebuilt.

Nevertheless, the whole Ukrainian-Russian border remains relatively open, with numerous cases of illegal border crossings and weapons trafficking. The lack of modern border control equipment only exacerbates the

² Tuzla Island had been an administrative part of Crimea since 1941, and therefore was transferred to Ukraine in 1954. However, claiming that the transfer included only the peninsula proper, Russia started building a dam toward the island in 2003. The construction was eventually suspended after Ukraine set up a border patrol station on the island and bilateral talks were held.

³ "Na granitse s Rossiiyey Ukraina oborudovala 230 kilometrov protivotankovykh rvov," *UNIAN*, 2 February 2016, www.unian.net/society/1252506-na-granitse-s-rossiiyey-ukraina-oborudovala-230-kilometrov-protivotankovyih-rvov.html.

problem. Remarkably, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles against Ukrainian forces in Donbas has recently become common practice. Often too small to be detected by border guard radar, these drones have been used by “militants” for launching bomb attacks on Ukrainian military infrastructure, even far behind the contact line (for example, in the Zaporizhzhia region).⁴ Finally, corruption is widespread among Ukrainian border guards, with almost 4000 staff having faced disciplinary and administrative action in 2015 alone.⁵ Although an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has been deployed to eastern Ukraine in order to monitor and report on the situation and movement across the border, it has been allowed access to only two Russian border checkpoints, at Gukovo and Donetsk.

Thus, because it is unable to provide a military response to Russian aggression, the future status of the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service, including its possible militarisation, has been recently discussed. As a result, the Security and Defence Sector Development Concept, approved in 2016, provides for the increased combat capability of the State Border Guard Service, as well as the creation of rapid reaction border guard units. If required, the State Border Guard Service is also to be supported by the Ukrainian national guard and armed forces.

NATO’s Support for Ukraine since Russian Aggression

At the 2014 Wales summit, NATO countries decided to step up practical assistance to Ukraine. As a result, new trust funds have been established and existing programmes have been enhanced. For instance, through the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, the Ukrainian State Emergency Service was provided with modern technologies for demining activities in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Ukrainian armed forces have also been involved in a number of NATO’s capacity development projects.⁶ Moreover, Ukraine benefited from bilateral cooperation with individual NATO members. Twenty four of the 28 NATO countries contributed to security sector reforms in Ukraine in 2015 in terms of capacity development, medical assistance and equipment, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.⁷ Ukrainian soldiers have been trained by the Joint Multinational Training Group—Ukraine, led by the U.S. at the Yavoriv International Peacekeeping and Security Centre, and supplied with non-lethal weapons. Although some NATO members also supported Ukraine’s border and customs agencies in terms of border security and human trafficking, most of these projects have been implemented within the framework of Ukraine-European Union cooperation.

The Georgian-Russian Border and Administrative Boundary Lines with Separatist Territories: Russia’s Management of Instability

The August 2008 war in Georgia was a result of a long period of Russian acts of provocation, which occurred mostly in the “gray zones” in the vicinity of the border with Russia and the separatist territories of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia). By 2007 there had been a number of incidents, with several air space violations by Russian aircraft including firing on a village in Georgian-controlled territory in the Kodori Valley. The number of incidents continued to grow in the months preceding the Russian-Georgian war as, along with air space violations, the contingent of Russian troops in Abkhazia rose above the number allowed for peacekeeping purposes and Georgian soldiers were kidnapped. Finally, South Ossetian mortar attacks on Georgian villages near Tskhinvali, which took place in early August, led the Georgian government to attempt to recapture separatist territory using force, which in turn gave Russia a pretext to invade Georgia.

After the war, having never accomplished its post-conflict obligations in accordance with the Sarkozy–Medvedev agreements of 12 August and 8 September 2008, Russia moved to further destabilise the situation

⁴ “Hybrid War: Drones Attack,” *UNIAN*, 2 March 2016, www.unian.info/war/1281025-hybrid-war-drones-attack.html.

⁵ *Border guards distributed anti-corruption flyers in order to prevent corruption*, State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, 23 February 2016, http://dpsu.gov.ua/en/about/news/news_10777.htm.

⁶ NATO’s practical support to Ukraine, www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_06/20160615_1606-factsheet-nato-ukraine-support_en.pdf.

⁷ M. Hanssen, *International Support to Security Sector Reform in Ukraine. A Mapping of SSR Projects*, Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2016, <https://fba.se/en/how-we-work/research-policy-analysis-and-development/publications/international-support-to-security-sector-reform-in-ukraine>.

in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in late 2013. Initially, Russia expected that the Georgian Dream ruling coalition, formed in October of the previous year, would retreat from policies of integration with NATO and the EU, promoted by President Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement party (2004–2012). Yet a year after the election the new government hadn't changed its foreign policy objectives, and staunch Euro-Atlanticist Giorgi Margvelashvili had become president. As Georgia was advancing its' negotiations of Association Agreement with the EU and condemning Russian military intervention in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity, Russia restarted its provocation on the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).

These actions were focused mostly on the "borderisation" of the ABL with South Ossetia, mainly with the construction of a barbed wire fence around the occupied territory. For Georgian villagers living in the vicinity of the ABL these activities meant a land grab that blocked access to their farmlands. One of the most provocative incidents was the construction of a fence and "border signs" by Russia on the southernmost section of the South Ossetian "border" in July 2015. As a result, Russia occupied a strategically important area, through which the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline passes and less than half a kilometre away from the main route linking the western and eastern parts of Georgia. The Georgian government reacted calmly, highlighting only the possibility of moving the pipeline deeper into territory controlled by Georgia and criticising Russia for its activities.⁸

On 19 May this year, a Georgian citizen was killed by an Abkhazian border guard in the Georgian-controlled area close to the Khurcha-Nabakevi crossing point at the ABL with breakaway Abkhazia. The Abkhazian authorities promised an investigation, but have not yet taken a suspect into custody.⁹ Russian provocation cannot in this case be excluded, as Russian border guards allowed an armed Abkhazian man to cross the ABL and then walk freely from the scene, without intervening during the incident that took place there at the time. Generally the ABL is guarded by the Russian FSB on the Abkhazian side, not by representatives of de facto government in Abkhazia. The latter are positioned behind the line of Russian guards.

The issue of the Khurcha murder was discussed by Georgian, Abkhazian and EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) representatives during the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in the town of Gali on Abkhazian-controlled territory. The IPRM meetings were suspended four years ago by Abkhazian authorities, and resumed only in May. However, it is by no means certain that Abkhazia will not suspend them again. The reason given for the 2012 suspension was the appointment of General Lieutenant Andrzej Tyszkiewicz as head of the EUMM. The authorities in Sukhumi protested that Tyszkiewicz's military background disqualified him from holding such a post.¹⁰ Even though the presence of the EUMM since 2008 has contributed to relative stability on the ABL, incidents such as "borderisation" and the Khurcha murder show that the situation is very fragile and may deteriorate rapidly. Provoking anger among the Georgian public appears to be one of the goals of such incidents.

During "borderisation" in the summer of 2015, Georgian activists tried to remove signs on the ABL. Generally, the Georgian Dream coalition is criticised by the United National Movement opposition party for its passive stance towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a policy that was viewed on focusing on confidence building at the expense of security. For the opposition, continued "borderisation" and the murder in Khurcha prove that Georgia should focus more on the security of its citizens, and redeploy regular military and Ministry of Interior Affairs special forces to the zones along the ABL.¹¹ At the moment there are neither border guards (as Georgia does not recognise the ABL as an international border), nor special forces, who are based at some distance from the ABL in order to avoid provoking the Russians and separatists.

⁸ K. Zasztowt, "Russia in the South Caucasus: Conflict Management and Business with Oligarchs," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 76 (808), 24 August 2015, www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=20223.

⁹ After more than one month the Abkhazian court ordered house arrest of the murderer; "Reports: Abkhaz Court Orders House Arrest for Khurcha Fatal Shooting Suspect Pending Trial," *Civil Georgia*, 23 June 2016, www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29249.

¹⁰ "Sokhumi Wants EUMM Head to Be Replaced," *Civil Georgia*, 3 May 2012, www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24724.

¹¹ T. Zurabashvili, "Murder on the Bridge," *The Clarion*, 26 May 2016, <http://new.civil.ge/clarion/news/3/1274/eng>.

NATO-Georgia Cooperation after the 2008 War with Russia

In 2001, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze began strengthening military cooperation with the United States. Georgia participated in joint military exercises with the Alliance and declared integration with NATO to be the country's strategic goal. After the Rose Revolution, Georgia pursued Euro-Atlantic integration even more actively under Saakashvili. At a referendum in January 2008, 77% of voters supported Georgia's membership of NATO.¹² In December 2008, the NATO–Georgia Commission was established, which further enhanced mutual cooperation, and at the Wales summit in 2014 the “Substantial NATO-Georgia Package” was initiated with the aim of strengthening Georgia's defence capabilities. A Joint Training and Evaluation Centre was opened in Krtsanisi to assist Georgia in reforming its security and defence sectors, enhance the interoperability of Georgian Forces with those of NATO members, offer multi-national training and exercise opportunities, and contribute to promoting regional stability in the Black Sea and Caucasus region.¹³ The Alliance, however, is not involved in practical activities providing security to Georgia's volatile borderland with Abkhazia and the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali regions. In these areas, the EUMM has been the only international player since Russia and the separatist authorities brought about the end of UN and OSCE missions after the August 2008 war.

Recommendations

While NATO should play a greater role in enhancing border security for Ukraine and Georgia, priority must be given to their borders with the Russian Federation and administrative boundary lines with Russian-occupied territories. The Alliance should offer Ukraine and Georgia more practical cooperation, allowing both countries' governments to influence realities on the ground. It should also build on the experience of its individual members, and join ranks with the European Union, in order to fully exploit the available potential. For that to happen, joint working groups on border security should be established under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia commissions, so as to address the existing border challenges comprehensively and provide regular consultations. Within the working groups, strategic NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia communication ought to be simplified by determining authorised representatives from all sides in order to coordinate and supervise cooperation. Special representative of the new European Border and Coast Guard might also be included in such groups. Given the different challenges facing Ukraine and Georgia, the subsequent steps should be as follows.

Ukraine

With the annexation of Crimea, Russia managed for the first time in decades to change European borders by force. Most of the United Nations members supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and recognised the 2014 “Crimean referendum” as invalid. The policy of non-recognition was introduced by the most advanced nations of the world. However, the expanded Russian military presence in Crimea means Ukraine is unlikely to regain control of the peninsula, even in the medium term.¹⁴ Moreover, given Crimea's dependence on water and power supplies from mainland Ukraine, and the lack of land connection between Crimea and Russia, Ukraine faces the constant threat of Russian provocation under the pretext of “preventing humanitarian disaster” on the peninsula. There is also a risk that Russia will attempt to create a land corridor to Crimea.

Despite the 2015 Minsk Agreement, the situation in Donbas is also far from being settled, with the number of shellings having risen recently. Unless its attempt to federalise Ukraine is effective, it is in Russia's interest that the conflict remains unresolved. This is because Moscow believes that such a situation may prevent the EU and NATO from seeking closer ties with Ukraine. However, full implementation of the Minsk Agreement

¹² R. Ondrejcsak, “Perspective for NATO-Georgia Relations,” in: R. Ondrejcsak, B. Górká-Winter (eds), *NATO's Future Partnerships*, Bratislava–Warsaw, 2012, p. 49.

¹³ “Fact Sheet, 27 August 2015, NATO-Georgian Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC),” www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20150827_150827-jtec-georgia.pdf.

¹⁴ A.M. Dyer, “Russia Beefs Up Military Potential in the Country's Western Areas,” *PISM Bulletin*, no. 35 (835), 13 June 2016, www.pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-35-885.

would create serious risks for Ukraine, too.¹⁵ Although it provides for the eventual return of the border to Ukrainian control, it may open the door for Russian-backed “separatists” to form their own border guard service while posing as Ukrainian. This would further enable the movement of people and weapons across the border, and would mean a de facto legalisation of the occupation.

Consequently, because it is currently impossible to build the “European Wall” in Donbas, there is a need to continue the reinforcement of the border line with Russia along sections under Ukraine’s control (in the Chernivtsi, Sumy and Kharkiv regions). At the same time cooperation between the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service and the Ukrainian armed forces should be strengthened, with the aim of securing both the contact line in Donbas and the administrative boundary line between Kherson Oblast and the occupied territory of Crimea.

Therefore, while Ukraine struggles with unilateral demarcation of the border with Russia, NATO and the European Union should offer additional financial aid and technical assistance so that work on building fortifications on the border can proceed in the aforementioned regions. The construction of such fortifications should be followed by the creation of a comprehensive border surveillance system, employing drones and satellite imagery. Ukraine and the French concern Airbus have already signed an agreement that provides for the reception of high resolution satellite images. However, the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service still lacks modern, high precision equipment needed to control the situation at the border, and such equipment may well be provided by individual NATO members.

NATO should support the creation of Ukrainian rapid reaction border guard units, and launch a tailored train and equip programme that will cover cooperation with territorial defence forces in the state border area and weapons supply. The programme may build on the experience of the analogous initiatives for Georgia and Syria (led by the U.S.), operate at the Yavoriv International Peacekeeping and Security Centre, and be based on the already existing Joint Multinational Training Group—Ukraine.

With a view to facilitating cooperation between the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service and the national guard and armed forces, as envisaged in Ukraine’s Security and Defence Sector Development Concept (2016), NATO support in the spheres of communication, command and control, and logistics and mobility, should be strengthened.

Finally, a dedicated trust fund needs to be set up for an integrated system of mine clearance in Donbas. Although both NATO and the EU have supported Ukraine in demining activities, the Ukrainian Defence Ministry says that mine clearance in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions will take at least another 10 years.

Georgia

As the EUMM is the only organisation monitoring the conflict zones in Georgia, it is extremely important, even if it is unable to monitor situation inside the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. At the same time, the fact that the Russian strengthening of control over the ABL by “borderisation” overlapped with a period of relative calm in the region led many observers to the false conclusion that Russia is interested in permanent stabilisation of situation on the ABLs. Other false assumptions are that, since Russian occupation, security has increased in the two breakaway regions, and that the role of the EUMM is diminishing as the ABL is becoming (at least from the Russian perspective) a “state border.”

Such views ignore several factors. First of all, Russia was never interested in supporting separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a goal per se; its main interest was in using their territories as a tool to gain control of Georgia as a whole. Before 2008, Russia used its military peacekeeping presence in Georgia as a political tool to influence Georgian political and public opinion. The Russian invasion in August 2008, and Moscow’s subsequent official recognition of the independence of the two separatist regions, weakened Russia’s influence. It strengthened the image among the Georgian political elite, and in public opinion, of Russia as an enemy. Nevertheless, it is clear to all Georgian political factions that Georgia will not regain control over the

¹⁵ “Realizatsiya Minskikh ugod u pidsumku formuye zagrozu ukrayinskim interesam – ekspert,” *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, 25 June 2016, http://dt.ua/POLITICS/realizaciya-minskikh-ugod-u-pidsumku-formuye-zagrozu-ukrayinskim-interesam-ekspert-212107_.html.

lost territories without Russian consent. Russia is aware of this and is already trying to tempt some politicians in Georgia that Russian consent for a change in the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be given. Nino Burjanadze and her Eurosceptic Democratic Movement—United Georgia is perhaps the most obvious of such cases. In the minds of the Georgian Eurosceptics, Russia might agree to withdraw from Abkhazia and South Ossetia in return for Georgian withdrawal from European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Certainly, Russia will continue to use this bait in the future. At the same time, Russia may intentionally provoke incidents on ABLs. The current government in Tbilisi is trying to present the situation as relatively stable, and to diminish Georgia's image as a "troublesome" NATO partner. Thus, further attempts at destabilisation connected to the breakaway regions would influence the scepticism of NATO members in regard to deepening cooperation with Georgia and its prospects of Alliance membership.

Thus, Georgia has to adjust its policies on the ABL, and Georgian EU and NATO partners should help the government in Tbilisi to complete this task. Traditionally, the EU and its Member States have tended not to cooperate with NATO on security issues related to conflict zones and security on ABLs. The reason was to avoid provoking Russia, which always tried to portray NATO as an aggressive military alliance, and used to be more neutral towards the EU (including EUMM activities on the Georgian side of the ABL, agreed with Russia in 2008). Since 2013, the EU is also been the target of strong, negative Russian propaganda. It is, therefore, necessary to accept that it makes no sense to refrain from any joint security initiatives in Georgia involving the EU and NATO simply for diplomatic reasons or with the goal of maintaining a "soft" approach to Russia. For that reason the EU and NATO should strengthen their own cooperation, and further coordinate work with the Georgian government, especially in the field of intelligence. Deeper cooperation is needed between the three parties on the levels of the EU Delegation and NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi and Georgian government agencies.

The Alliance's relationship with the Georgian government institutionalised by the NGC is an example of fruitful cooperation with a non-NATO state. The activities focused on better monitoring and security of borders and the ABL may be enhanced in the framework of the Joint Training and Evaluation Centre. The August 2008 war proved how unprepared Georgia was to counter new "hybrid" tactics. Since then, taking into account the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, it has become obvious that Russia has improved its skills in this respect. The goal, which should be supported by NATO, is to prepare Georgian special forces units to react to various hybrid war threats. In the Georgian case, unlike the Ukrainian one, the answer to potential threats lies not in militarisation of the ABL but in fostering Georgia's ability to react correctly to possible provocations. First, the Georgian military command should ensure that they are constantly updated and fully aware of the nature of potential threats, through effective intelligence and a meticulous monitoring system on the ABL. Secondly, the establishment and training of rapid reaction units, able to move quickly to the area along the ABL and react to provocations, would enhance security of citizens of these territories.

Finally, both the EU and NATO should support the Georgian government in confidence building measures regarding the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. The Georgian government was trying to carry out a policy of engagement, especially towards the population of Abkhazia. For instance, Tbilisi started to grant travel documents enabling citizens from occupied territories to travel abroad (which is impossible with an Abkhazian passport) and gave them access to Georgian healthcare facilities. Even if the Russian response is to gradually limit movement through the ABL, such initiatives should be continued. And, although it is only Georgia that may launch such initiatives, its NATO and EU partners may enhance them through financial support for specific projects that benefit the civilian populations on both sides of the ABL.

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