# The Frozen Conflicts of the Wider Black Sea Region

Pierre Jolicoeur

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The Queen's Centre for International Relations (QCIR) is pleased to present the sixty-second in its *Occasional Paper* series. The *Occasional Papers* are intended to reach the policy-community and the broader public with short analyses of contemporary trends and issues in international security and in Canadian foreign and defence policy.

Kosovo's recent declaration of independence after almost a decade of internationally supervised *de facto* separation from Serbia has placed the phenomenon of "frozen conflicts" in an unaccustomed spotlight. Pierre Jolicoeur's analysis of four such conflicts in the wider Black Sea region is therefore nothing if not timely. The cases he examines – Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh – might have remained exotically-named mysteries to all but a handful of regional specialists had it not been for the geopolitics of the Balkans and Russia's vigorous reassertion of its interests there and in the Black Sea region. The implications of accepting Kosovo as a precedent, of course, go beyond the four Black Sea cases to other frozen conflicts such as Cyprus. And, as shown by the reluctance of many EU member-states to recognize Kosovo's new status, they reach into the domestic politics of states with ethnically distinct regions.

Russia, the focus of Pierre Jolicoeur's study, is pursuing several aims. It seeks to enhance its influence with Serbia as part of an energy-oriented European strategy. It has its own domestic concerns, not least the presently-quiescent Chechnya. At the same time, while publicly deploring the Kosovo precedent, Russia uses it as leverage to strengthen the *de facto* autonomy of Transnistria from Moldova, and of the two Georgian regions. Jolicoeur explores the bases and instruments of Russian policy with respect to each conflict, and assesses critically what he sees as an inadequate response by the Atlantic community, whether through the EU (enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy) or NATO.

The QCIR was founded in 1975 to further research and teaching in international relations and security studies. It specializes in research on Canadian, North American and transatlantic security issues. The work

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## Introduction

In the context of the international war on terrorism it is generally acknowledged that "failed states" or uncontrolled zones affecting regional stability represent a serious threat to international security. As a consequence, the Euro-Atlantic organizations are increasingly concerned with the secessionist conflicts that have marked the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This type of internal conflict is particularly widespread in the Wider Black Sea Region (WBSR). Thus, secessionist conflicts in Moldova (Transnistria), in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), in Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) are no longer considered merely as 'internal affairs' of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. At the same time, the EU and NATO enlargements have brought these organizations closer to the region and have increased their interest in promoting solutions to these "frozen" conflicts halted by cease-fires for more than a decade in the absence of any peace agreement.

Along with these new international trends, Moldova and Georgia – two WBSR states that are currently grappling with "frozen" secessionist conflicts – have recently become active advocates of a greater involvement of the international community in the conflict resolution processes. However, the long-lasting stagnation of these peace processes calls into question the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution frameworks. In other words, the international community is entering a phase of reassessing its policies towards the secessionist conflicts in the former Soviet Union. The challenge is not only to find a way to accommodate the secessionist entities and the states from which they seceded, but also to address Russia's pervasive involvement in the peace processes and seeming contribution to the maintenance of the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space.

This paper seeks to describe Russia's complex and sometimes contradictory policies towards these secessionist conflicts and to analyze the reactions of the Euro-Atlantic institutions, namely the EU and NATO. The first section will discuss how the double role Russia played during the 1990s has influenced the evolution of the secessionist conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova and their peace processes. Through a series of examples it will be shown that the policies towards the secessionist entities adopted by the Russian Federation have become openly assertive and interventionist in the last few years. The policies to be examined include: political, economic and diplomatic support, state-building assistance and the invocation of the 'Kosovo precedent'. These policies have significantly contributed to the maintenance of the status quo. In light of the Russian interventionist strategy, the second part of the text will compare the policy responses adopted by the EU and NATO. The approaches of these two major Euro-Atlantic institutions reveal to be considerable divergence. The conclusion will evaluate their potential to lead to peace agreements putting an end to the 'frozen conflicts' and opening the way for a durable stabilization of the WBSR.

## Russia: The Traditional Regional Power Seeking to Preserve Its Influence

### *Russia's Policies on a Multilateral Level*

The Minsk Group is tasked with the resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This group was created in 1992 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE) to encourage a negotiated resolution of the conflict. The idea was to convene, as soon as possible, a conference on Nagorno-Karabakh under the auspices of the CSCE to provide an ongoing forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis on the basis of the principles, commitments and provisions of the CSCE. The conference was to take place in Minsk, but, it has not yet been possible to hold it because of the conflicting parties' disagreements. The number of countries involved in the Minsk group qualifies this as the most internationalized conflict among those covered in this study.[1]

Russia holds a permanent co-chair and other OSCE countries are supposed to hold the other co-chair in rotation. Yet, in practice France has stayed in this position since 1997 and has resisted efforts of transforming it into an EU co-chairmanship. Also in 1997, the United States took up an additional permanent co-chair position. While the OSCE Minsk group facilitated high level meetings between the parties in Key West in 2001 (Cutler, 2001; Martirosyan, 2001) and Rambouillet in 2006 (Mouradian, 2006), these meetings have failed to produce results. Negotiations have broken down over difficult questions like the exchange of territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the organisation of a referendum on self-determination of the people living in Nagorno-Karabakh, and whether to resolve the conflict by a global settlement or by using a 'small steps' process (Danielyan, 2005; Jacoby, 2005). This negotiating formula was complicated by the lack of cooperation between the co-chairs and the absence of trust expressed by the conflicting parties in the current negotiating process (Hancilova, 2006; Khachatrian, 2001).

In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite the fact that these two conflicts are located in the same country, Georgia, their peace processes have different constellations. This is partly due to the nature of the organisation sponsoring the negotiations – the UN and OSCE respectively. These sponsors have different organizational cultures, which presents serious obstacles to coordinating the two conflict resolution processes. In South Ossetia, the open phase of the conflict that erupted in 1990 lasted until the 14 July 1992 ceasefire agreement. As a result of this agreement, conflicting parties convened to establish a trilateral peacekeeping operation consisting of Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian troops. A Joint Control Commission (JCC) composed of Russia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia (a Russian region) and Georgia was tasked with watching the security situation and pursuing negotiations on conflict settlement. The EU is an observer in JCC meetings and can intervene only on economic issues. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was involved only after the establishment of the JCC, is in charge of controlling the situation but lacks a well-established intervention strategy. Russia holds a veto in the OSCE and is thus able to neutralize the organisation's actions. The JCC institutionalizes an imbalance of interests with two actors biased towards South Ossetia. This format alienates Georgia from the process. All negotiations have been hosted by Russia, and there is no established role for the OSCE or other international bodies in these talks.

The negotiating process of the Abkhazian conflict is different. A *Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict* was signed in April 1994 in Moscow and an *Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces (Moscow Agreement)* was signed in May 1994[2]. However, outbursts of violence[3] and some guerrilla activity persisted in Abkhazia well after these agreements. There is a Russian-led peacekeeping operation under the mandate of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and under the supervision of the United Nations (UN Observer Mission to Georgia – UNOMIG). As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia has been opposed to a strong role for the UN, limiting UN presence in Abkhazia: UNOMIG is essentially an unarmed observer mission consisting of 121 observers. The real peacekeeping force is the CIS force, which is exclusively composed of 1500 Russian soldiers. This mission was adopted at a time when the UN was unable to recruit troop-contributing countries[4] (Jolicoeur, 2004, pp. 77-99; Mackinley and Sharov, 2003, pp. 63-110). UN engagement in conflict resolution has mainly consisted of the assignment of a special envoy for the conflict. Since 1997, activities of the special envoy have included initiating a Geneva process for discussion. Also, a "Group of Friends of the Secretary General" has been formed, including major Western states[5], but has only made moderate progress in reducing Russian dominance of the process. The principal proposition issued by this political process is the document *Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi*, also known as the Boden Document[6], the final draft of which was disclosed in January 2002[7]. The UN initiatives hold only a consultative role, and Russia acts as facilitator in the so-called "friends" group[8]. Aside from this, international interest in the conflict in Abkhazia has remained low, and Russian dominance over the conflict resolution processes remains largely unchallenged[9] (ICG, 2007, pp. 4-5).

The conflict in Transnistria, in Moldova, lasted for a few months in the spring and summer of 1992[10] (Radvanyi, 2003, pp. 54-65). A ceasefire agreement was signed on 21 July 1992. The war ended after the Russian 14th Army intervened on behalf of Transnistria and defeated the Moldovan troops. Moldova and Russia signed an agreement in October 1994 establishing a retreat of the Russian troops within three years after ratification of the agreement. This retreat never took place because of the Russian Duma's refusal to ratify the agreement. The agreement also planned synchronization between the Russian military retreat and the

resolution of the conflict, which explains the actual Russian military presence in the region (Charlotin, 1999). A trilateral peacekeeping operation has been in place since the ceasefire was concluded. As in South Ossetia, the peacekeeping troops consist of military forces from the two parties in conflict (Moldova and Transnistria) and Russia as the leading peacekeeper. The OSCE oversees the situation. Negotiations on conflict settlement were carried out in the so-called 'five sided format', which consisted of Moldova and Transnistria as conflict parties and Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators (Löwenhardt, 2004, pp. 103-112) In October 2005, the format became '5+2' after the EU and US joined the group as observers.

It is remarkable that Russia is the dominant third party in each of the peace processes of the frozen conflicts, especially in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. Russia held a principal role in the peacekeeping operation and negotiation processes, restricting the involvement of international organisations. Peacekeeping and negotiating formats reflect the geopolitical situation of the early 1990s, granting Russia control over these processes, in spite of the major transformations that have occurred in the region since the ceasefires were implemented. The successive EU and NATO enlargements brought these organisations' frontiers very close to those zones of instability, a situation inconceivable at the time ceasefires were established. Moreover, from being "post-Soviet" states, the states of the region have evolved into European states in their own right. They have undergone significant changes in both their domestic affairs and foreign relations, and are oriented, to varying degrees, towards the West and aimed at strengthening their relations with Euro-Atlantic structures.

### Russia's Policies on a Bilateral Level

It is not only in the context of multilateral peace negotiations that Russia is playing a dominant role in the CIS' frozen conflicts. Indeed, Moscow adopted highly visible policies towards the frozen conflicts in order to maintain its influence in the region. Whereas Russia's official position towards the frozen conflicts is characterized by a formal recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia, in practical terms Moscow has openly supported several demands of the *de facto* states. This ambiguity in Russian policies creates important incentives for the *de facto* states to persist in their quest to secede. As the following

sections will show, Russia has provided assistance to the de facto states in political, diplomatic, financial and military dimensions.

On the political level, Russia gives a high profile to the *de facto* states' authorities and has often acted as a bridge between the four self-proclaimed republics. The four *de facto* states created a community of their own informally called "parallel CIS" or "NATO-2" (Socor, 2005a). Although the level of institutionalisation of NATO-2 should not be over-stated, it includes summits, ministerial meetings and cooperation networks[11] (Socor, 2007a; 2005b; 2005c). Most of these summits took place in Moscow where high-level Russian officials received the leaders of the secessionist entities (Socor, 2005d). During periods of tension in one or the other frozen conflict, Moscow helped the de facto govern-ments coordinate their solidarity efforts[12] (Bielawski and Halbach, 2004, p 7). Moreover, members of the Russian Duma adopted numerous reso-lutions endorsing the position of the de facto governments and took part in official activities held in those contested territories (Corso, 2006; The Messenger, 2006). The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, also frequently referred to the leaders of the unrecognized secessionist enti-ties as "presidents", which implies an important degree of recognition of the *de facto* states. Another example of a high-level political interference was the support offered by President Putin to a presidential candidate in Abkhazia's 2004 elections; in the election campaign the candidate, Raul Khajimba, was campaigning with posters showing him and President Putin shaking hands (Freese, 2004; Transition Online, 2005; Peuch, 2004). For the first time in March 2007, for the first time on record, Lavrov des-ignated Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria as "republics". His Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to refer to the leaders of these enti-ties as "presidents" in its official documents (Socor, 2007b).

In the diplomatic field, Russia has often intervened in favour of the *de facto* states in international organizations, from which the secession-ist entities remain excluded. It was for example, impossible to adopt common statements in the annual OSCE Ministerial Councils in 2003, 2004 and 2005 because of strong disagreements between a majority of OSCE member states on the one hand and Russia on the other. These disagreements were precisely about the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova and the withdrawal of Russian troops from these countries (Popescu, 2006, p. 5). In this case, it is not an exaggeration to speak of Russian obstruction. The same can be said concerning the Russian role in the blocking of the deployment of a peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Since 1994, the OSCE – the sponsor of the Minsk Group, the contact group in charge of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process – had designed on paper such an operation ready to be implemented. The only obstacle to the deployment of this OSCE peacekeeping operation was the conflicting parties' refusal to consent. Despite the fact that Russia is both part of the OSCE and co-president of the Minsk Group, Moscow proposed an alternative Russian peacekeeping operation. Azerbaijan, which has repeatedly accused Moscow of siding with Armenians in this conflict, prefers the OSCE plan, considering it as more neutral, whereas Armenia is in favour of the Russian proposal. The conflicting parties cannot agree on the choice of one single plan. This explains why Nagorno-Karabakh is presently the only frozen conflict of the CIS where the ceasefire is not enforced by a peacekeeping operation. In others words, rather than promoting the deployment of peacekeeping operation, the alternative Russian peace plan paralyzes the talks between the warring parties (Jolicoeur, 1998).

Other examples of Russian political and diplomatic support can be found in its passport policy, granting Russian citizenship to the residents of the *de facto* states[13]. According to estimates, some 90% of the residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and around 15% of the Transnistrian population hold Russian passports. The policy of 'passportisation' is an official state policy. In the passports themselves it is clearly stated that they are issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry. One can certainly criticize Georgia's decision not to allow the population of its two secessionist territories to have UN passports. This gives Russia the opportunity to meet their demand; Moscow takes advantage of the situation by granting Russian citizenship to other countries' citizens. Thus Russia can claim a right to represent the interests of the *de facto* states because they are technically populated by Russian citizens. In a certain way Russia is creating a political and even legal basis for extraterritorial interventions under the pretext of protecting its own 'citizens' living in the *de facto* states (German, 2006, p. 11; Chivers, 2006). Russia's introduction of visa regimes for Georgia in 2000, in the context of the resumption of the Chechen war, follows the same logic to strengthen the *de facto* states and weaken the legitimacy of the states of origin[14]. The residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were exempted from the visa regime. Many observers, including the European Parliament[15] (German, 2006, p. 9; King, 2004), maintain that Russia has *de facto* annexed those two Georgian territories by means of a combination of passport and visa policies.

Recently, Russian diplomatic support to the *de facto* states led to a turning point in the peace process of another frozen conflict of the Wider Black Sea Region, namely in the case of Kosovo. Moscow established an inextricable link between the future status of this Serbian province and the fate of its protectorates in the CIS. As a rule, Russia has been opposed to any form of recognition of Kosovar independence in order to avoid implying its support to the 1999 NATO strikes. With the launching of talks about the final status of the Serbian province in October 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin modified the traditional Russian position[16] (Tziampiris, 2005, p. 291). In January 2006, he opened the door to the recognition of an independent Kosovo, under the condition that the Kosovo case will be considered a precedent for other similar situations, namely the CIS' *de facto* states[17] (de Waal, 2006). Following Putin's remarks, the Kosovo case became a real dilemma for the international community, which considers Kosovo as a unique case. Since most countries in the world are in favour of the principle of an independent Kosovo, the Russian position is likely to have a great impact in the CIS' frozen conflict's peace processes. Kosovo's declaration of independence, albeit viewed as "conditional", gives these secessionist entities a new *raison d'être* and a strong incentive to resist any conflict settlement hoping to follow the example of Kosovo. Illustrating this, the Abkhaz *de facto* president openly stated "if Kosovo is recognised, Abkhazia will be recognized in the course of three days. I am absolutely sure of that" (Bagapsh, 2006).

On the financial level, Russian support takes different forms, partially overlapping the political and diplomatic measures mentioned above. For example, in addition to offering Russian citizenship to the residents of the *de facto* states, Russia pays a pension to retired people in those territories. These pensions are higher than those granted by the Georgian government. This measure creates additional incentives for these regions to join the Russian Federation rather than pushing them to seek a conflict settlement. Moreover, many Russian firms are playing an important role in investment assistance for the *de facto* states, aiding them to survive economically. Russia is the main trade partner of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite of the fact that these territories are officially under embargo. Russia's economic support to the *de facto* states is coupled with economic pressure on Moldova and Georgia. In 2005, Russia introduced restrictions on meat and vegetable imports from Moldova and Georgia. In March 2006 Russia banned all Moldovan and Georgian wine and brandy imports to Russia, as well as the import of

Georgian mineral water, which are principal sources of income for those countries (Jolicoeur, 2006). At the same time Russia increased natural gas prices for Moldova and Georgia. Such restrictions did not affect the *de facto* states. Petrol and gas prices have often been often used by Moscow as a lever to exert pressures on these trade partners (Smith, 2004; Boussena and Locatelli, 2005, pp. 85-105). This pressure tool is not new: for example in 1998, just before the beginning of the negotiations with Moldova for the redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping troops in Transnistria, Russia threatened to cut the delivery of gas to the country. The pressures were exerted by Gazprom, a Russian gas company, which insisted that Moldova pay its arrears accumulated since 1992 in hard currency. Transnistria was exempted from this measure[18] (Leijonhielm and Larsson, 2004, pp. 126-128). Transnistria even benefited from generous subsidies – some estimate that the Transnistrian industrial sector obtained more than $1(US) billion of natural gas without paying the bill to Gazprom[19] (Socor, 2007c). This allowed this *de facto* state to continue its industrial production, ensuring the economic survival of the local regime (Centre for Strategic Studies and Reforms, 2003, p. 28).

In light of the above, one can reasonably conclude that Moscow developed a coherent policy of supporting the *de facto* states that appeared in its near abroad. This questionable policy does not reflect the official Russian discourse, which pleads for recognition of the territorial integrity of the states that have become independent in the post-Soviet space. It should also be mentioned that Russia's role has not always been as explicitly supportive of the *de facto* states. Until just a few years ago, Russian policies towards the conflicts have sometimes swung back and forth between periods of open support for the *de facto* states and periods of rapprochement with states of origin. Three different sets of explanation can help us to understand the logic underlying the Russian (sometimes concealed) support of *de facto* states: 1- modifications in the leadership of the states of origin, 2- domestic Russian issues, and 3- a new geopolitical context in the Wider Black Sea Region.

*New Leadership the States of Origin*

In the mid-1990s, there were moments when Russia reduced the level of its support for Georgia's secessionist territories. One such moment was when Georgia joined the CIS and its Collective Security Treaty in

1993, and accepted the establishment of Russian military bases on its territory. But in spite of this climate favouring an improvement of Russo-Georgian relations, divergences of view soon appeared between Moscow and Tbilisi. Georgia implicitly expected Russia to support its efforts to reassert control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in return for Georgian collaboration, while Russia's understanding of the agreement differed completely. Russia helped Georgia's new president, Edward Shevardnadze, establish himself as the undisputed leader of the country during the civil war between the supporters of the ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and supporters of the new leadership. Despite its role supporting the new leadership of the country, Russia did not help Shevardnadze re-establish Georgia's territorial integrity.

In Moldova, the rapprochement with Russia followed the arrival to power of the then pro-Russian Communist party in 2001 and lasted until 2003. Moldova's leadership hoped that improving relations with Moscow would bring about a boost of support from Moscow to assist Moldova in its efforts to resolve the Transnistrian conflict. Thus, Moldova agreed to follow Moscow's political line in international relations, implemented policies of a favourable – even preferential – treatment for Russian businesses, promoted the Russian language in Moldova and generally moved closer to the Russian Federation in political, social and economic terms. In exchange, Moldova requested the withdrawal of Moscow's support of the Transnistrian authorities and the ousting of Igor Smirnov, Transnistria's self-proclaimed president and a Russian citizen. Between 2001 and 2003, Russia indeed limited its support to Transnistria in order to promote a settlement of the conflict. In 2003, Putin endorsed the Kozak memorandum – a unilateral Russian plan to settle the conflict on largely Russian terms. This withdrawal of support to the Transnistrian side did not last and Russia soon reverted to its strong support for Transnistria and its tense relations with Moldova. The turning point was the failure of the Kozak memorandum, which was rejected by Moldova in November 2003. Since then, Moldovan-Russian relations have deteriorated.

If Russian policy towards states of origin was more conciliatory when a pro-Russian leader was in power, the opposite is also true. Moscow was shocked by the Western policy of democracy promotion and regime change in Eurasia. When the wave of coloured revolutions, initiated in Serbia in 2000, reached the CIS – Georgia in 2003, Ukraine 2004, and Kyrgyzstan 2005 – Moscow had to react before the democratic virus could spread on Russia itself.

*Domestic Issues*

There are at least two domestic factors that are affecting the Russian stance about the CIS' *de facto* states: 1- the Chechen conflict, and 2- the improvement of the Russian economy.

    Facing a strong secessionist movement on its own territory in the 1990s, Russia could hardly be non-supportive of the territorial integrity of other states such as Georgia and Moldova. Any precedent for successful secession resulting from violent conflict was questioning the future of Chechnya in the Russian Federation. Thus, for most of the 1990s Russia has been oscillating between the tendency to support the secessionist entities in Moldova and Georgia and the fears of spill-over effects threatening Russia itself. The second Chechen war that started in 1999 led to the defeat of the secessionist movement in Chechnya. Certainly, the Chechen guerrillas still pose a serious security challenge to the Russian internal stability but they are no longer a credible secessionist force. President Putin is right in saying that "there are other regions in the northern Caucasus where the situation is even more worrying than it is in Chechnya" (Putin, 2006). The war in Chechnya is not considered a "Chechen conflict" anymore, but is viewed rather as a north Caucasus conflict having large religious, social and security implications. Although Moscow defeated the nationalist secessionist movement in Chechnya, it ended up with a more diffuse security challenge. The defeat of the nationalist secessionist movement in Chechnya meant that Russia was no longer afraid of the consequences of supporting secessionism in other states.

    Another issue explaining the new Russian stance concerning the *de facto* states is the condition of Russia's economy. Moscow achieved steady growth since the 1998 ruble devaluation crisis and a significant inflow of cash due to high oil and gas prices. Unlike in the 1990s, Russia is no longer concerned with a lack of resources to pursue its foreign policy. Russian president Vladimir Putin endorsed this view when he claimed that "the growth of the economy, political stability and the strengthening of the state have had a beneficial effect on Russia's international position" (Putin, 2004).

*The Geopolitical Context*

To understand the increasing Russian assertiveness in its support for the *de facto* states, one should take into account the broader geopolitical

context. Since Putin's accession to the Russian presidency, the Kremlin has adopted a strategy of *realpolitik* in foreign relations, especially in the relations with the states of its 'near abroad'. This strategy is aimed at obstructing the states of the Black Sea region from integrating and developing their links with Euro-Atlantic institutions. Russia perceives the Black Sea region as an essential piece to its own security, notably because of the terrorist activities developing in the North Caucasus. In this context, Russia seeks to prevent important Russian security matters from being decided or influenced by neighbouring states. Russian leaders consider any encroachment by a foreign state into this area as a policy directed specifically towards Russia rather than a policy of regional strategy (Vahl and Celac, 2006, pp. 169-181). In this geopolitical perception, Russian elites consider security issues as a zero sum game, where the expansion of NATO influence in the region, for example, detracts from its own influence.

As Russia becomes more assertive both within and beyond its immediate neighbourhood, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are seeking to develop new post-Soviet identities and closer ties with Europe – particularly with the new EU and NATO members in Central Europe who share their concerns about Russian policy. The new pro-Western states in Eurasia have sought to build new groupings and institutions to bring them closer to the West (Peuch, 2005a). In August 2005, Georgia and Ukraine initiated the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC), including countries ready to embrace and support democratic reforms, with the support of the United States and many European states. The first meeting on 2 December 2005 in Kiev was attended by the presidents of Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia and Macedonia (Peuch, 2005b). The CDC established links between countries in the Baltic and Black Sea regions seeking to distance themselves from Russian domination, share experiences in domestic reforms and come closer to Europe(Caucaz.com, 2006).

In May 2006 another loose grouping of states, GUAM[20] , was formalized into the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (Today.Az Online, 2006; Emerson, 2005, p. 3). The aim was to develop closer ties between Eurasian states willing to restrict their dependence on Russia and to pursue closer integration with the West. Among the key priorities of the new organisation were free trade and economic integration, particularly in regard to energy transporta-

tion, and plans for joint peacekeeping forces to address regional con-
flicts (Middle, 2006).

Russia views these new organisations with suspicion and considers
them as having inherently anti-Russian agendas, creating an alternative
to Russo-centric regional groupings such as the CIS. Statements from
Georgia and Ukraine expressing intentions to review their CIS member-
ship have reinforced the prospects for further fragmentation of Eurasia
and the emergence of parallel regional alliances pursuing either the
Russian or the Western policy agenda.

## Europe's Hesitant Involvement

Generally speaking, the EU is virtually absent from the peace processes.
Certainly, it has occasionally made statements expressing the need for
a peaceful resolution of these conflicts and reaffirming its support to the
ongoing political processes, without taking an active part in any of these
processes (ICG, 2006, p. 16). There was of course some collaboration
with the UN and OSCE, as the EU contributed financially to border as-
sistance programmes. More particularly, the EU financed in 2001-2002
a border guard program in cooperation with the OSCE. More recently, in
December 2005, the EU contributed to the efforts made by the United
Nations to implement a mission of assistance with border control at
Ukraine's border with Moldova. These forms of indirect participation re-
main all in all quite limited and confer on Europe an almost passive role,
as the EU intervenes only if other international organizations require
supplementary assistance with specific programs. Even though these
programs are very useful for immediate security issues, they have the
disadvantage of not encouraging the belligerents to revise their own
position and to adopt a proactive strategy aiming at a resolution of the
conflict. The EU did not deploy any police force or peacekeeping troops.
Some analysts conclude that the non official EU policy was limited to
"waiting for a resolution" (ICG, 2006, p. 16).

The implementation of the new European Neighbourhood Policy
(ENP)[21] in 2003, and the extension of this policy to the South Caucasus
states in May 2004 marks, at the same time, the most important devel-
opment in the creation of an European intervention strategy for the states
of the Greater Black Sea Region and a bitter disappointment to the states

for which the policy was intended. The ENP must be considered a major development because it constitutes the beginning of a concerted European action. The adoption of this policy along with four action plans for each of the WBSR countries shows the EU's increasing interest in its neighbour states. Yet these action plans look more like another set of criteria to be met by concerned states, rather than an outline of concrete projects. What is more promising is the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), announced for 2007 and intended to coordinate and consolidate the efforts made through different existing programmes. Included in this is the Tacis programme, which will enhance the effectiveness of the EU's assistance to the regions bordering its territory. Furthermore, the ENP is accompanied by a new diplomacy, which is apparent in the creation of a post for a special EU representative in the Southern Caucasus region on July 7th, 2003[22]. The creation of this new post was also considered an excellent opportunity to enhance the EU's political visibility in the region (ICG, 2006, p. i).

This new European dynamism conceals, however, the real objective of the EU "Neighbourhood" policy, which is to block the way to EU integration of states that failed to qualify for EU membership at the time of previous enlargements. It is very clear that the state's eligibility to benefit from the ENP deprives it of the possibility of appling for accession in the future[23]. As pointed out by Romano Prodi, then President of the EU Commission, the ENP is independent from the question of enlargement. It aims at creating a circle of friends, with whom EU members could share everything "except common institutions" (Sourander, 2006). It is precisely in the context of the management of frozen conflicts that the ENP becomes important; it is through this policy that the EU intends to develop and strengthen its relations with the states affected by these conflicts. For the latter, this policy is much less attractive, as it confirms their inability to become members of the EU in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, this policy introduces a new division in the WBSR, which just recently acquired a certain regional cohesion: states that will be integrated and states that will not. The ENP thus establishes a clear distinction between Balkan states and other "neighbour states"[24]. In the Balkan states the EU was prepared to a greater extent to get involved in conflict resolution, to undertake expenditures, and to impose its view of interethnic relations.

The ENP represents a bitter disappointment for the states of the Black Sea Region, which had all expressed their willingness to join the

EU in the medium term. The ENP, intended to resolve the frozen conflicts, might have the pernicious effect of dissuading the concerned states from implementing political and economic reforms which would be necessary for their EU admission. Consequently, these states are less likely to carry out reforms that might allow them to reach a resolution of the frozen conflicts[25]. This is a paradox, insofar as Brussels justifies its limited involvement in the frozen conflicts' peace processes by invoking the priority of reforms and transformations, which are seen as a precondition of conflict resolution (Popescu, 2007).

The latest policy generated by European strategy illustrates particularly well the limits of the EU members' capacity or even of their willingness to become seriously involved in the resolution process of frozen conflicts outside the Balkans. When EU members realized the crucial importance of regional stability in the Wider Black Sea states for European security, there seemed to be a consensus among them about the necessity of an intervention. No consensus could be reached, however, about the appropriate remedy. This can be explained to some extent by a certain enlargement fatigue. This fatigue was seen in France's and the Netherlands' refusal to ratify the European Constitution in 2005. The ENP was an easy response, allowing the EU to take some action without entering into a binding commitment, such as considering the possibility of another enlargement including all of the WBSR states. Nevertheless, EU integration remains the most effective instrument to permanently eliminate the sources of regional instability.

## NATO: A Strategy of Inclusion

For NATO, the WBSR was perceived as a region distinct from Eastern Europe following the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Then for the first time in its history, NATO member states expressed their solidarity with the US on the basis of article 5 of the Washington Treaty. This precedent resulted in operation *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan. In order to ensure the logistic support of the military operation in Afghanistan, it was essential for NATO forces to obtain the right to use the air space of numerous states located in the corridor that stretches from Eastern Europe, to Ukraine, to the Caucasus and Central Asia. In this context, the WBSR became an essential part for achieving the strategic objectives of the NATO mission in Afghanistan (Jolicoeur, 2007 forthcoming).

This new context allowed to a majority of countries in the WBSR to assert their strategic interests and to gain support from the NATO states. Conversely, it has also heightened existing tensions and might contribute to further militarization of the region. Both Turkey (a NATO member state) and Russia (not a member of NATO) seek to maintain the status quo in military terms since both are strongly opposed to the increasing involvement of the US in the region. Russia has subjected the use of its air space by NATO member states to such restrictive conditions that it is almost impossible for NATO to efficiently use the Russian corridor. After having granted the anti-terrorist coalition over-flight rights for the operations in Afghanistan, Turkey prevented the US from launching an offensive from the north of Iraq – despite its long-lasting NATO membership.

Bulgaria and Rumania allowed NATO states to establish military bases and to use their air space for operations in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq[26]. Their remarkable cooperation as well as their participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme and their strict observance of the action plans for NATO accession were rewarded in 2004 by their accession to full NATO membership (Zulean, 2004, p. 96). Similarly, states aspiring to strengthen their relations with the Atlantic alliance such as Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine allowed NATO over-flights and sent troops to support the US operation in Iraq[27] (Socor, 2007d). Even Moldova, the poorest country on the European continent, participated in the war in Iraq by providing troops.

The considerable cooperation shown by the states of the WBSR following 9 -11 has led NATO to consider the fight against terrorism in this region in the long term. According to NATO's m*ilitary concept for defence against terrorism* (NATO, 2002a), adopted in 2002, the organization has to take action to foil plans for terrorist attacks and to manage the aftermath of such attacks by pre-established procedures in order to reduce their devastating consequences. This document promotes military cooperation not only between NATO members, but also with partners outside the alliance. Official NATO documents issued in the following months identify a number of fields of cooperation the Atlantic alliance should develop with states in the Black Sea Region as well as in the Balkans and in the Caucasus[28] (NATO, 2002b).

One important instrument to implement this agenda and to strengthen collaboration with countries of these regions was the adoption of a series of intermediate statuses between simple participation in the PfP programme and full NATO membership. The different statuses have not

been introduced all at once as part of a coherent, comprehensive framework. Rather, they have been introduced one by one as new points have been added to the continuum. This is shown in the graph below. The first intermediate status was created in the context of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) launched in April 1999. This new status allowed NATO the possibility to reward the progress made by states by providing them a real prospect of accession[29], without giving them any guarantee. Following the 9-11 terrorist attacks, new statuses have been created. In 2002, the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) were implemented in order to support and to strengthen the anti-terrorist capacities of the partner countries. Henceforth, these IPAPs constitute the "first step" leading from PfP to a complete NATO accession. A new intermediate status, created along with the so-called "intensified dialogue" (ID) framework, represents a further milestone on the way to NATO accession. Located on a higher level than an IPAP, ID is inferior to MAP status (NATO, 2002c). The hierarchy of the statuses leading to full NATO membership can be summarized by the following graph:

**Graph 1: Stages of NATO Accession**

Non member state → PfP → IPAP → ID → MAP → NATO Accession

The majority of former Warsaw Pact states have benefited from the PfP programme since 1992 (Cornell, McDermott, O'Malley, Socor and Starr, 2004, p. 100). The countries having established an IPAP with NATO are essentially those of the WBSR. The first ones were Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively in 2004 and 2005. Armenia, Kazakhstan and Moldova have followed. Ukraine and Georgia, the two states most determined to accelerate the process of their integration into the Atlantic alliance, are now benefiting from ID[30]. The state with the best chance to become eligible for a MAP in the short term is Georgia.

These developments indicate that the institutional arrangements made by NATO with non-member countries are focusing on the WBSR. Albania and Macedonia, both located in the western fringe of the region, have MAP status; all the other countries having IPAP or ID status are located within this region. The NATO enlargement process is clearly directed specifically at this region (ibid). The result is increasing influence

for NATO over the region. This rising influence can be partially explained by the region's strategic importance in the context of war on terrorism and by the desire of the WBSR states to counterbalance Russia's influence. However, it is also a direct consequence of the weakness of the ENP that failed to establish a European lead role in this region, in order to suit Russia and not to launch a new EU enlargement in the foreseeable future.


## Conclusion

The Wider Black Sea Region constitutes a part of the EU's and NATO's borderland. This region was among those most strongly struck by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and is still faced with deep-rooted security challenges related to these events. The frozen conflicts – Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, as well as Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan – must be considered as the most important regional security challenges. The Euro-Atlantic organisations have to address the fact that their own enlargements have brought them closer to these conflict zones. Since the NATO accession of Rumania and Bulgaria, Transnistria is less than a hundred kilometres away from their new borders, and Abkhazia is just across the Black Sea. Continued instability in these conflict zones will necessarily affect these organisations. Should these conflicts erupt to large-scale violence – an eventuality that cannot be dismissed – Europe will be significantly affected by flows of refugees and by increasing activities of already-established criminal networks of drug, arms and human trafficking. The new proximity of Euro-Atlantic organisations to the region requires them to play a lead role in regional conflict resolution and peacekeeping. The need for a Euro-Atlantic intervention is also conditioned by Russia's ambivalent double role in the conflicts, undermining its credibility as a peacekeeper and honest broker. Building stability in this environment is hence increasingly becoming a priority for the EU and the NATO, but cannot be achieved without a durable resolution of the conflicts in the region. However, the intervention strategies developed thus far by the EU and NATO seem to follow quite divergent orientations.

Attempts to internationalize conflict resolution processes have so far failed to secure coherent engagement from either the EU or NATO. As discussed in this paper, Russia's dominant role in current peacekeeping

and negotiation forums constitutes the primary obstacle to the resolution of these conflicts. Russian geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus and Moldova are clearly reflected in processes for conflict resolution, using them as instruments for maintaining the status quo rather than achieving durable resolutions. This constitutes a growing challenge to Euro-Atlantic interests. Europe has yet to acknowledge that challenge, whereas NATO seems to be pursuing its own path while risking confrontation with Russia on this issue.

The analysis presented in this paper showed thateven if both NATO and the EU recognize the strategic importance of the Wider Black Sea Region, they have adopted somewhat different strategies to stabilise the region. Thus the WBSR can serve to illustrate the strategic gap between Washington and a majority of European countries – a gap that intensified in 2002 and in 2003 in the context of the Iraq war dispute (Asmus, 2003). At present we can hardly talk about any substantive compatibility between the policies of the US and the EU towards the Black Sea post-Soviet space. The discord is twofold. First it stems from attitudes towards Russia. While Washington still perceives Moscow as an opponent, if not a rival in the key issues of Black Sea democratization and reform, France and Germany acknowledge Russia's legitimate right to keep its own sphere of influence around its borders in order to balance the extension of the Atlantic alliance to the east. Some analysts hold that the major European capitals have adopted a cautious attitude towards Georgia's efforts to turn the state, a former satellite of Russia, into a reformed partner of the West. Some European leaders were also leery of the Orange revolution in Kiev, which attempted to transform Ukraine from an amorphous buffer zone between Russia and Europe to a reformist applicant for NATO and EU membership (Le Figaro, 2006).

The second line of US – European disagreement in the Black Sea relates directly to the EU enlargement dilemma. The faster the EU enlarges to the east, the better the position of the United States. EU enlargement adds economic and social stability to the regions integrated into the Euro-Atlantic security space through the NATO enlargement. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a strong link between the accession of ex-communist countries of central and eastern Europe to NATO and to EU membership. One can even state the existence of a certain pattern: NATO membership generally seemed to open the door for EU accession. It is apparent that this model of interdependence is no longer applicable. By its adoption of the ENP, Brussels seemed to reject

further enlargement commitments after the "Big Bang" of the accession of ten new members in 2004, Bulgaria and Romania in January 2007, with Croatia expecting to be admitted by 2009, and Turkey still waiting in line. The politically correct definition for this rebellion is "enlargement fatigue" (Quatremer, 2006). Others estimate that Washington seeks to sap European unity and political integration through an excessively hasty enlargement in order to prevent the EU from becoming a real competitor for the US on the international diplomatic scene (Rupnik, 2003, p. 38). Whatever the reasons underlying "enlargement fatigue", there is no doubt that there will be no further EU enlargement process in the Black Sea post-Soviet space, at least in the next decade. If Europe is to support the American Black Sea strategy, this support will not be through further EU enlargement.

For its part, NATO doesn't seem to suffer from such an "enlargement fatigue". The creation of a new level of relations with non NATO countries, the launching of ID programmes, and the consideration of Ukraine and Georgia as candidates for a full NATO accession give clear indications of NATO's willingness to increase its influence in the WBSR.

The resolution of the WBSR's frozen conflicts is not likely to include EU intervention. Due to its dependence on Russia's energy resources, the EU has allowed Russia to preserve its dominant role in the negotiation forums for these conflicts. Yet we have seen that Moscow acts to maintain the status quo rather than helping the peace process move forward. NATO, driven by the US, seems prepared to confront Russia, pursuing a more inclusive policy towards the states of the WBSR. This approach stands a better chance of paving the way towards a real resolution of the frozen conflicts – the condition sine qua non of a lasting regional stabilisation.

## Notes

1.   In addition of the two conflicting countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Minsk group is composed of eleven other states: Belarus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States.

2.  These texts are available on the United Nations Observer Mission to Georgia's website at http://www.unomig.org/.

3.  Resumption of hostilities occurred regularly, the more serious being the ones in May and June 1998.

4.  This force counted up to 3000 troops in 1994.

5.  This group is composed of France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States.

6.  The document is named after the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Georgia, Dieter Boden.

7.  The UN Security Council repeatedly supports the document. However, the Abkhaz side still refuses to accept the document as a basis for negotiations because it stipulates Georgia's territorial integrity and precludes the possibility of an independent Abkhaz state.

8.  For example, Russia delayed the renewal of the UNOMIG mandate in January 2006 because the resolution had a reference to the Boden Document which is rejected by the Abkhazian side.

9.  For an analysis of the role played by Russia, acting both in cooperation and in competition with United Nations: ICG, *Abkhazia: Ways Forward*.

10. Four months after the Republic of Moldova did the same, the Transnistrian population broadly voted for the independence of Transnistria in a referendum held in December 1991. Chisinau decided, in March 1992, to re-established its authority with force and take a military action against Tiraspol. The conflict caused the death of some 700 persons.

11. The last formal meeting of those unrecognised states with Russian authorities were held in February 2007 in Moscow.

12. This was for instance the case during the summer 2004 crisis in South Ossetia.

13. That is the case for the residents of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria.

14. The expression "states of origin" refers to the states the secessionist entities originally belonged to – and legally still belong to.

15. Charles King uses the term of 'Russian protectorates' to designate the *de facto* states benefiting from this discriminatory policy.

16. So far, Moscow has been reluctant of an independent Kosovo in order to avoid creating a precedent that could apply in Chechnya.

17. In January 2006 President Putin stated that "if someone thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence as a state, then why should the Abkhaz or the South-Ossetian peoples not also have the right to statehood? I am not talking here about how Russia would act. But we know, for example, that Turkey recognised the Republic

of Northern Cyprus. I am not saying that Russia would immediately recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia as independent states, but international life knows such precedents … We need generally accepted, universal principles for resolving these problems".

18. Since then, Moldova adopted a better paying strategy. Excluding Transnistria, Moldova paid 85% of its gas consumption in 2003.

19. Transnistrian arrears surpassed the billion US$ in 2004 and reached 1.2 billion in mid-2006.

20. GUAM is an acronym named after its members Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

21. The European Neighbourhood Policy aims at intensifying political, security, economic, and cultural cooperation between the EU and states in its new immediate or near neighbourhood. This policy is based on a series of agreements concluded by the EU and its member states on the one hand and the neighbour states on the other. These agreements constitute a legal basis for the relations between the EU and its partners.

22. The Finnish diplomat, Heikki Talvitie, filled this post. See the text about the appointment of a special representative for the Southern Caucasus region published in the *Official Journal of EU*, at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/fr/oj/dat/2003/l_169/l_16920030708fr0074 0075.pdf.

23. For instance, when selecting the states eligible for ENP programmes, the European Commission excluded West Balkan states, given the EU's engagement to accept the application of those states once they satisfy the conditions of EU admission, according to the European Council held in Thessalonica in June 2003.

24. This distinction certainly is of a geographical nature, but it also implies a technical aspect, given that, following the EU membership of Bulgaria and Rumania in 2007, West Balkan is entirely bordered by EU member states.

25. The prospect of EU membership constituted the most efficient incentive to persuade the Balkan states to carry out reforms at the end of the 1990s.

26. The war in Iraq is of course not a NATO, but a US operation. This war has been initiated on the basis of a misrepresentation made by US government about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and about the extent to what the Saddam Hussein regime represented a threat to international security. The Bush administration clearly considers this war as a part of their war against terrorism. Furthermore, given the decisive influence of the US within NATO, there is no doubt that the states aspiring to NATO membership can reasonably hope to enhance their chances of admission through their participation to this war.

27. For instance, Georgian government recently announced its plan to send additional troops to Afghanistan though without giving any details. At the same time Tbilisi announces to bring the number of its troops in Iraq from 850 up to 2000. This contribution is remarkable, considering this country's limited resources.

28. For instance, the establishment of PfP Trust Funds to assist partners in their specific efforts against terrorism is considered as a priority.

29. The states which obtained this status in 1999, the Vilnius group, were all included in the 2004 NATO enlargement.

30. ID was first engaged with two states of the WBSR, Ukraine in 2005 and Georgia in 2006.

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# About the Author

Pierre Jolicoeur joined the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston as a Professor of Political Science in 2007. He completed his PhD at the University of Québec in Montréal in 2006 with a dissertation entitled "Autonomy and Secessionist Conflicts in the South Caucasus between 1988 and 2005" (forthcoming in 2008). In 2006-2007, he was a postdoctoral fellow at Queen's University, working with the Queen's *Center for International Relations* and the *Ethnicity and Democratic Governance Consortium*. His main areas of research are security issues in the post-Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy, and federalism in the context of conflict resolution. Jolicoeur's actual research project focuses on the role of federalism and other federal institutions in the prevention of ethnic conflicts in multinational states. This comparative study considers a large variety of states such as Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, Spain as well as ethnic federations in the communist and post-communist zones. Besides many articles and book chapters, Jolicoeur published (with Yann Breault and Jacques Lévesque) *La Russie et son ex-empire; reconfiguration géopolitique de l'ancien espace soviétique*, Paris: Presses de sciences po, 2003. From 2000 to 2006, he edited the "Points de mire" series, published by the Centre d'études des politiques étrangères et de sécurité (CEPES) at UQAM.