

Chapter 8

Back to Diplomacy

On 12 August, the Russian Government reported to the European Union High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, that “the aim of Russia’s operation to force the Georgian side to peace had been achieved and it had been decided to conclude the operation”.¹ Later that day President Medvedev met with President Sarkozy, who presented a ceasefire plan on behalf of the EU after telephone consultations with President Bush, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other European leaders. President Medvedev reportedly backed some elements of the plan. French Foreign Minister Kouchner then flew to Tbilisi to present the proposals to the Georgian side. Presidents Medvedev and Saakashvili consulted by phone and reportedly agreed to a six-point peace plan. It called for all parties to the conflict to accept the following conditions :

- to refrain from the use of force;
- to end hostilities definitively;
- to provide free access for humanitarian aid;
- Georgian military forces will have to withdraw to their usual bases;
- Russian military forces will have to withdraw to the lines held prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Pending an international mechanism, Russian peacekeeping forces will implement additional security measures;
- opening of international talks on the security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²

As long as international mechanisms were not put into place, Russian peacekeepers patrolled in a large so-called buffer zone outside South Ossetia. The plan did not

¹ ITAR-TASS, August 12, 2008.

² The English translation of the six-point plan is to be found in Press Release, Extraordinary Meeting General Affairs and External Relations, Brussels 13 August 2008, Council of the European Union.

specifically state that international peacekeepers would be deployed within South Ossetia.³

South Ossetia and Abkhazia agreed to and signed this ceasefire plan on 14 August 2008. The same day Georgia initiated the legal procedure for the cancellation of its membership within the CIS, finally taking a step which had been discussed for years. On 22 August, several Western media reported sizeable but not complete Russian military withdrawal from “Georgia proper”. Diverging interpretations of the *status quo ante bellum* called for a follow-on ceasefire agreement.

A diplomatic event called the six- point peace plan into even greater question. On 25 August, Russia’s Federation Council and the State Duma recommended that the President recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Even at this point some Russian and Western experts did not believe that the Kremlin would follow this recommendation. However, in an announcement on 26 August, President Medvedev announced Russia’s official recognition of the independence of both regions, and he called on other countries to follow this diplomatic step. On 5 September, Nicaragua recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Within Russian-dominated regional formats like the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) no government followed suit . At a late August 2008 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) the communiqué appeared to reflect disapproval of recognition of the breakaway regions. After the armed conflict, Russian President Medvedev formulated a doctrine of privileged zones of interest.

On 8 September, President Sarkozy and President Medvedev signed a follow-on ceasefire agreement setting out the provisions of the six point plan in detail. It provided for measures on the withdrawal of armed forces and for international monitoring mechanisms. It also referred to the continuation of the activities of the international observers of UNOMIG and OSCE Mission to Georgia. This should happen within their existing mandates and would be subject to further adjustments by respectively the UN Security Council and the OSCE Permanent Council. International observers, including at least 200 from the EU, would have to be deployed in the areas adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Thus the EU became a guarantor of the

³ Jim Nichol: *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, Congressional Research Service Report, March 3, 2009, pp. 7-12.

principle of the non-use of force. The agreement also referred to the holding of international discussions, as provided for in the six point plan, to begin in Geneva on 15 October 2008.⁴

Russian troops withdrew from Poti and Senaki on 13 September and pulled back by 9 October from so-called buffer zones in accordance with the follow-on ceasefire plan. However, only one day after this plan was agreed upon, the Russian Defence Minister asserted that several thousand Russian troops would remain in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Additionally, Russian checkpoints remained in some areas like the Akhagori district in the eastern part of South Ossetia, which had been administered by Georgia before the August 2008 armed conflict. Thus Russia did not follow the call to pull back its troops to the pre-war level.

Moreover the Kremlin's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the basis of the Kosovo precedent formula has an impact on international conflict resolution efforts. The newly-created Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) defined its area of action as "throughout Georgia" or "the whole of Georgia", but did not obtain free access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It soon became clear that Russia and its protégés in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali did not grant access to international observers to both regions. This limitation had serious consequences for a mission like the EUMM. Without access to both regions it could not fulfil its task to monitor the post-war stabilisation process in Georgia and the implementation of the ceasefire accords. Limited in this way in its area of action to the "adjacent regions" around Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EUMM would be contributing to the safeguarding of *de facto* borders not recognised by Europe and the rest of the world, with the exception of Russia and Nicaragua. Thus the post-war stabilisation process in Georgia was based on a rather uncertain foundation.

The international discussions on Georgia began at the United Nations in Geneva with a first meeting on 15 October 2008, with the full involvement of the European Union, the United Nations and the OSCE.

⁴ See "President Nicolas Sarkozy travelled to Moscow and Tbilisi (September 8, 2008)", Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, http://pastel.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article_imprim.php3?id_article=11846 (accessed on 5 August 2009)