



EaP Security Forum

Associated Trio Security Monitor

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Associated Trio Security Monitor is a bi-monthly security analytical digest that reports and analyzes the international, regional, and domestic events, trends, decisions, actions, and conflicts that impact on the national security of the three associated countries of the Eastern Partnership: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The security monitor is part of the **project „Eastern Partnership Security Forum”**, that aims to launch the “EaP Security Forum” that will engage nongovernmental and governmental experts from Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine in a joint effort to strengthen security resilience of their countries in the areas of cybersecurity, intelligence reform, offsetting hybrid threats, and strengthening the national defense.

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MOLDOVA SECURITY CONTEXT

by Laura Zghibarta
Foreign Policy Association

SUMMARY

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan made headlines worldwide in the past month, with the US decision to withdraw its troops from the country and the collapse of the Afghan government prompting divisive debates, international insecurity and uncertainty about the future of the region. In addition to the fleeing of Afghan citizens, emergency evacuations, concern for human rights and freedoms infringements, as well as threats of renewed terrorist activity in the country, the world witnessed the US, EU, NATO, Eastern Europe and Russia-centric diplomatic engagement, serving in the past few months as a key security tool for a different set of issues.

The Biden-Putin Summit, the NATO Summit in Brussels, the new EU agenda for the Eastern Partnership countries, the Association Trio cooperation project and the Crimea Platform Summit all represent strategic moves aiming to strengthen the Western resilience. Meanwhile, Moldova has been working on a new agenda to ensure a European safety net for the country's security objectives and is currently laying the groundwork for a revitalized Transnistrian settlement process. These high-level summits and meetings, new formalized regional initiatives and national agendas have been shaping an emerging regional security ecosystem, one that does include a Moldova committed to addressing its domestic and external vulnerabilities.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

While a liberal, security and democracy reinforcing Western ally bloc is undergoing construction, the international community is seeking to regain some sort of a balance of power. The Biden-Putin Summit held in June, at a time of declining US-Russian relations and an assertive China entering the equation, probably sought to accomplish that. For President Biden, the meeting was one of the first steps towards fostering more “stability and predictability” in bilateral engagement and it did allow both parties to draw several security-related red lines. Complementing that push on Western resilience, the decisions on resuming US-Russian diplomatic ties and dialogue and plans to jumpstart cooperation on arms control and cybersecurity, is NATO's commitment to adapt and equip the Alliance to better withstand the new sources of insecurity, decided upon at the 2021 NATO Summit in Brussels. According to the Summit Communiqué, part of that rests on taking more responsibilities as an organization: deepen and enhance political consultations, establish concrete resilience objectives, increase the assistance offered to allies and NATO partners likewise, ensure continued presence in the Black Sea Region, enhance strategic awareness and consultations on energy security and maintain interoperability related to cybersecurity and technological development, in addition to working on a new, updated military strategy.

The EU is a security provider on its own terms. In recognition of the new shifts in some of the Eastern Partnership countries' politics, the EU outlined in July a new cooperation proposal - “Eastern Partnership, a renewed agenda for recovery, resilience and reform”, underpinned by a €2.3 billion Economic and Investment plan. Prioritizing democracy, the rule of law and good governance as additional means to ensuring national security, the EU is also committed to improving the alignment of the EaP countries with its legislation on cyber resilience and cybercrime, working on energy interconnections and security, including the transition to clean energy, as well as promoting the resolution of regional conflicts. Not only this agenda will set the tone for the EaP Summit planned for December, but also the agenda of the Association Trio Platform, a new partnership among Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, all aiming for EU membership, that was formalized in May and later discussed at the Batumi International Conference held in July. Although there is common ground on some areas of suggested strengthened cooperation such as cyber resilience, countering hybrid threats, involvement in the CSDP missions,

or enhancing cooperation in the Black Sea Region, the countries are also committed to consolidating the EU's role in advancing a peaceful settlement of their conflicts. This request may not necessarily be on par with what the EU may be ready or capable to fully offer aside from socio-economic projects, confidence-building measures and support for conflict prevention and the negotiations process: hard security does not fall under EU competencies and the Eastern Partnership, as a whole, “is not a conflict resolution mechanism”.

Likely to attempt to draw the EU further into discussions, the Association Trio members invoke the violations of international law that led to the undermining of European and regional security and the rules-based international order, referencing their territorial issues. As a pressure point for other Western partners too, this was a recurring idea emphasized by Ukraine during the Inaugural Summit of the Crimea Platform, meant to resume the discussions about the peninsula, institutionalize a unique Ukrainian-led platform for international consultations and decision-making on Crimea and pressurize Russia to engage in the peaceful return of the territory. The initiative was seen by Russia as a major infringement of its territorial integrity and an anti-Russian act that could prompt backlash. Crimea will remain a Russian leverage over Ukraine and Europe, wide-spreading into the security and stability of the Black Sea Region, where NATO recently conducted one of its routine exercises aimed to enhance NATO interoperability and readiness in the region, amid the Russian Navy Day parade boasting the country's naval power and new hypersonic weapons systems, and Ukraine's announcement on plans to develop its own naval fleet by 2035.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline, however, should not become a political leverage or geopolitical weapon to be used against Ukraine or Europe once it becomes operational, according to a recently reached US-German deal. The deal allowed the completion of the project but ensured compensation for the transit fees Ukraine will lose and support for the development of its green energy capabilities. The split control of the gas pipeline between Russia and Germany under EU regulations decided in a court ruling, should also aid the country. Meanwhile, the US continues to invest in closer security ties with Ukraine. Despite offering no real closure on a potential NATO membership plan for the country, during the visit of President Zelenski at the White House in early September, the US reaffirmed its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and announced the delivery of a new security aid worth \$60 million.

INTERNAL SECURITY CONTEXT

Represented by President Maia Sandu, Moldova was one of the participating countries at the Crimea Platform Summit adhering to the idea of a rule-based international order being key to ensuring security. Her speech touched upon several ideas: Moldova is committed to peace, the country's welfare is dependent on a norm-driven regional security order, and having an international order with rules that are questioned or dismissed, thereby contributing to collective insecurity, calls for reinforced principles of international law, order and justice. Although without any direct mentions of the country's sources of insecurity, notably the Transnistrian conflict, the speech can be extrapolated to Moldova's own issues.

The first few mentions on national security and regional stability in the President's list of foreign policy priorities for 2021-2022, published in July, emphasize the importance of fostering a constructive and non-conflictual environment in the wider region that would benefit Moldova. Rather than signaling complacency, the national security agenda is backed up by the proactive activity program of the newly installed Government. It recognizes both traditional and non-traditional security issues: the military, economic, political, environmental and humanitarian insecurities deriving from the Transnistrian conflict, asymmetric energy dependency, the socio-economic and governance issues downgrading the country's security and cyber threats, in addition to Moldova's less developed security and defense capabilities. To address some of those, the new Government plans on deepening security ties with the EU and maximizing the opportunities it can offer. The authorities will seek to ensure the country's energy, food and health security through increased sectoral cooperation, launch a high-level dialogue on security, justice and energy issues, develop the country's information and cyber security capabilities

with the help of the EU, access its new security tools and identify new cooperation avenues with the EU, which is in line with the objectives of the Association Trio, also highlighted in the program.

Conversely, reinvigorating the Moldovan-Russian relations, maintaining a constructive political dialogue with Russia and ensuring mutually beneficial cooperation that would satisfy Moldova's national interests is seen as a security desideratum in itself. The short visit of Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Head of Russia's Presidential Administration, in Chisinau, signaled a non-confrontational initial exchange. Both parties seemingly agreed to mutually lift trade restrictions, maintain dynamic institutional communication and continue talks about a new agreement on the import of Russian gas, with an apparently non-political, market-based pricing, according to Dmitry Kozak. The big opportunities to achieve mutually advantageous agreements, mentioned by the Russian official, imply that, ultimately, Moldova will have to compromise with Russia. As claimed by Kozak, Russia will not act against its national interests while helping the country, but it was Russia's decision-making and those interests that have generally clashed with Moldova's own national interests.

The new leadership probably acknowledges the gains and inevitable losses in compromising with Russia to secure at least some of Moldova's national interests, which is why the quadrilateral meeting of the Heads of State of Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine, held on the occasion of the country's Independence Day, is that much more symbolic and important. The parties discussed about regional security and cooperation, the future of the EaP and the current state of affairs of the protracted conflicts, among others. Poland, a long-standing advocate of the EU 'open door' policy and supporter of the Association Trio agenda, expressed openness to seeing Moldova become a member of the Three Seas Initiative in the future. The Initiative is already a Moldovan foreign policy target and is acknowledged by the current leadership as a European platform that could contribute to regional and national security through energy, transport and digital interconnectivity. With this strategic move being one of the authorities' attempts to ensure a European safety net for the country's security objectives, Moldova's security identity is gaining more shape, becoming one that is not bound to the concept of neutrality.

SEPARATIST CONFLICTS/POLITICAL RESOLUTION OF 'FROZEN CONFLICTS'

The landslide victory of PAS at the early parliamentary elections prompted not an entirely neutral and open to cooperation response from the Transnistrian regime as may have seemed. Although claiming to hope for an intensified dialogue with the new authorities, Vadim Krasnoselsky called Moldova a "neighboring country", proving that the regime will resist the new reintegration strategy. Although with some mentions about the withdrawal of the illegally stationed Russian troops and the destruction of the Russian ammunition stored in Cobasna, the activity program of the new Government (not the official Government action plan for 2021-2022 to be out in September) shows that the authorities will pursue a bottom-up approach in dealing with the region, an expanded strategy that is less dependent on Russia's decision-making and involvement. The Government will work to increase Moldova's appeal to the region by ensuring the respect for human rights, internal reforms, fight against corruption, economic growth and democracy; fight against smuggling and corruption in the region, deemed as prerequisites for a peaceful and diplomatic settlement; implement citizen-centered socio-economic projects; intensify diplomatic engagement; and build a national consensus on conflict settlement.

The authorities' push to have socio-economic, human rights and freedom of movement issues included as discussion points in the 5+2 negotiations alongside the political settlement of the conflict, is another government priority that will likely attempt to put more international pressure on the regime, engaged lately in several cases of violation of the law. Among those are the illegal convictions by alleged Transnistrian courts of two citizens protesting against the regime and the blocking of free movement across the Dniester River; the illegal movement and presence of so-called border guards in the Security Zone; and the illegal detainment of two Moldovan police officers by the so-called regime authorities.

The Government's unilateral and Western-supported agenda on Transnistria should theoretically work. During his visit to Moldova, Dmitry Kozak stated that the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict is a matter of Moldova's

internal affairs, one that Russia is ready to offer assistance for, but in doing so will not attempt to impose its terms of settlement (despite Russia being the one to advance in 2003 the Kozak Memorandum on the country's federalization). To that end, both parties did eventually agree to start negotiations on the destruction of the Russian ammunition in Cobasna, although it was unclear whether they discussed about the Russian troops or the status of the peacekeeping mission. With that said, Russia's expressed disinterest in intervening in Transnistria's affairs does not necessarily hold true. In the past couple of months, the Russian delegation of the Joint Control Commission impacted on the efficiency of the decision-making of the Commission on matters pertaining to human rights and the illegal military activity by invoking the need for additional consultations, and opposed the involvement of OSCE experts in overseeing the situation in the Security Zone, seen as what would be a replacement for the role undertaken by the peacekeeping mission.

Russia also seems to have acted as an intermediary on behalf of the regime on matters related to the international travel restrictions imposed on vehicles with Transnistrian number plates and the switch to neutral registration plates, to be fully in force starting September 1st, according to the Moldovan-Ukrainian agreement. During his visit to Moldova, Kozak was reassured there would be no 'Transnistrian blockade' associated with these changes, as alerted by Tiraspol. Given there were only 5% of Transnistrian cars with renewed registration plates, the Moldovan authorities soon followed with a request to postpone the enforcement of those restrictions, issued to their Ukrainian counterparts. Although the deadline was extended several times since 2020, when the initiative was first considered, Ukraine decided to follow through with the agreement, which prompted Russia and Transnistria's discontent, but will probably help fasten the transition.

Meanwhile, the new Government has started to lay the groundwork for a revitalized process of conflict resolution. Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Vladislav Kulminski conducted several meetings with OSCE and EUBAM representatives, in hopes to jumpstart work on a future action plan for the region, in addition to the 'field work' done in several villages and districts affected by the Transnistrian regime. Within those several exchanges with representatives of local public authorities, citizens, economic agents and landowners, the Bureau for Reintegration aimed to lobby the government agenda, assess the current challenges in the region, including the functioning of local public institutions, as well as encourage local authorities to develop and implement more socio-economic projects.

Engaging Ukraine was also a priority. The Deputy Prime Minister conducted several meetings with the Ukrainian Ambassador to Moldova, the Minister for Reintegration of the Temporary Occupied Territories of Ukraine and Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine to reset the bilateral cooperation on Transnistria, ensure progress on several joint areas of work and discuss new plans on border management. Ukraine is a critical partner for the reintegration agenda and the tackling of cross-border Transnistrian issues, such as corruption and smuggling. With this in mind, by intensifying the bilateral engagement and by supporting Ukraine's endeavors within the Crimea Platform, the Moldovan authorities do not only reinforce the primacy of a rule-based international order but possibly expect it to lead to a trade-off with Ukraine benefitting the Transnistrian conflict settlement.

Abbreviations:

CSDP - Common Security and Defence Policy

EaP - Eastern Partnership

EU - European Union

EUBAM - EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSCE - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PAS - Party of Action and Solidarity

US - United States of America

About the author



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GEORGIA SECURITY CONTEXT

by Alex Petriashvili, Sandro Megrelishvili, Beka Parsadanishvili
Georgian Center for Strategy and Development

SUMMARY

July and August have been eventful in terms of regional and internal security. After 8 months of the Second Karabakh War first incidents between Azerbaijan and Armenia were recorded in the period of July 6-15. Georgia has observed significant episodes regarding radicalism and extremism, personalized attacks against journalists, cyber security, human trafficking, illicit drug trade, interstate partnership, and information-related issues. The monitor document covers major internal security events that took place in the respected period.

Georgia has seen development in cyber security for the last two months. Since the beginning of July, Georgia ranks 55th world and 30th in Europe according to Global Cybersecurity Index. Furthermore, the Parliament of Georgia adopted new information security laws, which define the new Operative Technical Agency responsibilities.

In the early August, the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality – Tea Akhvlediani – presented report on the achievements of Georgia’s government on the conflict resolution. Among other important issues, she mentioned that in order to stimulate trade and facilitate Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian business projects, a ‘peace fund’ has been established, through which, 11 projects have already been funded.

Georgia has offered the Abkhaz and Ossetian communities an opportunity to get vaccinated with internationally acclaimed vaccines (Pfizer, Astra Zenneca, Sinovac, Sinopharm) with no pre-registration required in the medical centers across the administrative border line on the Georgian government-controlled territory.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

July and August of 2021 have been both, tense and dynamic in terms of regional security. After 8 months of the Second Karabakh War first incidents between Azerbaijan and Armenia were recorded in the period of July 6-15. The theater of hostilities covered both areas along the Armenian-Azerbaijani state border as well as territories of the Karabakh region, where Russian peacekeeping forces have been temporarily deployed under the ceasefire accord of November 10, 2020.

On July 17-19 the South Caucasus tour of European Union Council President Charles Michel took place. As reaffirmed during the visit, Brussels is interested in the revival of the mission of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Moscow would welcome this role if it “facilitate[s] the implementation of the existing agreements” - which can be interpreted as Moscow’s rejection of any third-party attempts to modify the trilateral agreements. These comments were made by Kremlin officials after the President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan paid a working visit to Moscow on July 20 (The Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian also met with President Putin in Moscow in early July).

On July 28 the heavy border clashes were monitored in the region again. Armenia said three of its soldiers had been killed and two wounded. Azerbaijan said two of its soldiers had been wounded. Shortly after the incident, Armenian Prime Minister has proposed that Russian border forces be stationed along the length of his country’s border with Azerbaijan. The latest tensions occurred when the section of the highway was closed on August 25 by dozens of Azerbaijani soldiers. They blocked the road, passing Azerbaijani territory between the two Armenian cities Goris and Kapan in the southern region of Syunik after an alleged stabbing incident. On August 27, after nearly two days of closure, Azerbaijan has unblocked the highway.

On July 19 the presidents of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the presence of European Council President Charles Michel signed a Batumi Declaration committing to trilateral cooperation for the peaceful, democratic and prosperous European future for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The presidents of so-called Trio jointly proclaimed their commitment to a European future, standing with European Council President Charles.

The multinational military exercise Agile Spirit 2021 started on July 26 and continued until August 6. Georgia hosted the multinational exercise for the 10th time. Overall, 2500 military servicemen from 15 NATO member and partner countries took part in the exercise.

On July 28, the leader of the ruling party Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze annulled an EU-brokered deal with opposition parties, blaming the opposition for the agreement failure. The USA and the EU voiced deep concern about the future of Georgia's democracy on July 29.

Commenting on the 13th anniversary of the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008, The Russian MFA official expressed hopes that "common sense will prevail in Tbilisi, and our Georgian partners will begin to build relations with neighbors, taking into account the balance of interests." The Georgian Foreign Ministry slammed remarks by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, who visited Ukraine on August 21-23, addressed the inaugural summit of the Crimea platform, a Ukrainian diplomatic initiative aimed at strengthening international coordination efforts against Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

INTERNAL SECURITY CONTEXT

July and August of 2021 have been eventful in terms of internal security. In the course of the previous two months, Georgia has observed significant episodes regarding radicalism and extremism, personalized attacks against journalists, cyber security, human trafficking, illicit drug trade, interstate partnership, and information-related issues. The monitor document covers major internal security events that took place in the respected period.

Right-wing extremism and radicalism were manifested at the beginning of July when the far-right extremist groups marched through the city of Tbilisi against the LGBTQ community. Far-right groups physically targeted more than 50 media representatives (including a Polish journalist). The TV Pirveli cameraman Lekso Lashkarava died shortly after being physically harmed during the demonstrations. The Ombudsman of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria, criticized the government in her statement:

"Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies do not respond to all similar cases in a timely, strict, or effective manner. Organizers of the violence committed against journalists on July 5-6 have not been identified and appropriate measures have not been taken to bring them to justice, which creates a syndrome of impunity"

Further on journalism, Azerbaijani blogger Hussein Bakikhanov, who criticized the government of Azerbaijan was found dead in his apartment in Tbilisi on July 30.

On the other hand, Jihadi extremism is still present in Georgia. On August 26, the State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) conducted an operation against five people from Pankisi Gorge who pledged loyalty to Islamic State and its leaders. According to the State Security Service, these people were actively spreading ISIS propaganda and seen to demonstrate the symbolics of a terrorist organization.

Georgia has seen development in cyber security for the last two months. Since the beginning of July, Georgia ranks 55th world and 30th in Europe according to Global Cybersecurity Index. Furthermore, the Parliament of

Georgia adopted new information security laws, which define the new Operative Technical Agency responsibilities. British ambassador to Georgia Mark Clayton views the changes as a “strong foundation which will help Georgia build its future cyber security.” However, The Institute for Development and Freedom of information suspects that new amendments simultaneously grant the Operative Technical Agency regulatory, monitoring, and sanctioning powers. The Cyber Security Bureau of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) also received an integrated cyber security solution worth 231 000\$ within the EU SAFE project.

The U.S state department claims Georgia has maintained the highest level of fighting trafficking: *“The Government of Georgia fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.”* – 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report.

SSG took action against the illicit trade of drugs. The anti-corruption agency at SSG and the Intelligence Department conducted a joint operation from June 30 to July 23 in major cities of Georgia and identified 27 pharmacies to trade psychotropic drugs illegally.

SSG held series of training to prevent the proliferation of nuclear materials under the project “CONTACT-BLACK Sea.” The project aims to improve the preventive capacity of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova against the multiplication of nuclear materials.

The 2016 partnership agreement between the Georgian State Security Service (SSG) and the Belarus State Security Committee (KGB) came into force on August 1. The document suggests signing parties cooperate on sovereignty, terrorism, cyber security, weapon proliferation, and share information to boost partnership. The decision caused critique of local non-governmental and civil society organizations because of KGB’s close ties with its Russian counterparts.

SSG launched an investigation into the facts of the disclosure of state secrets under the “classified” category on August 10.

SEPARATIST CONFLICTS/POLITICAL RESOLUTION OF ‘FROZEN CONFLICTS’

During the reporting period, no radical shifts have been noticed in the conflict dynamics between Georgia, its breakaway regions, and Russia, with status quo being maintained. Still, few important developments have been observed.

Most notably, Zaza Gakheladze – an illegally detained citizen of Georgia has been released after spending more than a year in the Tskhinvali prison. Weeks before, Georgian Catholic Patriarch Illia II has addressed Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kiril with a request to release Gakheladze, presumably, playing an important role in the process. State Security Services of Georgia declared Gakheladze has been released as a result of applying “international mechanisms”. Against the claim, the Ossetian media stated that Zaza Gakheladze had been freed in an exchange for Vadim Gobozov, a prisoner detained in Tbilisi on the charge of murder of a dual citizen of Georgia and Russia. Video has been published online, with Vadim Gobozov meeting Anatoli Bibilov, the de-facto president of South Ossetia. In the meantime, two more citizens of Georgia – Irakli Bebuia and Genadi Bestaev remain illegally detained by the de-facto governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the early August, the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality – Tea Akhvlediani – presented report on the achievements of Georgia’s government on the conflict resolution. Among other important issues, she mentioned that in order to stimulate trade and facilitate Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian business projects, a ‘peace fund’ has been established, through which, 11 projects have already been funded. At the same time, more than 100 trust building initiatives have been commenced, while around 4 million GEL has been allocated to support residents of Abkhazian region. She expressed readiness for result-oriented and depoliticized dialogue with the Abkhaz and Ossetian communities, and announced that the strategy on

reconciliation and engagement is being reviewed. The de-facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia condemned the statements made by the State Minister Tea Akhvlediani and blamed her in distorting the facts. The statement made by the de-facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia explicitly mentioned that ‘citizens of Republic of Abkhazia do not take part in joint Georgian-Abkhaz business projects’, and also denied the reception of any type of assistance from Tbilisi.

Importantly, Georgia has offered the Abkhaz and Ossetian communities an opportunity to get vaccinated with internationally acclaimed vaccines (Pfizer, Astra Zenneca, Sinovac, Sinopharm) with no pre-registration required in the medical centers across the administrative border line on the Georgian government-controlled territory. Notwithstanding that, both of the de-facto governments of the breakaway regions heavily rely on vaccines provided by Russia, disregarding the calls of the group of people from Abkhazia to ask international organizations as well as Russia to deliver ‘effective’ vaccines.

In the meantime, the legal issues committee of the Parliament of Georgia discussed Resolution on the De-Occupation and the Peaceful Resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict, appealing to the international society to maintain consistent and uniform position against the occupation and annexation policy by Russia. In response, the de-facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia stated that ‘the resolution is detached from reality and distorts the causes of Abkhazian-Georgian contradictions and called for Georgian authorities to reconsider its unconstructive position’.

On 30th of July the de-facto president of Abkhazia, Aslan Bjanina visited Moscow and held official meetings with various representatives of Russia to discuss matters of security, energy supply and gasification as well as vaccination and fight against corruption, as stated by Abkhazian media sources. Further, on 6-9th August Bjanina paid an official visit to Tskhinvali, to participate in the activities commemorating the 13th anniversary of the 2008 War.

Abbreviations:

EU - European Union

GEL - Georgian Lari (Currency)

ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

KGB - Belarus State Security Committee

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MOD - Ministry of Defence (Georgia)

NATO - The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

SSG - State Security Service of Georgia

USA - United States of America

About the authors



Alex Petriashvili is a career diplomat with over 20 years of experience representing his country in both bilateral and multilateral formats at the highest levels. He served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2004-2009. In October 2012, he became a member of the Georgian Parliament. In 2012-2014, he served as the State Minister for Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. He received his degree from Tbilisi State University’s Faculty of Economics and Social Geography in 1992. He also graduated the NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy in 2000. Currently, Ambassador Petriashvili is an international affairs anchor, the host of a weekly TV program, The World as Such, as well as the co-host of the weekly

political talk show, Political Friday on TV Pirveli. He also is a contributor on international and security affairs for Forbes Georgia. Since 2020 joined The GFSIS as a Senior Fellow. His area of interest is NATO EU Integration, as well as global and regional affairs.



Sandro Megrelishvili joined GCSD in October 2020, in the position of organizational development manager. Sandro has received a Bachelor's degree in International Relations at the University of St Andrews, and a Master's degree in Political Science, at Ilia State University. Over years, he has successfully completed several international courses, among which should be singled out the course - 'Managing Defense in Wider Security Context', held at the UK Defense Academy. Sandro has spent most of his professional career at the Ministry of Defense of Georgia, where he worked on the preparation of various reports and documents. In parallel, he has been engaged in the academic field as well. Currently, Sandro is a Ph.D. student at Ilia State University.



Beka Parsadanishvili is a Research Project Manager at GCSD. He studied public governance at MykolasRomeris University in 2018. He graduated from Tbilisi State University's International Relations bachelor programme in 2020. He is currently doing MA studies in conflict analysis and management at Tbilisi State University. Beka Parsadanishvili was nominated to do Master's studies at Masaryk University (Faculty of Social Sciences). He has work experience as a research assistant at TEPSA (2018). Has a number of publications and conference papers on state security, terrorism and soft power.

UKRAINE SECURITY CONTEXT

by Hennadiy Maksak
Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”

SUMMARY

The summer of 2021 was robust for global and regional-scale events that directly left a footprint on the security environment in and around Ukraine. The NATO Summit, G7 meeting, the US-EU Summit and the Biden-Putin bilateral talks have formed the main international security context. Ukraine's relations with the US demonstrated a wide array of both positive and challenging multilateral and bilateral interactions, affecting directly Ukrainian and regional security. In August, President Zelenskyy signed the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine, which is supposed to streamline the governmental efforts along with core priorities of foreign policy.

In the field of security sector reforms, a draft law of the Security Service of Ukraine has been presented to the Verkhovna Rada. Symbolically, this draft law has gained the support of the International Advisory Group, with the participation of NATO, the EU and the USA. If adopted and fully implemented, this version might serve as a solid footing for the Security Service Reform in accordance to the European and Euro Atlantic standards and best practices. President Zelenskyy made serious changes within the top management of the security and defense agencies in Ukraine. On the level of Security Service of Ukraine, three deputy heads and directors of general departments were fired.

The same fate was prepared for the head of the General Staff of Ukraine and three deputy ministers of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. The head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine was also changed in July. Also in July, the Ukrainian parliament has accepted the resignation of the Minister of Interior A. Avakov, the most experienced and longstanding minister in the government. While the official reasons for each case may differ, the political impact of this massive change shows that the president and his team are not satisfied with the overall dynamics in the security and defense sector.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

The NATO Summit held in Brussels in June mentioned Ukraine in its final communiqué and reiterated that NATO adheres to its commitments made back in 2008 in Bucharest. It states that Ukraine will be a member of the Alliance and the Membership Action Plan is an indispensable part of the integration process. It became possible due to active diplomatic interactions, undertaken by the Ukrainian officials in many capitals of the NATO member-states. Not surprisingly, this immediately provoked a reaction from Russia and was followed by statements that Ukrainian membership is considered a red line for the Kremlin.

The final communiqué of the G7 meeting in June was also positively met in Ukraine. The statement explicitly mentioned Russia as a side of the conflict, not a broker. The G7 leaders called Russia to de-escalate the situation, abide by its international commitments, withdraw its armed forces from the Eastern Ukrainian border and decrease the number of troops on the occupied Crimean Peninsula. The communiqué also has addressed the issue of reforms in Ukraine, including law-enforcement agencies reform.

Transatlantic dimension

The Ukrainian-US engagement showcased a wide array of both positive and challenging multilateral and bilateral interactions, affecting directly the Ukrainian and regional security. On one hand, the United States, Ukraine's strategic partner, announced the allocation of 150 million US dollars as military assistance for the country. On the other hand, the Biden administration showed a clear readiness to mend the relations with the core NATO ally in Europe, Germany. Inter alia, this was planned to be reached by lifting the US sanctions from entities connected to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a project of strategic importance for Berlin and Moscow.

Ukraine undertook a number of diplomatic interactions with both the American and German sides but fell victim to the direct bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU), signed by J. Biden and A. Merkel in Washington, D.C. in July. Ukraine was not a full-fledged partner in this agreement, which raised a storm of political criticism in Ukraine and in the Central European region. Although some energy security guarantees and financial support were earmarked for Ukraine by states-signatories, security risks posed by the unpredictable Kremlin (which is not a signatory side to the MoU as well) overshadowed all positive effects.

Ukraine looked carefully at all destinations and topics on the agenda of the European tour of the US president. As a result of the US-EU summit, several important statements have been made. First, Washington and Brussels agreed to coordinate their policy towards Russia. Second, the parties declared their strong support for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

But most attention was attached to the bilateral meeting with Russian President V. Putin. The press conference, delivered by J. Biden after the meeting with his Russian counterpart, reinforced the US-UA strategic partnership. The POTUS reiterated his unwavering support for restoring the state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. It is important to note that prior and after the bilateral meeting with Vladimir Putin, the US counterparts reached out to Ukraine to brief on the plans and achieved results.

The US-Ukrainian political agenda also included a strong push from the White House and the State Department for consistency in the implementation of reforms in Ukraine, including within the judiciary, anticorruption and law-enforcement agencies. The delay in the reception of the Ukrainian president's working visit to Washington (was shifted twice during July and August and took place at the beginning of September), a low level of the official US representation on the Crimea Platform Summit may evidence the concern of the United States with the pace of reforms in Ukraine.

In relation with Germany, several issues were important in the security domain. In June, a new discussion unfolded about a potential weapons delivery to Ukraine. It has been prompted by President Zelenskiy's interview for the Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung, where he has called for military assistance with rifles, radio facilities and armored vehicles. It has provoked a quick response from Berlin, citing its traditional commitment not to deliver the weapon to areas affected by war. The Ukrainian MFA mentioned that despite the declared German official ban on such deliveries, the Ukrainian diplomats put effort into changing the stance within the new German Government. The issue of NS2 was another stable topic for Ukrainian-German interaction, where the positions of the sides were too far from reaching a compromise.

European Security agenda

In June, the EU presented its strategy towards Russia. The new approach of the EU rests on three pillars: push back, constrain, and engage. But the summer months also presented a grave challenge for Ukraine and EU member-states themselves. A new French and German initiative proposed resuming direct political contacts with V. Putin through the EU-Russia summits. Both E. Macron and A. Merkel proposed to invite him to a meeting with EU leaders. Ukraine joined the chore of opponents of this move from Poland and the Baltic States, predominately. As a result, the initiative failed. At the same time, the EU leaders agreed to coordinate their policies towards Russia.

In June of 2021, Ukraine, the first from the EaP partner states, launched an official Cyber-Dialogue with the EU, providing a platform for comprehensive consultations on possible ways of cooperation in this field.

In July of 2021, in a very strong political move with wide security implications, the EU extended with a half a year the time-frame for applying economic sanctions against Russia as a result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

When it comes to the EaP region, it is worth mentioning the Association Trio initiative of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In June, the Foreign ministers of the Trio presented a joint non-paper on the EaP prospects and interests

of associated partner-states in Brussels. It was further developed and politically enforced in the Batumi Declaration, signed by the heads of the three states in Georgia in August of 2021. Among other mentioned priorities, this document stipulates that Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia declare their readiness to cooperate with the European Union in the area of the Common Security and Defense Policy, including the fight with hybrid threats and disinformation, strengthening of the cyber resilience, cooperation with EU law-enforcement and security agencies.

Black Sea region

In June and July, Ukraine co-hosted with the USA the multinational maritime exercise Sea Breeze 2021, which united this year 32 partner states, predominately the Black Sea nations and NATO Allies. Exercise Sea Breeze 2021 is an annual military drill, involving sea, land, and air components aimed at enhancing the interoperability and capability among participating forces in the Black Sea region. This time, the exercise drew Russia's attention in a specific way, having organized a provocation against the British Navy HMS Defender in Ukrainian territorial waters near the occupied Crimea. Fortunately, no grave damage was inflicted, but it showcased Russia's aggressive behavior in the Black Sea region.

The bilateral relations with Turkey remained on a positive track in terms of the military and technical cooperation. Ankara showed interest in purchasing 14 Ukrainian-made engines for helicopters against the backdrop of the non-manned aerial vehicle sold to Ukraine to boost the Ukrainian defense capabilities. At the same time, high-level contacts between the Ukrainian and Turkish presidents proved the unchanged position of Ankara towards the restoring of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In its turn, Ukraine showed solidarity with Turkey during the massive fires that affected the country.

Regional security environment

Belarus reappeared on the security radar of Ukraine during these summer months. At the end of May, Ukraine was one of the first to react to the unlawful forced landing of a civilian airplane with the Belarusian civic activist Roman Protasievich on-board. This dangerous precedent forced Ukraine to close its national aerial space for flights to and from Belarus. The new spiral of confrontation with the Belarusian autocratic authorities provoked direct threats to Ukraine voiced by Aleksandr Lukashenko. Ukraine was traditionally blamed for preparing a coup in Belarus and training militants to undermine the political stability in the neighboring country. A. Lukashenko, unrecognized by Ukraine as a legitimate president, voiced several threats that directly and indirectly crossed the red lines for non-recognition of the legitimacy of the occupation administrations of Russian Federation in Donbas and Crimea. Ukraine had to react through its diplomatic and political channels. It should be mentioned that Ukraine has not yet joined the sectoral sanctions against Belarus introduced by the EU this summer.

The death of the Belarusian activist V. Shishov in Kyiv under vague circumstances refocused the attention of the Ukrainian police and security services on the internal security environment, including those Belarusian citizens who fled Belarus to escape political persecution in their own country. At this point, there is an unfinished investigation process.

Ukraine was also involved in the Belarus-initiated migration crisis on the Eastern borders of the European Union (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland). In August, Ukraine offered humanitarian assistance to Lithuania - barbed wire to curb the migration flow from the Belarusian territory.

INTERNAL SECURITY CONTEXT

Internal developments in Ukraine in the area of security and defense were not so numerous but some of them deserve to be mentioned. First, in August, President Zelenskyy signed the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine, which is supposed to streamline the governmental efforts along with the core foreign policy priorities. This comprehensive document names six core directions for Ukraine on the international arena: restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine; countering aggressive policy of the Russian Federation; NATO

and EU membership; promote the Ukrainian export; protection of the right and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens; promotion of a positive image of Ukraine in the world.

In the field of security sector reforms, one has to mention the draft law on the Security Service of Ukraine. Its next iteration was presented in June. The legislative process over a new framework for the Security Service of Ukraine has already been lasting for 4 years. The main bone of contention is the separation of the counter-intelligence functions and the investigation of economic crimes. Symbolically, this edition has gained the support of the International Advisory Group, with the participation of NATO, the EU and the USA. If adopted and fully implemented, this version might serve as a solid footing for the Security Service Reform in accordance to the European and Euroatlantic standards and best practices. The Group called on the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine for immediate adoption. The same positive assessment was delivered by the G7 ambassadors to Ukraine. The adoption and implementation of this version of the draft law will allow the creation of a modern counter-intelligence agency in Ukraine. The EU Advisory Mission also commended the introduction of the version, although there are still some concerns over human rights protection.

In July, President Zelenskyy made serious changes within the top management of the security and defense agencies in Ukraine. On the level of Security Service of Ukraine, three deputy heads and directors of general departments were fired. The same fate was prepared for the head of the General Staff of Ukraine and three deputy ministers of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. The head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine was also changed in July. Also in July, the Ukrainian parliament has accepted the resignation of the Minister of Interior A. Avakov, the most experienced and longstanding minister in the government. While the official reasons for each case may differ, the political impact of this massive change shows that the president and his team are not satisfied with the overall dynamics in the security and defense sector.

SEPARATIST CONFLICTS/POLITICAL RESOLUTION OF 'FROZEN CONFLICTS'

During the monitoring period, OSCE has changed some of its representatives in the negotiation mechanism. In June, there was a rotation of two OSCE coordinators of thematic subgroups (on Political and Humanitarian issues). At the end of August, Mikko Kinnunen, the new OSCE Chairperson's Special Representative in Ukraine and the TCG, took up his duties upon the departure of Ambassador Heidi Grau.

In June-August, the Trilateral Contact Group was convened in the VTC format, both on the subgroups' level and in general composition. Still, the negotiation process remained blocked by the Russian side. The main issues on the agenda there were as follows: issues of ceasefire violations on the Russian side, the Minsk and Paris Agreement implementation, security provisions in the conflict zone, hostages and prisoners exchange, provision of unfettered access of international organizations, resumption of economic ties through the contact line, etc.

The ceasefire regime has been not respected by the pro-Russian militants, the number of violations increased in July, including the use of weapons, prohibited by the Minsk agreements. The Russian-backed formations continued attacking civilian targets, including the city of Avdiyivka. The OSCE SMM monitors were constantly limited in access to the occupied territories.

Against the background of the Russian parliamentary elections, during the summer months Kremlin intensified its unlawful activity with the "passportization" of Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. These citizens were allowed to vote in the newly introduced online voting system. / This was received with a critical assessment from the EU side.

In June, during a phone call with the Foreign Minister S. Lavrov, the foreign ministers of France and Germany asked for a "positive contribution to be made" by Kremlin towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas.

On several official occasions during the period of the monitoring, Germany has addressed the situation regarding the stalemate in the negotiation process, both in the Normandy format and in the Trilateral Contact Group. Given the worsening of the Ukrainian-Belarusian relations after the forced landing of the civilian plane by the Lukashenko regime, in Kyiv emerged a new wave of criticism towards Minsk being the location set for the TCG

meetings. In this regard, A. Merkel stressed that the Normandy format did not depend on Minsk as a negotiations' location.

During the numerous visits made by the Ukrainian high officials to Germany and vice versa, Berlin has been constantly calling Russia, as a side of the conflict, to ensure progress on the Paris agreements of the Normandy format. In August, during her last visit as Germany's Federal Chancellor, A. Merkel stressed that she remained committed to the resolution of the conflict in Donbas. Despite the proactive approach of the Ukrainian side in June-August 2021 in its diplomatic efforts, the possibility of the next Normandy format meeting was out of reach.

Against the backdrop of the slowdown in Normandy format, in July, President Zelenskyy reiterated once again his call for expanding the format of negotiations, so as to involve the United States. The current composition might be changed or go in parallel as a supplementary negotiation format to not contradict the existing agreements.

But the crown jewelry of the Ukrainian de-occupation efforts this summer, and this year at large, is the launch of the Crimea Platform, an international mechanism for gaining and consolidating support for the de-occupation of the Crimea Peninsula. During June-August of 2021, Kyiv accelerated all diplomatic efforts to gather foreign states and international organizations for the Inauguration Summit on August 23. And despite the absence of the heads of state of the USA, Germany and France at the inauguration assembly, overall, 46 delegations took part in the event and joined the Crimea Summit declaration.

The platform has 5 working groups and different levels of international cooperation: summits of heads of states and governments, foreign ministers' meetings, as well as the parliamentary and expert levels. The Crimea Platform Expert Network held its own inauguration Forum in the run-up to the Summit.

Abbreviations:

EaP - Eastern Partnership

EU - European Union

G7 - Group of Seven

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NS2 - Nord Stream 2

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

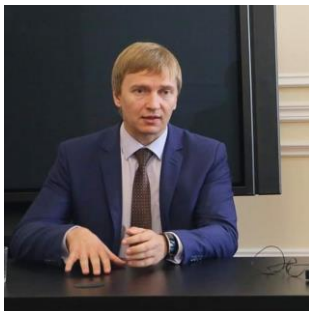
POTUS - President of the United States

TCG - Trilateral Contact Group

USA - United States of America

VTC - Video Tele-Conferencing

About the author



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ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION



Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (APE) is one of the leading foreign policy think-tanks in Moldova. The Association is committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country's Europeanization. APE was established in 2003 by a prominent group of local experts, public figures, former government officials and high-ranking diplomats, who decided to contribute through their experience and expertise to the development of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova.

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About the partners organizations



Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (GCSD) is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization. Since its establishment, GCSD has directed efforts towards supporting Georgia's and regional sustainable, democratic development by embedding values of respect, impartiality, accountability, fairness and transparency in all interventions and undertakings. Over years GCSD has distinguished itself as an outstanding local think-tank. The organization has carried out number of research activities and issued remarkable publications, covering variety of topics. GCSD is the first Georgian organisation to establish a unit within its structure fully dedicated to research of topics related to terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation. The Terrorism Research Center (TRC) of GCSD aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of the Georgian society regarding the above stated phenomena and to design and implement projects that help minimise the threat thereof.

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Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" is a network-based non-governmental analytical center, the goal of which is to participate in providing democratic ground for developing and implementation of foreign and security policies by government authorities of Ukraine, implementation of international and nation-wide projects and programs, directed at improvement of foreign policy analysis and expertise, enhancement of expert community participation in a decision-making process in the spheres of foreign policy, international relations, public diplomacy. The Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" is officially registered as a non-governmental organization in 2015, while analytical work and research had been carried out within the network of foreign policy experts "Ukrainian Prism" since 2012. At present, the organization united more than 15 experts in the sphere of foreign policy, international relations, international security from different analytical and academic institutions in Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Chernivtsi.

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