

## **The Position of a Group of Experts Regarding the Impact of the Georgian Crisis on the Republic of Moldova**

The armed conflict between Russia and Georgia has produced a major political-military crisis capable of generating profound transformations in the system of international relations. Rapid and fundamental degradation of institutional cooperation mechanisms and relations between Russia, on the one part, and the European Union and NATO, on the other, marks the beginning of a new period of confrontation, with serious implications for regional security and stability.

The Georgian crisis threatens stability of many post-Soviet countries that Russia unilaterally perceives as being part of its paramount sphere of interests. These countries face separatist conflicts that have been initiated and supported politically, economically and militarily by the Russian Federation. The armed conflict between Georgia and Russia has clearly demonstrated the role of Russia as a party in these conflicts and highlighted the limitations of the existing system for ensuring stability in the frozen conflict zones.

Considering the important changes appearing in the context of international relations, Moldova should thoroughly and comprehensively analyze the significance of these developments, assess their impact on its interests and make necessary adjustments to its foreign and domestic policies.

Wishing to contribute to this effort of analysis and adaptation, representatives of the community of foreign and security policy experts from the Republic of Moldova held a series of consultations, having agreed upon the following points:

- By launching a major military operation, including attacks on non-military targets and occupying parts of the Georgian territory, the Russian Federation has violated the basic principles of international law and has committed an act of aggression against an independent country member of the UN.
- Through its actions, Russia has irreversibly undermined its position of a peacekeeper and mediator in the settlement of conflicts in Georgia. It has confirmed its role as a party to the conflict and demonstrated that the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are rather conflicts between Russia and Georgia. The nature of Russia's involvement in the Transnistrian conflict is similar to that in Georgia and this could adversely affect the prospects for a lasting settlement.
- Russia's decision to use military force demonstrates its determination to apply all means to thwart the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgia and, indirectly, those of Ukraine and possibly Moldova.
- The decision to use military force for promoting its interests, even by seriously undermining its image in the world, shows that Moscow places greater importance on blocking further NATO enlargement to the East and keeping post-Soviet states in its sphere of absolute control rather than build partnership relations with the European Union and the United States.
- The fact that this military incursion was partially explained by the need to protect Russian citizens in South Ossetia and Abkhazia creates a worrying precedent, given that many post-Soviet states still have a large population of Russian citizens and Russia could at any time intervene in other places to allegedly defend them.
- The aggression of one CIS member against another member of this community demolishes the concept of cooperation among equal and independent states of this organization and takes things back to soviet times when the center dominated through the use of force.

- Against the backdrop of the war in Georgia, one could expect Russia to attempt to demonstrate its capacity to peacefully solve conflicts in the CIS area, proposing a *pro forma* solution of the Transnistrian conflict that actually would lead to the consolidation of Russian influence in Moldova and block our country's aspirations for European integration.
- Considering the radicalisation of Russia's towards full support for the separatist regions of Georgia and actions aimed at recognizing their independence, it is not realistic to expect that Russia would adopt an opposite approach in the Transnistrian conflict and support its viable settlement.
- The format of the "peacekeeping" forces deployed in the security zone on the basis of the Moldovan-Russian Agreement signed on July 21, 1992, is similar to that in South Ossetia and hence, Russia could use the precedent set in South Caucasus to hinder Moldova's advance towards the European Union and its greater cooperation with NATO.
- The events in Georgia once again show that Ukraine could represent a real "strategic shelter" for the Republic of Moldova and therefore, Moldova is vitally interested in the success of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and in developing a strategic partnership with its neighbor.
- Following the military conflict between Russia and Georgia, the European Union demonstrates greater openness to play a more active role in the resolution of frozen conflicts, and to send clearer signals to the countries of its Eastern Neighborhood, encouraging their aspirations for European integration. This development could represent a major opportunity for Moldova's EU prospects.

*Considering the above, we believe that Moldova should:*

- Show greater caution with regard to any possible Russian initiatives to solve the Transnistrian conflict outside the framework set by the Law of July 22, 2005 "*About the basic principles of the status of Transnistria*".
- Intensify efforts aimed at replacing the current "peacekeeping arrangement" in the security zone with an international mission of civil and police observers.
- Together with the authorities in Kiev and Bucharest, identify as soon as possible compromise formulas, as needed to solve existing problems that hold back the development of a strategic partnership between the Republic of Moldova and its neighbors.
- Undertake a fundamental cost-benefit analysis of maintaining its position as a CIS member, closely coordinating any potential adjustments with Ukraine's position.
- Set up a format of permanent consultations with Ukraine in the areas of European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation.
- Consolidate its cooperation in the framework of regional organizations in which Ukraine is also taking part, and in particular in the framework of GUAM.
- Take advantage of the renegotiation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO to include common actions aimed at consolidating the security of the Republic of Moldova.
- Further urge the European Union to adopt as soon as possible the mandate for the negotiation of a new framework agreement with Moldova, without linking this decision to the electoral calendar in the Republic of Moldova.
- Insist that this document confirms the EU membership prospects for the Republic of Moldova and contains a solidarity clause, through which EU would commit to support Moldova in case its sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened.
- Deepen reforms, and first of all those aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, and ensure that future parliamentary elections are conducted in full compliance with international norms and standards.

*The undersigned experts:*

- express their availability to discuss broadly these recommendations with relevant institutions from the Republic of Moldova, including under the existing forms of cooperation with the civil society,
- propose the organization of consultations and debates regarding the impact of ongoing changes on the security situation and national interests of the Republic of Moldova, with the participation of civil society experts, decision-makers and political parties,
- agreed to initiate a comprehensive study on the security options for the Republic of Moldova in the new international context.

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