

Georgia After Russia-Ukraine War: The Security File Europe Must Not Ignore

Whatever form the end of the Russia-Ukraine war takes, it will not be the end of the Russian problem in Europe. It will only move the problem into a new phase. The future European security order will be shaped not only by the cease-fire lines in Ukraine, the security guarantees offered to Kyiv, or the sanctions that remain on Moscow, but also by what happens to the unresolved conflicts that Russia created before 2022. Georgia (and Moldova) belong in that discussion from day one.

There will be several possible endings to the war. In the best scenario, Russia will be strategically weakened, Ukraine will remain sovereign, armed, politically Western-oriented, and sufficiently protected from the next Russian assault, notwithstanding the territorial concessions. Such an outcome would damage the logic of accommodation with Moscow across the region. It would show that Russia can be resisted, contained, and made to pay a geopolitical price. For Georgia, this would matter

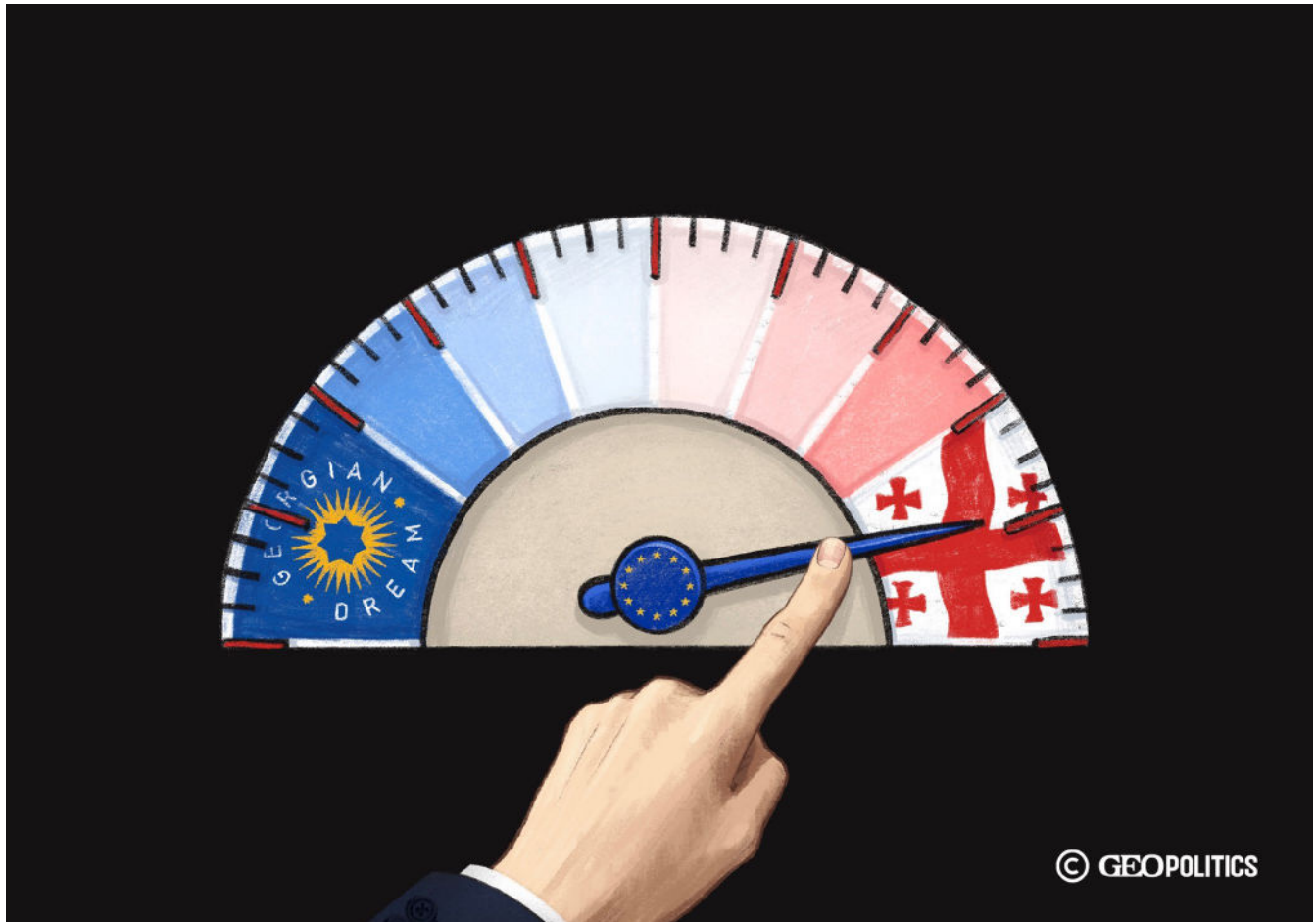
enormously. The central argument of the Georgian Dream (GD) government has been that Russia remains the decisive regional force and that Georgia must therefore avoid confrontation, avoid “provocation,” avoid war, and accept a narrower space for sovereignty. If Russia emerges weakened, that argument loses much of its force, even if it does not entirely disappear.

A second scenario is more ambiguous. War freezes. Ukraine survives, but under permanent military pressure, with parts of its territory occupied, political uncertainty inside the country, and fatigue among Western supporters. Russia neither wins nor loses clearly. This would be the most convenient outcome for the Georgian Dream’s propaganda machine. It would allow the ruling party to say that Ukraine was used, exhausted, and then abandoned by the West, while Georgia survived because it chose “peace.” The lesson would be false, but politically usable. And in Georgian Dream’s propaganda view, that is often enough.



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The third scenario is the most dangerous: Russia is perceived as victorious or at least enduring. This does not require Moscow to achieve all of its original war aims. It would be enough for Russia to keep significant occupied territories, secure sanctions relief, avoid accountability for war crimes, and return to international bargaining as if nothing fundamental had happened. In that case, GD would present its accommodation policy as vindicated and victorious. Anti-Western rhetoric would deepen. Quiet normalization with Moscow would accelerate. The EU's leverage would shrink to a minimum.

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However, what will matter is not only what happens on the battlefield, but how the outcome is interpreted in Tbilisi, Sukhumi, Tskhinvali, Yerevan,

Baku, Brussels, and Moscow. For Georgia, perception will shape politics. For the EU, perception will shape policy. If Europe treats Georgia as a secondary file after the war, Russia will read that message correctly. So will Georgian society. So will the occupied regions.

It is therefore imperative that the European Union begin developing a security strategy towards Georgia and the occupied regions in the medium to long run. This strategy should be developed now, regardless of who is in power in Tbilisi and regardless of the authoritarian trend.

The Country, Not the Government

Much has already been written on the pages of this journal about Georgia's [democratic backsliding](#), [state capture](#), political repression, [authoritarian consolidation](#), and the deliberate dismantling of the country's European path by Georgian Dream. Those issues currently remain central. They should not be

minimized. But this article looks at Georgia through a different lens: not as a democracy-promotion case, but as a security unit in the European order. A billiard ball, to use the old realist language. Even under a bad government, Georgia still occupies the same geography, carries the same unresolved conflicts, hosts the same illegal Russian military presence on its occupied territories, and remains exposed to the same Russian instruments of coercion.

This is the uncomfortable part for Brussels and European capitals. Georgia is becoming less politically reliable at the exact moment when it is becoming more strategically important. Georgia is the Black Sea gateway of the South Caucasus and an indispensable part of the Middle Corridor. It is connected to Europe's future access to the Caspian basin and Central Asia. It matters for energy diversification, trade routes, sanctions enforcement, infrastructure security, and the political balance between Russia, Türkiye, Iran, China, and the EU in the wider region. Thus, there can be no serious European South Caucasus policy without Georgia.

There can also not be a serious European security policy that ignores the occupation of Georgia's territories.

Russia still [occupies](#) Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, exercising full effective control over these regions. Russian troops remain stationed there illegally in violation of international law and the bilateral obligations towards Georgia. Moscow has built military, security, customs, legal, and economic structures that bind the two regions to Russia, where the process has moved far beyond old-fashioned separatism. In both regions, Russia has integrated security structures, controlled border management, shaped customs and law enforcement, pushed legal harmonization, used passports as leverage, taken strategic property such as Bichvinta, and advanced its military position on the Black Sea coast, including around Ochamchire.

This is therefore not a local Georgian problem. It is a European arms-control problem that has implications for Black Sea security. It is also prone to becoming a sanctions-enforcement problem. But overall, it is a test of whether Europe's next security architecture will address all Russian occupations, or only the one that became too large to ignore.

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If the post-war settlement and new European security architecture address only Ukraine but leave Georgia and Moldova outside the frame, Europe will create a hierarchy of occupations. Russia will understand that some occupations are negotiable, tolerable, and can eventually be absorbed into the background noise of diplomacy. That would not be the peace that the European continents aspire to, but a surrender to a precedent that would ultimately undermine European security. And let's make no mistake, the reason why Russia became so emboldened in Ukraine, first in 2014 and then in 2022, was that it got away with snatching Georgian territories and paying zero price for it. 2008 might sound like ancient history, but for those of us who remember and were first-hand [witnesses](#), the application of the same rule of force to Crimea and further was just a matter of time.

What Europe Should Not Do

The EU's first task is to avoid self-inflicted damage in the name of "doing something." Suspending Georgia's candidate status, as some European states are considering, would be a strategic mistake. It would punish the wrong side of the Georgian political divide and hand Georgian Dream the propaganda victory it wants. The oligarch's talking heads and his propaganda machinery would present such a decision as proof that Europe rejected Georgia, humiliated

its people, and never intended to accept the country anyway. That message would be repeated every day, on every loyal television channel, through every party-controlled platform, through every bot and troll in social media, and it would be hard to defeat because it would contain one visible fact: the “candidate status” was removed.

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The same applies to visa liberalization. Removing visa-free travel for Georgian citizens would hit precisely those people who still look to Europe as a political, educational, professional, and cultural space. It would not weaken the regime at all, but would rather strengthen it. Targeted sanctions against responsible officials, judges, propagandists, security officials, and oligarchic networks, who have undermined Georgian democracy, are a different matter and are legally and politically comprehensible if Europe so decides. But collective punishment of Georgian citizens would be strategically stupid, would serve no real purpose, and would actually strengthen Russia in the region, not weaken it.

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pragmatism. Engagement with the Georgian government may remain necessary, especially on security, infrastructure, and occupied territories, but engagement must not become legitimization. The basic political demands should remain unchanged: political prisoners must be released, repressive laws must be repealed, political parties must not be banned, and a permissive environment for political competition must be restored. These are not decorative democracy clauses. They are the minimum conditions for Georgia to remain a credible European state. And any politician or party in Georgia should know that these are the EU’s non-negotiable demands, which, if unfulfilled, will lead to restrictive measures, the withholding of financial and economic benefits, and high-level diplomatic engagement.

But since this article’s subject is not democracy and EU conditionalities but a European security architecture, another “must not” matters even more. Europe must not allow Russia to convert occupation into a veto over Georgia’s future. If unresolved conflicts automatically block European integration or NATO accession, Russia has already won. It will not need to resolve anything. It will only need to maintain troops and the status quo.

What Europe Should Put on the Table

The EU needs an anti-annexation policy toward Georgia once peace in Ukraine is established. It actually needed this policy a long time ago, but better late than never. Not another declaratory and a lowest common denominator non-recognition policy, but an active strategy designed to make Georgia harder to dismember, harder to coerce, and harder to absorb piece by piece. For Georgia, this means that the EU should treat Russia’s actions in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia as part of its broader Russia policy, not as an old conflict-management issue parked in Geneva.

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In fact, the EU should seek new commitments from Russia regarding the occupied regions – troop withdrawal, loosening control, status-related negotiations, and transparency and openness measures. Russia's withdrawal to pre-war positions, access for international organizations, and non-use of force arrangements should not be treated as archival material from another era. They are still the legal and political basis for reversing the consequences of the 2008 war. Any future normalization of relations with Russia should include Georgia and the topic of its occupied regions. Sanctions relief for Moscow should not move forward while Russia continues to occupy Georgian (and Moldovan) territory as if these were side issues.

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The EU should also create a sanctions regime connected specifically to the occupied regions of Georgia. This should target Russian officials, military commanders, business actors, legal architects, and companies involved in annexation by stealth: military integration, property seizures, legal harmonization, passport coercion, customs absorption, strategic infrastructure control, and Black Sea militarization. Bichvinta-type [transfers](#), Ochamchire-type military [projects](#), and the weaponization of Russian citizenship should carry a price. Currently, also because the attention is elsewhere, these actions cost Russia nothing.

At the same time, Europe should become more open toward the people living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. The current reality traps many residents in a cycle of Russian passports,

isolation, and fear of political uncertainty. That serves Moscow. The EU should design a status-neutral engagement policy that does not recognize these regions, does not undermine Georgia's territorial integrity, and provides the residents of these regions with access to European education, better health-care, mobility, vocational training, youth exchanges, micro-grants, and, eventually, even status-neutral travel arrangements. The message to these residents should be that Russia is not their only option and that, as residents of the European continent, they can count on Europe, which is opening its doors to them. In fact, the central element of the anti-annexation policy should be to drive a wedge between the residents of the occupied regions and their occupier, and there is no better way to do so than to highlight the contrast between what Russia offers and what Europe offers.

This matters especially in Abkhazia, where dependence on Russia is deep, but the desire for outright incorporation into Russia is neither as natural nor as unanimous as Moscow pretends. Abkhaz society has resisted Russian property expansion, demographic pressure, and direct interference. Europe (and Georgia) has never seriously used that opening.

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it into an EUMM-plus mission with satellite support, drone-monitoring capabilities, airspace surveillance, borderization tracking, cyber and hybrid-threat monitoring, and the ability to report early signs of military build-up or annexation-related moves. And its added value will only increase if these reports are publicly accessible and transparent. If Russia continues blocking access to the occupied territories, the EU should increase remote monitoring and raise the diplomatic cost of obstruction. But first of all, allowing this mission inside the occupied regions should become a major talking point with the post-Ukraine War Russia.

Georgia also belongs in any future European arms-control conversation. The adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) logic of Istanbul in 1999 should not be forgotten. Illegal Russian military bases in Georgia and Moldova are not marginal details. They might seem funny in comparison to hundreds of thousands of troops, machinery, and heavy artillery and scores of drones employed in the Ukrainian theater; however, at the legal level, Russian military presence in these occupied regions is just as unlawful as their presence in Crimea or Donbas. These military installations are part of the continental force posture, a remnant of the Soviet legacy that could become a precursor to future military problems years down the road. Any negotiations between the West and Russia on conventional forces, missile deployments, Black Sea security, transparency of armed forces, inspections, or confidence- and security-building measures must address the Russian military presence in Abkhazia, the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, and Transnistria.

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The EU also has to stop pretending that conflict resolution is separate from enlargement. The accession process for Eastern candidates has no serious

instrument for dealing with the occupied territories. That has to change. The EU should not make conflict resolution a formal condition of accession, as that would give Russia a veto. But it should create a conflict-monitoring annex to enlargement reports that covers human rights, military activity, borderization, Russian legal integration, demographic pressure, access for humanitarian actors, and restrictions on movement. It should also prepare a legal model for accession under partial territorial control, drawing on the Cyprus precedent, in which EU law applies only within the territory controlled by the recognized state until peaceful reintegration becomes possible. In addition, the EU could also draw on the mixed creative out-of-the-box experiences of Kosovo (not the recognition part), and Greenland (after all, it is a de jure part of the EU member state, but is not part of the EU), and draft the scenarios on how the occupied regions will be treated after the accession of the Eastern neighbors.

That approach would preserve Georgia's territorial integrity while denying Moscow a veto over its European future. It would also break with the self-defeating logic that has often guided Western thinking on unresolved conflicts: namely, that countries partially occupied by Russia are somehow unsuitable for integration. If accepted, that principle rewards aggression. It tells Moscow that every occupied district, every military base, and every frozen conflict can be transformed into a permanent obstacle to European integration. Europe should be doing the exact opposite.

The EU should also start treating Russian Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) as part of security policy, not as a public relations problem. Georgia has shown how Russian methods can be reproduced by local authoritarian actors: demonizing the EU as a war party, portraying civil society as foreign agents, presenting neutrality as prudence, and using fear of war to justify the shrinking of sovereignty and foreign policy options. A future EU strategy should include a dedicated FIMI

and sanctions-evasion monitoring mechanism for Georgia and the South Caucasus, with support for independent media, civil society, digital forensics, rapid attribution, platform monitoring, and public communication in Georgian, Abkhaz, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian languages.

The EU will not be able to do this alone through Brussels bureaucracy. It should build a coalition of willing states. Baltic and Nordic countries can lead on education, digital resilience, and civic technology. Poland, France, and Germany can provide political weight. Britain and Canada (it does not have to be the EU) can support Track 1.5 diplomacy and civil society engagement. Türkiye matters for trade, logistics, and Abkhazia's wider social connections. The point is not to create another ceremonial format. The point is to build a flexible ecosystem that can reach societies, not only governments. I deliberately do not mention the U.S. in this discussion, because Georgian security and de-occupation is first a Georgian and then a European problem. And only then is it American.

The File Not to Be Parked Again

For too long, Georgia was treated as a warning that Europe had not fully absorbed. The August 2008 war was followed by civilian monitoring, common positions, track two and 1.5 formats, and cautious diplomacy, but not by a strategic correction. Russia learned from that. It learned that occupation could be normalized over time, that military facts could become “a new reality,” and that Western attention would move elsewhere.

Ukraine changed the scale, but not the nature, of the problem. Ukraine fought for its territories, independence, and freedom because it had military, human, and moral resources. Not all countries can afford that. However, it is erroneous to assume that the Russian occupation can only be resolved by force. Europe is not good at showing force, but it has an excellent track record of using its economic, financial, and soft-power magnetism to attract people's hearts and minds. And the residents of the occupied regions, believe it or not, also have hearts and minds. And many of them feel more European than Russian.

After the Russia-Ukraine war ends, Europe will face a choice. It can design a security architecture that addresses Russian revisionism as a whole, including Georgia and Moldova, or it can settle the largest war while leaving earlier occupations intact, hoping that old wounds will stay quiet. They will not.

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Georgia is not a side theatre. It is where the 2008 war remains unfinished, where Russia still holds military positions inside an EU candidate country, where the Black Sea meets the South Caucasus, where Europe's connectivity agenda passes through a politically captured state (a few kilometers from the illegal Russian military bases), and where the next contest between Russian coercion and European statecraft is already underway. If Europe forgets Georgia again, even if the current reasons are legitimate, Russia will not ■