

PICTURE STORY

Privileged Interest? The Russian debate on the South Caucasus

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For centuries, the South Caucasus region, a patchwork of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, was the playground of empires – Persian, Ottoman and Russian. In the early 19th century, the territory of today’s Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan was annexed by Tsarist Russia. In 1918, each of the three states declared independence. It was to be short-lived. Soviet rule was imposed in 1920 and the region was all but neglected by the West during the decades that followed.

The South Caucasus returned to the international arena in the early 1990s following the fall of the Soviet Union. Though the collapse of the USSR brought about the independence of all three South Caucasus republics, it also marked the beginning of a severe economic downturn, violent contestation of Soviet-time borders, extreme political tensions, and the displacement of millions of people.

Russia, however, with its empire gone but many of its imperial entanglements intact, maintained troops on the ground in all three states. This generated the main themes of the current Russian debate on the Caucasus: the fear of losing influence, often allied to a sense of frustration; the belief that control of the Caucasus is vital to Russia’s standing as a great power; and a sense of growing rivalry not only with the US but also with the EU in this region.



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Russia's dilemma: partnership or empire?



Kremlin domes. Photo: flickr/Yukon White Light

For centuries, the South Caucasus region, a patchwork of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, was the playground of empires – Persian, Ottoman and Russian. In the early 19th century, the territory of today's Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan was annexed by Tsarist Russia. In 1918, each of the three states declared independence. It was to be short-lived. Soviet rule was imposed in 1920 and the region was all but neglected by the West during the decades that followed.

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Andranik Migranyan, a well-known Russian expert on the South Caucasus and an outspoken critic of US and European policies, wrote in 2007:

“In the South Caucasus, Russia has already lost Georgia and Azerbaijan: the US, Turkey and the EU have already established themselves in these countries. Georgia has taken on the role of NATO's and the West's outpost and calls, in essence, for a crusade against Russia, identifying itself as the key

anti-Russian force in the region. In these circumstances, Armenia remains the only country which retains its traditional and strategic ties to Russia.”¹

Migranyan argued that the way for Russia to ensure Armenia’s pro-Russian stance is by providing more financial aid, investment, and possibly even lower gas prices. Other analysts have questioned Migranyan’s prescription. In April 2009, Sergey Mikheev of the Center for Political Technologies wrote:

“We are no longer going to ‘feed’ anyone, enough! Our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States have turned politics into trade – they want to be with those who give them more money. My understanding of politics is as follows: either you have a natural partnership, or you don’t. Russia is not going to buy anyone’s friendship. If Turkmenistan, Armenia or Belarus believe that others will pay well for their friendship, then let it be, we won’t hinder them. But ultimately, such a policy will turn out to be detrimental to their interests.”²

Then again, turning its back to the region is not considered an option for Russian policy makers either. A second recurrent theme is the real or symbolic importance of the region for Russia’s status as a world power. In 2004 Mikhail Leontiev – one of Putin’s favourite TV journalists – published an article tellingly entitled “The Union of the Sword and the Ploughshare”. In it, he celebrated the restoration of Russia to a position of strength under President Putin:

“Russians have a huge desire to see a renaissance of their country, a restoration of its role, power, and national dignity. As underlined by all sociological studies – regardless of the differences in the assessments – these sentiments all point to the same fact: it is a demand for revenge. Putin as a political phenomenon was born out of that feeling of humiliated national dignity and the craving for a revenge.”

One way to act on this craving for revenge is a more assertive foreign policy:

“... it was important to regenerate Russia’s vital interests in the territories around its borders. Without the neighbouring countries located in the so-called post-Soviet space, Russia cannot be viewed as an economically and, moreover, politically self-sufficient sovereign state. The latter means restoring the Russian state as a player in international politics, as well as maintaining its sovereignty. It should be noted that only a handful of contemporary countries enjoy genuine sovereignty; the others either lack the chances of becoming truly sovereign or delegate a part of their powers – more or less voluntarily – to some great power. Except for a few international outcasts, several countries have real sovereignty – the U.S., China, India and Russia. Germany, Britain or Japan, for example, cannot be categorized as truly sovereign nations.”³

¹ Andranik Migranyan, “[Elections in Armenia and Russia’s Strategic Interests](#)” (in Russian), *Politcom.ru*, 5 April 2007.

² Sergey Mikheev, “[Yerevan Should Understand that Russia Cannot Formulate Its Policy in the Region Tying It to Armenia’s Interests](#)” (in Russian), *Novoye Vremya*, 30 April 2009.

³ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/7/519.html>

If Germany and Japan have no true sovereignty, it follows, then clearly Georgia or Azerbaijan cannot claim to have any either! In line with such thinking, the Caucasus states' only potential source of patronage – the only great power they should look to – is Russia.



"Welcome to Mestia". Soviet tourist sign in the Svaneti region, Northern Georgia. Photo: flickr/tomaradze

Even those who believed that relations between the newly independent states of the South Caucasus and post-Soviet Russia could develop in an amicable way shared these assumptions. In early 2004 [Sergey Karaganov](#) wrote the following on the subject of Georgian-Russian relations:

"Russia may toughen its policy toward Georgia if the regime in Tbilisi is transformed into an externally-controlled one. This move by Russia is even more likely considering the growing overconfidence and nationalist sentiments on the part of the Russian elite, which manifested themselves during the election campaign prior to the December 2003 parliamentary election."

He also saw the possibility of a different scenario:

"... if the new Georgian leaders are not downright insane – and I am almost confident of their good sense – they must be given a chance; we must open for them a road to the north, to Russia. To this end, it is necessary that we first start pursuing a friendly and indulgent policy toward Georgia, a policy befitting a strong state such as Russia. It is necessary that we offer Georgia the carrot (the stick will always be with us, and there is no need to display it, since everyone knows that it is there)."⁴

Such thinking – that the Caucasus is Moscow's to lose, that local elites in the South Caucasus states have to accept a dominant Russian role and that a loss of influence would mark Russia's demise as a great power – nourishes the view of the region as a theatre of strategic confrontation with the US, NATO and even, increasingly, the EU. This view already figured in the debate in 2004, President Mikheil Saakashvili's first

⁴ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/6/507.html>

year in power and year one of the big-bang East European enlargement. It was then that Russian analyst and EU expert [Timofey Bordachev](#) noted that rivalry in the common neighbourhood between Russia and the EU was almost inevitable:

"Russia and Europe have been increasingly divided by problems associated with the post-Soviet space. Moscow's projects for economic integration between the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and its own strategy of settling local conflicts, did not receive a positive response from the EU. On the other hand, the European Union has to intensify its policy toward countries in the western part of the CIS and in the South Caucasus, since following EU enlargement these regions will become the Union's immediate neighbors. Simultaneously, the European project attracts the attention of the elites in a majority of post-Soviet states – a factor that greatly increases the rivalry between Russia and the European Union."⁵

Writing at roughly the same time, Caucasus expert Vladimir Degoev, head of the Centre of Caucasus Studies, also predicted a growing rivalry between Europe (not NATO!) and Russia in the region.

"In 1991, an expanding Europe once again turned its attention to the Caucasus. The situation at the time there was unprecedented – never in the past had the countries of the region enjoyed so many opportunities to formulate their national goals as full-fledged members of the international community ... Until fairly recently, the European Union mostly admitted to its ranks the countries and nations belonging to the European cultural, historical and geographic space. The Caucasus has never been part of the Occidental civilization, and its integration into the EU – something that officials in the regional countries often mention today – will be problematic even on the conditions of associated membership, especially if the problem of European identity comes into the limelight."

Degoev has little patience or respect for the Caucasus states' autonomous development. Russia, he argues, has a right and a duty to reorganise its neighbourhood. The EU must either accept this or face potential conflict.

"Whatever the projects designed for the Caucasus, they are doomed if they ignore Russian interests. The immediate neighbourhood of the South Caucasus is of automatic concern for Russia's national security. The last thing the Kremlin will be ready to part with is the right to defend Russia's southern borders from the variegated threats emerging from sections across the Caucasian Range, and there are signs that Moscow is toughening its stance on the issue. ...

Europe is an entirely external player in the Caucasian geopolitical theater, and the EU in its current structural and institutional condition is an entirely new player. It may make any declarations about its goals, but its presence in the region that used to be part of the Soviet Union will continue to keep Moscow on alert. As for the possible deployment of NATO and/or EU military

⁵ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/7/526.html>

infrastructures along Russia's southern flanks, the reaction from the Kremlin would be even more predictable."

He concludes, ominously:

"Presently, it is difficult to outline the contours of a compromise that Moscow would be ready to make with the West in Transcaucasia. Obviously, it will not object to a mutually beneficial business partnership and honest economic competition. But the idea of turning Azerbaijan, Georgia or Armenia into a military and political affiliation of the EU will inevitably encounter Russia's resistance with all of the negative consequences concerning peace and stability in the South Caucasus."⁶

All of the above renders Russia's perceptions of the Caucasus of great importance to its relations with the rest of Europe. There is suspicion of outside designs – even the modestly ambitious Eastern Partnership launched by the EU in May 2009 is seen through the lens of potentially “losing” the region to a geopolitical rival. Russia also has little respect for independent policy-making by the South Caucasus states. All this makes the region volatile and dangerous. The 2008 war in Georgia did little to counter this impression.

In fact, for many Russian analysts the main source of instability in the Caucasus region is Western policy, particularly following the 2004 EU enlargement and the experience of “velvet revolutions”:

“New NATO and the European Union members, such as Poland and the Baltic States, contributed a lot to the irritation in Russian-Western relations, as they – out of petty egoism – did their best to impede the establishment of a business partnership between Moscow and Euro-Atlantic structures. This policy by the Russophobe leaders of those states enjoyed U.S. support – just as in the case with Georgia – which could not but tell on the Russian-U.S. dialogue. NATO's expansion to former Soviet republics, colored by an ideological tint, marked the beginning of a new phase that can be described as a rivalry for influence in post-Soviet territory using nonconfrontational means. The ‘democratic revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine, instilled in the Western public consciousness as opposed to ‘autocratic tendencies’ in Russia, moved this rivalry into the field of heated international debates about social development models, election technologies, and the role of non-governmental organizations in elections.

An analysis of elections in Slovakia, [Serbia](#) and especially Ukraine gave Moscow weighty grounds for concluding that the United States and its NATO allies used the democracy rhetoric as a cover. Thus, the mechanisms created and financed by the West for replacing unwanted regimes formally acquired a political legitimacy. Many experts even began to speak of the danger of creating a *cordon sanitaire* along Russia's western and southern borders, including neighboring states unfriendly to Russia ranging from Estonia to Georgia.”

⁶ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/9/711.html>

Never has it been more important to understand and engage with Russian views of the region. It is only on the basis of such an understanding that a credible European policy towards the South Caucasus can be defined.

The Russian debate on the South Caucasus contains multiple strands and takes place in different arenas. A new [*Russia Debates the Caucasus manual*](#), produced by ESI, covers the most important institutions, experts, and media sources that shape public opinion and official policy in the South Caucasus.

This picture story highlights some of the main recent themes.

Medvedev and Putin on red lines in the Caucasus



Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin at the Victory Day parade in Moscow, May 2009.
Photo: drzz.info

Dmitry Medvedev, born in 1965 in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), was elected President in March 2008. He won over 70 percent of the vote and succeeded the powerful and popular Vladimir Putin, who had been president since 2000. Putin then became Prime Minister in the new Russian government.

The election campaign was criticized as grossly skewed in favour of the Putin-backed Medvedev. The OSCE [boycotted](#) the elections altogether, citing the “limitations and restrictions” imposed by Russia on the organization’s electoral observers. Many felt that Medvedev would be no more than a place-holder, continuing Putin’s political course. Some hoped that the young president, coming from a legal background and not the secret services, would steer Russia toward a more liberal policy. In his [inauguration speech](#), Medvedev stressed the importance of respecting human rights and freedoms. However, he was to continue Russia’s assertive policy with regard to the South Caucasus in general and Georgia in particular.

After the military intervention in Georgia in August 2008, President Medvedev endorsed the independence of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He underlined that “the recognition of South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence was the only possible solution. This decision will not be reviewed.”⁷ He saw the war in August 2008 as a major turning point: “Almost immediately after these events it occurred to me that for Russia, August 8, 2008, was almost like September 11, 2001, in the United States. There were many useful lessons from 9/11 in the United States. I would like the world to draw its own lessons from what happened. The world changed.”⁸

⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL8610074>

⁸ <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/Russian-President-Dmitry-Medvedev-Says-The-Georgia-War-Was-Like-Russias-9-11/Article/200809215098289>

Soon thereafter, he presented his “Five Principles of Russia’s Foreign Policy” in an interview given to three Russian TV channels:

1. Supremacy of international law;
2. Multipolarity. In Medvedev’s words, Russia cannot accept a “world order in which one country decides everything, even if it’s a country as powerful as the United States.” Unipolarity, he added, leads to instability and increases the potential for conflict;
3. Engagement. Russia does not desire confrontation and is not planning to “isolate itself” from the international community;
4. The protection of Russian citizens “wherever they are.” Medvedev emphasized that Russia would also protect the interests of its business community abroad;
5. Finally, “Russia, just like other countries in the world, has *regions of its privileged interests*.” These regions are not limited to countries bordering Russia.

A more detailed summary of the interview is available on the website of [Rossiiskaya Gazeta](#) (in Russian). A summary in English can be found [here](#) (BBC, 1 September 2008).



Vladimir Putin. Photo: Russian government

Vladimir Putin, Russia’s former President (2000-2008) and current Prime Minister, shares these views. He spoke at length about the Caucasus and Georgia in an address to the members of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2008:

“Concerning the sovereignty of former Soviet republics: Russia was the initiator of the USSR’s disintegration. If not for the Russian position, the USSR would still have existed. We made this decision a long time ago. We had no desire to infringe on the sovereignty of former Soviet republics; we actually support this sovereignty. But let’s look at the realities on the ground.

First, I have spoken about this many times: we have to find common rules of behaviour in the international arena. One cannot make the nation’s right to self-determination the cornerstone principle in Kosovo’s case and at the same

time choose the principle of territorial integrity in Georgia's case. Let us negotiate the rules we will live by.

We spoke about this many times and warned about it, too. We asked not to create a precedent in Kosovo. But no, they got their way. No one would listen, everyone forgot about international law, forgot about UN resolutions, forgot about everything.

They did as they wanted, did as they saw fit based on their geopolitical interests. I mean our Western partners and primarily, of course, our American partners, while the Europeans just followed. OK, so they did it.

But I am drawing your attention to this fact: we did not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after Kosovo.... As I recently said in public, we 'swallowed' it, in fact. Everything that I did back then was sign the order to develop economic relations with these territories. And, by the way, this was in the spirit of the requirements set out by the United Nations, which insisted on not isolating these territories economically. And that was it. In principle, we were ready for further dialogue.

But no, they had to use armed forces here [in South Ossetia] as well. They like so much to shoot and bomb, so they thought they would have success here too. Anyway, if there is no success anywhere else – neither in Afghanistan, nor in Iraq nor in the Middle East – why did they decide they would be successful here? And they have failed here, and will fail in the future ...”⁹



Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, at a press conference in Moscow (January 2009).
Photo: runet.lt

⁹ Government of the Russian Federation official website, “Vladimir Putin Meets the Participants of the Valdai International Discussion Club” (in Russian), 11 September 2008.
<http://www.premier.gov.ru/pda/events/597.html>

Sergey Lavrov, born in 1950 in Moscow, is the Foreign Minister of Russia since 2004. He has also long warned against NATO's enlargement in Russia's neighbourhood. In October 2008, he noted:

“The August events... have had far-reaching geopolitical consequences, in particular for North Atlantic politics. It would have been difficult to highlight the inefficiency of the European security architecture any better than the Saakashvili regime did. Fragmented, with the pretence of NATO-centricity, this architecture was unable to prevent either the reckless military venture or the supplying of large volumes of offensive arms to the Tbilisi regime, which made the venture possible.”¹⁰

Further reading:

- [Dmitry Medvedev's LiveJournal videoblog](#)
- [The Draft of the European Security Treaty](#) proposed by Russia and published on the Kremlin's website on 29 November 2009 represents Russia's attempt to develop a “new pan-European security treaty” based on the initiative put forward by Medvedev in June 2008. The draft envisions supporting the role of the UN Security Council, where Russia holds a veto. It states that “Any security measures taken by a Party to the Treaty individually or together with other Parties, including in the framework of any international organization, military alliance or coalition, shall be implemented with due regard to security interests of all other Parties.” Russia's initiative has been so far perceived with caution by Western experts.
- [Medvedev's interview](#) with German magazine *Spiegel* (in English), published on 11 September 2009. In it, Medvedev discusses the fall of the Berlin Wall, Russia's policy toward its neighbours and Russian civil society.
- [Go, Russia!](#), published on 10 September 2009 on Gazeta.ru. In this recent article, Dmitry Medvedev delivers scathing criticism of Russia as he speaks of the country's “primitive economy based on raw materials and endemic corruption,” as well as “the inveterate habit of relying on the government, foreign countries, on some kind of comprehensive doctrine, on anything or anyone – as long as it's not ourselves.” He challenges Russians to engage in discussion on how to modernize the country. *Go Russia* (also translated as *Forward Russia!*) has been widely read and discussed in Russia and abroad. The official English translation of the speech can be found [here](#).

¹⁰ “Speech by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov”, *Körber Stiftung, 141st Bergedorf Round Table*, 24-26 October 2008, <http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/international-affairs/bergedorf-round-table/round-tables/141st-round-table.html>

Establishment Debates: Council for Foreign and Defence Policy



Valdai Club participants visit Gazprom headquarters, September 2009. Photo: Gazprom

The [Council for Foreign and Defense Policy](#) (CFDP), was founded in February 1992 by a group of political leaders, leading entrepreneurs, representatives of the military, scholars and media professionals. Today, CFDP is known as one of the most influential analytical centres in Russia.

Among the projects implemented by CFDP (in cooperation with other partners) is the annual Valdai Discussion Club, a government-funded discussion forum on Russia's role in the world. Another is *Russia in Global Affairs*, an English-language journal widely seen as one of the best sources on the Russian debate on foreign policy.

CFDP publications often lead to wider debates. In November 2009, a group of CFDP experts – Sergey Dubinin, Evgeny Savostyanov, and Igor Yurgens – published an article under the title [“A New Entente”](#) in *gazeta.ru*. The authors advocate the creation of a political and defence alliance with the United States, arguing that only the US is suitably positioned to become a strategic partner for Russia. None of the other regional players in the world would make good allies:

“China, throughout its history spanning thousands of years, has never been anyone's ally – and will not be. The friendship of Collective Security Treaty members is unreliable, always very costly and may lead one to become involved in their internal conflicts. Today's Europe is a well-to-do and closed world concentrating on its problems, separated from the sea of political passions by the reefs of Egypt – Israel – Turkey – Russia.”

The debate in Russia in Global Affairs



Mikhail Troitsky – Fyodor Lukyanov (chief editor)

Russia in Global Affairs, founded in November 2002 by the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (CFDP), the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, and the *Izvestia* daily, is an English-language journal published on a quarterly basis. It is [accessible online free of charge](#). Its editorial board includes the chairman, [Sergey Karaganov](#); Martti Ahtisaari, Nobel Prize Winner and former President of Finland; Carl Bildt, Foreign Minister of Sweden; Helmut Kohl; and Sergey Lavrov and Igor Ivanov, both in personal capacity. The editor-in-Chief is Fyodor Lukyanov.

Russia in Global Affairs has published many contributions to the debate on the South Caucasus. The following are some of the most interesting recent articles on the region:

Mikhail Troitsky, “Accepting the Inevitable?”, *Russia in Global Affairs*. no. 2, April – June 2009

Troitsky discusses the forces behind US policy toward the South Caucasus and Georgia in particular:

“U.S. policy in the South Caucasus has been affected by two powerful domestic interest groups – the Armenian lobby, which prevented Washington from developing relations with Armenia’s rival – Azerbaijan – in 1991-1994, and transnational energy corporations that grew increasingly interested in the Azeri and Kazakh oil and natural gas after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Eventually, the latter groups made sure that the United States normalized relations with Azerbaijan and supported the Contract of the Century – the 1994 deal to develop Azeri oil by an international consortium involving – among others – Britain’s BP, America’s Amoco and Russia’s Lukoil.

On the ‘ideological front,’ starting from 2003 the Bush administration consistently presented Georgia as a showcase of democratic transformation and Washington’s important ally in the global fight against terrorism. The U.S. officials made repeated statements that Georgia was a democracy stronghold in the South Caucasus, a society which had successfully removed authoritarian rulers and had firmly allied with the U.S. As a flip side, America’s international prestige of a supporter of Georgia’s democratic transformation

became dependent on the outcome of the domestic reform and external policies pursued by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.”

Analysing the reasons for war in Georgia in 2008, he notes:

“Debate on whether the United States encouraged or acquiesced with Tbilisi’s plans to invade South Ossetia in August 2008 continues unabated. There is little evidence that Washington could officially approve of such action if consulted by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. Yet it is clear that the April 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration set a timeline for Tbilisi to resolve its internal territorial problems. Under a strong influence by the U.S., which was widely reported in the media, the leaders of NATO countries asserted that Georgia (and Ukraine) ‘will become members of NATO’ and announced that a further decision on the prospects for Georgia’s (and Ukraine’s) NATO membership would be made at the December 2008 meeting of NATO foreign ministers. The next step could have been granting a Membership Action Plan to Georgia. In any case, the Bucharest declaration clearly implied that Tbilisi had several remaining months of 2008 to achieve a decisive progress in the reunification as a precondition for joining NATO. Tbilisi took the Bucharest message as a green light for dealing with the breakaway regions as it wished. In their turn, American policymakers, knowing the situation on the ground, could have little doubt that Tbilisi would choose to resort to military force.”

And looking forward:

“For all its interest in the South Caucasus, the United States was not prepared to seriously commit itself to the defense of the Transcaucasian republics. Apart from moral support, Georgia did not receive the material backing it expected from Washington during the military confrontation with Russia over South Ossetia in August 2008. As long as U.S. President Barack Obama is intent on pursuing a more pragmatic foreign policy than his predecessor, who considered supporting Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to be a matter of principle, American stakes in the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may decrease. However, even if the ideological component of U.S. policy in the South Caucasus becomes less pronounced, Washington’s material interests will persist in America’s support of Georgia.”¹¹

Interview with Troitsky on [Russia Today](#).

Mikhail Delyagin, “A Testing Ground for Modernization and a Showcase of Success”, *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 1, January - March 2009

This is a detailed discussion of the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The author argues that the success or failure of the “normalization” of South Ossetia is an important test for “Russia’s ability to promote development,” with Abkhazia “an outside testing ground for modernization”:

¹¹ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/27/1283.html>

“The greater part of the region’s potential can be tapped only with the aid of Russian financing and through access to its markets, which makes Moscow’s policy a key factor in Abkhazia’s development. The key task is to raise the quality of management in the region, including state administration. Management today combines zeal with the absence of elementary skills. It is enough to mention that Abkhazia does not accumulate data for calculating the inflation index and the authorities have to make judgments about the economy based on cost indicators.

The transfer of trivial knowledge and skills by Russian managers and experts, which was previously blocked because Abkhazia was not officially recognized, will speed up its development and will help Russia train specialists for its own modernization. These people will be unique due to their experience with constructive creative activity in Abkhazia (rather than stealing) and because of their zeal to win (as opposed to the current defeatism of Russian red tape).

Abkhazia needs standard mechanisms for promoting its image, including making its virgin and fervently-protected natural surroundings popular. It should stress the idea that the denial of Abkhazian recognition is fraught with destruction of the environment. The West is usually not prepared to help people, but it quite often supports them together with some nice-looking ‘shrubs’. Just a single film about Abkhazia’s natural wonders on the National Geographic Channel would do more for the region than any big investor ...

Russia needs its own offshore zone, as such zones are not only tools for tax evasion, but also levers of global manipulation of capital. Big business needs such zones, including Russian business ... Abkhazia may take on the role of an offshore financial center, along with the Kaliningrad Region. Since most countries have not recognized Abkhazia, the functions of a registration center may be delegated to a Russian town close to the border. Abkhazia would get dividends in the form of salaries of token directors and business activity, while Russia would get an instrument of global business maneuvering not subject to external controls.

Russia needs a seaside resort that is close, but along with assigning that role to Abkhazia it is essential to protect the environment. The region may grow into an analogue of Montenegro for Russians in terms of it being an inexpensive seaside holiday and there could be investment in real estate as early as in the next two years. It is time to drop the Soviet-era mania of erecting concrete edifices, oil refineries and all such things in recreational areas. **Poverty dictates that the Abkhazians cannot choose investors, so control over environmental standards of production facilities in the region should become Russia’s responsibility.”**

As for South Ossetia’s economic future:

“Russia’s goal is to bring South Ossetia’s economy and living standards to the average level of Russian regions that make up the South Federal District (all of which are in depression except for the Rostov Region, the Krasnodar and

Stavropol Territories) by 2011.

A total of 16 billion rubles will be allocated to restore the first 750 examined facilities under a restoration plan for 2009-2011 and another 9.5 billion rubles will be needed for priority measures. In all, allocations for the restoration of South Ossetia will reach 25.5 billion rubles (10 billion rubles in 2009) and this figure will likely increase. For instance, Russian Transport Minister Igor Levitin has requested 40 billion rubles to rebuild roads in North and South Ossetia from 2008-2015. **Some of the money will come from the budget of North Ossetia, which means that South Ossetia will be plugged into Russia’s budgetary system. One can also surmise that the region could be united with North Ossetia after it reaches the average economic level of the South Federal District.**¹²



Russian Ambassador at the United Nations, Vladimir Churkin. Photo: blog.kievukraine.info

Sergey Markedonov, “Regional Conflicts Reloaded”, *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October - December 2008.

Markedonov blames successive actions by the government in Tbilisi for ‘unfreezing’ conflicts in Georgia/ South Ossetia/ Abkhazia. 2004, he argues, was a turning point in Russian-Georgian relations:

“The fifth stage can be described as ‘unfreezing’ the conflict. It began with attempts by Tbilisi to revise the balance of forces in South Ossetia and the political-legal format of the settlement. The Rose Revolution in Georgia in October-November 2003 and Mikheil Saakashvili’s stunning victory in the presidential election in January 2004 (he got a landslide 97 percent of the votes) were all mobilized by a ‘patriotic resource,’ as was the case in the 1990s. In their speeches, Saakashvili and his associates called for rebuilding

¹² <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/26/1266.html>

one Georgia and taking revenge for ‘national humiliation’ in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

On May 31, 2004, Georgia sent 300 special task force fighters to South Ossetia under the pretext of combating smuggling, but without consulting the Joint Control Commission (JCC). JCC participants branded the move as a breach of the Dagomys accords of 1992. Georgia then accused the Russian peacekeepers of ethnic bias and crimes. On July 20, 2004, the Georgian president publicly stated that he did not rule out a denunciation of the Dagomys accords: ‘If the Georgian flag cannot be hoisted in the territory of the Tskhinvali district within the framework of the agreements, I’m prepared to walk out on them.’

Saakashvili’s statement indicated three goals he was striving to achieve:

- internationalize the Georgian-Ossetian conflict by involving the United States and European countries in its settlement;
- reformat the conflict from Georgian-Ossetian to Georgian-Russian, and present it as a manifestation of Russian neo-imperialism;
- reject Russia’s exclusive role as the guarantor of peace in the region.

It is the realization of these goals that became the quintessence of the fifth stage of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.”

And he continues:

“A second war began in South Ossetia from August 8-19, 2004. The parties did not only use small arms in this confrontation, but also artillery. Although the warring sides had stopped fighting briefly by the end of the month, August (a fateful period in the conflict) 2004 marked the beginning of a new wave of shellings, attacks, provocations and blockades of vital lines of communications. From this time on, the tactics of ‘small incidents of overreaction involving the military’ became daily routine in South Ossetia.

This brief war (which has been forgotten and eclipsed by ‘the hot August’ of 2008) was a turning point in Russian policy in the region. Until 2004, Moscow had been anxious to stay unbiased and neutral, and keep the status-quo as the best way out. After 2004, Russia, realizing that the security of the whole North Caucasus depended on the situation in South Ossetia, de facto took the side of the self-proclaimed republic.

First, Moscow began to view Tskhinvali as an instrument to influence Tbilisi (which had started out by then not just on a very pro-American, but also on an anti-Russian path). Second, the loss of South Ossetia was seen as a threat to Russia itself. The still unresolved Ossetian-Ingush conflict was closely linked to the situation around the self-proclaimed republic. In 2004-2006, the Georgian parliament adopted a range of resolutions calling the Russian peacekeeping mission ‘negative’ and Russia’s actions as ‘an undisguised annexation.’ In the autumn of 2006, Tbilisi launched the project of ‘an

alternative South Ossetia’ by putting the Georgian flag into the hands of Dmitry Sanakoyev, a former prime minister and defense minister of South Ossetia. The purpose of the project was to reformat the negotiating process (by actually giving up direct dialog with Tskhinvali).

...

Tbilisi was feeling increasingly confident as the United States and its allies turned a blind eye to the violations of peace accords with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and reacted half-heartedly to backtracking from democratic standards inside the country: such as a crackdown on the opposition on November 7, 2007, and the use of administrative resource to fight the opposition during elections in Adzharia in 2004 and at municipal elections in 2006.

In 2008, Moscow also contributed to the ‘unfreezing’ of conflicts in Georgia. On March 21, the State Duma adopted a statement which outlined two conditions for a possible recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia’s accession to NATO and use of force against the two self-proclaimed republics). In April, Vladimir Putin, as the outgoing Russian president, instructed the federal government to provide ‘substantive assistance’ to the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The instruction envisioned, among other things, the establishment of direct contacts between Moscow and Tskhinvali and Sukhumi. The West, whose response was immediate and tough, said that Georgia’s territorial integrity was its priority.

Nevertheless, the status quo was disrupted in South Ossetia before August 7, 2008, and, to a lesser extent, in Abkhazia as well. During the armed clashes four years ago, some 70 people died (today these casualties have simply been forgotten), while in subsequent years the number of deaths on each side (according to different estimates) totaled 100. Quantity evolved into quality in August 2008.”

The new situation is viewed as extremely dangerous. Frozen conflicts, warns Markedonov, have by now thawed.

“In 2008, confrontations within the CIS attained a qualitatively new level. Although they were primarily caused in the early 1990s by the break-up of the Soviet Union, today they are motivated not by past inertia, but by the current dynamics of the development and construction of new nation-states. ... **‘Frozen conflicts’ are a thing of the past decade, which disappeared together with Yeltsin’s generation. Now conflicts are conceived and resolved by the post-Soviet generation of politicians, who work out new rules as the game progresses.”**

Looking at the 2008 war in perspective, he takes stock of Russia’s fear of instability in the Northern Caucasus:

“Russia took military actions beyond its territory for the first time in years. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russian military and borderguards

took part in containing two civil wars in Tajikistan (1992-1997) and Georgia (1993). Later, the Russian army only fought on its own territory. In 2008, the format of the Russian army's operations abroad differed dramatically from the experience of both the imperial and Soviet periods.

Russian troops did not want to resolve ideological tasks (as was the case with the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1849; and during the events in Budapest in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968). The purpose of the operation was not to expand territory, which Tbilisi keeps insisting was Moscow's objective. The action 'to compel Georgia toward peace' was meant to ensure in the first place the safety of the North Caucasus. **Had Russia kept silent during the attack on South Ossetia, some forces in the North Caucasus might have tried to replay, for example, 'the conflict over North Ossetia's Prigorodny district.'**

The Kremlin's ineptitude and unwillingness to spell out its national interests (for fear of looking weak and vulnerable) is another matter. **In any case, Moscow staked out its role in the post-Soviet terrain in a similar way to the U.S. role in Latin America, the Israeli role in the Middle East, Australia's in Oceania, and France's in the former colonies of 'Black Africa'.** It was an entirely new designation of a zone where Moscow had vital and legitimate interests."

He concludes:

"As Russian political scientist Andrei Ryabov rightly said about the different political potentials of the West in the Balkans and the Caucasus: unlike the Balkan policies, 'the Western community has ideas regarding the South Caucasus, and these ideas are increasing in number, but their resources – diplomatic, political and economic – are apparently insufficient to influence the opinion of the parties to the conflict and to make them agree with the West's view of the problem.' ... **In any case, we got an entirely new South Caucasus with a totally new agenda in August 2008. The work to realize this agenda is just beginning.**"¹³

Interview with Markedonov on [Russia Today](#).

Read also:

- Sergey Markedonov, ["The Paradoxes of Russia's Georgia Policy"](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no.2, April – June 2007.
- Sergey Markedonov, ["Without Friends and Foes"](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 3, July-September 2008
On Azerbaijan's policies.
- Sergey Markedonov, ["Unrecognized Geopolitics"](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, January- March 2006

¹³ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/25/1247.html>

Analyzes the issues related to “unrecognized geopolitical entities” such as Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria

Further reading:

Recent articles on the Caucasus in *Russia in Global Affairs*:

- **Alexei Vlassov, [“The End of Multi-Vector Policies”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October-December 2008.**
On the implications of the 2008 war in Georgia for Russia and the CIS, and the inadequacy of “post-Soviet multi-vector policies”.
- **Ivan Kotlyarov, [“The Logic of South Ossetia Conflict”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October-December 2008.**
Provides suggestions for the Russian government on how to act in the aftermath of the conflict and Moscow’s recognition of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence:

“By standing up to defend the South Ossetian population – the majority of which are Russian citizens – from extermination by Georgian troops and to support its own peacekeepers, who had become targets of an unmotivated attack, Russia took the only action that was possible in that situation. The logic of defending the civilian population in the zone of one’s own peacekeeping control is immaculate from both the political and moral point of view, and the operation by the Russian troops was quite correctly described as ‘peace enforcement’. This was not a war against Georgia; this was a peacekeeping action aimed at coercing the aggressor to stop military operations.”
- **Alexander Buzgalin and Andrei Kolganov, [“The Caucasian War and Public Interest”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October-December 2008.**
- **Alexander Aksenyonok, [“Paradigm Change in Russian Foreign Policy”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October-December 2008.**
Defends Russia’s actions in the conflict, argues that the West is not ready for a new security architecture and keeps provoking Russia: “in the view of Russia’s political elite, the demonization of Russia at every given opportunity, artificial attempts to create an enemy image of Russia, and gross violations of the rules of free competition in world markets – all these developments are intended to prevent Russia’s rebirth as a center of power in the rapidly changing world.”
- **Alexander Lukin, [“From a Post-Soviet to Russian Foreign Policy”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 4, October-December 2008.**
Discusses Russia’s national interest, in particular in the aftermath of the 2008 war in Georgia

- **Sergey Minasyan, [“Moratorium on the CFE Treaty and South Caucasian Security”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 3, July-September 2008**
Includes a discussion on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue
- **Fuad Ahundov, [“Who Is to Blame for the Karabakh Impasse?”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs* no. 1, January- March 2008.**
- **Alexander Aksenyonok, [“Self-Determination: Between Law and Politics”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, January- March 2007.**
Compares and contrasts the Kosovo situation with that of Georgia.
- **Yekaterina Kuznetsova, [“The Near Abroad: Increasingly Far Away from Russia”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, January-March 2005**
Discusses Russia’s policy in the near abroad, providing substantial analysis of Russian-Georgian relations. Argues that “helping post-Soviet states to restore their integrity would bring Russia more dividends than the hopeless and costly support for the unrecognized autonomies.”
- **Vladimir Degoev, [“Wider Europe’s Horizons in the Caucasus”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, October – December 2004**
- **Vladimir Kazimirov, [“Looking for a Way Out of the Karabakh Impasse”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, October – December 2004**
- **[“Armenia Amid a Sea of Uncertainty”](#) (survey results), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, October – December 2004**
Discusses four scenarios for Armenia in 2008-2010: integration into the EU; stagnation in isolation; Russia’s outpost; and regional leader.
- **Leonid Radzikhovsky, [“Georgiophobia”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, October – December 2004**
A journalist’s take on the state of Russian-Georgian relations. “Russia is Georgia’s natural ally. To make Georgia understand this, Russia must change its attitude toward its southerly neighbor. First and foremost, we must take our feet off the tabletop and stop putting on arrogant airs.” Advocates cooperation between Russia, Georgia, and the US.
- **Andranik Migranyan, [“Georgia Propelling Its Disintegration”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, October – December 2004**
Critical of Saakashvili’s approach to Abkhazia and South Ossetia: “Today, Saakashvili seems to be propelling a de jure formalization of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence.”
- **Sergei Karaganov, [“Moscow and Tbilisi: Beginning Anew”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1, January-February 2004**
Argues that the new Georgian leadership may be an opportunity for a new start to relations between the two countries; that Russia is not interested in Georgia’s decline or disintegration; and that “friendly assistance to the

Georgian people will be more advantageous in the long term than semi-hostile disregard.”

Russia, Georgia, the world in 2009: Sergey Karaganov



Sergey Karaganov. Photo: unknown

Sergey Karaganov, born in 1952, heads the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy. He is regarded as one of Russia's top foreign policy experts. In 2005, *Foreign Policy* and *The Prospect* (UK) ranked Sergey Karaganov among the world's top 100 public intellectuals.¹⁴ Karaganov's research interests focus primarily on Russian foreign and defence policies, as well as the security and economic aspects of Russian-European relations. Karaganov previously advised former presidents Yeltsin and Putin on foreign policy issues.

An article in the June 2009 issue of *Russia in Global Affairs* sets out his view of Russian-EU rivalry following the Georgia war in 2008. Like many Russian observers, he sees the Kosovo war in 1999 as a turning point in that it convinced Russians that the West could not be trusted:

“This New Epoch is characterized by increased tensions between Russia and the traditional (in Cold War terms) West, caused by objective changes in the alignment of forces and by Moscow's tough and even arrogant policy of revising the model of relations with the West, which had taken shape in the years of chaos and destruction in Russia. The growing tensions expanded into a direct confrontation when Georgia attacked South Ossetia and was defeated. This conflict has shown that, despite assurances from all parties, the Cold War has never ended.”

“... in 1999, the United States and European nations, euphoric with feelings of victory in the Cold War and of their righteousness and impunity, attacked Yugoslavia. Russia's attitude towards the West underwent an important psychological change. **Moscow imagined itself repeating the fate of Belgrade bombed by NATO and a process began that led to a profound estrangement between Russia and NATO ... It was the first time since**

¹⁴[“The Prospect/FP Top 100 Public Intellectuals.”](#) *Foreign Policy*, September 2005.

World War II that one country or a group of countries in Europe attacked another European state. There had been many shameful episodes during the Cold War. For example, in the mid-1940s, a British expeditionary corps crushed the Communist guerrilla movement in Greece. In 1953, the East German authorities ordered the opening of fire at a demonstration of workers. In 1956, Soviet tanks suppressed an uprising in Budapest. In 1961, the East German authorities, acting on approval from Moscow, built the Berlin Wall. In 1968, troops from the Soviet Union and its allies invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to the Prague Spring. Yet towns and cities had not been the targets of air strikes since World War II.”

He also describes what he considers false, even naïve, hopes after 1989:

“It seemed that liberal democracy, U.S.-European style, had finally won. But the experience of the past years has shown that this type of political and economic system has only taken root in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They have received huge economic aid – in exchange for part of their sovereignty.

In all probability, the new Russian elite were ready to follow the same path. In the early 1990s, much hope in Russia was pinned on close rapprochement with the West, which sounds naïve today. Russian leaders even spoke about their desire to join NATO (statements to this effect were made by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Vice President Alexander Rutskoy) and the European Union (by Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin). It is difficult to say how seriously the West discussed such scenarios, but it decided against this idea. **Apparently, the EU concluded that integration with Russia, which was too large and potentially independent, would be too expensive for it. In defiance of Moscow’s opinion, NATO began to expand. A historical crossroads was passed.**

It is embarrassing to admit, but the Russian political class of that time initiated the breakup of the Soviet Union and lost some historical Russian territories When giving up the empire (and even part of it which they viewed as the historical territory of their own country), the Russians hoped for the coming of a new era of a ‘common European home’ and the creation of a ‘united and free Europe’ (as put by George H.W. Bush). That was not only starry-eyed self-deception, as everyone predicted at the time that Europe would look like that. This is why the Kremlin believed that written guarantees of the non-expansion of Western institutions, above all NATO, were not necessary and that verbal promises from the leaders of the U.S. and Germany would suffice ... **However, after hesitating in the first few years, the West began to behave like a winner and to view the territories from which the Soviet Union withdrew not as being abandoned voluntarily, but as occupied and freed.** NATO expansion began in 1994 and 1995. The first and the second waves of NATO enlargement had no ideological footing, but there was a desire to consolidate the booty, taking avail of the weakness and chaos in Russia.”

“Expand or die. Washington and its allies decided to consolidate their geopolitical acquisitions in Europe by laying down the markers for a zone of

their economic and political influence ... NATO degraded from the anti-Communist defensive alliance of the Cold War years into an offensive union. The alliance unleashed three major wars over the last decade. NATO committed aggression against Yugoslavia and annexed Kosovo from it. The NATO leader, with a group of its allies, attacked Iraq. NATO is actually waging an offensive war far from its original area of responsibility in Afghanistan – with Russia's consent, it must be admitted. NATO's appetite is increasing. ...NATO expansion towards Russian borders and the inclusion in NATO of countries whose elites had historical complexes with regard to Russia because of their setbacks and defeats in previous centuries, have increased anti-Russian sentiments in the alliance. **I do hope that Tbilisi's attack on South Ossetia and Russia's response to it will prove to be a fruitful episode in the historical perspective. The sacrifice – the Ossetians, Russians and Georgians who died in that war – may not be in vain. Russian troops gave a strong military rebuff to the logic of NATO's infinite expansion which, if not stopped, would inevitably bring about a big war – not in Georgia but around Ukraine, almost in the heart of Europe.**"¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/printver/1279.html>

The EU, Russia and the Caucasus: Timofei Bordachev



Timofei Bordachev. Photo: cceis.ru

In 2007 a group of Russian analysts produced the publication [“The World Around Russia: 2017. An Outlook for the Midterm Future”](#). The group included Sergey Karaganov, Timofei Bordachev, Vagif Guseinov, Fyodor Lukyanov, Vadim Radayev and Igor Yurgens.

The 2017 report sets out to analyze Russia’s position in world politics. It notes:

“For now, however, the external conditions in the military-political sphere can be described as relatively favourable for Russia. The probability of an attack against the Russian Federation by some large nation or coalition is low. Russia has no explicit enemies or potential aggressors in the world – just as it has almost no friends left. Thus, it is not in the situation where it must exhaust itself with a program of militarization, spending exorbitant financial and raw material resources ...

With respect to Russia, it is important to mention the possibility of armed conflicts breaking out near its borders and the danger of getting involved in them; the emergence of an unfriendly military-political environment; the problem of unrecognized states in the post-Soviet area; and NATO’s further eastward expansion (to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova). **NATO expansion to take in Ukraine is especially dangerous, since it would cause a ‘semi-circle’ of mini-crises, including those provoked by the local population, throwing Ukraine back and creating serious problems for Russia and Europe as a whole. Many in Russia may see this move as declaration of a new Cold War. Failure in some way or other to resolve the problem of unrecognized states can provoke crises around them (especially in the Caucasus) within the next two or three years.”**

The chapter on Europe and the EU was written by analyst Timofei Bordachev. He is the Director of the [Center for Integrated European and International Research at Moscow State University’s Higher School of Economics](#). He is also Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the *Russia in Global Affairs* journal, leader of research programs of the Council of Foreign and Defence Policies and a leading researcher at the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences. His starting assumption in this chapter is the current crisis of the European Union following its latest enlargement (page 104):

“An analysis of developments of the last few years provides solid grounds to believe that the EU political project is in a state of systemic crisis, which

could bring about qualitative changes in the entire political and economic system of contemporary Europe. Russia’s EU policy must not be oriented to the Europe of the present or past, but rather to possible scenarios for the development of the European integration project.

Today, the EU is faced with at least four potentially insurmountable strategic problems:

- A substantial weakening of the quality and effectiveness of governance within the EU. The EU’s unprecedented enlargement in 1995-2007 has caused the EU institutions (the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the European Parliament) to exceed the limits of their effectiveness for coordinating the interests of the EU member countries, lobbying groups, and other groups of interests.
- The lack of a common vision of strategic goals for the development of the ‘European project’ (the EU has achieved all of its main goals that are not in conflict with the basic rights of its member states);
- The low economic effectiveness of the prevailing development model in the majority of EU countries;
- The declining level of trust in relations between the member countries on the one hand, and the member countries and EU supranational bodies, on the other. This trend manifests itself, among other things, in the so-called ‘democracy deficit,’ that is, the exclusion of EU citizens from the growing spectrum of political and economic matters.

The so-called ‘soft’ (cultural, political and economic) influence of the EU is tremendous. In the opinion of many representatives of foreign elites, despite its problems, Europe remains a good example of civilized and humane development.

With the exception of two EU member countries (the UK and France), the armed forces of the EU states are not a serious factor to be reckoned with. Military spending in the EU countries is 2.6% and 2.4% of GDP at the most (France and the UK account for 40% of all defense spending), with spending levels in the majority of EU member countries being less than 1.5% of GDP. For example, Germany spends a mere 24 billion euros a year on military programs (as compared with \$382 billion in the U.S.)”

Looking at the future of EU-Russian relations, Bordachev underlines the growing crisis of Europe’s integration model:

“Political relations between Russia and the EU are generally friendly, but political cooperation is rather ineffective and there are strong elements of competition. In the recent period, a clash of interests has surfaced ... Despite the obvious advantages of rapprochement and the creation of a strategic politico-economic union both for the EU and for Russia, this scenario is unlikely in the

next five to seven years. Its realization could become more probable if Russia embarks on the path of economic modernization and political democratization, which would help enhance interest in economic rapprochement and eliminate some of the obstacles to the rapprochement in the ‘democratic values’ sphere ... Presently, it would be expedient for Russia to restore the balance between the political and economic-legal components of its relations with the EU at the level of equitable cooperation between independent agents of international relations. **In the future, Russia could consider its formal accession to an integrated entity that will replace the European Union after the European project overcomes the stage of stagnation. The way out of the emerging stagnation will most likely be found through consolidating the role and significance of sovereign states, which is a traditional path for the EU.”**

Political Technologists: Gleb Pavlovsky



Gleb Pavlovsky, head of the Foundation for Effective Politics. Photo: Konstantin Zavrazhin

Gleb Pavlovsky, Russia's best-known political technologist and consultant, is the head of the pro-government [Foundation for Effective Politics](#). He is a constant presence in the media. The FEP has launched several popular websites including [Strana.ru](#), [Vesti.ru](#), [Smi.ru](#), [Ukraina.Ru](#), [Inosmi.ru](#). *Time Magazine*, discussing Pavlovsky's role in the 1999-2000 election campaigns, crowned him "[Russia's Dick Morris](#)" and the "new anti-hero of Russian politics":

"Gleb Pavlovsky, an owlish political consultant with a taste for casual clothes and an abiding reputation for dirty tricks, is being hailed as a genius by the winners and a cynical villain by the losers ... **it is a sign of the times that Putin's election is not credited to a business tycoon or Kremlin staff member but to a professional political organizer--a former dissident and political exile who scorns the 'intellectual poverty' of the Gorbachev years and is bullish on the Internet.** His consulting firm, the Fund for Effective Politics, avoids the limelight but enjoys a reputation for achieving the impossible."

"The main weapon employed by Pavlovsky was the Internet. Only a million or so Russians have access to the Web, he notes, but they are the elite--in universities, government offices, security services and the mass media. This makes the Net a powerful yet dangerous tool, Pavlovsky remarked recently. Through it, he explains, black propaganda can easily be 'laundered' into 'white' press reports."¹⁶

A [2006 article on "Democracy's Doubles"](#) by Ivan Krastev further probes Pavlosky's role:

"Russia's political system can best be grasped by looking at the country's 'political technologists', the Kremlin's infamous grand masters of manipulation. Just as the Soviet regime could not be properly understood without reference to communist ideology, managed democracy today cannot

¹⁶ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,42335,00.html>

be grasped without reference to the political technologists and their view of democracy and politics ...

In a Kremlin world dominated by mediocre apparatchiks, KGB officers, and ruthless oligarchs, the political technologists might look like people from another planet. They come from the milieu of the intelligentsia and the world of alternative culture. Gleb Pavlovsky is a policy intellectual and a former dissident who was persecuted in Soviet times for his ‘reformist delusions’. ... Pavlovsky worked with George Soros and his Open Society Institute in the early 1990s and briefly acted as editor of a Russian version of the *Journal of Democracy*. ... They were Russia’s liberals. In the early 1990s, they proclaimed their belief in free and fair elections, limited government, democratic pluralism, and independent media. Today, however, they have all become ‘political technologists’.

“The Russian political technologist resembles a Western political consultant in the way that the electric chair resembles an armchair. Political consultants in the West (however low one’s opinion of them) work with independent media, and their trade is influencing these media. Political technologists are experts in manipulating dependent media. Political consultants in the West are experts at winning votes for their candidates; political technologists are also specialists in winning votes, but they take matters one step further—they are also specialists in ‘creative counting’ of the votes. A political consultant works for one of the parties in an election and does his best to help that party win; the political technologist is not interested in the victory of his party but in the victory of ‘the system’. His goal is not to maximize the vote for his client, but to obtain an election result as close as possible to the percentage of the vote that the Kremlin has planned for his client ... They are the ideologues and the symbol of Russian managed democracy. They operate in a world of ‘clones’ and ‘doubles’; of ‘administrative resources’, ‘active measures’, and ‘kompromat’ [compromising information] ...

“In the wake of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Modest Kolerov, Pavlovsky’s deputy at the Center for Effective Policies, joined the presidential administration as head of the new ‘anti-Orange’ department dealing with the post-Soviet republics. The political technologist can be found everywhere in the policy process, performing all kinds of jobs. In his role as ‘gray cardinal’, Pavlovsky urged the Kremlin to adopt new legislation that would create a body known as the Public Chamber in order to control Russia’s NGOs. In his role as a policy expert he supported the move, and then in his role as an independent political commentator he explained to the public what a wonderful policy the Kremlin had initiated. The circle was closed.”¹⁷

Gleb Pavlovsky, who was born in Odessa, was also involved in the 2005 Ukrainian election campaign in support of Viktor Yanukovich. In 2006, following the Orange Revolution, the Ukrainian Security Service banned Pavlovsky from entering the

¹⁷ <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/Krastev-17-2.pdf>

country for a period of five years, on grounds that his activities were “contrary to the interests of Ukraine.”¹⁸

In [“How the West Misunderstands Russia”](#) in a recent publication by the European Council on Foreign Relations, Pavlovsky puts forth on Russia’s weakness, its neighbourhood policy and the Southern Caucasus:

“The new Russia has transcended its Soviet identity and managed to put down uprisings in the post-Soviet space as far away as Tajikistan. It has dealt with a new generation of security threats on its territory – such as the societal terror of Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev – entirely on its own ... Russia also helped other new nations in Eastern Europe create identities of their own. Is this not a contribution to international security? Doesn’t all of this demonstrate Russia’s global know-how?”

“Russia’s activities in the Caucasus, especially since 2000, do not only benefit Russia. By bringing recalcitrant minorities into a new security consensus, Russia has helped transform local ethnic conflict into a constructive process of nation-building. Therefore, when Russia claims to be a central element in the security of Eurasia, on a par with the US and the EU, this is not a claim by a Hobbesian state that wants to play the role of the Leviathan. Rather, it is an argument in favour of a universal legal order.”¹⁹

(Full text of ECFR’s publication: [What Does Russia Think?](#))

Further reading:

Commenting on Dmitry Medvedev’s recent (September 2009) critical [article](#) entitled “Forward Russia!” on the necessity of modernization in Russia, Pavlovsky said,

“The country is not ready for modernization; the society is archaic and reactionary, that is why there will be a harsh battle to win the majority. Dmitry Medvedev must issue an insurance policy to those young, energetic people who will become involved in the process of modernization and will have to confront the conservative part of society and the ossification of the state apparatus.”²⁰

How nervous are the Russian elites today? [Rumours on conspiracies](#)

Pavlovsky’s role in the [1999-2000 Russian election campaigns](#).

About [the role of the internet and mass media](#) during this campaign:

¹⁸ “Pavlovsky Barred from Entering Ukraine” (in Russian), *Grani.ru*, 24 October 2006.

<http://www.grani.ru/Politics/World/Europe/Ukraine/m.113335.html>

¹⁹ “How the West Misunderstands Russia”, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2009, p. 74

²⁰ Pavlovsky, “Putin – Medvedev Tandem Moving Toward a Split” (in Russian), *Grani.ru*, 19 November 2009, <http://www.grani.ru/Politics/Russia/President/m.162349.html>

“The Kremlin's favourite PR consultant, Gleb Pavlovsky, lists among the achievements of his Effective Politics Foundation (FEP) three sites which were part of a bitter negative campaign against ex-Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. ... More broadly, the Kremlin's entire policy on media freedom (or even media pluralism) is awaiting clarification, following September's ‘information security doctrine’, whose thrust is that anything that hinders officials' attempts to get their message across to the public is a threat to the state. Mr Pavlovsky called then for a special centre in the Kremlin to take charge of ‘information security’, and reports quickly circulated that a ‘rapid reaction unit’ had been set up to gather and disseminate kompromat on journalists who remained persistently off-message.”

In 2000 Pavlovsky advocated [taking over the Russian mass media](#):

“Gleb Pavlovsky, Vladimir Putin's chief aide on media questions, has published a manifesto on the media on his new website, strana.ru. In it, he says that press freedom, often viewed as a major achievement of Russian reform, has become a tool for the degradation and destruction of society. He blames oligarchs like Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky for this situation, saying that recent moves against them have limited the danger they represent but have not precluded the possible ‘takeover of their holdings’ by foreigners.”

[On Ukraine](#) in 2006:

“Ukraine will remain a creator of problems for Russia and a seller of fears of Russia.”

Recently [on Obama](#):

“And when Gleb Pavlovsky, a close associate of Putin, says Russia is in trouble and needs a friend in the United States, it's clear something has changed. ‘The current world is dangerous, and Russia doesn't have a strategy,’ he says. ‘We need someone with whom we can navigate this new world. We need someone to talk to, to find areas of agreement.’ Pavlovsky believes Obama is that someone.”

The Centre for Political Technologies (CPT)



Alexey Makarkin, Vice President of the Center for Political Technologies.

The [Center for Political Technologies](#) (CPT), founded in 1991, is one of the oldest think tanks in Russia. The Center specialises in political and business consulting and works on promoting Russia's image in the world. CPT has organized a number of events and provided commentary on how to improve Russia's image after the August 2008 war with Georgia.

The Center has a permanent staff of 70 people working in 13 departments; in addition, it regularly hires experienced professionals on a part-time basis in order to support the implementation of different projects. Since 2002 CPT has been running [Politcom.ru](#), an award-winning analytical commentary-focused website. The site is updated daily and receives an average of 6,000 visits per day. The CPT's Department of CIS Countries, headed by political analyst Sergey Mikheyev, tracks developments in the post-Soviet space. It has also been involved in election campaigns in former Soviet republics.

CPT experts regularly publish in leading Russian newspapers and journals such as *Kommersant*, *Profile*, *Vedomosti*, and others, and appear on TV and the radio. While rarely going against mainstream political thinking, CPT analysts tend to embrace a more moderate, pragmatic position on Russian policy toward post-Soviet countries – steering clear of the usual diet of spy stories, mutual accusations, diplomatic scandals, and ideological declarations.

Commenting on the war in Georgia in August 2008 in *Vedomosti*, CPT Expert **Alexey Makarkin** refrained from inflammatory rhetoric, interpreting the events as the result of a two-layered conflict:

“The conflict in South Ossetia (as well as in Abkhazia) has two layers. The first layer is the most evident one and is related to the protracted confrontation

between two peoples, a confrontation that became much sharper after Zviad Gamsakhurdia's attempt to turn Georgia into a unitary state. The second layer became discernible several years ago, when competition between Russia and the US in the post-Soviet space transformed from 'potential' into 'real'. While Russia has patronized the Ossetians from the very beginning (which is unsurprising, given that Russia contains the Republic of North Ossetia), the US has patronized Georgia, actively supporting its political regime, also in the military sphere. This patronage fuelled the ambitions of both parties in the conflict, providing each with an opportunity of turning to their 'big brother' in times of a crisis situation.

The difference lay in the fact that the irresponsibility of the South Ossetian authorities could not lead to a large-scale military action against Georgia (because of the small size of South Ossetian armed units), whereas the irresponsibility on the part of Tbilisi was able to provoke much graver consequences – which is exactly what happened. In this situation, the US at the very minimum did not carry out its containing function vis-à-vis a regime capable of engaging in such adventures. Preoccupied with the geopolitical confrontation with Russia, the Americans viewed their client in the Caucasus as a completely sensible potential NATO member – and this perception had not been seriously undermined even by last year's [2007] crackdown on the opposition's demonstrations in the centre of Tbilisi."²¹

Boris Makarenko, another CPT expert, writes a column on a variety of issues, from the global economic crisis to the elections in Ukraine to NATO, for *Kommersant*. Commenting on the NATO Anniversary Summit in April 2009, Makarenko advocated a less confrontational stance vis-à-vis the Alliance, even on issues as controversial for Russia as Georgia and Ukraine's future membership in NATO:

“As we ‘reset’ the relationship [between Russia and the West], we come to an agreement – both with America and NATO – to treat our disagreements in a constructive way. After all, the [NATO] Summit declaration contains, alongside the correct words about the common strategic interests shared with Russia, the same positions as earlier: the inadmissibility of our recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; the necessity to develop a system of anti-missile defence. These positions – just like the desire (which never disappeared, but has been only postponed) to see Ukraine and Georgia in NATO – were not forced on Europeans by the bad former president of the US but reflect their real vision of the future of their continent. The good news here is the readiness to ‘tolerate’ disagreements in order to develop cooperation in those areas where our interests obviously coincide.”²²

Makarenko maintained the same pragmatic position when commenting on the budding rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey in April 2009:

²¹ Alexey Makarkin, [“The War: The Drama of South Ossetia”](#) (in Russian), *Vedomosti*, no. 148 (2170), 11 August 2008.

²² Boris Makarenko, [“The Importance of the Question”](#) (in Russian), *Kommersant*, no. 60 (4115), 6 April 2009.

“Armenia, having gone through many tests, has come to an understanding that the state of ‘frozen war’ is blocking the opportunity for economic and political development. And Turkey is one more ‘bridge’ to Europe, as well as a quite respectable partner of Azerbaijan. On the Karabakh issue, Turkey can function both as an intermediary and a guarantor – it has already practiced this role in several areas. ...

How important is this for Russia? **One has to understand, again, that there is no such thing as a monopoly on the post-Soviet space, even if we consider an ally ‘with no alternatives’ like Armenia. Armenia was an ally with no other alternatives ...until it began to destroy its own ideological stereotypes.** Therefore, now one has to look for a way to complement the mediation efforts. Let us repeat once again: if you don’t have good relations with your neighbours, you won’t have a strong foreign policy in the rest of the world.”²³

Analyzing President Saakashvili, Makarenko did not engage in the lengthy invective so common in the Russian press, but instead addressed the issue of “charismatic politics”:

“[Saakashvili’s] ascent to power is the result of the dead end in which Georgian politics and Georgian state-building found themselves ... Georgia put its trust in Saakashvili, who stood for the hope of finding a way out from that dead end. Saakashvili, on the other hand, keeps repeating both the achievements of his predecessors (and not only the Georgian predecessors) and their mistakes. One thing working in Saakashvili’s favour is the nation’s unity, which only grew stronger after the lost war. But he himself undermines this unity by his recklessness and his ‘scorched earth’ policy, not only toward the opposition but also toward his own allies. In such a situation, any kind of charisma becomes a drawback. It is not by accident that Saakashvili’s behaviour irritates not only his sworn opponents but even his allies and friends. And this is despite the fact that the Georgian political class has maintained consensus on a number of crucial issues including territorial integrity and the country’s pro-Western orientation.”²⁴

Further reading:

Alexei Makarkin in Open Democracy on the [European factor in Russian politics](#). He also discusses how the Russian political system might change in the future:

“There are two scenarios in which the situation may change. The first, unlikely, one is that the executive will make some move towards limiting its powers, of its own accord, and in its own time. There are no precedents for this in Russian history.

²³ Boris Makarenko, [“The Importance of the Question”](#) (in Russian), *Kommersant*, no. 74 (4129), 24 April 2009.

²⁴ Boris Makarenko, [“The Importance of the Question”](#) (in Russian), *Kommersant*, no. 234 (4051), 23 December 2008.

The second, more likely, scenario is that a change in the socio-political situation will lead to a new unilateral revision of the contract between the state and the populace, with the latter once again clamouring for democratic rights. This revision under pressure from below could become quite dramatic. For we have no civilised procedures for dealing with crises. There is no strong opposition capable of putting forward alternative proposals for political and economic development.”

Alexei Makarkin on the phenomenon of Orange Revolutions in the post-Soviet space (in 2005) in Russia in [Global Affairs](#):

“The expression “orange revolution” stands for those peaceful actions of the middle class (intelligentsia, small and medium-sized businesses, students) of various countries which are aimed at achieving one global goal: Westernization. The participants of these movements do not only desire to live in Europe, but also have grounds for believing that if political changes occur in their country, this dream can come true in 10 to 15 years. It is for this reason they take to the streets where they are prepared to stay in freezing temperatures for days or even weeks. Accordingly, everything that runs counter to European integration – be it the corrupted regime of Eduard Shevardnadze, the autarchy of Slobodan Milosevic, or the pro-Russian candidate Victor Yanukovich – turns out to be on the other side of the barricades.”

Alexander Dugin and Eurasianism



Alexander Dugin holding a Kalashnikov in South Ossetia, June 2008. Photo: Anton Shekhovtsov

Philosopher and political scientist Alexander Dugin, born in 1962 in Moscow, is a controversial figure in the Russian political landscape. His political biography encompasses different allegiances and ideologies – he has been described as a fascist, an anti-Semite and a radical anti-Westerner. Dugin was one of the founders of the National Bolshevik Party, a nationalist outfit. The Party was declared an “extremist” organisation by a court decision in 2007 and has been banned ever since. Dugin is currently the leader of the “International Eurasian Movement”, which aims to promote Russo-centric integration in Eurasia. The movement’s ultimate objective is the creation of a common political and ethnocultural space in Eurasia under Russian leadership.

In an [interview](#) with the *Ekho Moskvy* radio station on the occasion of the August 2008 war with Georgia, Dugin expressed his full support for Russia’s military intervention in Georgia. He argued that international law and post-WWII borders were no longer binding:

“In this case, when the old [international] legal system has collapsed due to the change in the balance of powers, the law of the strongest, again, triumphs over rights ... I actually think that we should not stop at liberating South Ossetia but should move further.”²⁵

“It’s very simple: there are friends and foes, and nothing else is important. And we have to do something similar in Ukraine.”²⁶

²⁵ [Interview with Alexander Dugin](#), by Matvei Ganapolskii. *Ekho Moskvy*, talk show “Osoboe mnenie,” 8 August 2008.

²⁶ [Interview with Alexander Dugin](#), by Matvei Ganapolskii. *Ekho Moskvy*, talk show “Osoboe mnenie,” 8 August 2008.

Dugin has been successful in attaining recognition in Russia. The Eurasianist ideology has allied itself to Russia's official foreign policy orientation in the 2000s. Dugin, in fact, was an advisor to Gennadiy Seleznev, former Speaker of the State Duma. In 2008 Dugin became a professor at Russia's highly prestigious Moscow State University, where he heads the Centre for Conservative Research at the Department of Sociology. Dugin's Eurasianist movement has its own website, www.evrazia.org, containing Dugin's publications, public lectures, and so forth.

An article in *Open democracy* from September 2008 sees Dugin's ideas gaining ground in Russia:

“Dugin presents himself today as a ‘radical centrist’ and ardent supporter of Russia's authoritarian domestic and anti-Western foreign policies. Both his impassioned articles in defence of Putin and his especially rabid anti-Americanism are, apparently, popular in the Kremlin and in Moscow's ‘White House’ (the seat of the federal government). No other explanation is possible for Dugin's frequent appearances on popular evening shows on Russia's government-controlled TV channels.”

“Mikhail Leont'ev, one of Russia's most well known TV commentators and, according to some information, Putin's favourite journalist. In 2001 Leont'ev took part in the foundation of Dugin's [Eurasian movement](#); subsequently, he was, for some time, a member of that organisation's Political Council. In February this year, Ivan Demidov, a popular TV presenter, was promoted to Head of the Ideology Directorate in Putin's United Russia party. This happened in spite of the fact that only a few months earlier Demidov had professed to be a pupil of Dugin and announced that he would use his talents as PR manager to disseminate Dugin's ideas.”²⁷

Dugin was very outspoken during the Georgian conflict:

“Alexander Dugin, a famous proponent of neo-Eurasianism in Russia, is heavily involved in the crisis between Russia and Georgia. On August 26, he visited South Ossetia to celebrate the recognition by the Russian Duma of the independence of the small republic and to welcome the ‘long-awaited renaissance of the Russian empire’. The Ossetian issue is indeed steeped in history. From the nineteenth century wars in the Caucasus, the Ossetians positioned themselves as allies of Moscow in its conquest of the region ... **Dugin has taken a position clearly in favour of the intensification of conflict with Georgia, arguing that the Caucasus is at the heart of American strategies to ‘destroy Russia’.** His stance is therefore simultaneously based on geopolitical arguments (avoiding the encirclement of Russia by states defending U.S. interests), cultural arguments (preventing what he called ‘genocide’ of the Ossetian people by Georgians), and territorial arguments (the rest of the Ossetian people, in North Ossetia, are already integrated into Russia).”

²⁷ <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/russia-theme/who-is-alexander-dugin>

“To influence public opinion, Dugin in 2005 formed the Union of Eurasianist Youth. This group is notable for its forceful actions, organizing the first ‘Russian March’ on November 4, 2005, following with numerous forays into Ukraine and Estonia to destroy symbols of independence and protect symbols of the Soviet Union, particularly those related to the Second World War. In autumn 2007, it attacked the Ukrainian cultural center in Moscow, which then hosted an exhibition devoted to the famine of 1930. This year, like many other nationalist associations, the Union of Eurasianist Youth invited young people to participate in the resistance in South Ossetia. In August, the movement organized an ‘Eurasianist camp’ in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali just after the departure of Georgian troops.”

“Dugin appears to have a new ally in the Kremlin, Ivan Demidov. A former journalist who became one of the new engineers of patriotism through his ‘Russian Project’, Demidov took the lead of the pro-presidential youth group, the Young Guard (*Molodaia Gvardiia*). In May 2008, he was promoted to lead the ideological arm of the presidential party. Dugin and Demidov have known each other for several years since they worked together on the Orthodox-oriented television channel Spas and on television programs like ‘Russian View’. Demidov promotes ethnocentric and Orthodox nationalism, inviting the country’s elites to free themselves of the taboo associated with the russification of Russia. He supports the ideas of Vladislav Surkov on modernization without Westernization.”²⁸

Alexander Dugin’s vision for the Caucasus also highlights the potential for Russian-Turkish rapprochement. Some of his most important Turkish contacts are currently on trail in Turkey, however, as part of the so-called [Ergenekon investigation](#):

“The Caucasus region represents a stress point for Eurasian integration since the heterogeneity of its cultures and ethnic groups easily turns it into a high tension zone. This characteristic is usually exploited by the forces which aim to thwart integration processes in Eurasia. The Caucasian enclave is populated by peoples belonging to different states or to different civilisational spheres. This region is meant to become a laboratory for integration, since an adequate Eurasian federated model for the Caucasus would showcase the advantages of the adequate restructuring of the entire Russian-Central Asian zone. According to the Eurasianist vision, the Caucasus question is solved not through the creation of mono-national (mono-ethnic) states, nor through the inclusion of certain peoples into regional states, but through the creation of a flexible federation on an ethno-cultural and confessional basis.

This integration project would thus feature a system of semi-axes between Moscow and Caucasus centres, such as Moscow-Baku, Moscow-Yerevan, Moscow-Tbilisi, Moscow-Makhachkala, Moscow-Grozny, etc., on the one hand, and between Caucasus centres and Russia’s allies in the Eurasian project on the other (Baku-Ankara, Yerevan-Ankara, Yerevan-Tehran, etc).”²⁹

²⁸ <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4928>

²⁹ Alexander Dugin, [“The Eurasianist Idea”](#) (in Russian).

Further reading:

- Alexander Dugin, “[The Georgian Scenarios](#)” (in Russian), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 6 February 2004.
- For a more detailed analysis of Alexander Dugin’s Eurasianist ideology, see Anton Shekhovtsov, ‘[Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: The New Right à la Russe](#)’, *Religion Compass*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2009), pp. 697-716.

- An [article on Dugin’s views](#) from 2001 finds that:

“Eurasianists were in many ways similar to traditional Russian nationalists. For example, they believed in the corporate/collectivist nature of Russia/Eurasia and asserted that Western-style democracy was foreign to the country's political culture. They also berated the West for its absence of a grand goal and a sense of spiritual messianism. For them, the West was crass, materialistic and, of course, morally rotten. What made the various brands of Eurasianists different from traditional Russian nationalists was their assumption that Russia's spiritual tone was not so much Slavic as Asian in origin.”

- Dugin, in the same article, is quoted as saying that “a confrontation between the West and Eurasia is inevitable”:

“And I was the first to state this. I was the first who made this clear even in the beginning of the Yeltsin era, when everyone was confident that Russia would become a part of the West. Everyone who has stated that Russia will clash with the West took these ideas from me. And what I say is on the mind of the Russian elite.”

- The author goes on:

“A grand explosion, presumably nuclear, will be the final outcome of this confrontation. ... Dugin's hatred of the West is so intense that he regards the flames of mutual self-destruction as a better alternative to that of existence of the West ... Recent developments give some credibility to Dugin's assumptions that the Westernism of the present day Russian oligarchy, whether they are ethnic Russians or Jewish, is a fleeting phenomenon, and that they will eventually have to join the Russian nationalists and prepare Eurasia for a showdown with its arch enemy, the United States ... Dugin's views, i.e., the sense of hostility to the West, seem to be spreading among the Russian elite, and not only among those who disagree with the government. In a public radio interview, the editor of one of the new Russian magazines stated that Russia and Nato are on a collision course and the Russian elite should strengthen the country's armed forces to be ready for all eventualities.”

Opposition Voices: Garry Kasparov



Garry Kasparov, leader of the United Civic Forum

In Russia, openly dissenting voices on Caucasus policy belong to a heterogeneous crowd. One of them is former World Chess Champion-turned-political activist Garry Kasparov, born in Baku to a Jewish father and an Armenian mother, whose website Kasparov.ru has become one of the main internet platforms of the Russian political opposition.

Garry Kasparov directs his criticisms at Russia's entire political system, which, despite seemingly very different leaders (Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev), manifests – as he sees it – a basic continuity.

“All those much awaited signs of liberalization have drowned in the ‘Putinism’ of reality: the war in Georgia, escalation of tensions in relations with Ukraine, the creation of a special ‘E’ centre for fighting dissent, the growing number of political prisoners, the final subordination of the Constitutional Court to the executive power, and so on. The wait for the *Medvedev Thaw* has turned out to be nothing more than ‘useful idiotism’, which is being actively exploited by the authorities.”³⁰

Kasparov's opposition to the system is sweeping.

“Under the present circumstances, any form of active interaction with the regime, be it participation in elections or membership in the pseudo-civil society structures created by the authorities – any such interaction represents, at the very minimum, indirect involvement in the crimes that are being committed.”³¹

³⁰ Garry Kasparov, [“Russia after Putin. Part I”](#) (in Russian), *EJ.ru*, 19 August 2009.

³¹ Garry Kasparov, [“Russia after Putin. Part III”](#) (in Russian), *Kasparov.ru*, 7 October 2009.

His vision of the South Caucasus policy of post-Putin Russia also challenges current orthodoxy:

“Russia’s policy in the Caucasus should not only take into account all geopolitical, moral and other factors. First and foremost, it should be shaped by the understanding that the perpetuation of endless war in this high-risk region would kill any hope for effective reformation of the state. There is no sensible alternative to a multilateral negotiations process involving all parties in the conflict, without setting any preconditions ...Even if the Caucasus is destined to witness the emergence of new states on its territory, let this be the result of spilling much ink during the long-winded and boring negotiations rather than spilling blood in yet another impressive military adventure.”³²

³² Garry Kasparov, [“Russia after Putin. Part III”](#) (in Russian), *Kasparov.ru*, 7 October 2009.

Russia as Aggressor: the view of Andrei Illarionov



Andrei Illarionov. Photo: unknown

Like Kasparov, Andrei Illarionov is highly critical of the current regime in Russia. A libertarian who served as an economic advisor of President Putin until 2005, Illarionov has strongly condemned Russia's intervention in Georgia and resigned in protest from his government position. He has also argued that Georgia is winning the battle of ideas due to its commitment to democracy and free market ideals. On his [personal blog](#) he writes,

“Sometimes I am reproached for giving too much attention to Georgia. I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I am convinced that I don't give enough attention to Georgia.

Because the topics that are often times – superficially – referred to as ‘Georgian’ are in reality not only Georgian, but to no lesser extent ‘Russian’.

Because what is happening in Georgia is oftentimes the most visible and convincing alternative to what is happening in our own country.

Because what is happening in Georgia today gives us, Russians, invaluable lessons and perhaps can show us what our ‘tomorrow’ – or maybe ‘the day after tomorrow’ – may be like.”³³

In a recent essay published in the book “The Guns of August 2008 – Russia's War in Georgia” he writes that “... the Russian leadership had in fact taken very important decisions that made war between Russia and Georgia inevitable much earlier –

³³ Andrei Illarionov, [“Georgian Liberal Advance”](#) (in Russian), 13 October 2009.

between September 1999 and June 2003.” The war, in his view, was part of the execution of a “Grand Plan” that had existed for years.

Andrei Illarionov has authored several book chapters and published extensively in a number of Western journals including the *Journal of Democracy*.

Further reading:

- “The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999-2008,” in Svante Cornell and S. Fredrick Starr, eds. [*The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*](#) (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009). Here Illarionov makes the case that Russia never really sought to resolve its problems with Georgia peacefully.
- “[The Siloviki in Charge](#),” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 2, April 2009, looks at the new Russian political elite.
- “[Friedman and Russia](#),” *Cato Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, Winter 2008
- “[Oil and Freedom in the New Russia](#),” Cato Policy Report, vol. 29, no. 1, January/February 2007
- “Russia's Potemkin Capitalism,” in Ian Vasquez, ed., [*Global Fortune: The Stumble and Rise of World Capitalism*](#) (Cato Institute, 2000).

Dissenting voices: Ekho Moskvyy and Yulia Latynina



Yulia Latynina. Photo: Ogoniok – Journalist Nikolay Svanidze (left) on the *Osoboe Mnenie* (Special Opinion) program on Ekho Moskvyy. Photo: Ekho Moskvyy

Ekho Moskvyy (The Echo of Moscow) has an established reputation as an independent radio channel characterized by open debate and quality journalism. Valeria Novodvorskaya, a well-known Russian dissident, advised her readers in September 2008: “Listen to Ekho, there is nothing else in this country to listen to or watch.”³⁴ Founded in 1990, *Ekho Moskvyy* boasts an audience of 900,000 listeners per day. According to data provided by Medialogy, a market research company, it was the most frequently cited Russian national media outlet in February 2009.

Some of the most popular programs on *Ekho Moskvyy* include *Osoboe mnenie* (*Special Opinion*) and Yulia Latynina’s *Kod Dostupa* (*Access Code*). Yulia Latynina is an award-winning fantasy writer and journalist born. Aside from hosting *Kod Dostupa*, she writes for opposition papers *Novaya Gazeta* and *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal*. Her extensive coverage of the August 2008 war in Georgia generated a great deal of controversy in Russia, with Latynina voicing very critical views of the official Russian position. This did not go unnoticed. In late August 2008, *Ekho Moskvyy* Editor-in-Chief Alexey Venediktov was publicly berated – if not threatened – by Vladimir Putin for the station’s coverage of the war. “You are responsible for everything that goes on at the radio station,” the Prime Minister reportedly told Venediktov. “I don’t know who they are, but I know who you are.”³⁵

Yulia Latynina’s writings on South Ossetia are scathing in their treatment of the local elites. In her view, the government of breakaway South Ossetia is an example of a *siloviki*-steered structure (*siloviki* are the representatives of the Russian security apparatus):

“I cannot even describe the regime in South Ossetia as ‘separatist’. If you think about it, who would you identify as the separatists there? The head of

³⁴ Valeria Novodvorskaya, “[Ekho Responded](#)” (in Russian), *Grani.ru*, 9 September 2008.

³⁵ The Other Russia, “[Putin Slams Radio Station for Reporting on Georgian War.](#)” 17 September 2008.

South Ossetian KGB, Anatoliy Baranov, used to head the Federal Security Service of the Mordovian Republic in Russia; the head of the Interior Ministry, Mikhail Mindzayev, served in the Interior Ministry of North Ossetia; Defense Minister Vasilii Lunev was a military commissar in Perm; and Security Council Secretary Anatoliy Barankevich used to be the Vice Deputy of the commissar of Stavropol Krai. So who exactly is the Ossetian separatist in this government? Prime Minister Yuri Morozov, perhaps?”³⁶

Latynina summarizes her impressions:

“South Ossetia, just like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, is neither a state, nor an ethnos, nor a territory; it is a special form of para-state where residents are turned into militarized refugees. It’s a quasi-army whose leader cannot allow subjects to get involved in anything other than war, a war that makes his power absolute and the money in his control unaccountable. It is where the hysteria of the deprived population becomes the main means of settling personal accounts.”³⁷

³⁶ Yulia Latynina, [“On the Forced Bankruptcy of the Joint Enterprise Called South Ossetia”](#) (in Russian), *EJ.ru*, 8 August 2008.

³⁷ Yulia Latynina, [“On the Forced Bankruptcy of the Joint Enterprise Called South Ossetia”](#) (in Russian), *EJ.ru*, 8 August 2008.

Mainstream views on Russian TV



Ekaterina Andreeva, a popular news anchor on Russia's First Channel. Photo: Itvrus.com

Television remains the most popular media in Russia. According to a survey conducted in September 2008 by the Public Opinion Foundation, “96 percent of Russians watch television and 44 percent use it as a source of news.”³⁸ *First Channel* and *Russia*, both state-controlled, are the country’s two largest TV channels. Gazprom-owned *NTV* has the third largest audience.

Originally owned by the media magnate Vladimir Gusinsky, NTV quickly established a reputation for its quality analytical reporting on a wide range of political issues, its highly professional team of reporters, as well as its frequent criticism of the government. However, soon after the Russian authorities arrested Gusinsky on embezzlement charges in 2000 (he subsequently fled to Spain) NTV was sold to Gazprom, ostensibly to settle a commercial dispute. It was also restructured, with a large part of its staff leaving in protest against the new policy. As the Committee to Protect Journalists put it in its [open letter](#) to Vladimir Putin, the takeover of NTV was “part of a concerted effort to silence media that are critical of [the] government’s policies.”³⁹ NTV’s takeover was followed by increased government pressure on other, smaller independent TV channels.

Today, the remaining independent TV channels are the smaller-sized *Ren TV* and St Petersburg’s *Channel Five*. In October 2009, the two companies, citing financial trouble, began negotiations on a possible partnership with the government-funded English-language *Russia Today* (see below). The move raised concerns among many observers.⁴⁰

³⁸ IREX, *Media Sustainability Index 2009*, Chapter “Russia,” p. 189.

³⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists, [“State takeover of news outlets threatens press freedom.”](#) 30 April 2001.

⁴⁰ Fred Weir, [“Russia’s Last Independent Stations to Move into Kremlin-Owned Studios.”](#) *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 October 2009.



Margarita Simonyan, Editor-in-Chief of RT. Photo: ITAR-TASS

In 2005 the Russian government launched *Russia Today (RT)*, an English-language channel targeting foreign audiences: the idea was to counter Western misperceptions by presenting news from a Russian perspective. Headed by the young and ambitious Margarita Simonyan, *RT* provides round-the-clock English-language broadcasting in over 100 countries. *RT* was also the first Russian TV channel to embrace YouTube. As of 30 November 2009, it boasted nearly 25,000 subscribers and over 1.5 million views. (By comparison, CNN International’s YouTube channel – launched one and a half years earlier – had approximately 12,000 subscribers and 550,000 views.)

Margarita Simonyan, only 25 when she became Editor-in-Chief of *RT*, has dismissed accusations that the channel is a Kremlin mouthpiece:

“Whatever comes from Russia, especially if it gets government support, is going to be bad, bad propaganda. Is anyone worried that the BBC is getting its funding from people’s taxes? Nobody seems worried by that.”⁴¹

RT’s coverage of the August 2008 war in South Ossetia, which represented the official Russian version of the events, attracted a particularly large audience on the channel’s online Livestation service.⁴² It also attracted a barrage of criticism from abroad. Analysing the Russian media’s treatment of the conflict, experts from the EU-Russia Centre, an independent European think tank, wrote:

“Russian TV chose the simplest approach available; those in charge of TV broadcasting evidently thought it was the most accessible to popular audiences. They resorted to shock tactics and distasteful images. In news reports the dead bodies of Tskhinvali inhabitants were repeatedly shown. One news programme repeated again and again the same clip of the body of a middle aged Ossetian woman dressed only in her underwear. Did no TV boss feel uncomfortable with this editorial choice? Did no one consider what effect broadcasting that scene had on her relatives?

Television screens showed shattered buildings and terrified Ossetian refugees, images that were accompanied by accounts of Georgian soldiers ‘finishing off’

⁴¹ Kara Rowland, [“Russia Today: Youth Served.”](#) *The Washington Times*, 27 October 2008.

⁴² Livestation, [“Georgia crisis sees surge in demand for live TV over broadband.”](#) 20 August 2008.

the wounded Russian peacekeepers, pouring water into cellars where refugees were hiding, a continual stream of brutality.

There was no information about what was happening behind the fighting, of the negotiations, of the reasons behind the conflict that were being discussed in Georgia or by those in the European Union and the Council of Europe. There was no analysis of events or history — beyond hysterical assertions that the Americans wanted to unleash a Third World War and were behind it all.”⁴³

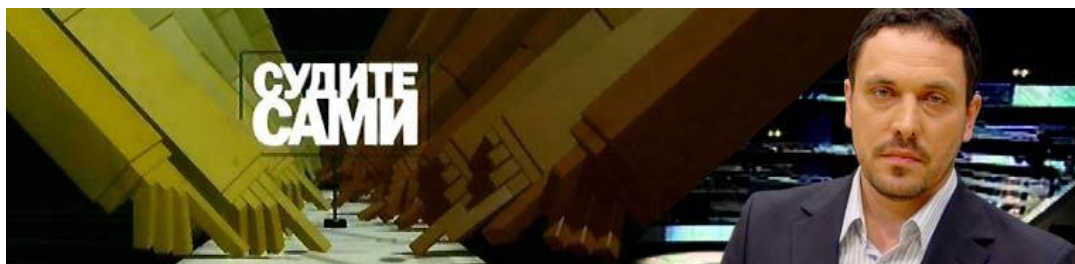
Critical voices came from within Russia as well. As Russian TV critic Slava Taroschina wrote on 13 August 2008:

“The propaganda war is accompanied by an information war. Until Sunday night, when Vesti 24 broadcast the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, we had heard the point of view of only one of the parties to the conflict – namely, our own. This, however, did not prevent Konstantin Syomin [a Russian journalist known for his anti-Western views] to denounce the biased reporting by Western media every time he was on TV. To an extent, it is true. It is perhaps the first time that CNN and BBC are so non-objective. At the same time, there was a CNN reporter who extensively interviewed, in a rather benevolent tone, our high-profile Interior Ministry official Grigoriy Karasin, and the interview was then happily cited by our news channels. But our own channels have not yet presented any coherent opinion about the Tskhinvali tragedy from the Georgian perspective.”⁴⁴

⁴³ EU-Russia Centre, [“Campaign in the Air Waves.”](#) 2008, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Slava Taroschina, [“Apocalypse on Air”](#) (in Russian), *Gazeta.ru*, 13 August 2008.

Judge for yourself: Maxim Shevchenko and the Caucasus



Maxim Shevchenko is the host of *Sudite Sami* (Judge for Yourself), a popular political talk show on the First Channel. Photo: 1tv.ru

There are several popular political talk shows on Russian TV. One of them is *Sudite Sami* ([*Judge for Yourself*](#)) with Maxim Shevchenko, which airs on Thursday nights on the First Channel. Maxim Shevchenko, born in 1966, is a well-known Russian journalist and expert on religious movements. His show has become known for its polemical style and the participation of well-known political figures, writers, journalists, and scholars. Some recently discussed topics have included “The Tragedy of Tskhinval: The Guilty Are Named” (2 October 2009), which focused on the conclusions of the Tagliavini report on the August 2008 war in South Ossetia. The videos and transcripts of each episode can be found on the talk show’s website (in Russian).

Shevchenko is also a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation’s Committee for International Relations and Freedom of Conscience and head of the Center for Strategic Research on Religion and Politics in the Modern World.



Maxim Shevchenko

From 1990 to 1992 he was a member of the political council of the Christian Democratic Union of Russia. He has been working in independent journalism since 1987 and is now one of the leading Russian journalists and a special correspondent in “hot spots” (in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Yugoslavia, Israel and Palestine). In 2000 Shevchenko founded the Strategic Research Center for Modern

World Religion and Politics, an independent non-profit group which unites experts and analysts specializing in modern political, social and religious awareness issues.

As commentator for Channel One state television Shevchenko explained the killing of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya as "an attempt to provoke an Orange Revolution here."⁴⁵ In an interview in *Georgian Times*, he warned about Western designs on Ukraine and the Caucasus:

Q: How would you describe the political turmoil in Ukraine?

A: I think this is a coup attempt by the 'orange coalition' against the government and Rada (which expresses the interests of the majority of the Ukrainian population). The thing is that the 'orangists' hate Russia, the Russian language and the Orthodox Church in Eastern Ukraine to such an extent that they are ready to run the risk of a civil war. They have very radical ambitions – to fully *Ukrainize* Ukraine.

Q: What external forces support them?

A: The West and Washington, certainly. The current crisis erupted in the wake of a visit by Timoshenko to Washington. She might have taken some pledge there: she promised that the 'orange' coalition would start shaping a common Ukraine out of a huge, diverse country. Besides this, she promised to distance Ukraine from Russia and Russian policy.

Q: Do you think US policy in Ukraine will be a failure?

A: Yes, absolutely.

Q: You said that the war between Iran and the US would have an indirect impact on Georgia as well. How is that? What threat should we expect?

A: You will be embroiled in the war, as you will be required to start a war with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Any forceful measures will again drive the Georgian people to disaster and Georgia will be on the verge of further fragmentation. Only a stupid person cannot understand this.

Q: So, what do you think Georgia should do?

A: I cannot dictate to Georgia what it should do. It cannot ensure the return of its IDPS to Abkhazia without the help of Russia. **Georgia will never be able to solve the issue with the help of Washington or Brussels and will engage into a more bloody war.**⁴⁶

⁴⁵ <http://www.templetonthorp.com/en/news1371>

⁴⁶ <http://www.geotimes.ge/index.php?m=home&newsid=3892>

Pavel Felgenhauer and Novaya Gazeta



Pavel Felgenhauer. Photo: Jewish Community Centre in Moscow

Pavel Felgenhauer, born in 1951 in Moscow, is a well-known independent defense analyst who regularly writes for the *Moscow Times*, the opposition *Novaya Gazeta*, and the *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, and is a frequent guest on the *Ekho Moskvy* radio station. Felgenhauer, who holds a PhD in biology, explained his unlikely career as a military analyst in an interview given in 2005:

“I am a biologist by training. For a long time I was working in the field of molecular biology. But from my student years I always wanted to understand how and why armed conflicts develop, what national armies and military alliances are, how their alignment is influenced by politics and how they, in turn, influence the international climate. When the Soviet Union broke apart and, all of a sudden, politics stormed into everyone’s lives, I turned my hobby into a profession. I am often asked how I, a biologist, could suddenly become a military analyst. I usually reply: ‘To dissect a frog, do you have to be a frog yourself?’ Is it not known that a view from the outside is always more balanced?”⁴⁷

Felgenhauer has written extensively on the conflict over Georgia’s breakaway republics, warning against the possibility of war years in advance of the August 2008 events. In 2006, he described Russia’s confrontation with Tbilisi over South Ossetia as a “lethal folly,” arguing that fighting in South Ossetia could “spill over into the North Caucasus, undermining pro-Moscow rulers in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and

⁴⁷ Jewish Community Centre in Moscow, [“Interview with Pavel Felgenhauer”](#) (in Russian), 26 July 2005.

Ossetia. The Islamist insurgents in the North Caucasus could use this opportunity to cause even more trouble.”⁴⁸

In the spring and summer of 2009, Felgenhauer was widely cited in the Western media as saying that Russia was “preparing the ground for a new war against Georgia with the goal of overturning the [Saakashvili] regime”⁴⁹ and that the risk of renewed hostilities was high. Several months later, however, he wrote:

“This summer the situation in Georgia hovered around a possible renewed full-scale war, but now the risk is minimal. Abnormally early heavy snowfalls in the Caucasus have already virtually cut off South Ossetia from Russia by snow-drifts (RIA Novosti, September 28). Essential supplies for the reconstruction of South Ossetia are not being delivered. It will be a harsh winter for the occupying Russian soldiers and the remaining civilian population of South Ossetia, while the border with Georgia is closed and access to Russia impeded until spring 2010. Any major Russian military action is virtually impossible until next April, when the threat of a new war will reappear, if no diplomatic progress is made in the meantime. Profound differences continue to separate Russia, Georgia and the West, making progress difficult.”⁵⁰

In November 2009, Pavel Felgenhauer also commented on the draft of the new Russian military doctrine, which proposed allowing the use of nuclear weapons, including preemptive strikes:

“Since a potential nuclear war, be it with NATO in the West or with China in the East, can lead to the guaranteed destruction of Russia itself, the idea of a ‘preemptive nuclear strike’ makes the unprepared public shudder. In addition, according to Patrushev [head of Russian Security Council], the new doctrine confirms the ‘shift in focus away from large-scale military conflicts to local wars and armed conflicts.’ The list of potential threats includes, along with the traditional threat of NATO enlargement, potential claims to the yet unexplored ‘energy and other raw material resources’ of the Arctic region, Japanese territorial claims to the Kuril Islands, etc. This means that our superiors are potentially ready to burn all of us in nuclear fire because of disputes over ice, rocks or South Ossetia.”⁵¹

In Felgenhauer’s view, Russia’s military ambitions do not square with the reality on the ground:

“Russia has inherited from the USSR a strategic nuclear potential developed during a Cold War era of global confrontation. But today’s Russian Federation is merely a large regional power whose real sphere of influence and interests

⁴⁸ Pavel Felgenhauer, [“The Kadyrovtsy: Moscow's New Pawns in the South Caucasus?”](#), *North Caucasus Analysis*, vol. 1, issue 24, 14 June 2006.

⁴⁹ Stuart Williams, [“Russia warns of force if more Georgia ‘provocations’”](#), *AFP*, 1 August 2009.

⁵⁰ Pavel Felgenhauer, [“Danger Recedes of New Conflict in the South Caucasus.”](#) *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 6, issue 180, 1 October 2009.

⁵¹ Pavel Felgenhauer, [“Paper Tigers with Nuclear Weapons”](#) (in Russian), *Novaya Gazeta*, 23 November 2009.

does not extend far beyond the CIS – and even in that area Russia finds it difficult to dominate. The ongoing radical military reform liquidates for good the mass Soviet multi-million army of reservists and creates brigades deployed in peacetime. These armed forces, without a doubt, are designed for solving local conflicts over pipelines and the ‘energy and other raw material resources’ which provide the basis of existence of our ruling class. But until the reformed armed forces are actually created, one is left to rely on nuclear weapons.”⁵²

Further reading:

Selected English-language publications by Pavel Felgenhauer:

- Book chapter: “After August 7: The Escalation of the Russia-Georgia War” in Svante Cornell and S. Fredrick Starr, eds. *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), pp. 162-180.
- In *Eurasia Daily Monitor*: [Before the Summit, the U.S. Forgives Russia for Invading Georgia](#) (EDM vol. 6, issue 127), 2 July 2009.
- [Risk Increasing of Russian Intervention in Georgia](#) (EDM vol. 6, issue 88), 7 May 2009
- [Moscow Sends the West Friendly Signals While Relations with Georgia Worsen](#) (EDM vol. 6, issue 19), 29 January 2009
- [The West Is Confused about What to Do in Abkhazia](#) (EDM vol. 5, issue 122), 25 June 2008
- [Russia and Georgia Still Teetering on Brink of War](#) (EDM vol. 4, issue 184), 3 October 2007
- The archive of Pavel Felgenhauer’s columns in *Novaya Gazeta* can be accessed [here](#) (in Russian).

⁵² Pavel Felgenhauer, [“Paper Tigers with Nuclear Weapons”](#) (in Russian), *Novaya Gazeta*, 23 November 2009.

Masha Lipman and the Carnegie Moscow Centre



Masha Lipman. Photo: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Masha Lipman is the editor of the [Pro et Contra journal](#) published by the [Carnegie Moscow Center](#). Lipman is also an expert at the Center’s Civil Society Program. She served as deputy editor of the Russian weekly news magazines *Ezhenedel’ny zhurnal* (from 2001 to 2003) and *Itogi* (from 1995 to 2001). She remains one of the most outspoken liberal voices in Russia.

She has analysed the system of power in Putin’s Russia in a large number of articles:

“The Kremlin keeps a firm grip on societal forces: Its concept of civil society implies loyalty to the state and rules out genuine autonomy. Those who dare defy the Kremlin vision may be tolerated, but they are consistently marginalized. Assistance to such groups from abroad is treated with great suspicion. Moreover, the West, and the United States in particular, are viewed as a threatening force seeking to do harm to Russia. This dramatically hampers Russian development and leaves Russia still further behind the developed nations ... It is up to the Russian people to change this, but they will have to overcome their apathy and fragmentation.”⁵³

⁵³ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23384&prog=zru>

During a 2008 debate on the role of the Russian media she was one of the most outspoken voices:

“Lipman focused on the evolution of the media from the relative pluralism of Boris Yeltsin's presidency to the tight control of Putin's system. ... She noted that the state and Gazprom were the two largest players in the national media market and that loyalty to the state is a requirement for success in any business sector, including media. The state's control of broadcast media is particularly important, as television is the overwhelmingly primary source of information for the Russian public. Meanwhile, on a regional level, journalists are routinely punished for attempting to uncover local malfeasance or corruption.

Although the Russian leadership has consolidated a majority of the media under its control, Lipman said, media with independent editorial content still exists. She speculated that there were a number of functions that having a tiny minority of independent media could serve: existing for the sake of external consumption, a valve to let off some steam, and potentially an in-house bulletin board for the use of elites to signal dissatisfaction or to inform the leadership of conflicts.”⁵⁴

The war on Georgia, Lipman noted, has further undermined America's popularity in Russia:

“The United States no longer has a sympathetic constituency in Russia that views America as a force for good that may help make Russians' lives freer, more democratic or more prosperous. **These days, people who still view the United States so positively are hard to find, even among the liberal intelligentsia, and the U.S. reaction to the war in Georgia further reduced their numbers.**

Putin's autocratic regime enjoys strong support here: In September, Putin's approval rating was 88 percent and Medvedev's 83. This is not loyalty driven by fear of repression – the Russian people rally behind the leader who has delivered better living standards and reasserted Russia's international standing. It may sadden Russian liberals, including me, but political rights and civil liberties simply do not matter much in Russia these days.

Relations between Russia and the United States have entered a dangerous stalemate. America can't accept Russia's aggressive posture, but U.S. anger is only making things worse. The risk of Russia slipping toward an isolationist course and a militarized economy is growing. **Events of the 20th century indicate that in the long term, Moscow's own irrational pursuits may prove more baneful to Russia than any foreign adversary. But in the short term, Russia's neighbours as well as European security could be at great risk.**”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=1124&&prog=zru>

⁵⁵ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22206>

Further reading:

- Masha Lipman on recent [violence in the North Caucasus](#) (2009)
- [Carnegie Moscow Centre Program on the Caucasus](#)

The Russian Caucasus Debate online



The RuNet Award (full name – the National Award of the Russian Federation for Contribution to the Development of the Russian Segment of the Internet). The contest, organized by the Federal Agency for Print Media and Mass Communications, has been held annually since 2004 with competition in seven different nominations including "The State and Society," "Culture and Mass Communications," and "RuNet Beyond RU."

The Russian segment of the Internet, usually referred to as “RuNet” in Russia, has been growing rapidly since its inception in April 1994 (the official “birth date” refers to the registration of the domain *.ru* assigned to Russia, replacing the older domain extension *.su* for the Soviet Union).

While television remains the most popular means of mass communications in Russia, the number of internet users has been growing at a fast rate, particularly in large urbanized areas. According to research by the Public Opinion Foundation, in 2008 the internet audience in Russia reached 30 percent of the adult population (and significantly more in large cities – in Moscow 58 percent of adults use the internet).

Depending on the age category, 93 to 98 percent of internet users read news online; roughly 50 percent create their own online content.⁵⁶ Social networks have also enjoyed a spectacular start in Russia, with Russian analogues of Facebook – *Vkontakte.ru* and *Odnoklassniki.ru* – consistently ranking among the most visited websites.

⁵⁶ Russian Public Opinion Foundation, cited in IREX, *Media Sustainability Index*, Chapter “Russia,” p. 190.

The plethora of online media outlets and news portals provides a much wider range of information than television and print media, most of which rarely include views that are substantially different from the official line. The highest-ranking news portals include Newsru.com (formerly the website of NTV channel, still independent at the time of the launch), Lenta.ru, Pravda.ru, vz.ru, and dni.ru, with leading outlets boasting an audience of 180,000-220,000 unique visitors per day. Another popular trend involves print media launching their own websites.

It is also important to emphasize the political role of the internet in Russia, given that there is generally no system of online censorship in the country. Notably, Russia has an active blogosphere, with the LiveJournal community being the most established and the most active. It is widely believed that the Russian blogosphere is becoming an increasingly popular platform for political debate. This may be explained by the paucity of opportunities for full-fledged debate in the traditional media (TV and print).⁵⁷ A number of experts, analysts, journalists, and even [President Medvedev](http://www.presidentmedvedev.ru) run their own blogs where they invite comments and engage in discussions with their readers.

Russian internet users are largely free to access various online information sources, including foreign ones (although the low level of foreign language skills among the general population presents a serious obstacle to obtaining information from non-Russian sources).

There are two main websites that provide translations of foreign (mostly Western) news stories – Inosmi.ru, run by the government-owned RIA Novosti news agency, and Inopressa.ru, affiliated with Newsru.com. *Inosmi.ru* has been frequently criticized for focusing on foreign articles which include particularly negative views of Russia.

Finally, there are several media outlets and online platforms that have come to be associated with dissident political views. These include Garry Kasparov's website Kasparov.ru, the news portal Grani.ru (formerly owned by oligarch Boris Berezovsky), and the websites of [Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal](http://EzhednevnyyZhurnal.ru) and [Novaya Gazeta](http://NovayaGazeta.ru).

In addition, the [Caucasian Knot](http://CaucasianKnot.org), available in Russian and English, is a dedicated news outlet and one of the most comprehensive, continuously updated online sources on the Caucasus region. Launched in 2001 by the human rights NGO Memorial, the *Caucasian Knot* retains a strong human rights focus and, in addition to regular news, provides detailed coverage of refugee issues, persecution of journalists, abuse of state power, and so forth. While the bulk of the *Caucasian Knot*'s reporting covers the North Caucasus republics of the Russian Federation, there are also dedicated sections on the three states of the South Caucasus.

⁵⁷ Viktor Agayev, "[Blogosphere As a Way to Avoid Censorship in Russia](#)" (in Russian), *Deutsche Welle*, 5 June 2009.

Further reading:

- For a more detailed history of the Russian internet, see [*A Creative History of the Russian Internet*](#) (2006), a PhD thesis by Eugene Gorny, a Russian researcher at the University of London. The thesis was recently updated and published as a [book](#) (VDM Verlag 2009).