

# RUSSIA, GEORGIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION –

## THE CREEPING FINLANDIZATION OF EUROPE

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### **Appeasement in Europe**

One month after the Russian occupation of Georgia the situation in the European Union is a reason for deep concern. Right at the start of the war EU President Sarkozy blundered when the ceasefire agreement, which he brokered between Russia and Georgia, could be interpreted in such a way as to give the Russian army a permanent presence in the Georgian heartland. And when Russian troops did not withdraw despite Medvedev's promises the reaction of the EU leaders was so soft as melting butter, so that even Putin could declare that he was 'satisfied' by the European response to his aggression. What was even more disquieting during the last month is the tone of appeasement, the 'understanding' many politicians show for the 'reasons' of the Russian aggression, an understanding which, sometimes, goes so far as to scarcely hide a pro-Russian bias. This pro-Russian bias is strongest in Germany, Italy, France, and the Benelux, the six founding countries of the EU.

***It is as if suddenly a wolf had broken into a henhouse and the chickens run in all directions in a desperate *sauf qui peut*. After the first shock the chickens start to accuse each other: whose fault was it that the wolf came in? And they come up with different reasons. Maybe we spoke too loud, or the wolf has been humiliated. Maybe we provoked the wolf or did not treat him with the necessary respect. Thereupon they decide not to provoke him, to treat him gently and with more respect than ever. The wolf, however, knows very well why he came: he simply had hunger...***

The German Minister of Foreign Affairs and SPD chancellor candidate Frank-Walter Steinmeier is the most outspoken representative of this group. Steinmeier is well known for his pro-Russian attitude. He started his political career as chef de cabinet of former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who

together with his friend Putin initiated Gazprom's Nord Stream gas pipeline consortium of which Schröder himself later became the president. Steinmeier acted as a mediator in the Abkhazia conflict in July of this year. His mediation was problematic because in the document that he drafted he not only accepted the continuation of Russia's 'peacekeeping' forces in the breakaway province, but he also forgot to mention the territorial integrity of Georgia, which is usual in international documents. He equally used the term 'Abkhazia' instead of 'Abkhazia, Georgia' which is normal for a document under UN aegis. These 'slips of the pen', hinting already at a secession of Abkhazia, were certainly not unpleasant for Russia. It was no surprise that after the Russian invasion of Georgia Steinmeier called for *Vernunft*, 'reason', which meant: no sanctions. Also the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a personal friend of Putin, refused to condemn the Russian action. In a television interview on 8 September 2008 on the French television two former Prime Ministers of France, the Gaullist Dominique de Villepin and the Socialist Laurent Fabius, instead of attacking the Russian occupation of a free and democratic nation, declared themselves both hostile to a possible membership of NATO of Ukraine and Georgia. In an article in the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad* of 5 September 2008 former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers and former Defence Minister Joris Voorhoeve equally did not say a word about the Russian aggression, but only spoke about 'the humiliation' experienced by the Russians. "In the past decennia the attitude of the West has been much too arrogant", according to the authors. "Therefore Europe should not react to the Georgian crisis (...) with arrogance and dominance, as the US has done in the last few years." "Europe must give an alternative for a blunt power policy." Which means "to look critically to yourself instead of only accusing the others." What does this mean in practice? The authors suggest putting the missile defence project on hold, and to look how "the sovereign integrity of Georgia can be assured without NATO membership." Russia should recognize Georgia's territorial integrity 'in a special treaty'. The tone and contents of the message is clear: give in to all Russian demands and distance yourself from the United States. Why we should need a special treaty with Russia on Georgia's sovereign integrity is also a big question. As a member of the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe Georgia's territorial integrity is already firmly established by international law. It does not need any 'reaffirmation' by Russia.

One can only be disappointed, if not ashamed, by the weak reaction of most European governments and politicians, which oscillate between appeasement and open support for Russia. This appeasement did not start in August, but can be traced back to the Bucharest NATO summit of April of this year, when France and Germany blocked the Membership Action Plans for Georgia and Ukraine – which was a signal to Moscow to accelerate its aggressive policies towards both countries. (It was the same conference where Putin said to Bush that Ukraine 'was not a real country'. We know

what happened in 1939 with Poland, another country that was not on the map for more than 120 years and that was not considered 'a real country' by its neighbors). The wish 'not to provoke Russia' equally might have inspired the refusal of Germany and the Benelux countries to give Ukraine an EU membership pledge at the EU-Ukraine summit on 8 September.

In 'old Europe' of the EU-15 only a few politicians stand out from the crowd, such as the Swedish Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt, and his British colleague, David Miliband, who both have taken courageous and principled positions, not wanting to compromise on what they – rightly – consider as non negotiable values.

### **A Re-colonization of the Russian Empire?**

Sometimes it is necessary to recapitulate the facts. Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe' of the twentieth century. Greatest geopolitical catastrophe? Really? According to R.J. Rummel, who has tried to calculate the number of victims of government repression in the twentieth century in his book *Death by Government*, "Probably almost 62 million people, nearly 54,800,000 of them citizens, have been murdered by the Communist Party – the government – of the Soviet Union." "It is impossible to comprehend this democide (...), it is over four times the battle dead (15 million) for all nations in the Second World War. Indeed it exceeds the total number of deaths (nearly 34 million) from all this century's international, civil, guerilla, and liberation wars, including the Russian civil war." "Part of this mass killing was genocide, as in the wholesale murder of hundreds of thousands of Don Cossacks in 1919, the intentional starvation to death of about 5 million Ukrainian peasants in 1932-33, or the deportation to mass death of 50,000 to 60,000 Estonians in 1949. Part was mass murder, as of the wholesale extermination of perhaps 6,500,000 'kulaks' (in effect, the better-off peasants and those resisting collectivization) from 1930 to 1937, the execution of perhaps a million Party members in the Great Terror of 1937 – 1938, and the massacre of all Trotskyites in forced labor camps."

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 this meant not only the end of the *last* European colonial empire, but also the end of the *most repressive* European colonial empire – an empire to which even Lenin referred to as 'the prison of nations'. Unlike the other former colonial powers in Europe, which have accepted the loss of their empires, Putin's Russia has *not* accepted this fact and wants to re-colonize its former colonies. This is easier for Russia, because its former colonies are not overseas and far away, but nearby, at its frontiers.

## Russia: Why it is Playing the Victim

Russia, however, does not openly admit that it wants to re-conquer the former Soviet space. Its re-colonization is not presented as a deliberate planned action, but rather as a *re*-action and legitimate defence. There are - at least - three reasons Russia presents for its aggressive policies:

1. The independence of Kosovo
2. The US missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic
3. The enlargement of NATO into the former Soviet space

The question is: are these real reasons or just pretexts that can be used in the propaganda war with the West? What, for example, about Russia's 'anger' expressed on the occasion of the independence of Kosovo? This 'anger' seems to be greater in Moscow than in Belgrade. It is clearly simulated and artificially constructed. This 'anger' concerns more the fact that Western powers bypassed Russian obstruction in the Security Council. And it is at least strange that this 'anger' was not expressed when Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of the province was underway.

A second reason for the Russian 'anger' is the planned missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. According to the former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hubert Védrine, (radio interview on 9 September 2008 on France Inter), the shield "is made to put pressure on them (the Russians). It has nothing to do with the Iranians". Everybody who is informed – the Russians included – know very well that the anti-missile system is *not* directed against Russia, but against Iran. And this is for obvious reasons. How could a system that can intercept up to *ten* ballistic missiles be a threat to a country that possesses more than *five thousand* deployed nuclear warheads - plus the same number in stockpiles? Add to this the fact that if Russia wants to hit the US, it will not launch its ballistic missiles in the direction of Europe, but directly over the North Pole (which is the shortest route and where there is no such shield), or from submarines near the US coast. It is, therefore, a reason for deep concern that European politicians have started to believe the Russian propaganda.

There remains the third reason for the Russian 'anger': NATO enlargement. The question here is not only the fact that sovereign and independent countries have the right to ask to become members of a security pact, the question is also *why* countries of the former Soviet empire are so eager to become NATO members. Because NATO enlargement is not a pernicious Western strategy to encircle Russia, it is a process that is clearly *demand-driven*. And it is the specific history of the Russian empire - its aggressive, oppressive and anti-democratic legacy that is the driving force behind the rush to

NATO. Recent events in Georgia have only reinforced the fear of former satellite states and former Soviet republics for a re-colonization by Russia. Russia has taken up its old habit of depicting NATO as an aggressive alliance. The fact is that NATO is a defensive alliance and the Russian power elite knows very well that NATO does not present any danger for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. It could, however, effectively block an eventual re-colonization policy.

### **The Real Reason behind Russia's Land Hunger**

So what is the real reason behind Russia's aggressive policies? Moscow's real fear concerns the 'colored revolutions' – in 2003 in Georgia, in 2004 in Ukraine, and in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan - which swept away authoritarian and corrupt pro-Russian regimes and replaced them by democratic governments. Democratic governments at Russia's frontiers are the specters that are haunting Putin, because real democracy could become a contagious disease. The young democracies at its frontiers have, therefore, to be crushed and to be reintegrated into the former empire – by setting up puppet regimes or by straightforward annexation.

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