



**The Georgian-Russian Conflict:  
a Turning-point?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper addresses the question whether the conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 really stands for a turning-point as often argued, and if so what has changed and with what consequences. Has the Caucasus conflict been of a ground-breaking importance with power politics back on the agenda or instead stood out as a minor incident and an unintended conflict soon to fade into oblivion? In order to pass judgment on such questions and to arrest some of the more profound dynamics of the discourse waged, an interpretative frame is developed. It is above all utilized in probing the subject-positions of the European Union, the United States and Russia in the context of the debate. The paper argues that rather than a turning-point the conflict has been conducive to the emergence of a meeting-point particularly in the sphere of US-Russia relations whereas the EU is experiencing considerable difficulties in trying to stay in tune with the more general outcome. Overall, the conflict indeed shook the world, albeit it did so in a rather unexpected manner and the reverberations still continue to unfold.



## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 provides ground for a broad variety of interpretations. It has mostly been viewed as a classical power political war with a major power attacking a small one in the context of a more general power political contest (cf. Allison, 2008; Fedorov, 2008, Friedman, 2008). It has, however, also been taken for a small country mistakenly engaging in war out of an acute sense of insecurity and in being alarmed by an accelerating Russian military presence in South Ossetia, or viewed as a war by proxy (with the US backing and arming Georgia and/or Russia using South Ossetia as a disguise for offensive activities) (Cornell et. al., 2008; Nichol, 2009), i.e. an episode perhaps preceding a more general confrontation between Russia and the West (cf. Makarychev, 2009: 11; Pain, 2009: 16). In addition, there is undoubtedly also the option of singling out and stressing the importance of the intra-state and aspects of the conflict and to view it as standing in essence for an escalation of an internal and ethnic conflict (Antonenko, 2008b). It points, if viewed in this latter perspective, to some further weakening of Georgia and may even augur a state-failure.

In consequence, the different framings amount to widely different views as to the over-all significance of the event, this then also hampering rapprochement and the emergence of a common understanding needed for any efforts of resolution of the remaining tensions (cf. Welt, 2009). For some

observers and analysts it figures as a rather modest clash and appears as a ‘frozen conflict’ suddenly spinning out of control, albeit soon bound to fade into oblivion. Those adhering to this view of a minor ethnic conflict stress that it remained local in nature and secondary in importance in comparison to a number of other recent conflicts such as those of Iraq or Afghanistan. It is, furthermore, pointed out that if measured according to the standards of modern warfare it was hardly a ‘war’ at all; it was low in intensity, several non-state parties took part and the fighting lasted for less than a week. The number of casualties amounted to some hundreds and the question of territorial gains or more generally state sovereignty did in the end not seem to stand out as defining issue. As noted by Ekaterina Stepanova (2008: 2), in the ranking provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) the label used is bound to be the one of a ‘minor conflict’ rather than ‘war’.

And still, the conflict has also been instigated with ground-breaking importance. For example Ronald Asmus (2010) speaks of “the little war that shook the world”. Somewhat similarly, the Russian leadership (Medvedev, 2008b) depicted the event in its immediate commentary as “Russia’s 9/11”. It was in other words perceived as a landmark and conceptualized as a “moment of truth”. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2008) talked about the conflict as indicator of a systemic breakdown, which then necessitates a reparation of Europe’s deficient architecture of security. Finland’s Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb (2008) followed in some sense suit by arguing that the conflict was conducive to “a post-080808 world”. All these coinages depicted the conflict as a watershed, and saw it as one bound to have quite far-reaching consequences.

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Whereas Asmus is quite concrete in the sense of arguing that the conflict constitutes a setback and represents a breach of the rules that have governed Europe's inter-state relations since the end of the Cold War, both Medvedev and Stubb abstained from elaborating their choice of coinage and refrained from spelling out why they found reasons for resorting to such a dramatic language. It may well be argued, though, that the conflict has not been seen as one among many. It amounted, in fact, in some of its aspects to a full-blown international crisis and brought the relations between Russia and the West to a post-Cold War low.

Furthermore, the August clash does not seem to belong to the numerous cases where the initial buzzing quickly subsides with other conflicts or issues such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, energy security, drug trafficking or climate change soon taking over. The debate has instead been rather persistent focusing both on some particular aspects of the conflict – and specially the distribution of blame and the question which party carries the main responsibility for having initiated the fighting has attracted considerable attention – but also various broader and more principal issues have been extensively debated. This is so as the conflict appears to epitomize a reversal in the more general debate as to the state and direction of international relations. It has done so in having clearly provided the themes of war, invasion and use of force in changing borders as well as security at large with increased prominence.

Whilst there is in some ways ground, as noted above, for approaching the conflict as a minor incident and an aberration within an otherwise cooperative constellation, there have also been reasons to regard it as auguring a more permanent (re-)turn towards a rather conflictual period of international re-

lations. In line with the latter interpretation, a considerable amount of commentary has employed 'back to the future' type of approaches in trying to pin down the basic character of the conflict. There has thus been talk about 'Russia's public return to great power status' (Friedman, 2008: 4) and more generally 'normalization', i.e. a shift that would restore the relevance of Realist interpretations of the character of international relations and more broadly, the conflict has provided credence to views about history finally being back on track as opposed to arguments about 'the end of history'.

Against this backdrop, my aim here is neither one of resolving the issues of blame nor to determine what really happened in the context of the conflict. It is instead one of exploring more fully and in a somewhat broader light the various temporal claims pertaining to shifts and breaks put forward in the context of the Georgian-Russian conflict. In particular, I focus on the question whether the conflict really stands for a tilting-point and if so, what has changed and if so, in which regard and in which direction.

In passing judgment on these issues, I approach the conflict as a discursive battlefield consisting of clashes between various arguments and views struggling with each other. More particularly, the aim is one of exploring whether the contest unfolds in the context of positions adopted within a particular and *shared* discourse or if it rather entails shifts and jumps *from one discourse to another*. Introducing such a duality, one with two distinct and competing discourses simultaneously present, allows for conclusions to be drawn on whether the subject positions have unfolded within a particular discourse with the relationship between various discourses intact or if the changes are more fundamental and radical in the sense



of having occurred between the two rather different accounts. The latter option would then signal that the conflict is indeed to be endowed with considerable importance and warrants to be viewed as a turning-point. Whatever the dynamics turn out to be, the approach applied will arguably provide insight into crucial constellations of a *systemic character* in the sphere of international relations, and it informs, if shifts have actually occurred, about their nature and seriousness not only in a manner that reaches beyond the conflict itself and its immediate military and security-related aspects but also in the sense of allowing for broader policy-related issues to be addressed.

The paper starts out by sketching a more general interpretative frame for the broader discursive pattern and the contests at play related to the August conflict to be arrested. The approach applied in this context is a post-structuralist and pluralist one – along the lines of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) – in seeking to gain a greater understanding of the patterns unfolding in terms of symmetry and asymmetry and the discursive dynamics more generally at play. And secondly, the paper focuses on the statements provided and policies pursued by some of the key actors, namely Russia, the European Union and the United States. This is done in order to see how they have chosen to position themselves in relation to the discursive options on offer. And finally, in having traced the unfolding of the discursive setting and the pattern of the relevant subject positions as well as the dynamics of the discourse at large, the paper probes the various more policy-related consequences of the August conflict in the light of the discursive and identity-related constellations that the event generated and brought into existence.

## KOSOVO VERSUS GEORGIA

As a key point of departure, I would like to ground the argument regarding to the existence of two competing discourses, and to do so by drawing on conclusions presented by Iver Neumann (2008: 128-30) in the context of his study on the historical unfolding of Russia's position in European politics.

Neumann asserts that Russia has continuously been faced – in aspiring to gain recognition as a great power – with two different accounts of greatness. There has, on the one hand, been the classical *Realpolitik* account with stress on sovereignty and the material aspects of power and on the other hand a more recent and competing one fastening on ethics, moral standing and normative purpose. He also observes that Russia has consistently failed to get the recognition it has been yearning for and has frequently positioned itself in a rather problematic manner in relation to the two accounts (see also Prozorov, 2008 and 2009; Ringmar, 2002; Williams and Neumann, 2000).

Crucially, the same difficulty of gaining recognition on broadly acceptable terms and to locate oneself unambiguously in regard to the two accounts has also been noticeable in the context of the Kosovo-conflict with Russia refusing in no uncertain terms to abandon the traditional conceptual baggage of *Realpolitik*. This corresponded, as testified among others by Timofey Bordachev (2009: 62), with a persistent trend in Russia's policies: "A belief in traditional Westphalian sovereignty is therefore now a central principle of Russia's foreign policy and a key point of difference with the 'liberal interventionist' West".

It is therefore quite noteworthy that a profound change of footing took place in the case of the Georgian-Russian conflict. In fact, Russia broke the long-standing pattern,

one outlined by Bordachev, of resisting a distinctly collective and norm-based approach and staying resolutely with a classical sovereignty- and interests-based standing. It did so by suddenly signaling a preparedness to abide to the dictates of the moral and ethical account and by resorting to post-sovereign arguments. Rather unexpectedly, Russia maintained that the clash was in essence about ‘peace enforcement’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’, i.e. military interference in order to protect the two break-away provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia along with the Russian peacekeepers as well as Russian citizens located in the region against Georgian abuses of power. Concepts such as ‘genocide’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ were employed and it was also asserted that the number of casualties had turned unacceptably high.

In essence, Russia claimed that it did not resort to war in the customary and modern sense of the concept (as doing so would actually provide, in the context of a *Realpolitik*-based reading, further ground for accusations that the Russian use of force actually stood for an aggression and boiled down to a rather classical invasion) but positioned itself instead in terms of an actor engaging in a local conflict as a guardian of those in danger and more generally a defender of the value-based international society. It aspired, in other words, for recognition as a great power but did so this time by pursuing ‘liberal interventionism’, by invoking explicitly normative arguments and advocating in general “a European solution to the Caucasian problems” (Gorenburg and Makarychev, 2009: 5). In short, it was arguably on its way of joining the hegemonic accounts as to the nature of current-day international relations and moving, in terms of identity, towards the stance of figuring as a liberal power and one sharing common European values.

It may be noted, however, that Russia’s change in footing amounted to a failure. At large, the view that Russia was sincerely knocking on the door and signaling an interest in joining the liberal international order was rejected. In addition, there was nothing for Russia to join in the sense that the discursive hegemony had actually shifted. Georgia was in general not seen as breaching international norms and thereby inviting for intervention and international counter-measures. It was rather regarded as a small and sovereign power in peril and depicted as a state in danger of losing its sovereignty as well as a formidable part of its territory. Georgia was therefore to be protected from intervention instead of inviting for one. Moreover, it also followed that the event was not conceptualized in a neutral fashion as a ‘war’ between Russia and Georgia and there was hence much talk of ‘Russia’s war in Georgia’ (cf. Sestanovich, 2008: 13; Cornell et. al., 2008; Pallin and Westerlund, 2009) and in fact traditional statist concerns with stress on independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity as the primary concerns were this time placed – in choosing an interpretative frame – above the rights of individuals or the right to self-determination. Overall, Georgia’s efforts of purporting itself as a victim of great power aggression impacted the discourse – with a considerable number of decision-makers from numerous countries appearing side-to-side with President Mikhail Saakashvili in Tbilisi – far more than the norm-based arguments at least initially weathered by Russia.

It is also to be noted in this context that Russia was not just blamed for its resort to military means. Rather than accepting the normative framing suggested by Russia – and then criticizing the policies pursued within such a context – Russia was again met with exclusion in the broader international discourse. It was categorized as a non-us and seen as an

outcast to be denied any constitutive impact in defining what the conflict was about. Notably, this took place despite that reports carried out by various fact-finding missions (see Amnesty International, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2008 and 2009; Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, 2009) have actually all asserted that Georgia carried a considerable part of the blame in having initiated the conflict by shelling Tskhinvali. The Wikipedia account of the conflict reads: “During the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, Georgia launched a large scale military attack against the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia”, and as noted by Pierre Schori (2009: 2), director of FRIDE: “few foreign observers, including diplomats in Tbilisi, and the overwhelming majority of the political sphere outside the cabinet offices, dispute the Wikipedia account”.

It hence appears that it does not really matter whether Russia opposes the dominant, norm-based account underpinning the post-Cold War international relations or instead aspires to abide to some of the key arguments part of that discourse. The discursive borderlines are in any case drawn in a manner positioning Russia as an object. Russia appears to be void of constitutive power in the sphere of agenda-setting and can at most aim for the position of a semi-insider. Russia can do so by joining the hegemonic discourse and abiding to its dictates as a late-comer and a learner. Access is denied even in the case of Russia showing signs of being prepared to abandon the principles of interest-based state sovereignty in favour of the international protection of human rights and other normative concerns. The stance purporting Russia as a neutral peacekeeper, one operating on the basis of an agreed international mandate in the context of a humanitarian mission has almost unanimously been viewed, it appears, as be-

ing merely tactical if not distinctly cynical in essence.

At large, rather than approving the Russian efforts of depicting the clash in post-sovereign terms and then passing critical judgment on the policies pursued by the various actors party to the conflict, the verdict has in general been that such claims – and the conflict more generally – stands for yet another example of Russia’s increasingly assertive policies and expansionist tendencies as well as its preparedness to abuse, in this context, broadly agreed international standards. This is confirmed – the argument goes – by Russia having in the first place in various ways contributed to the circumstances that led to the conflict but in particular by the Russian forces not stopping at the border of Georgia-proper. Instead of doing so they opted for broader geopolitical gains after having ejected Georgian forces from South Ossetia. This is to say that realist and sovereignty-related – rather than post-realist and norm-based – explanations have dominated the discourse with much faith being invested in arguments about Russia wanting to reassert its control over former Soviet territory, block NATO membership for a country in its ‘backyard’, and simultaneously “expose the hypocrisy of the US foreign policy in Kosovo and subsequently in Iraq” (cf. Peel, 2008).

## CHANGES IN POSTURES

But in relation to the accounts at stake, do the alterations then refer to shifts and changes within a single and established discourse or, more radically, to a switch from one discourse to another? Both readings seem, as such, conceivable. They do not necessarily exclude each other as there might be changes detectable that unfold within particular discourses

but also infringe the borderlines between separate discourses. A modest interpretation of the term ‘watershed’ would narrow the change down to a spatiotemporal shift taking place *within* one and basically a shared logic.

However, a more profound way of staging the setting would consist – as already indicated above – of arguing that there are in fact two rather different accounts at play with claims pertaining to ‘shift’ and ‘return’ pointing not only to changes within an established discursive constellation but actually referring more broadly to alterations *between* these discourses. ‘Return’ would in this context imply that the classical stance has recently grown in strength with Russia refraining in the end from any efforts of moving over and reaching out in order to be included in the more normatively premised discourse on international relations and ‘shift’ could also amount to the West pursuing, for a change, a classical, sovereignty-related logic as to the Georgia-Russian conflict.

Importantly, the convergence of positions in the context of a classical stance would either pave the way for *securitization* with stress on danger and the need for various security-related countermeasures high on the agenda to form the discursive meeting-point or, for that matter, allow agreement on *de-securitization* to become the common stance. The discourse would in the latter case relate to mediation and rapprochement between the respective parties as well as various efforts of confidence-building and arms control. Whatever the outcome, security-related arguments – with security constituting an integral aspect of the *Realpolitik*-related story – would in any case figure as the key aspect of the discourse. Some form of security-speak would in any case account for the postures adopted, determine the way the subject positions unfold and inform about the probable direction of

future relations between the actors in question.

Principally, the more normative and value-based discourse figures as something quite different, and this is so above all in the sense that it is far less geared towards security. It actually allows for the dismissal of the whole argument and invites for the focusing on other things such as integration and development, i.e. departures that mostly unite and bring the parties together. Yet, although mainly pertaining to *non-security* and accounts located outside the realm of security, the theme of security can nonetheless also enter the norm-based discourse. It is not categorically excluded and may enter the stage due to efforts of *re-securitization*, i.e. arguments advanced within a basically non-securitized discursive sphere about the need to reactivate once again the argument of security in order for it to regain relevance.

Against this background, departing from the existence of two basically separate discursive settings and the way security enters as an argument, the interpretative framework (rather than a diagram or a matrix as the two discursive settings are taken to be distinct from each other) employed for analyzing the relevant subject positions in the debate on the August conflict unfolds as follows:

Deployed Discursive Approach	Mode of Securitization	
<i>Sovereignty and Interest-Based Logic</i>	Intensive securitization	De-securitization
<i>Norm-based and Communitarian Logic</i>	Non-securitization	Re-securitization

Clearly, there are numerous options present for either the stance adopted by one party to correspond within the constellations outlined above with those deployed by the others (resulting in a situation of *congruence* in discursive location) or the stance being challenged by others applying a very different reading (amounting to *incongruence* as to their respective discursive locations). The parties operating in the context of a shared reading (amounting for example to views about an unintended conflict) may develop friendly and cooperative relations, but they may also clash and disagree as to the specific policies pursued, and do so precisely because of their congruent comprehension (with the conflict being viewed as a challenge in the form of a power political contest) of the prevalent discursive constellation. This is in particular the case if the shared mode of securitization consists of the parties contributing to and engaging themselves in an intense and continued securitization. Security-speak thus forms a kind of common language, albeit one that may despite the shared logic set the parties apart from each other in bringing about an adversarial relationship. Engaging in re-securitization yields a similar result whereas the options of de-securitization and especially non-securitization tend to be far less prone to the emergence of tensions and conflict-ridden relations.

Overall, incongruence may be the outcome because of positions adopted within a shared discursive logic but it can also be rooted in the parties abiding to different and competing discursive logics. The Russian and the Western framing of NATO's operation in Kosovo exemplify, as noted above, the latter stance and the approaches to the Georgian-Russian conflict seem at least initially to have unfolded in a similarly incongruent fashion, although with the positions of the parties be-

ing at least for a while reversed (i.e. Russia supporting of norm-based and communitarian reading whereas the West stood for a rather sovereignty-related approach). With Russia then having moved back towards an emphasis on the logic of undivided sovereignty, the prospects for congruence (in the sense securitization being the common stance) to be the outcome seem to have improved, albeit the question remains whether the meeting-point as to the mode of speaking security consists of *continued* or perhaps even *intensified securitization* or if it instead boils down to joint *moves of de-securitization* in the form of efforts to defuse a rather problematic issue and avert an increasingly dangerous constellation.

## POSTURES ADOPTED BY THE EU

As to the way the EU, the United States and Russia position themselves in regard to the frame outlined above, all of them appear to have at least to some degree profiles of their own. In some cases the differences pertain to their positioning within a shared discursive logic whereas in some others it appears to boil down to locations in separate discursive contexts.

The EU distinguishes itself as to its construction of identity from most other actors on the international scene in being largely driven by rather normative concerns and in relying on civilian rather than military means of influence. The emphasis on norms and communitarian approaches implies that the EU aims at setting standards and endeavours at impacting what is considered appropriate and normal behaviour in the sphere of international relations (cf. Diez and Manners, 2007). The investment into the power embedded in norms is closely connected with economic forms of power, this then point-

ing to efforts of ‘domesticating’ international relations above all through a strong emphasis on integration and development. Such an emphasis clearly conflicts with the customary sovereignty-related approaches as well as the naturalization of security. The approach has paved the ground for purporting the EU in terms of a ‘civilian power’, one engaged in efforts of ‘civilizing’ international behaviour.

Accordingly, the EU is also to be viewed – in aspiring at a broadening and strengthening of the impact of norms rather than staying with sovereignty as a key departure – as post-statist in character. It is, in this vein, oriented towards change and owing to the efforts of broadening the sphere of norms and setting standards in the sphere of international relations at large, to be seen as rather cosmopolitan in nature.

Consequently, and in positioning itself as a normative power, the EU has – with the security dilemma seen as having been overcome – traditionally stayed aloof from security-talk. Security has not figured as a constitutive argument except in the sense that securitization is in the case of the Union something to be avoided. It is to be left behind as a relic from a previous and utterly problematic era of European politics. And against the background of the EU trying to opt out of security-speak, de-securitization is not an option to be explored, at least not in a power-political sense. Yet it is to be noted that arguments pertaining to security have increasingly crept into the EU-discourse since the end-1990s. Numerous voices have contributed to re-securitization by arguing that even normative aims have occasionally to be backed up and defended against violations by a resort to military means. Actually, it appears that stress on normative aims may also boil down to the pursuance of rather ‘hard’ policies. This is to say that there seems – despite the Cold War

being over as a major form of securitization – to be less trust present within the discourse in the power of norms on their own merits or, for that matter, normative aims being merely backed up by economic and other ‘soft’ forms of influence. Hence also issues pertaining to military power – and in that context security as an argument – have over the recent years turned into an established part of the discourses integral to the EU’s essence.

The alterations within the norm-based logic have then, more concretely, paved the way for a security strategy (initially in 2003 and then in a revised form in 2008) to be devised and the consequences are also reflected in the acquisition of various forms of military power as well as in the EU’s participation in a number of ‘humanitarian’ interventions. It appears, though, that the policies pursued still remain distinctly normative in essence. They are there in the first place for the normative approach to be supplemented by the use of force rather than testifying to a switch in and profound re-location of the very constitutive logic. This is so as force still seems to be used with great reluctance and it figures merely as the last resort. The policies pursued also remain post-sovereign and cosmopolitan in essence as the Union has retained its preparedness to impinge, if need be, on state sovereignty and intervene in defense of various values (articulated as ‘responsibility to intervene’) and in order to support individuals in danger.

It has to be noted, however, that the borderline between the two discursive settings has over the recent years turned increasingly thin. Voices insisting on the EU abandoning its ‘Kantian’ nature (cf. Kagan, 2003) and advocating the grounding of its subjectivity in the acquisition and use of ‘hard’ power (cf. Cooper, 2003; van Ham, 2008) have multiplied. These interventions aim explicitly at providing the acquisition of military means

and use of force with increased legitimacy without this being necessarily linked to various norm-based aspirations. It seems fair to conclude that the relative success of such arguments calling for the EU to gain 'real' subjectivity implies that the Union's trust in impacting others by setting an example and relying merely on processes of socialization is no longer as self-evident as it used to be and there are, in fact, analysts arguing that a tipping-point has already been passed (cf. Diez, 2004). They assert that the approach of re-securitization in a norm-base context has over the recent years been traded for securitization in a more traditional manner.

In sum, discourses with *Realpolitik* as the unifying stand are no longer totally off-limits and the acquisition and even use of military means stand increasingly out as integral attributes of the EU, this obviously pointing to a developmental path leading away from the previous emphasis of non-securitization.

### **THE UNITED STATES: HOBBESIAN RATHER THAN KANTIAN**

In comparison, the constitutive discourses unfold somewhat differently in the case of the United States. They do so in the sense that the US rests on a Hobbesian rather than Kantian departures as to the essence of international relations. Accordingly, the US has been far less prone than the EU to drop sovereignty-related arguments and it has also stayed with securitization as a central aspect of the constitutive discourses. This then implies, on the one hand, that there is little reason to expect the US to engage in any re-securitization (along the lines of the EU) with security already figuring as a core constitutive argument but, on the other hand, it also fol-

lows that the option of de-securitization is readily available as a location and a meeting-point in the broader international discourses. While de-securitization does not figure as a link to the EU (as securitization has a rather weak standing within the EU), such a stance nonetheless offers a kind of 'natural' option to be pursued by America in its relationships with other major actors on the international scene, i.e. powers interested in linking up the US through an engagement in conflict management, cooperative security, arms control or, for that matter, disarmament.

It is to be noted, however, that the US persistence on securitization and the lack of the option of de-securitization for the part of the EU do not imply that the two would remain far apart in grounding themselves through the employment of separate and competing discursive logics. In actual fact, the congruence between their respective approaches and locations is considerable as also the US has been renowned for its rather moralistic and idealistic approach to international politics. The normative approach appears to have taken somewhat different forms in the cases of the EU and the US, and there seems to exist some discrepancies of a temporal nature. The US efforts of civilizing international politics through the establishment of a variety of international institutions, starting with the League of Nations, peaked during the Wilsonian era. The EU constitutes in this sense a latecomer to the game, and has engaged itself in the spreading of norms at a juncture when the US in turn appears to figure predominantly as a more conventional and sovereignty-related power. The EU's emphasis on cosmopolitan departures implies that there is a preparedness to be one among many and therewith also abide to the norms commonly pursued whereas the US has at least on occasions been more keen on imposing a normative stance

on others while at the same time refraining from subordinating itself to broadly accepted international norms (cf. Ikenberry 2009: 82-3). The labeling of the US as ‘unilateralist’ catches some aspects of this tendency.

And yet the EU might – with normativity being a common concern and a joint location – nonetheless have a somewhat different list of priorities as to the norms to be pursued. Whereas ‘governance’ would strongly label the EU’s approach in the pursuance of normative aims, the US is much more inclined to operate in the sphere of ‘high policies’ with the moral zeal articulated through the employment of markers such as ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’. Equally, the toppling of ‘tyrants’ has been high on America’s foreign and security policy agendas amounting then in policies such as those pursued over the recent years *vis-à-vis* Iraq and in other similar contexts. Furthermore, the processes applied in the pursuance of normative goals have in the case of the US had a kind of ‘top-down’ quality. They have been straight-forward in style and accompanied more often than not by a resort to the use of military means of influence – whereas a similar approach for the part of the EU tends to unfold in a ‘bottom-up’ kind of fashion (cf. Kopstein, 2006) with the option of military involvement to be used merely in exceptional cases and with utter care.

## **A TRADITIONALIST RUSSIA**

Although Russia displays in general features of waging a rather traditional discourse with emphasis on sovereignty and security-related issues, it has on occasions also ascribed to explicitly norm-based departures. The Russian revolution obviously stands for a reminder of this, and there has more recently – during the

period of Mikhail Gorbachev – been the effort of grounding Russia in ‘universal human values’. Likewise, the narrative of ‘Our Common European Home’ testifies that there has from time to time been preparedness to join and contribute to the construction of a rather value-based Europe.

However, in the end Russia’s ability to remain with and follow up the various norm-based proposals and hook on to the different initiatives taken in order for the country to become firmly anchored in the European norm-based discourses have proved insufficient. In addition, there has been little preparedness – with sovereignty-related securitization as one of the approaches still around – on the Western side to open up and accept Russia as an actor with an equal voice and with normative departures of its own in the European discourse. Having failed to join the ‘new’ Europe, Russia has nonetheless remained European, albeit it has done so in a rather traditional sense with considerable stress on undivided sovereignty as a core departure, and with this emphasis then also accompanied by securitization as a key aspect of the discursive approach applied.

In consequence, Russia and the EU seem to unfold basically along the lines of separate constitutive logics, although the question of integration remains as a point of convergence and stands out as a potentially unifying issue. In this latter regard, Russia has on occasions displayed considerable interest in taking part in EU-related cooperation, but has also more often than not found reasons to reserve its position owing to dissatisfaction as to the conditions on offer. In general, Russia has been prevented from proceeding further on the path of integration as it has not, in the view of the EU, been able to abide to the rules of conditionality. The initiatives have mostly come from the Union, although



there are also cases pointing to the opposite with Russia advancing integrationist proposals and the EU pursuing a more assertive and self-exclusive orientation. Sergei Prozorov (2009) refers in this context to Russia's recurrent proposals for a visa-free regime between Russia and the EU with the latter deploying the conventional instruments of sovereignty in insisting on the uniform and stringent visa regime for Russian visitors to Europe.

Prozorov thus finds it important to stress that the principles of sovereignty and international integration are present both in the policies of Russia and the EU. He concedes, however, that the constellation has usually been one of the EU pursuing integrationist policies with Russia instead invoking claims of sovereign equality and non-interference in its internal affairs. The EU's offer for Russia to join the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a case in point, and a number of other examples could be provided as well. Whilst Russia initially sided with the integrationist logic, one may according to Prozorov speak of an accentuation of Russia's self-exclusion from the space of European politics since Putin's second term as Russia's President. In a sense, Russia has aspired for subjectivity by positioning itself within a shared discourse, but has then deliberately purported itself as the radical Other in order find to a solution to its dislocation consisting of being in-between and remaining in a kind of 'no-man's land'. It searches for ways of solving and sorting out its inconvenient location of being neither really in nor belonging fully to the outside.

He thus finds reason to argue that exclusion and self-exclusion have more lately dominated – due to incongruence in regard to their respective discursive departures – the EU-Russian relations. Russia's main tendency has been one of gradual abandonment of

the position of the complainant over unwarranted exclusion by the EU. This position has been traded for a more assertive and self-exclusive orientation that devalues concrete moves towards greater integration between Russia and the EU.

It has to be added, though, that Russia does this without entirely dispensing with the ideal of integration as such, although hanging on to the integrationist discourse has not provided Russia with the identity-related certitude that it has been opting for and instead the aspiration appears – as also noted by Morozov (2009) – to have amounted to considerable disarray. The demand for symmetrical and non-hierarchical interaction has not been met, and particularly in the sphere of norms and values the EU has been able to exert hegemonic influence over Russia (see also Aalto, 2008; Guzzini, 2008). In consequence, there has for quite some time been an almost constant crisis present in the EU-Russia relations.

Notably, the sharpening of discursive borders and emphasis on quite different discursive locations does not seem to have occurred merely in the sphere of integration-related policies but applies also to the sphere of explicitly security-related issues. This is due to Russia having resumed the patrolling of strategic bombers, unilaterally suspending participation in the CFE-treaty and threatening to withdraw from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (cf. Fedorov, 2008: 13). These measures clearly indicate that the approach of securitization has turned far more pronounced, although also some moves of de-securitization have been present. They have been detectable above all in the form of Russia proposing the devising of a new European security treaty. The latter proposal has been met with some curiosity and has amounted to a variety of discussions, and de-

spite having failed to turn into any immediate success, it has at least not been rejected out of hand. The proposal is obviously problematic if viewed with the eyes of the EU. This is so as the Union does not have de-securitization on its agenda or a mandate to engage in security-related talk, but the theme no doubt resonates with the constitutive discourses waged in various European countries as well as the one in the United States and, importantly, it allows at least potentially for a lowering of the otherwise quite strict discursive boundaries in relation to Russia.

### **THE RUSSIAN DISCOURSE ON THE GEORGIAN–RUSSIAN CONFLICT**

To be sure, the Georgian-Russian conflict of August 2008 and the discussions waged in Russia in that context testify to an emphasis on securitization. Engaging Russia in a highly controversial conflict underlined that the efforts of ‘mutual delimitation’ as forms of de-securitization had at least for a while turned into a secondary consideration. Russia had, as argued by Yuru Fedorov (2009), instead opted for “controlled confrontation”.

The conflict gained enthusiastic public support and the moves undertaken were in the domestic Russian discourse justified and legitimized in a variety of ways (Pain, 2009: 23). They were in the first place purported, in the case of the Georgian-Russian conflict, as measures of self-defense conducted in order to protect Russian peace-keepers and citizens located in South Ossetia. Georgia was depicted as an aggressor, i.e. a country not to be appeased but to be firmly rejected in contrast to measures such as the 1938 Munich agreement. President Medvedev (2008a) invoked for his part arguments pertaining in

general to the outbreak of WWII (and now applicable in the case of Georgia) with Russia having to take upon itself the task of defending European civilization. Moreover, and in addition to these more principal arguments, the Russian leadership resorted to various rather arrogant statements in order to downplay and undermine the legitimacy of various western claims. “Shutting up the Millibands” was one of these. Yet another line of discourse consisted of pronouncing in an assertive and a rather self-assured manner that “Russia did not fear anything, not even a new Cold War” as stated President Medvedev (2008b).

Russia suspended, on a more practical plane, its participation in cooperation with NATO and announced that it can very well do without a membership in the WTO. In general the western criticism of Russian policies was presented as testifying that Russia had taken the right path in defending its dignity and interests against efforts of testing its strength and endurance in a more general power-related context, one involving US measures to initiate indirect confrontations (cf. Nichol, 2009: 28).

An examination of the more recent turns in the discourse allows Prozorov (2009) to suggest that the grand constitutive battles as to Russia’s belonging have turned destitute. Metaphors pertaining to ‘divorce’ have proliferated in the Russian discourse and the integrationist stance, with Europe as a key signifier, have been removed from the Russian agenda. Being viewed against this background, the Georgian-Russian conflict exemplified mutual irritation and resentment rather than stood for any endeavour of protesting at not gaining the recognition aspired for as the latter ambition had already been abandoned, he claims. Accordingly, further securitization – as exemplified by the conflict – would hence

appear to be the logical option left to pursue in Russia's policies.

However, Prozorov also concedes that the question remains whether a 'divorce' has really occurred and the integrationist/cooperative discourse shelved and declared as belonging to a bygone era. It may also be that the various expressions of irritation pertain in the first place to Russia harbouring feelings of being trapped within an integrationist/cooperative constellation and remaining unable – due to a shortage of narrative resources – to find a way out of such a discourse entrapment. In pondering this question, he arrives at the conclusion that the various expressions of irritation would actually be pointless if an unequivocal abandonment and move to a different discursive location had already taken place. He then settles for the stance of an impasse, one preventing any progress but with the integrationist/cooperative frame still in place as a dominant departure.

It may be noted, though, that the two options considered and played against each other by Prozorov are not necessarily the only ones available, at least not in a broader context than just the one consisting of the EU-Russia relations. In the light of the frame endeavouring at outlining the constitutive logics at play, Russia may at least in principle also proceed in the direction of de-securitization. The conflict no doubt testifies to moves of deliberate securitization rather than de-securitization, but it also makes abundantly clear in its consequences that the costs of proceeding in that direction are formidable and perhaps unbearable (Erik Ringmar (2002) has argued that similar developments crucially contributed to the outbreak of WWII). The experience might imply that de-securitization as a form of rapprochement – rather than hanging on and returning to policies and more broadly

the frame of integration – constitutes the avenue for Russia to contemplate.

## **THE EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS: A WIDENING GAP**

The increased emphasis on security as a core constitutive argument has been there already for some years. The incongruence that has been detectable in the departures applied implies that the relations between the European Union and Russia as well as those between Russia and the West more generally have for quite some time been far from problem-free. They have in fact been coloured by an almost constant crisis with little progress being achieved over the years. Various conflicts such as those of the two Chechen wars, tensions between Russia and some of the post-Soviet states, authoritarian developments in Russia as well as various 'affairs' such as the Yukos case or murders of journalists and advocates of human rights have contributed to tensions and a deterioration of relations. Whilst preserving to some extent their cooperative appearance, the relations have in essence been quite constrained.

The discursive pattern underlying the EU-Russia relations has been divergent in a variety of ways. Russia has complained that it has constantly been met with a request to adapt to a set of ready-made and rather 'ideological' rules. It has, rather than being offered a dialogue between equal parties, been asked to accommodate principles and approaches tabled by the EU in a European context. Instead of having been recognized as a key actor with departures of its own, Russia feels having been pushed to the sidelines while at the same time wondering whether the rather legalistic, administrative and in a number of ways rather non-political EU harbours any subjectivity to

start with. In general, Russia perceives itself as having been turned into an object and treated as a client within a pattern based on a separation between subjects (with new norms also determining who is granted the position of a subject in the first place) and objects.

The EU has, for its part, felt itself being betrayed and turned down because of a wide discrepancy between Russia's promises and its deeds. The EU-Russia agreements have not been followed up in the pursuance of practical policies and the norm-based EU-critique concerning authoritarian tendencies, lack of openness and deficiencies in terms of democracy have been met by Russian reprisals along the lines of 'look at yourself' arguments.

Despite regular meetings and an up-keeping of the cooperative rhetorics, little practical progress has been achieved. Rather than progress, the meetings have testified to a stand-still with some analysts (Barber, 2008) suggesting that the frequency of summits should actually be reduced in the future in order to avoid disgraceful biannual demonstrations of the ineffectiveness of the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership'.

However, the norm-based and integrationist logic undergirding the EU-Russia relationship seems to have prevailed. It has done so at least to some extent, although its discursive relevance appears, as noted above, to have diminished over the recent years to some degree. Some exclusionist features have been present, albeit they boil for the most part down to Russia's self-exclusion. Russia has been offered inclusion above in the sphere of the EU's neighbourhood policy, but the Russian demand to be recognized as a 'strategic partner' has implied that the invitation has been somewhat angrily turned down with the remark that Russia is not 'some kind of Morocco'.

The August clash between Georgia and Russia undoubtedly fits the contentious pattern in the EU-Russia relations and accentuates it further. Their relationship reached, no doubt, its lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The increasing doubts about Russia's credentials in an integrationist context as well as the current disillusionment in Russia's Europeanization and the retreat of ambitious visions of EU-Russia cooperation call, Prozorov (2009) asserts, not only for minor revision in the approaches applied. They invite, he claims, for a re-assessment of the overall theoretical framework used in viewing and analyzing the relations between Russia and the European Union.

The occurrence of a kind of paradigmatic shift appears to be the case also in the sense of the EU being faced with profound constitutive issues. The Union's approach in regard to the Southern Caucasus, including Georgia, has by and large been based an integrationist approach. The EU aims at promoting development and conflict resolution in principle through 'constructive engagement' using conditionality as the main departure (cf. Diez, Stetter and Albert, 2006). Conditionality, i.e. an explicitly norm-based approach, constitutes the cornerstone also in the case of Georgia with the country being part of the ENP and more recently the Union's Eastern Partnership, and conditionality is also reflected in the offer for Georgia to move towards free trade, visa-free arrangements and to join the EU's Energy Treaty.

The Rose Revolution in November 2003 prompted the EU to pay increasing attention to Georgia and this trend was further accentuated by Georgia becoming the Union's direct neighbour with enlargement turning Romania and Bulgaria to EU-members. Yet the Union's role has remained relatively modest with the relationship being basically rest-

ing on a PCA-agreement signed in 1999. In the first place, the Union's endeavours have been geared towards a strengthening of the Georgian state for example by actively supporting juridical reforms and re-structuring of the border guard service (Blank, 2009: 112-14; Fean, 2009). The Union has also aspired to improve Georgia's dialogue – with issues pertaining to security being approached indirectly – in relation to its secessionist parts (cf. Lynch, 2006; Tocci, 2008).

The EU's policies of involvement has been premised on integrationist departures with peace, stability and development in the neighbourhood being seen as essential goals, although it may at the same time be noted that the Union's profile in the sphere of mediation and engagement in conflict resolution has remained relatively modest. One reason for this obviously consists of that many other actors and international organizations, including the OSCE, have been quite active in this field. It appears, however, that an accentuation has in general taken place with conflict resolution having gained a standing of its own. It has more recently become to some extent detached from the EU's purely integrationist aims.

The establishment in 2003 of the post of the EU's Special Representative in the Southern Caucasus region – with special emphasis on Georgia – might be seen as a vindication of that the integrationist departures are on their way of being gradually complemented if not substituted by other, and more openly security-related approaches. Along similar lines, the EU and its member states – most notably Germany – have searched for solutions to the relations between Georgia and its dissident parts and the EU was similarly active in the setting up of the Geneva talks in the aftermath of the conflict (Fean, 2009: 6). In the context of the conflict, the EU

contributed in various ways to the achieving of a ceasefire as well as settlements of various issues on the ground in the aftermath of the Georgian-Russian conflict by sending an observer mission and more broadly through participation in the intense EU-Russia negotiations in Moscow in September 2008 (cf. Allison, 2008: 1159).

Yet, and despite of the EU being increasingly accepted as a mediating and a moderating force, Russia's abstention from the integrationist discourse leaves the EU in a rather problematic position. The Union may endeavour at pursuing policies of negative conditionality, as it did with the Commission speeding up the implementation of the Eastern Partnership immediately in the aftermath of the Georgian-Russian conflict (with Georgia included and Russia excluded from the initiative). A considerable number of the EU-countries sided strongly with Georgia and Poland, for its part, decided instantly to conclude the agreement to host parts of America's missile-defense shield (Krastev, 2008). These moves prompted harsh Russian critique (Foreign Minister Lavrov spoke of "an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence") as was to be expected, albeit the consequences of this critique have remained limited.

It appears in general that the Union's policies of exclusion combined with Russia's self-exclusion have advanced to the extent that the parties remain quite detached and relatively independent of each other. Russia does not aspire for membership or even an associated status and it does not depend on the EU's external financial aid. Russia may well opt for an emphasis on the more classical discourse premised on state sovereignty and move further away from an integrationist Europe whereas such a choice and emphasis would be highly problematic for the Union.

This is so as European integration remains grounded in an anti-power political stance and a down-grading of the modern principle of state sovereignty from the very start. Russia could easily adapt to the appearance of a more classical and security-based constellation whilst the outcome would spell a profound identity-crisis for the part of the EU.

### **THE UNITED STATES: A DEVIANT CASE**

Obviously, the US-Russia relations are not similar to the EU-Russia ones as to their discursive underpinnings. This is for example evidenced by that the Russian complaints as to US policies about discrimination do not predominantly pertain to exclusion within some integrationist scheme but are rather rooted in a more classical reading of international relations. For example, in the rather famous speech in Munich in February 2007, President Putin condemned the strictly unipolar nature of international relations and expressed Russia's dissatisfaction with the existence of "a world of one master, one sovereign, where "nearly the entire legal system of one state, first of all, of course the United States, has transgressed its natural boundaries and .... is being imposed on other states" (quoted in Morozov, 2009).

It thus also follows that the problems part of the US-Russia relations do not pertain in the first place to any major incongruence as to their discursive location. This then also allows the argument to be made that there is a considerable dose of 'US-centrism' to be detected in Russia's foreign policy (Makarychev, 2009: 6). Given the congruence, Russia has been able to improve its standing by riding on security-talk. Joining 'the war on terrorism' after 9/11 is a case in point. Crucially, the

US-Russia relationship does not rest on the abandonment of various sovereignty-related departures and does not call for further steps to be taken along the path of norm-based policies and transnational integration. This is so as both the avenues of securitization (in relation to a third party) and de-securitization in the sphere of their mutual relations remain available in order for a more positive relationship to be devised.

But these options notwithstanding, the initial reactions to the Georgian-Russian conflict pointed neither to increased equivalence nor did it testify to efforts of de-securitization as the discourse was primarily about dissidence and exclusion. One of the dominant interpretations advanced in the Russian debate concerning the essence of the conflict pertained to the idea that it was in essence about the US testing Russia's strength and resolution. In other words, the crux of the issue consisted according to some interpretations basically of questions pertaining to major power relations and boiled down to Russia's ranking in that context. Although in essence conflictual, the interpretation nonetheless pointed to a shared discursive departure and stood out as a kind of indirect recognition of Russia as a significant contender, adversary or opponent, i.e. embedded in positions outlined within the logic of *Realpolitik*.

The US reading has in essence been sovereignty-based as well, although also values such as democracy have ranked high as evidenced for example by the speech given by President Bush during his visit to Tbilisi in May 2005. In his view Georgia "...is today sovereign and free, and a beacon of liberty in the region and the world". It appears, however, that being faced with a choice the US supported the government of Saakasvili rather than pushed for broader democratic development in Georgia. The strong personal ties that developed

between the leaderships in Washington and Tbilisi might account for this prioritization. Similarly, the US backed reuniting Georgia's territorial unity rather than acted as an honest broker in order for the frozen conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia to be settled (Blank, 2009: 434). In hearings conducted in the US Senate, there was explicitly stress on securitization with emphasis on Georgia having become a key ally in the Black Sea region allowing then also US access to various other parts of the world, including the Greater Middle East (Lynch, 2006: 51-54). Georgia itself fuelled the strategy-related discourse and bolstered its position by stressing its willingness to contribute to the combating of terrorism and taking part in the Iraq war.

Having studied the US discourse on Georgia, Lincoln Mitchell (2009: 88) arrives at the conclusion that both the normative and the *Realpolitik*-related logics have been present in the US discourse. Within this setting, Georgia's strategic value comes first for such a stance then to be followed by various arguments related to Georgia's western essence and its democratic nature "in a sea of post-Soviet autocracies and kleptocracies".

In broad terms, the emphasis on ideology and values in the Bush administration's foreign policies worked against Russia, and to the extent that there has been a power political and security-related approach present, it has first and foremost been premised on further securitization with emphasis on US supremacy. Moreover, there was in fact a profound reticence to be noted against any acceptance of a cooperative stance in the form of sharing power and influence with Russia – except in the sphere of some specific matters such as the fight against terrorism, non-proliferation, climate change, drug trafficking, energy provision and the stabilization of the Middle East (cf. Lyne, Talbott and Watanabe, 2006).

It is, however, to be noted that the US-Russia dialogue appears to have been plagued by splits inside the US administration, this then preventing the coining of a coherent US policy. Rather offensive statements such as the one of Vice President Cheney on the need to isolate Russia have appeared at the side of much more conciliatory ones, for example the one delivered by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (speech on American-Russian relations, 18 September 2008, Washington, GMF) with Rice assuring that Russia is not to be treated as a "vanguished enemy" but regarded as a partner in power.

For the part of Moscow there was sufficient reason to conclude that few openings remained in the discursive logic underpinning the policies of the Bush Administration, openings that would allow Russia to gain recognition as a genuine partner. Instead, much pointed to disregard and efforts of subordination, these being pursued either through an emphasis on norm-based policies or explicit moves of securitization. In this light, there has been good reasons for Thomas Gomart (2009: 21) to conclude that in the context of the Georgian-Russian conflict, Russia had decided to respond to securitization in kind by moves of further securitization: "the war in Georgia can thus be understood as the desire to finally make itself heard by inspiring fear". In other words, the conflict was not there because of some misreading or owing to incongruence as to the discursive logics applied. It rather erupted with Russia aspiring to signal that it felt itself to be unduly discriminated against in the context of a logic which was, as such, common to both the US and Russia. As argued by Emil' Pain (2009: 16), it boiled down to a "revenge for almost two decades of humiliation and geopolitical retreat".

It may be noted, though, that over time the more classical *Realpolitik*-type of voices with

less stress on norms have coloured the US discourse regarding the August conflict and they also appear to have increased in strength over time. Consequently, the attention attached to Georgia's assumedly democratic and western nature or, for that matter, its strategic value (with Russia being the overwhelming security-related concern) seems to have declined. Henry Kissinger and George Schultz (2008) have, among others, stood for this more classical line of argumentation. Whilst securitization has retained its position as the key discursive departure, the conclusion has increasingly been that relations with Russia matter most and they are not to be sacrificed in the context of a local and peripheral conflict (cf. Mitchell, 2009: 93). While securitization forms a joint discursive approach, also moves of delimitation are required and in this sense the Russian-Georgian conflict occurred too much as a surprise, it was unintended, went too far and could proceed in a rather uncontrolled manner. An abandonment of Russia as a partner would entail that the US loses a considerable amount of social capital needed not only in impacting some specific questions such as developments in North Korea or Iran but also influencing international relations at large.

The critique concerning too aggressive and pronounced forms of securitization was there already at an early stage, albeit the change in presidency appears to have tilted further the balance between various stands existing *within* the logic of securitization. Already the Bush Administration refrained in the aftermath of the conflict from any further aggravation of the US-Russian relations. As argued by Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney (2009: 55), "it did little when Russia invaded its neighbour". On the one hand, it reacted through the use of some rather strong and critical rhetorical interventions, but on the other hand the

US refrained translating the condemnations to concrete moves of further securitization. Measures such as depriving Russia of its belonging to the G8, withdrawing the US support for Russia to be able to host of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, proceeding further along the path of installing some ABM components in Europe or supporting Ukraine in terminating the Russian naval presence in the Crimea in 2017 (Nichol, 2009: 19) were brought up in the discourse as conceivable forms of sanctioning Russia, although the issues faded rather quickly into oblivion. Analysts, for example Oksana Antonenko (2008a: 24) regards the US response to the Russian action in Georgia as being "muted" whereas Stephen Blank (2009: 425) regards it as "tepid". There was much talk and little action, although Antonenko also notes that American warships arriving in the Black Sea did not just carry humanitarian aid but were also loaded with nuclear tipped cruise missiles.

The Obama administration has then continued along the path already opened up by the previous administration by making the conciliatory approach even more explicit. The discursive shift within the power political and sovereignty-related discourse has taken the form of 'resetting' the US-Russian relations. The articulation chosen points rather explicitly to a downgrading of an overly ideological and strongly value-loaded approach and testifies to the upgrading of a more pragmatic, albeit still a security-related one. A delimitation of securitization seems to have taken place with Russia being recognized as a 'partner'. This undoubtedly reflects a broader contextual change with the US accepting in general a less unilateralist and hierarchic position in the sphere of international relations and searching for a dialogue also with countries pursuing far less liberal and norm-based policies than the US itself (Ikenberry, 2009: 81-3).



Subsequently, a US-Russia dialogue has been initiated and a considerable number of concessions have become visible. Above all, the US has backtracked on the initial plan to deploy American ABM components in Poland and the Czech Republic. The opening for Georgia to enter NATO as a member appears to have narrowed down rather than expanded, a dialogue and serious negotiations both on political and expert level concerning a new strategic arms control treaty have been initiated, and the US has shown signs of being more conciliatory and forthcoming as to Russia's proposal in relation to a European security pact. Russia, for its part, has returned to its cooperation with NATO. It has also accepted to allow a transit route through Russia of US non-lethal military supplies for troops in Afghanistan, shelved the threat to deploy nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in Kaliningrad and accepted more generally that there is indeed a need to 'reboot' the US-Russian relations (President Medvedev in a meeting of the Russian-American Dialogue Group, 20 March 2009).

More principally, the US and Russia seem increasingly to position themselves within the same and a shared discursive setting and meet each other in a rather cooperative manner. In doing so, they have also been able to achieve a far less conflictual relationship compared to the previous state of affairs of being located either within different discourses or, pursuing both intensive securitization within a shared discursive constellation. Rather than aspiring for a shared interpretation of the Caucasus conflict such as the one of an accidental and unintended war, the parties seem to have pushed the very issue to the fringes of their dialogue and focused instead on issue of a far less problematic character.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In bringing about a vigorous if not an alarmist debate, the Russo-Georgian conflict in August 2008 clearly added to the weight of security-related arguments on the agenda of international relations.

In addition of being seen as crucial, the clash was in some sense also an unexpected one. There was a considerable element of surprise and perhaps even shock present in the discourse as war between statist entities had for quite some time been absent in a European context. The issue of classical war had, in fact, lost its previous centrality and had been pushed to a rather peripheral posture. The predominance of statist actors in the context of the conflict, in particular Russia, also implied that rather than framing the conflict as part and parcel of a more general trend of the post-Cold War period and seeing it as one of the numerous 'new wars', that is wars related to weak or falling states, the dominant reading was instead that the issue of classical war was again back on the agenda.

The centrality of the statist and assumedly power political elements also implied that concepts such as 'return' or 'reversal' were frequently employed in the debate and similarly, the Russian efforts of equating the Russo-Georgian one with recent conflicts in the Balkans and Kosovo in particular were resolutely rejected. The Russian assertions that the conflict was in a sense accidental in having broken out due to deficiencies in the European security system did not fare any better in the debate.

With arguments pertaining to 'return', the main question debated was whether war was again on its way back as a 'normal' aspect of European politics. Seen from a *Realpolitik* type of perspective, the answer was a clear yes. In other words, the somewhat exceptional period

of far-reaching cooperation and non-securitization had come to an end and the name of the game was again one of full-fledged power politics. Accordingly, the dominant reading of the conflict boiled down to invasion and Russia was subsequently charged with having behaved aggressively towards a small neighbouring power. The opposite view, and one calling for different interpretations, that also the far smaller and weaker Georgia had for its part contributed to the outbreak of the conflict and the use of large-scale violence was pushed aside, and this has in general been the case at least until recently with the publishing of the report of Independent International Fact-finding Mission (initiated by the EU) in September 2009.

In this vein and as a moment of profound negativity, the conflict instigated and strengthened views that the relations between the major powers had turned inherently conflictual. Speculation occurred at least in some of the commentary on whether a new Cold War might be in the making. Overall, the discourse waged provided credence to the understanding that intense securitization remains what one should engage in. The conflict constituted in this sense a clear landmark and turning-point. This has been evidenced among other things by the proliferation of arguments pertaining to 'strategic balance', security guarantees, 're-assurance' or issues such as the existence of 'gray zones' in the discourse. There has furthermore been talk about punishment and measures needed to balance further against Russia in order to restrain the assumedly offensive use of its power.

Yet, and whilst some of the repercussions clearly amounted to moves of further securitization, also a very different form of converge is to be detected. In a grand perspective, rather than being stuck with notions pertaining

to conflict and the prevalence of oppositional relations – as tended to be the case particularly during the initial phase of the conflict – the more long-term development seems to point into the direction of further dialogue, engagement, inclusive rather than exclusive policies and the search for an explicit agreement. Rather than going it alone and pursuing policies of punishment, counter-balancing or just efforts of containing the effects of a local conflict, the US appears to have accepted that it needs partners and a cooperative relationship based on de-securitization – with Russia then being able to capitalize on this.

Russia may for its part pride itself in the sense that the world appears to have turned more 'multipolar' than was previously the case, and it may celebrate the fact that it has increasingly been depicted as a 'partner' by the US, i.e. the great power whose recognition and politics really counts. Russia's standing also appears to have improved in the sense that the pressures to accept a posture and stay with a status devised more or less exclusively along the lines dictated by the normative and sovereignty-eroding accounts of international relations seem to have alleviated. Moreover, being increasingly included and engaged in dialogue between powers seen as relative equal to each other allows and invites Russia to down-play the previous policies of self-exclusion or to depict itself as being marginalized and allotted with the stance of a victim or a loser in the sphere of international relations. It may, instead of turning increasingly into a maverick, engage itself as one of the constitutive voices in the process of restoring the normative and institutional foundations of a changing international order.

It may be noted, though, that there is less of a turning-point to be traced in the sphere of the EU-Russia relations. The PCA-talks are bound to continue but otherwise some-

thing of a stand-still appears to prevail. The EU has in some sense been left outside and marginalized in relation to some of the recent key dynamics of international relations as the Union does not talk *Realpolitik* and engage in explicit moves of de-securitization. It may condemn power political behavior and stay aloof from far-reaching securitization as was the case in the context of the Georgian-Russian conflict. Similarly, it may capitalize on its position as a remote outsider by facilitating a dialogue between the conflicting parties or pass judgment regarding the distribution of blame by moves such as the establishment of an independent fact-finding commission. The commission may contribute to efforts of resolution and the avoidance of a 'frozen conflict' by providing an interpretation of the conflict which points to an accidental and unintended one (cf. Welt, 2009: 3). However, the EU is bound to stay away from constellations premised on explicit securitization as these would amount to committing oneself politically and taking a stand on issues that clearly fall outside its preferred norm-based and integrationist discourse.

It has to be added, however, that various signs point to the EU feeling rather pressed to move further in the direction of re-securitization. Staying with an integrationist discourse and moving cautiously towards re-securitization – whilst the US and Russia being rather hegemonic through their moves of de-securitization – is increasingly taken to imply that the EU remains at the sidelines. It is felt that being an actor premised primarily on the power of norms and employing just 'soft' form of power is insufficient. The Georgian-Russian conflict ushers in this sense – and one might add regrettably – in further talk about the EU being in need of having a 'telephone number' and having to acquire a 'big stick' in order to gain a respected and influ-

ential standing in the sphere of international relations at large.

Interestingly, it may more generally be concluded that whilst much initially pointed to the Georgian experience amounting to increasingly intense and adversarial securitization, this does not seem to be the end-result. The pattern unfolding is more complicated than just consisting of a turning-point. Rather than convergence in the name of further securitization, the meeting-point has instead over time consisted of efforts of de-securitization. The dynamics vary between the different actors as this applies in particular to the dynamics part of the US-Russia relationship. Some similar movement has been detectable also in the case of the EU, although basically the Union has stayed within the realm of non-securitization. It may also be observed that the discursive changes flowing from the conflict have mostly taken place within the sphere of the sovereignty and interest-based logic whereas the movements within the norm-based and communitarian logic have been less conspicuous. Within the previous logic, the changes initially pointed towards convergence in the form of increased securitization, for this then somewhat paradoxically to be substituted by moves of de-securitization. A small conflict indeed shook the world, albeit in a rather unexpected manner and the reverberations still continue to unfold.

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