

## **In fact, Russia lost**

*Laurynas Jonavičius, Eastern Europe Studies Centre*

Kremlin's recognition of independence of breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia fueled talks about Russia's recovery as a great power. However, an actual assessment of the situation demonstrates that Russia will lose more than it will gain from military victory against Georgia and subsequent steps Russia undertook.

In the aftermath of the military conflict between Russia and Georgia which received almost no support from the West, columnists started to speak about a new Russian foreign policy level: Moscow demonstrated to the world that it can act unilaterally in the post-soviet space even if it contradicts the interests of the USA and EU. Such assessment of the situation is especially evident in Russia where the restoration of the international status enjoyed during USSR era has been announced. However, one can agree only with the proposition about the new foreign policy level. One can hardly agree with the second claim that Moscow's victory in Georgia and recognition of separatist Georgian regions mark a restoration of Russia's power in the post-soviet space. Let us look at this issue intently.

### **New Russian foreign policy**

After V. Putin came to power in 2000 it was clear that he would abandon closer relations with the West - the foreign policy course that B. Jeltsin advocated. Temporary improvement in relations after September 11 and friendship with EU was tactical steps based on pragmatic calculations to enhance power and influence. V. Putin's speech in Munich in 2007 in which he outright criticized Western countries (especially USA) for their unilateral actions on the international scene revealed apparent essence of the new Russian foreign policy. This essence is a creation of a multipolar world in which Russia would have the same status and influence in making international policy as USA, EU or China. The most important condition to achieve this, according to Russian strategists, is the restoration of the control over the post-soviet area. Post-soviet area is considered as a territory of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) and control of this area means control over decisions in political, economic and social spheres in these countries. For a long time Russia used its "soft power" means to influence members of the CIS: energetic pressure, economic control by taking over important enterprises, direct support of the individual politicians, control of information and using the leverage of Russian minorities living in the CIS. We have to acknowledge that this tactic was successful and Kremlin managed to maintain its influence over CIS countries or at least not to let them turn to the West. Such actions in parallel with flirt with the largest EU countries and avoidance of the conflict with Washington allowed Russia to strengthen its international positions. Russia entered the G-7, its economy has been growing fast, Russia's voice in international forums was heard. Russia increased its international positions step by step and approached its

vision of a multipolar international world. Knowing the history of recent Russian foreign policy, the use of the military measures is a new step, but it is a question, whether an advantageous one.

### **Pyrrhic victory in South Ossetia**

Russian military invasion in South Ossetia was the greatest strategic mistake. Russia crucified Georgia that refused to obey by using military force. There's no doubt that Russia's military victory in South Ossetia can be estimated as a sign to the world that Russia is a strong and powerful country ready to fight for its interests by any means. However, it appears that this will cost Russia a lot. There are several aspects showing why such Russia's actions could be estimated as harmful for the implementation of its strategic interests.

First, Russia damaged its image in the post-soviet space. Countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan are still balancing between East and West, which means Russia's control over these countries hasn't reached proper level yet (according to Russia's perception). Color revolutions, dictator's A. Lukashenka recent actions tell that the post-soviet space is not consolidated yet as Russia's "sphere of influence". It appears that Kremlin's decision to tackle military Georgian disobedience will cast a chill in Moscow's relations with the above mentioned countries. Ukraine has Crimea, Azerbaijan – Nagorno Karabakh, Moldova – Transnistria, Belarus has nothing, but A. Lukashenka is eager to stay in power. If Kremlin once decided to use force, no one can be insured against the further use of military power. In this context it is expected that these countries would become more open to the West as a protector from Russian actions. Russia sends the intimidating signs itself – a statement that Transnistria issue is only a question of time – and these signs boost fear. Thus, Russia demonstrated its power to the world, but intimidated strategically important "near abroad" countries. In turn, it will aggravate its power consolidation in strategically important region.

Second, war in Georgia will put on ice Russia's relations with the West. G-7 already condemns Russia and criticizes its decision to recognize independence of separatist regions. Having in mind the fact that namely the West is the reason of Russia's economy growth, such estrangement will not be advantageous to Russia. Although in short term any serious consequences for Russia will hardly occur (especially having in mind the speed of decision making process in EU), in the long term perspective the West may change its position towards Russia. Moscow understands this well and is looking for the allies in the East. The summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization is starting these days. Apparently Russia will try to get support from Beijing, Astana, or even Delhi and Islamabad. However, even if support is given, it will likely be limited to oral statements. China itself wants to retain its great power status no less than Russia, it has Tibet and Taiwan, moreover, interests of both countries in the Far East do not always coincide. Thus, by embroiling into the war with Georgia, Russia took a step towards self-isolation.



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Whether Moscow has enough capabilities to continue the chosen foreign policy course self-sufficiently – without cooperating with its economic partners in the West – remains unanswered. It seems that to achieve this goal alone will be more challenging than by maintaining friendly international relations. This conclusion lets us claim that Russia's actions during the South Ossetia conflict allowed to win a battle but weakened its positions in the war. Russia tore South Ossetia (8 600 km<sup>2</sup>) and Abkhazia (3 900 km<sup>2</sup>) from Georgia, but probably lost Ukraine (603 700 km<sup>2</sup>) and other territories. Thus, it can be said that Moscow's actions during the war with Georgia equal to the cutting of the branch on which it is seated.