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What Kind of Role Should the European Union Play for Achieving Sustainable Peace in Georgia?

By Shu Uchida (University of Coimbra)

Abstract

This contribution discusses the role of the European Union in Georgia, with specific focus on improving the effectiveness of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). Now that the situation on the ground is relatively “stable”, what kind of role should the EU play in Georgia for achieving sustainable peace? It stands to reason that the EUMM should focus not only on early warning, since it is necessary but insufficient, but also on other activities, e.g., post-conflict stabilisation. Moreover, this article emphasizes the importance of conflict transformation for addressing protracted conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia via the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which was established in tandem with the Geneva International Discussions.

Introduction

On August 7, 2008, Georgia tried to forcefully incorporate South Ossetia into the Tbilisi Administrative Territory (TAT), which did not include the two breakaway regions, i.e., Abkhazia and South Ossetia, during the time when Russia was holding its Kavkaz 2008 military drill. Russia intervened in the armed conflict and invaded the TAT. For the first time since 1979, Russia’s military crossed state borders to attack a sovereign state. Based on the six-point agreement brokered by the former President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, the armed conflict ceased and the EU deployed the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) as an early warning apparatus, although Russia refused to accept the mission inside of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

According to the information extracted from the interview with an anonymous EUMM high-ranking officer in May, 2016,

“Local Georgian people have acknowledged the fact that people cannot cross the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs) of breakaway regions and this is no longer a temporary situation. Georgian people do not have access to the ABLs now, but the Russian and South Ossetian side have already stopped putting the new fences for demarcation of the ABLs. This is the new reality. In this respect, the situation on the ground is much more stable than before.”

Therefore, this article discusses the EU’s role on the ground in Georgia, with specific focus on improving the effectiveness of the EUMM. Now that the situation on the ground is relatively “stable”, what kind of role should the EU play in Georgia for achieving sustainable peace?

The EUMM is a mission without the direct influence of Russia unlike the United Nations (UN) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) missions regarding decision making. The function of the

EUMM is limited, mainly focusing on monitoring the area excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The mission does not have a mandate for conflict resolution or transformation, although it co-chaired the IPRM meetings for negotiations on security and humanitarian issues among the parties of conflicts for confidence building. Additionally, it has had difficulty in providing material support to the local people on the ground due to the nature of this mandate.

The resumption of the OSCE mission might become a solution for conflict resolution by providing a comprehensive remedy because it usually has a broader mandate. If the OSCE mission would come back, it must heed the amicable relationship with direct parties of the conflicts. However, Russia insists that if the OSCE mission would come back to Georgia, it should open independent offices in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which is totally unacceptable for the government of Georgia. According to an anonymous officer of the EU Special Representative Office,

“The OSCE mission would not come back to Georgia in the near future, although we do not exclude the possibility that it might come back as a project-based one, not the whole mission.”

Now that there are few possibilities of resuming the OSCE mission, the importance of the EUMM is unquestionable for achieving sustainable peace in Georgia.

The EUMM

EUMM is an unarmed civilian monitoring mission of the EU. Since deployment, it has patrolled day and night, specifically in the areas adjacent to the ABLs of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The EUMM is headquartered in Tbilisi with field offices in Gori, Mtskheta, and Zugdidi. Its mandate is valid throughout Georgia; however, the *de facto* authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have denied it access to the territories under their control (EUMM 2014).

The mission's extensive presence through hotlines ensures it has the capacity to gather accurate and timely information on the situation. When appropriate, this information is disseminated to relevant assistance and response bodies. As such, the EUMM has sufficient capacity to monitor ABLs as an early warning initiative. Furthermore, the mission has the capacity to gather detailed information on security issues.

Even if the EUMM plays an important role for early warning, it would be insufficient if the mission cannot access the possible conflict areas. As discussed earlier, the EUMM can access neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia. However, they attempt to overcome these constraints through a satellite system. Thus, it is not a major issue anymore. However, there is another constraint of the mission: the mission's mandate does not allow it to fund economic cooperation projects aimed at post-conflict stabilisation.

Improving the Effectiveness of the Mission

Concerning the EU's foreign and defence policies, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) replaces the former European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP.) Before the Treaty of Lisbon was enacted, tasks that could be conducted under the CSDP framework included the following:

- humanitarian and rescue tasks
- conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks
- tasks of combat forces in crisis management.

The Treaty of Lisbon adds three new tasks to this list:

- joint disarmament operations
- military advice and assistance tasks
- tasks in post-conflict stabilisation (European Union 2010).

Specifically, this research underscores the importance of the last task added by the Treaty of Lisbon, namely, "tasks in post-conflict stabilisation." It is essential to enhance the EUMM's capabilities and effectiveness for achieving sustainable peace in Georgia.

To give one example: The "Grassroots Human Security Grant Projects (GGP)," an still ongoing long-term grant scheme initiated by the Embassy of Japan in Georgia, funds local and international NGOs, enabling them to implement projects to stabilize society, e.g., renovating kindergartens for IDPs and clearing landmines. This should be regarded as a form of peacebuilding, because it addresses grassroots issues. The grant amount for each project is approximately 100,000 USD, and the embassy adopts approximately 10 projects each year, totalling approximately 1 million USD per year (Embassy of Japan 2014a). While this amount is relatively small, it could contribute towards strengthening and empowering the local population's capacity to return to normal

life and building resilience against post-conflict challenges. However, the Embassy is not always adequately informed on grassroots issues and sometimes has difficulties in finding reliable organizations to implement projects. Thus, the EUMM provides the Embassy with information and recommendations for project implementation. One EUMM recommendation was a project to construct a social education centre in Nikozi village in the Gori district, which was implemented by the NGO "American Friends of Georgia" and funded by the Government of Japan (Embassy of Japan 2014b). Another project implemented in close collaboration with the mission was aimed at renovating a kindergarten in Khurcha village in the Zugdidi district. These projects were highly appreciated by the local people, as the author's own interviews have shown. Also, these projects enabled the Embassy of Japan to deepen the ties with the EUMM.

In reality, the mission monitors areas along ABLs, and local people provide it with information on the challenges they experience. However, while the mission accurately acknowledges these challenges, its mandate makes it difficult to provide tangible support for the local people. Consequently, despite a good relationship between the mission and local people, both locals and monitors become frustrated over numerous daily questions. Thus, this research argues that the mission should strengthen relations with other donor embassies, e.g., the Embassy of Japan in the above example, by providing information pertaining to grassroots issues to stabilize society via economic cooperation projects. This should enable a win-win situation for EU-Japanese relations and a win-win-win situation for EU-Japan-Georgia relations.

As many donor countries face the challenge of securing an adequate budget for economic cooperation projects, many will be keen to collaborate with other donors, although until recently, donor countries competed to fly their national flags at project sites. Additionally, most donor countries need accurate information on the issues pertinent to the locals. The mission should utilize this opportunity to strengthen relations with other donors to implement projects and tangibly support the local population through information sharing and collaboration. Furthermore, by providing other donors with the precise information required for project implementation, the EUMM could improve its reputation in local society, which could enhance the environment in which the mission seeks to gather more accurate information from local people. This could create the synergy required to improve the mission's effectiveness through collaboration with other donors through co-conceptualizing projects and collecting more accurate information. Additionally, collaboration efforts do

not require that the mission's mandate be modified and that the activity is aligned to EU foreign policy such as CSDP, since it can stabilize local society as a peace-building activity.

Implication

Nevertheless, stabilizing activities and efforts only in the TAT contain certain risks to fix the *status quo* of Georgia regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Because of the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, conflict transformation is crucial via diplomacy, i.e., confidence building and coordination of interests of direct parties of the conflicts. Thus, this research also discusses the importance of multilateral diplomacy by means of the IPRM as an implication for further research and practice.

On the South Ossetian side, the IPRM meetings, co-chaired by the OSCE and the EU in the no-man's land of Ergneti, have been held on a regular basis for confidence building among stakeholders. However, on the Abkhazian side, the mechanism had not been functioning until May 2016 since the *de facto* government of Abkhazia declared the EUMM representative *persona non grata* in 2012 (International Crisis Group 2013). The stakeholders in the IPRM discuss the issues on the ground, e.g., airspace violations, gentlemen's agreements regarding IDPs and local individuals with respect to freedom of movement at the ABLs between breakaway regions and the TAT, "borderisation" by *de facto* authorities in breakaway regions and Russia using barbed wire, and a surveillance system to demarcate the breakaway regions. At this venue, stakeholders coordinate their interests and express their concerns for confidence building, and the EUMM has accurate information on the ground and adequate capabilities to facilitate the meetings of the IPRM. Therefore, the EU should further underline the significance of confidence-building measures: the IPRM.

Conclusion

The EU and its EUMM can play a significant role in Georgia, because the EUMM is the only international monitoring mission in Georgia since the expiration of mandates for the UN and OSCE missions to Georgia.

About the Author

Shu Uchida conducts research on conflict-related issues in Georgia and its peripheral regions at the University of Coimbra as a Marie Curie Early-Research Fellow within the EU-funded ITN "Caspian". He has spent the last several years working for the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies of Harvard University, the Strategic Research Center of Georgia, the Embassy of Japan in Georgia, the OSCE/ODIHR Presidential Election Observer Mission in Georgia, and other institutions.

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Thus, the EUMM should improve its stabilisation capabilities by collaborating with other donor countries, and the EU should further emphasize the importance of confidence-building measures, i.e., Geneva International Discussions and IPRM. Now that the security situation on the ground is relatively "stable", both further stabilisation and conflict transformation are needed to consolidate peace in Georgia. Furthermore, the EU's role should be supportive of the self-help undertaken by the Georgian government and Georgian people since sustainable local ownership is also the key for long-term peace in Georgia.

The EU is preoccupied with its own issues. Nonetheless, the EU should carefully consider signals from Tbilisi because the EU does not want the region to become volatile again. If the commitment from the EU does not measure up to the demand from the Georgians, Georgia might start looking for another more trustworthy patron, since dependence is vital for small powers such as Georgia. At this moment, there is no other option, except the West, for Georgia to follow. Russia might become an option in the future if Georgia thinks the West cannot be counted on as reliable. In addition, China might be another option for Georgia to depend on at least economically, although there are hardly any historical ties between them.

Consequently, the visa-free regime for Georgians in the Schengen area could be a crucial signal from the EU to Georgia not to alter its diplomatic trajectory. Furthermore, Georgia signed the Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU in Brussels on June 27, 2014 (civil.ge 2014). These moves are vital not only for Georgia but also for the EU, since the EU needs to soothe the region because of energy security and for sustainability on the European periphery. Accordingly, both Georgia's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration and the EU's Eastern Partnership initiatives could reinforce mutual relations. On the basis of this rapprochement, the EU could play a more crucial role for achieving sustainable peace in Georgia and not altering Georgia's diplomatic trajectory: the Euro-Atlantic integration.

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