

# GEORGIAN ADVENTURISM

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In just several hours, during the night of 7 /8 August, **by using force to try to solve a problem which was not really urgent**, President Mikhail Saakashvili managed to **render the worst possible service to his country, to the equilibrium in the Caucasus, to strengthening of NATO and to Western influence at the borders of Russia.**

We will not comment, here, on what lies at the bottom of the problem, the demand for independence of South Ossetia although we **may be allowed to wonder on what basis anyone would deny to the Ossetians a right that is acknowledged for the Kosovars....**

We will limit ourselves simply to recollecting that even if Moscow fanned the embers somewhat in 1992, **it was unquestionably the nationalism of the Georgians, who are incapable of taking into account the need for autonomy of important national minorities, that was at the source of the first war in South Ossetia in 1991.** It was possible to make concessions to the Ossetians, but Tbilisi preferred to send in 6,000 soldiers 'to reestablish order there,' with results that we know very well: Moscow supported the Ossetian demands and Georgia experienced a shameful defeat. Since then, South Ossetia set up an independent 'State' (that no other country, even Russia, recognized) but calm reigned in the region. Until 2004...

Having come to power in the wake of the *Rose Revolution* that put an end to the reign of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mikhail Gorbachev, Edward Shevardnadze, Mr. Saakashvili promised openness and reforms. The results were mixed, to put it mildly. While the country experienced growth of 9% per year, the Mafia and corruption continue to be hold sway and the state authorities have been agitated by incessant infighting at the top that has given rise to dismissals which bring to mind a *Banana Republic* rather than a State governed by law.

Partly in order to make people forget about this semi-defeat, partly, no doubt, in order to try to please the most radical part of his supporters, President Saakashvili next began to surf the nationalist wave by promising to reunite the country – which had to confront the secession of three regions: Abkhazia, Adjara and South Ossetia. The Adjara question was solved by diplomacy, with the return of the rebel province under the authority of Tbilisi having been obtained largely thanks to pressure from Moscow. The Abkhaz case has been nearly inactive but since 2004 – and particularly during these past few months – incidents between the Georgian Army and the Ossetians have multiplied. Nonetheless, the situation remained manageable. Right up to 7 August.

On that day, by sending Georgian troops against Ossetia, Mikhail Saakashvili *committed "plus qu'un crime, une faute"*<sup>1</sup>.

First of all, even if one can understand Tbilisi's discomfort with the secessionist desires of part of its population, **what was so urgent as to require using force to break a fifteen year old status quo? Was it really worth shedding blood to recover a**

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<sup>1</sup> As Talleyrand said, learning that the Duke d'Enghien was executed by Napoléon in 1804...

**territory of less than 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> populated by 70,000 people who refused and continue to refuse to fit into the Georgian mould? Finally and above all, did the Georgian President really think that Moscow would stand by and watch with its arms folded while South Ossetia, which Russia had been supporting for fifteen years, was re-integrated into Georgia as part of a normalization policy?**

We now see the result: Georgia and Russia are in a de facto state of war; many Georgian military bases and the outskirts of Tbilisi have been bombarded and hundreds of civilians, if not more, have lost their lives. In the end, the Caucasus will be far from being more stable, the nationalist virus will no doubt grow in strength in Georgia and a 'pro-Western' power is weakened and discredited. What a truly brilliant operation! **Our only consolation is that things could have been worse: just think what would have happened if Georgia had been a member of NATO, as it wishes to be.**

**We have here food for thought to offer those who would like to see NATO push ever further to the East and thereby take in countries which, certainly, deserve to be assisted but whose rulers demonstrate not much maturity and are ready, as we have just seen, for all kinds of adventures, even the very worst.**

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