

# FROM GEORGIA TO KOSOVO VIA EUROPE

by Francesc de Dalmaes

As a rule it is dangerous to draw parallels between separate events. However it is not unreasonable to make a comparison between the different stances taken by the international community following, on one hand, Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and, on the other, Russia's aggression against Georgian territory, using South Ossetia as an excuse.

Such parallels are dangerous because, while it is transparently obvious that Kosovo and Georgia are not comparable, we have also witnessed how some countries have contradicted the arguments they employed following Kosovo's independence. A prime example is Russia, which was firmly on Serbia's side during the supposed violation of its territorial integrity as a result of Kosovan independence. This summer, however, saw Russia's army violating Georgia's sovereignty with its military invasion of South Ossetia.

It is yet another case where we find a lack of a coordinated voice from the European community: a voice that is reasoned and above all capable

of winning respect and recognition of its authority. While it is certain that the European Union's eventual position over Kosovan independence was virtually unanimous (with Spain, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus' sole opposition being of little importance) it is equally true that for the first ten years of the Kosovan war Europe watched and failed to reach an agreement with respect to the Balkan question. Once more traditional state interests have proven to be more important than the common European interests of showing political, economic and social support for a Balkan region where each and every national identity is recognised and is obliged to live together.

In the case of Georgia it is unfortunate to observe how Moscow and Washington have taken up opposing positions. It is not so much that the common European opinion has been smothered by the unreasonable views of others, but rather that the Union's very role as an intermediary has failed due to a lack of strength in its voice as an interlocutor. This was expressed by the President of Georgia himself, Mikhail Saakashvili when he



came to sign, with conditions, the resolution proposed by Sarkozy (who currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU) and forced on him by Russia's President Medvedev.

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Russia's resurgence as a hegemonic force in the majority of the ex-Soviet Union republics has not taken place on the basis of understanding and democracy, but rather military supremacy and the desire to control energy reserves at origin and while in transit. In the same way, the United States has too many military fronts open (of which Iraq and Afghanistan are notable) with their accompanying human, political and economic costs of unprecedented proportions. This combined with a presidential race that questions, unmasks and weakens the final days of George Bush, a president who will be remembered for his continual gaffes

and failures in terms of American foreign policy. Meanwhile, China has ceased to be an emerging power by developing a potential with the desire to be, shortly, 'the' power.

In the midst of all this we find a Europe too interested in the economic crisis to stop and pay attention to the EU's own political and institutional crisis. The combination of both these factors could prove lethal in terms of the necessary consolidation of Europe as a main actor on the international stage.

If the global political debate eludes Europe and centres on the emerging axes of China and Russia both opposing American foreign policy, then the people of Europe as a whole will miss a train that will be difficult to board at a later date. Meanwhile, the majority of the planet will lose out on a voice that, beyond the legitimate defence of geopolitical and geostrategic interests, should also be the source of a certain idea of democracy that we desire, based on dialogue, understanding and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.