



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Will the lessons learned from the 2008 war in Georgia help the West to avoid repeating the mistake?



On that day, the world was captivated by the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing and watched open-mouthed at the scenes with which China announced its new historical epoch and its entry into the battle for the global economic and political throne.

Much less attention was paid at the time to the first war on European soil in the 21st century, which broke out at the same time as the glaring images of futuristic Beijing.

Russia's invasion of Georgia on 8 August 2008 was in many ways of secondary importance to the major global actors. Except for Russia. In many ways, the situation remains **unchanged** today, 17 years later.

In 2008, the weak post-Soviet democracy was far from the eyes of Europe, which was then at its pinnacle of strength. Having just completed the second wave of enlargement, welcoming Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, Europe felt that it had more or less completed its expansion into the former Soviet (Russian) zone of interest in Europe.

The EU's economy and politics had only an upward trend, and its ability to spread its idea of "united in diversity" made its leaders confident that the "golden age" would last forever.

Putin's **speech** at the Munich Security Conference just a year earlier, in January 2007, in which he effectively announced the shift of his policy towards violence, interventionism and conflict with the West, apparently did not attract the attention of Western leaders, at least not as much as it should have.

On the contrary, even afterwards, they stuck to the strategy of reaching out to Russia and cooperating with it in the expectation that the advance of Western influence in the post-Soviet period would forever make it an ally and "one of them."

Warning model

The way in which part of Georgia (about 20%

of the territory) was conquered by Russia will remain to this day a warning example of the imperial policy of Vladimir Putin, which appeared in Georgia exactly at this time 17 years ago.

Unfortunately, many leaders in the West refuse to accept the existence of such a model even after so many years.

Moscow's propaganda prepared the conflict by highlighting the threat to the Russian community in Georgia's remote areas. The open conflict began with a false flag operation in which forces loyal to Moscow first attacked the Georgian army, which Russia used as a pretext for an invasion.

The pattern from Georgia was repeated unchanged in Ukraine

The aim was to overthrow the pro-Western regime in Tbilisi, maintain the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in a frozen state, legally annex these territories to Russia, and create ground for long-term instability of all kinds—political, economic, and security.

The pattern from Georgia was repeated unchanged in Ukraine (why change it when it was successful)—first in Crimea in 2014 and then throughout Ukraine in 2022. The means and goals remained the same.

Moreover, this model is still actively used in many other places, for example, in Moldova and to some extent in the Balkans and even in NATO member states such as Bulgaria and Romania.

War against NATO

Only since the direct invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has the Kremlin openly said that NATO is its existential enemy. However, the Kremlin held the same belief, although it did not publicly announce it, when it invaded Georgia 17 years ago.

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April

2008, then US President George W. Bush only verbally **endorsed** the idea of Ukraine and Georgia joining the alliance. However, for Putin, the gesture was a warning sign, essentially a proclamation of war.

Putin not only still sees himself in conflict with the Western alliance, but he is also waging this war on the ground by attacking Ukraine's defences.

The **experience** of Georgia 17 years ago is worth its weight in gold these days, when many believe one of the most important **meetings** to end the Russian invasion of Ukraine is expected to take place.

While the time and place of the meeting between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are still being finalised by their diplomats, it is not known whether the American team will go to the meeting equipped with the lessons learned from the five-day war in Georgia. And they should.



The seeds of Putin's 2008 operation sprouted and led to a staunchly pro-Russian government in Tbilisi - PM Irakli Kobakhidze

Putin, on the other hand, is going to this meeting encouraged by the results of his mission in Georgia. The goals he set himself back then are still intact after 17 years. He has conquered part of the territory, caused severe political upheaval in "hostile" Georgia and thus isolated it from a flourishing connection with European economies.

Most importantly, the seeds of his 2008 operation sprouted and led to a staunchly pro-Russian government in Tbilisi, which not only

seeks close ties with Moscow but also fights hard to suppress the developed pro-European movement.

Error correction

Brussels has set up a wall towards the pro-Russian government of Georgia and attempted to sanction its members. In doing so, it is meeting the demands of the pro-European forces that were ousted in last year's parliamentary elections.

Moreover, Georgia is one of the most frequent **points** of re-export, i.e., the circumvention of European sanctions against Russia. Moreover, this grey trade channel has recently been increasingly working in the other **direction**, serving as a route for smuggling Russian crude oil to buyers around the world.

The legacy of the 2008 war in Georgia is positive and encouraging for Moscow

The legacy of the 2008 war in Georgia is positive and encouraging for Moscow, especially as it prepares for the big talks on the Ukraine deal, the undisputed centrepiece of Russian imperial ambitions.

On the other hand, after 17 years, Western leaders can only have negative flashbacks of their predecessors' policies on Georgia.

Their legacy is disappointing, especially for the majority of Georgians who see their country in the EU but also for Europe itself, which has not fully realised the destructive potential of Putin's policies towards its surroundings if it spirals out of control.

The peace talks on Ukraine will be an opportunity to capitalise on this experience. Putin will undoubtedly do so, but the question is whether the West will be able to correct its mistakes from the time of the 2008 Georgian war.