

*Tallinn, Special Correspondent Olivier Truc*

The three Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which were annexed by the Soviet Union for half a century, have along with other European countries firmly denounced Russia's recognition of the independence of Georgia's two separatist regions, Southern Ossetia and Abhasia.

„Unacceptable,” President Valdas Adamkus said in Vilnius.” „Contrary to the principles of Georgia's independence,” Latvian Foreign Minister Maris Riekstins declared.

The recognition has also been denounced in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Politicians call for enhanced NATO presence in the country, considering that membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation does not automatically guarantee security. But President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who joined his Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish colleagues for a supporting visit to the President of Georgia, is not going to confine himself to futile indignation.

Having asked Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, to suspend the visa facilitation agreement with Russia, Mr Ilves invites other countries to revise thoroughly their approach to Russia.

„The theory of new world order, which prevailed after 1991 and the collapse of the USSR, presumed that Russia would refrain from conquests in the future, is now obsolete,” he informs Le Monde. „The main presumptions of the security architecture of the post-1991 Europe have changed. We must change the very security concept of Europe. This will take months, perhaps years.”

Speaking from experience, he says that in Russia, something will change only when Russia itself decides so. Right now, even pending punishment is of no interest to Russia. Russia would

simply not care. „We are dealing with an aggressive Russia,” Ilves continues. „Look, for example, how [the Russian President Dmitri] Medvedev is lecturing the Moldavian President [Vladimir] Voronin about a mafia district in Moldova – which is what Transnistria actually is. This means returning to the laws of the jungle, something that is partly reminiscent of the 19th century British Empire and partly of gangsta rap – that’s what it reminds me of.”

Born in exile in Sweden and educated in the United States, the former Radio Free Europe journalist Ilves seems to nourish no illusions. „I think that the European Union has very limited possibilities here,” he says. „The problem is that we are living in the post-modern Europe, where everyone is nice and kind. And suddenly we find ourselves in the company of a great power from the 19th century. Europe is not ready for this. All the ideas of Monnet and Schumann about building up Europe, which bring us together and which we discuss, are post-modern. But Russia is pre-modern.”

It seems to be a permanently pending question how 21-century Europe should behave towards 19-century Russia. „This is a great dilemma,” Ilves says, admitting that he has no answer.

The President of Estonia, who has been in office since 2006, does not think that crisis in Georgia involves specific threats to the Baltic countries. Ever since 1991, when the three countries restored their independence, there have been Russian representatives who claim that the Baltic States still belong to Russia’s bosom. „As members of the European Union and NATO, we feel safe,” Ilves states simply.

In Latvia, though, the Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Veshnyakov has warned that if Latvia should get involved in the conflict, it would cost the country dear in the long run. In Lithuania, the Ministry of Defence has called for a revision of the country’s military preparedness. Ilves thinks, rather, that NATO should revert to its original task, the defence of Europe. Demonstrations, although moderate, have been organised in the three Baltic countries, although the issue is on everybody’s mind due to widespread Russian media.

When asked whether he fears that Russia would use rushing to the assistance of the considerable Russian minority (about one third of the population, the same as in neighbouring Latvia) in Estonia as a pretext for intervening with Estonia’s affairs, as Tunne Kelam, Estonia’s representative in the European Parliament, has claimed, Ilves is just as categorical: „Nothing happens to Russians in Estonia that could justify this kind of response,” he replies. „And last time, this argument was used by Milosevic, and before him – Hitler. If such arguments are

resorted to, we can no longer talk about civilised Europe."

In his opinion, the gravest mistake was made on the NATO summit in Bucharest in April, when Georgia and Ukraine were refused NATO membership action plan (MAP), mainly owing to the resistance of Germany and France. „In my opinion it is quite clear that Russia interpreted the refusal as a green light to do as it pleases with Georgia," he says.

What worries Ilves today is the response of certain European politicians – in their own words, they „fear the birth of an anti-Russian coalition" in the EU. „I must admit I am rather more worried about the development of a „pro-Russian coalition", which would set financial interests above the fundamental European values," he concludes.

*Link to the original article in French on [Le Monde's web page](#) .*