

European Union would probably be the best suited international organisation to adopt the conflict regulating measures required to anticipate new, armed hostilities between Georgia and Russia, President Ilves said. **The move on Monday by South Ossetia to close its border with Georgia, which was drawn along a de facto line last August, has elevated the combat readiness of Russia's defence forces. This together with the statements of South Ossetia's leader, in which he claims that Kazbegi is an ancient Ossetian territory, have resulted in increased tensions in Georgia. Does President Ilves see the threat of new military conflict breaking out in Georgia?**

Unfortunately, the threat of a military conflict is rather real today. In my opinion, new outbreaks of hostilities have mostly been avoided due to Georgia's refusal to respond to provocations. For me, it is most disturbing that Russia, by blocking the extension of mandates issued to NATO and OSCE, has not permitted access for an efficient international mission to the region concerned, and in doing so, has considerably contributed to the threat of conflict. However, there is still no reason to claim that the threat of a military conflict can be avoided, but it would be more easily avoidable through an international presence, sooner rather than later.

It's also important for Russia to adhere to the Sarkozy peace plan, which it signed. Above all, this would mean that Russia would withdraw its armed forces to their pre-conflict position. EU observers should also be able to act peacefully at both sides of the temporary administrative line; regrettably, Russia has also blocked this possibility.

After last year's Russia-Georgia War, both the European Union and NATO were blamed for their overly lenient and belated response to Russia's military aggression in Georgia. Is the European Union now – regardless of the absence of a common foreign policy – capable of anticipating such conflicts better than August of last year?

We cannot say that the European Union has absolutely no common position in foreign policy issues. In August last year, the activities of the European Union and the President of France, Mr. Sarkozy, whose country held the presidency of the European Union at that time, had an undeniably crucial impact on ceasing the military conflict in Caucasasia. Typically, quite a lot depends on the activities of the presiding nation. I'm convinced that the current presiding country – Sweden – is well informed of the processes taking place in the region and that this time the European Union will be capable of taking measures to avoid a repeat of the armed conflict.

Which international organisation would be most suited to adopt the conflict regulating measures required to anticipate new, armed hostilities between Georgia and Russia?

At present, the European Union would probably be best suited to the task, even due to the fact that Russia has blocked the presence of all the other organisations. Above all, we need to ask who has the capacity to influence the behaviour of both Russia and Georgia. The EU is definitely one such structure. Also, the role of the USA is highly important, and for that reason, I don't understand why Russia is against the arrival of US observers in Georgia.

What could be and is Estonia's role in mitigating such "hot/cold" problems?

Estonia should, considering its capacities, contribute resources to regulating such conflicts, through both its participation in international organisations and peacekeeping operations. Estonia is interested in achieving stability in regions within the European Union's immediate vicinity, and especially in the Caucasus; therefore, such activities in the aforementioned region will certainly remain one of our main priorities.

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