

## Business as Usual

David J. Smith\*

There was good and bad news last week about western efforts to end Russian aggression against Georgia. Good was that international donors pledged \$4.5 billion to help repair the damage Russia inflicted upon Georgia during the hot phase of the war. Bad was that the European Commission and the French Presidency of the European Union backed resumption of talks on the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The risk is that the west's generosity may assuage its conscience about sliding back into "business as usual" with Russia. The challenge is to define western objectives and behavioral norms in the aftermath of Russia's August assault on Georgia.

The EU and the World Bank hosted an international donors conference for Georgia on October 22 in Brussels. 67 countries and many international organizations gathered to pledge \$4.5 billion in various forms of aid, loans and guarantees—about \$1 billion more than expected. "Georgia is deeply moved and humbled by the demonstration of solidarity that we have received," commented Georgian Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze. The United States, the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, individual EU countries and Japan all chipped in considerable sums.

Jubilation was tempered, however, by the well-timed announcement a day earlier that both France and the European Commission favor resumption of talks on the EU-Russia PCA, which the EU had suspended in the wake of Russia's invasion of Georgia. "I know of no better way to pursue our own interests and make our concerns listened to," EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner told the European Parliament on October 21.

Speaking on behalf of the French EU Presidency, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Minister for European Affairs, told the same body, "Both sides need one another...It is very important for dialogue to continue with Russia."

Earlier, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed "a common economic space between Russia and the EU."

Other EU countries will no doubt vociferously oppose such schemes until Russia complies with the EU-brokered ceasefire agreement.

(Speaking unofficially, Jouyet also said that a NATO Membership Action Plan for Georgia at this time "is not in the interests of Europe or its relations with Russia.")

The same day, American Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with Russian General Nikolai Makarov, Chief of General Staff, in Helsinki.

The US Embassy in Helsinki explained, "Certainly the August conflict between Russia and Georgia was a factor in determining the need for this particular meeting. However, it is not uncommon for senior military leaders to meet to discuss issues of mutual concern, and the meeting also serves as an opportunity for the two men to discuss ways in which the relationship between their two militaries can be improved."

The west is sliding back into "business as usual" with Russia.

The problem is that nobody really knows what "not business as usual" means. With America's failure to respond effectively to Russian aggression against Georgia and the implausibility of effective sanctions on Russia, the west adopted this vague mantra. However, what to do and what not to do remain unclear.

“It is important that Russia implement the EU-brokered six point plan, which stipulates, among other things, the withdrawal of troops to previously held positions,” Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen told *Mainichi Shimbun* on a visit to Japan last weekend. “Only through dialogue with Russia a sustainable solution for the problems in Georgia can be found. Our ‘no business as usual’ with Russia, therefore, does not imply ‘no business at all.’”

To a point, this is a reasonable point. For example, it may be constructive—at least not harmful—that Mullen met Makarov. However, Washington for now must halt any concrete steps the two military officers may have discussed to improve US-Russian military relations.

Likewise, if the EU now proceeds with the PCA, it will send Moscow a “business as usual” message fraught with negative consequences not only for Georgia, but also for Europe and beyond.

The west must define the line between dialog and “business as usual.”

First, EU foreign ministers meeting on November 10 must shelve the PCA until Russia fully complies with the ceasefire agreement and participates constructively in talks about the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, set to resume on November 18. The November 14 EU-Russia summit meeting in Nice must only be a dialog because progress on other matters is now unacceptable.

Then, the outgoing French Presidency and the incoming Czech Presidency of the EU should sit together with the outgoing Bush Administration and the transition team for the American president-elect. They should agree on a line between dialog and “business as usual,” and settle upon a common strategy to thwart Russian war and post-war diplomatic objectives.

If the west can manage that, in 2009, we will have a principled and constructive opposition to Russian aggression.

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