

Global



Georgian-Russian War
Elections El Salvador
Weapons Traded for Gaza-War

We,
The International Community ...

April 2009 JG 16

Kring voor Internationale Betrekkingen

Globaal Jaargang 15 No1 – December 2007**Contact-information:**

KIB
p/a dept. Politieke Wetenschappen
Van Evenstraat 2B
3000 Leuven
KIB@student.kuleuven.ac.be
Fax: 016/323088

General inquiries

mariancramers@hotmail.com

Editor-in-chief

Marian Cramers

Layout

Marian Cramers

Responsible publisher

KIB

Contributors for this issue

Tom De Wachter
Iene Vanmanshoven
Pieter Stockmans / Amnesty International

KIB – ON-LINE

Find us on the net at www.kib.be
Register at the **KIB-mailinglist** to stay informed on all KIB-activities.

Globaal:

Through this magazine, KIB attempts to offer a forum for students that wish to express themselves within the boundaries of our mission. If you would like to contribute by writing an article on an international topic, feel free to contact us. Articles will not be published anonymously and the authors take full responsibility. The board of KIB retains the right to refuse, shorten or edit all articles.

Contents**EDITORIAL**

Letter from the editor - 2

GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 - 3

An insight

LATIN AMERICA

El Salvador 2009 Presidential Elections – 21

Wind of Change?

Interview Fatima Valdes, election observer – 24

El Salvador

MIDDLE EAST

Israël/Gaza: Wapens uit VS en Europa voeden

mensenrechtenschendingen - 26

Amnesty International

EDITORIAL**Letter from the editor**

Dear reader/KIB-member,

The world is no longer limited to the borders of towns or even countries, but is interconnected in global world. That was acknowledged by the founders of KIB in 1945 and has become more true every day. The increasing importance of internationalization in everyday life is still the main reason of existence of the Association of International Affairs (KIB).

The Association of International Affairs (KIB) is the second eldest and one of the bigger interfaculty student associations. Our goal is to increase awareness and to inform the students residing in Leuven of the international dimension of everyday life. We strive to this goal by giving the opportunity to students and other interested people to enlighten themselves about the international political, social and economic actuality. The means we offer range from lectures, through discussion evenings, debates, colloquia and study visits to the magazine you are now reading: the 'Gloabal'. In all these activities the content is central and we give this information from an objective, neutral and non-aligned viewpoint.

In this edition of Gloabal, Tom De Wachter offers us a very solid and extensive insight in the problems surrounding Georgia and its region. Last summer the world saw a bitter war between this country and its historical opponent, Russia, and today we see that the strong tensions are still present. Therefore it proves useful to look into the history and socio-economic background of this conflict. We also turn towards the elections in El Salvador, where our current board member Iene Vanmanshoven provides an analysis of the change that can be expected in the complex political constellation of this country and the power balance in the continent. Lastly, our former editor-in-chief,

Pieter Stockmans, currently active within Amnesty International, gives us some important insights concerning the weapons trade was a crucial element in the dramatic events in Gaza and Israel during the recent war.

I would like to thank the contributors of Gloabal for the work they've put in this edition. Furthermore we'd like to express our thanks to the whole board for their efforts in organizing the wide variety of activities during this year. We are looking forward to several more activities for the rest of the semester, including our trip to the NATO and SHAPE headquarters, debate evenings on the European elections and on the future of NATO, movie nights and our notorious cocktail-party. By the end of the semester we will issue another edition of Gloabal, with plenty of attention for the EU elections, but also on the evolution within American politics since the inauguration of President Obama.

More information, as always, on www.kib.be.

*Marian Cramers
Editor-in-Chief*

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008

An insight

by Tom DE WACHTER

The first of August was the beginning of a new episode in the longstanding conflict between Georgia and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. After the bombing of a Georgian police car and the disputed shelling of Georgian villages bordering South-Ossetia, the Georgian military intervened quickly through means of an assault on the South-Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali. This was the "casu bellum" for the Russian military; using the argument the Georgians were attacking Russian citizens.¹

It is striking to observe the amount of disinformation that surrounds the conflict. Both sides blame each other. Russian and separatist sources emphasise on the Georgian military offensive and the previous military actions. Georgian sources emphasise on the military build-up of the Russian "peacekeepers" in the break off regions and the South-Ossetian provocations. The fact remains that there was a massive Georgian assault on South-Ossetia from the sixth of August until the eight and it was answered by an immediate reaction of the Russian armed forces.



Russian forces heading for South-Ossetia

The counterattack started on the ninth of August. The Russian Black Sea fleet sunk a Georgian missile boat, Russian paratroopers assaulted deep inside Georgian territory to cause a disruption of the logistic means of the Georgian military, Russian armed forces used strong force to put pressure on the Georgian Forces in South-Ossetia and an offensive was launched in the breakaway region of Abkhazia. This offensive was of great importance for the conflict because it was the only part of Abkhazia, the Georgian government controlled (since 2001).



The Kodori valley

¹ Almost half of South-Ossetia's citizens have a Russian passport (700 000).

Why has the republic of Georgia used the national army to resolve a political dispute with the certain knowledge that the Russian Federation would intervene? Why would the Georgian president Saakashvili take this risk? The roots of the current conflict can be found in unsolved conflicts during the nineties and the Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008

The result was a confusing situation in which everybody speculated whether the Russian forces would stop in Georgia or force regime change by taking Tbilisi. This was certainly the question when the Russian armed forces seized the Georgian city of Gori and Abkhazian-Russian forces launched an offensive towards Zugdidi and Poti. This was the point of no return for the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). The western support for Georgia grew rapidly and it became increasingly apparent that the war would end soon. The end of the war was officially the 8th of August with the unilateral ceasefire of the Russian led forces. However, military operations continued until the 23rd of August. From then on, the Six Point Peace Agreement (signed the 12th of August) was executed. This peace agreement included the following points:

- (1) No recourse to the use of force
- (2) Definitive cessation of hostilities
- (3) Free access to humanitarian aid
- (4) The armed forces of Georgia must withdraw to their permanent positions
- (5) The armed forces of the Russian Federation must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of hostilities. Prior to the establishment of international mechanisms the Russian peacekeeping forces will take additional security measures.
- (6) An international debate on the future status of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia and ways to ensure their lasting security will take place.

It is important to note that some western inspired additions of the plan were rejected by Russia, such as the authority of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) in the matter, timetables and return of refugees in the breakaway regions. It was a sign of a restatement of Russian power in the Caucasian region and the beginning of the official recognition of the independent states of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia.



Addendum: *This map (source: Wikipedia) gives a better perspective on the military operations in August 2008. Here we can make a distinction between the Georgian offensive of August 7-10 (red) and the Russian counteroffensive of August 8-16 (blue). The situation on the map does not always reflect the real situation on the ground. Based on western sources, such as the BBC, the Georgian military had lost all control in the north of the country since the intervention of the Russian army and the situation west of Gori was largely unknown until the end of the hostilities.*

On the Russian side, the 58th army primarily participated in South-Ossetia with extra support of special units, the 76th and 98th airborne division and GRU personnel (Russian military intelligence organization). Georgia used five brigades to repel the Russian attacks. The first (repatriated from Iraq) and the fifth were deployed to protect Tbilisi, the second (Kodori valley) and the fourth (South-Ossetia) suffered heavy losses, the third (supporting the fourth in South-Ossetia) survived.

For the moment, Russia holds a strong contingent of Russian forces (+ 8000 men) in the breakaway regions and returned its military to the borders between the breakaway regions and Georgia. Mainly observers of the EU, who work in close cooperation with the OSCE and UN, have the task to supervise the pullback of

the Russian led forces out of the "security zones" it created on Georgian soil since the end of the hostilities. A negative point however is the strongly limited access of observers to the breakaway regions. In this position they cannot register a possible anti-Georgian policy in South-Ossetia or Abkhazia.

Now we can ask the question how all this could happen. Why has the republic of Georgia used the national army to resolve a political dispute with the certain knowledge that the Russian Federation would intervene. Why would the Georgian president Saakashvili take this risk? The roots of the current conflict can be found in unsolved conflicts during the nineties and the Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008.

Unresolved conflicts

The breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia are the result of the Georgian civil war and political unstable years during the nineties. The political turmoil that started at the end of the Soviet era did not stabilise until 1993. This turmoil was created by radicalised factions supporting president Gamsakhurdia² or opposing him.

Important persons of the opposing groups were Giorgi Chanturia³, Kitovani⁴, Jaba Iosiliani⁵ and Shevardnadze⁶. It was a longstanding political conflict, with violent repercussions during the period 1991-1993. The coup started on the 20th of December 1991 and ended on the sixth of January 1992 when Gamsakhurdia fled to Armenia and Chechnya (for 18 months). In this period, Georgia was led by a military council until Shevardnadze took over the task as chairman and was elected president in 1992.

² Democratically elected President of Georgia since the fall of the Soviet Union until the coup of 1991.

³ Chairman of the opposition party National – Democrat Party (NDP) and arrested by Gamsakhurdia (October 1991) in the period preceding the coup.

⁴ Former national guard leader supporting the opposition.

⁵ Leader of the paramilitary organization Mkhedrioni at the time of the coup.

⁶ Former minister of foreign affairs in the Gorbatsjev government and president of Georgia from 1992 until the rose revolution.

The flight of Gamsakhurdia however did not mean the end of his political support. The “coup d’etat” had not changed the regime, it only divided the country. The countryside and West-Georgia favoured Gamsakhurdia, the rest supported Shevardnadze. Frequent clashes between these two factions were the consequence of the divide. It was in this period (1992-1993) that Ajaria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia became de-facto independent. The secession of Ajaria was more or less non-violent, but the Abkhazian and South-Ossetian wish for independence resulted in a longstanding war with Georgia.

South Ossetia (1991-1992)

The current Georgian - South Ossetian conflict started in 1990, when the Georgian national council adopted a law that barred regional parties. This was interpreted as a move to curtail the independence movement in South-Ossetia. Self-defence forces were established and independence was declared. On December the 10th in 1990, South-Ossetia called elections and organised a boycott of the national Georgian elections. The next day, violent conflicts occurred between Georgians and South-Ossetians in the South-Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali. As a result the state of emergency was declared and Georgian armed forces tried to disarm the self-defence forces (January the Fifth, 1991). This action was not successful and an open war started between South-Ossetian forces and Georgian. Shortly after the start of the hostilities, the conflict came in a deadlock with Georgians occupying East-Tskhinvali and the South-Ossetians occupying West-Tskhinvali. A first attempt to reconciliation was blocked immediately by Georgia when it arrested the representative of South-Ossetia (Torez Kulumbegov) during peace negotiations. During this period, the Georgian armed forces pulled back in the hills surrounding Tskhinvali.

The next phase of the war came in April 1991, when Georgia intensified the pressure on South-Ossetia through the disconnection of the electricity supply and blocked roads connecting Tskhinvali with the outside world. South-Ossetia responded with blockades of Georgian towns in areas controlled by militia forces. An exodus from South-Ossetians fleeing towards the Russian Federation and an increase of Georgian refugees was the direct result. Georgian positions remained strong in the hillsides but came more and more under pressure because of Russian logistic support to the separatists. The desire to avoid a direct conflict with Russia and the consequences of the political/military Georgian coup in 1992 resulted in a new "ceasefire".

This war resulted in 3000 casualties of war and a depopulation of Georgian towns in mainly South-Ossetian areas. The war ended with a ceasefire, but a real peace negotiation was never an option. The South-Ossetian wish for independence and reunification with North-Ossetia (Russia) remained incompatible with the Georgian opinion that South-Ossetia is a part of Georgia.

A controversial annexation that led to strong feelings of dissatisfaction among the Abkhazians, but remained stable as long as nationalistic views were inferior to ideological ones.

In 2004, the conflict flared up due to the closure of a free tax market (used by many South Ossetians) by the Georgian police. It created a hostile environment that led to an exchange of gunshots and mortarshellings. In this case, the Georgian government displayed some goodwill to return to a peaceful situation. They pulled back non-peacekeeping forces and gave

strategic points to the combined Georgian-Russian peacekeeping force.

Abkhazia (1992-1993)

The Abkhazian-Georgian war was a strongly dividing war where pro-Georgian and anti-Georgian factions solved disputes "manu militari". Human right violations occurred frequently on both sides but it were overall the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia who suffered under these disputes. Even the OSCE (1994) and UN (2008) recognized the violations against the ethnic Georgians as "ethnic cleansing". More than 250 000 Georgians became internally displaced and many remained missing. Abkhazia was annexed in 1931 by the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) through a confederative "Union Treaty". A controversial annexation that led to strong feelings of dissatisfaction among the Abkhazians, but remained stable as long as nationalistic views were inferior to ideological ones.

This tension came back in 1989 when a riot occurred due to the unification of the Sukhumi University and the Tbilisi State University. Eighteen killed and 448 wounded were the result. Only doubts about the strength of the Abkhazian and Georgian army prevented an open war. This war came in August 1992 when Abkhazian militants attacked government buildings in Sukhumi. The Georgian reaction on the new circumstances was a military offensive (using all troops available). They managed to retake Sukhumi but failed in restoring order and peace in the region. The Battle of Gagra (October 1992) was the symbolic turning point in the conflict. The Abkhazian forces returned with more troops, weapons and strong support from Russia. The Georgians retreated rapidly and Abkhazian forces surrounded Sukhumi quickly (December 1992) and recapturing it

from the Georgian army, with strong support from volunteers and the Russian army, in September 1993. The advance of the Abkhazian led forces created a huge humanitarian catastrophe. Ethnic Georgians were systematically targeted and the fierce battles caused numerous of war casualties among civilians and soldiers. The battle of Sukhumi could be considered without doubt as bloody in both civilian and military casualties. None of the remaining Georgian-backed politicians survived and Shevardnadze barely escaped alive. The 1994 U.S. State department country report described the situation as such:

"The Abkhaz separatist forces committed widespread atrocities against the Georgian civilian population, killing many women, children and elderly, capturing some as hostages and torturing others. They also killed large numbers of Georgian civilians, who remained behind in Abkhaz-seized territory... The separatists launched a reign of terror against the majority Georgian population, although other nationalities also suffered. Chechens and other north Caucasians from the Russian Federation reportedly joined local Abkhaz troops in the commission of atrocities... Those fleeing Abkhazia made highly credible claims of atrocities, including the killing of civilians without regard for age or sex. Corpses recovered from Abkhaz-held territory showed signs of extensive torture".

The fall of Sukhumi and the implementation of an ethnic cleansing policy led to a wave of Georgian refugees fleeing towards safe havens. One of those safe havens was the only part of Abkhazia still in the hands of Georgians: the Kodori valley. A stampede to the mountains in the middle of the winter began, surrounded by Abkhazian forces. December 1993 was the official end of the war with the signing of a Russian brokered "cease fire". This was the

"end" of the war but not of the discriminating ethnic policies of the Abkhazian republic. From 1993 on, reports of anti-Georgian policies were common, for example making reintegration of refugees impossible.

Russian troops remained in the area as the official "peacekeepers". Aside of this military presence, there were also civilian organizations present, for instance the United Nations Observer Missions in Georgia (UNIMOG), monitoring operations of international organizations and the OSCE.

It remained relatively peaceful until 1996 when Georgian guerrillas (White Legion and Forest Brotherhood) retook the arms in the southern "Gali district" of Abkhazia. A situation that could escalate quickly because of the possible connection between the guerrillas and the Georgian armed forces. An Abkhazian offensive in the region of Gali was launched, weakening the different armed Georgian groupings (Six Day War). The danger of further escalation urged both sides; the Georgian and Abkhazian government, to react and negotiate a new treaty. This treaty, signed in May 1998, restricted military build-ups in the border areas, controlled on the one hand by Russian peacekeepers, on the other hand by UN and OSCE.



Demilitarized zone in Abkhazia anno 2007

Another flare-up occurred in 2001 and 2006 in the Kodori valley. In 2001 Georgian backed forces took over the control of the valley with force. New problems came on the surface when the "leaders" of the locals denied the authority of the central Georgian government in 2006. This is discussed more deeply and in another perspective on the next pages.

Civil war of 1993

The political attention towards Abkhazia and South-Ossetia created a united government, due to a common enemy who made it possible to realize cooperation between the militias backed by the government and those backed by Gamsakhurdia. The situation however changed quickly because of the loss of Abkhazia to separatists. A fact that weakened the position of Shevarnadze seriously and led to cracks in the cooperation. This was a 'one in a lifetime opportunity' for Gamsakhurdia. In September 1993, he returned to Georgia with the plan to bring down the ruling regime. This was the start of the Georgian civil war of 1993

and the subdivision in a pro-government Eastern Georgia on the one hand and a pro – Gamsakhurdia Western Georgia on the other hand. This political re-entry and the possibility that Georgia would lose even more territory to separatists, forced Shevarnadze to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and appeal for Russian military assistance against Gamsakhurdia. This assistance came in the following months as mainly naval and intelligence support. Soon, the pro-Gamsakhurdian forces needed to retreat till the rebellion was "broken" in 1994.⁷ The " " indicate that the pro-Gamsakhurdia groups were still active in the nineties but not on the scale of 1991-1993. This can be noted if you take into count the (terrorist) actions of those groups until 2000.

Credit for ending the civil war can be given to the Russian armed forces. This is strange if you take into count the involvement of Russian forces in the Georgian-Abkhazian war. The motive of this intervention remains vague. Maybe it was an attempt to create some goodwill from Georgia for more autonomy for Abkhazian and South-Ossetia. Maybe it was an intervention based on damage control, with the basic idea that a Georgia with Shevarnadze in the seat would be more beneficial for Russia. Maybe the entire policy in the Caucasus is based on the idea of a "divide and control" strategy.

It remains a fact that after the intervention of Russian forces (and volunteers), the policy towards the breakaway regions became softer. It created an open window for more autonomy for South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. This modus vivendi towards the breakaway regions is one of the arguments, critics are using against

⁷ The 31st of December 1993, Gamsakhurdia shot himself knowing defeat would come soon.

Shevardnadze and his legacy, claiming that his reign was not beneficial for Georgia. As an example: in 1998 Shevardnadze used minor force to repel Abkhazian forces taking over administrative powers in Georgian towns in the Gali-district despite strong demands from the opposition to react firm. Like I said before, negotiations came quickly after the Six Day War but the human cost fell primarily on Georgia with 20 000 new refugees. Only in 2001, Shevardnadze used a strong signal towards Abkhazia when he retook the control of the Kodori-valley with aid of Chechen-Georgian paramilitaries.

The situation after the Rose revolution

The Rose revolution and election of Saakashvili as the new Georgian president in 2003 reshuffled the political cards in regard to the breakaway regions and the relation with Russia (and the CIS). The new president was the opponent of the Moscow backed Shevardnadze and the "voice of the opposition". This opposition was not willing to give up the breakaway regions to independence de jure. Particularly Irakli Okruashvili, the minister of defence and minister of economy of the first government of Saakashvili, was a strong supporter of a firm and strong position towards South-Ossetia and Abkhazia.



Irakli Okruashvili

The position towards the breakaway regions divided the newly elected government of Saakashvili in 2003. What was the desired policy towards reunification of the international recognized territory of Georgia: reconciliation or forced annexation? On the international fora, Saakashvili proclaimed that he would only use peaceful means to achieve this objective. Empty words if you consider the attack in 2008 but credible in 2004. Why?

The Rose revolution and election of Saakashvili as the new Georgian president in 2003 reshuffled the political cards in regard to the breakaway regions and the relation with Russia (and the CIS). The new president was the opponent of the Moscow backed Shevardnadze and the "voice of the opposition".

There were three breakaway regions: Ajaria, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. Ajaria was the smallest one and populated mainly by ethnic Georgians. This would be the first test case of the policy of reunification and it seemed a peaceful one. The political gap between Ajaria and Georgia became deeper in 2003 after the Rose revolution. This was because the autonomous region of Ajaria had not accepted the new political leaders in Tbilisi as the legitimate ones. Just as the military build-up and threatening stabilised, a peaceful revolution occurred in Ajaria. In 2004 the Ajarians demanded a new government. In this case, the Russian government supported President Aslan Abashidze while the Georgian government backed the opposition. But despite the possibility to use military force, the Georgian government did not use it. The pressure it putted on the regime was political and economic, not militarily. May 2004 was the

turning point concerning this case; the Ajarian president lost most of his support within the administration while the opposition (with protests) became too strong. The need for change became urgent. On May the 7th, Ajaria became an integral part of Georgia and Abashidze fled to Russia. The semi-independent episode of Ajaria ended without too many casualties or open war. In the aftermath of the regime change, the Russian base in Batumi closed (definitely 2007), a point of discussion in Georgian-Russian relations.

This kind of politics could be the forerunner for the reunification strategy used by Georgia.

With Ajaria reintegrated in the Georgian territory of Georgia, the attention shifted to the other two regions with flare-ups of disputes and hostilities as a result. Soon, it became more accepted that the integration of Ajaria was not comparable with the other regions. First there was a history of violence. Secondly, the Russian foreign policy refocused itself somewhat after the revolution in Georgia and Ukraine. The new Russia could not count any longer on pro-Russian elites in the countries surrounding the Russian borders. It became more protective towards the remaining pro-Russian regimes like South-Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Knowing the different situation and conditions, Saakashveli took a different approach towards the breakaway regions. On January the 6th of 2005, he proposed broader forms of autonomy to South-Ossetia guaranteed by a new constitution. Unfortunately, the other side remained silent and the frozen conflict remained.

The relation between Russia and Georgia became strained by these new conditions.

In the past, Georgian politicians were divided in pro- and contra-Shevarnadze. Now,

Saakashveli had succeeded in some kind of reconciliation between the different factions.

In the nineties, Georgia was strongly connected to Russian infrastructure and economy, now they are more independent thanks to newly build pipelines and export towards Europe.

In the past Georgia was considered as a post-soviet state attached to the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Nowadays, its internal political focus is the US. Evidence for this are the American paid "*Georgia train and equip program*", Georgian support mission in Iraq and the strong position it takes in the American led "war on terror".

Russian – Georgian relation after the Rose revolution

The Russian-Georgian relationship was always a strained one. The Russian State (tsars and communists) considered the Georgian state as a border region, necessary to protect the southern border. This was the case in the time of the tsars and it is still nowadays. Of course there is also the argument that Russia wants to control Georgia for oil transit but, here we can argue that this is not the case since oilfields in the Caspian are shrinking and the Kazakh and Turkmen fields are strongly connected to the Russian transit system. From the Georgian point of view, Russia is only a neighbour not an ally. This was strongly reflected in the protests during the celebrations of the "Treaty of Georgievsk" (Georgievskii Traktat) in 1983. This treaty of 1773 brought seven states (among them the later known Georgia⁸) into the territory of imperial Russia. The annexation (with a brief period of independence during the Russian civil

⁸ Eighteenth century Georgia was geographically not the same Georgia as the present Georgia. Abkhazia entered the Russian empire as an independent state in 1810 and was only included in the Georgian SSR in 1930.

war) was not perceived as the beginning of integration, only as an occupation.

During the first years of independence, the relation became controversial. Russia supported the breakaway regions (certainly Abkhazia) but appointed itself as an (un-biased) peacekeeping force. In 1993 the situation changed. The support for Shevarnadze created some goodwill for the Georgian regime and the hot conflicts towards the breakaway regions became frozen. It is also in 1993 that Georgia joined the exclusionist CSTO (Collective Security Organization) and CIS. Russia and Georgia maintained good relations until 1999. In this year the Georgian government pulled itself out of the CSTO and joined another security organization; GUAM (The GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development).⁹ At that moment, arrangements concerning the breakaway regions (like an economic isolation of Abkhazia by the CIS) remained but they weakened significantly during the coming years.

From 2006 on, the Georgian-Russian relations became problematic. This can be blamed on the pro-western strategy of Saakashvili that threatened the position of Russia in the region. Saakashvili had never hidden his ambition to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a situation that was not beneficial for Moscow. The Georgian position towards the breakaway region held on to the principle of "*reintegration in Georgia*", with pro-Russian regimes in charge of those regions. Russia on the other hand became much more assertive, largely due to a stronger Russian identity and rising revenues since 1999. The strong Georgia-US relation made the Russian-Georgian relation a tripolar one. It is impossible

⁹ Members: Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan (until 2006) and Tadjikistan.

to leave the US out of the recent politics between Georgia and the Russian Federation.

These frozen conflicts remained largely unknown in the west but were known in Russia and Eastern Europe. It were conflicts in ex-Soviet states such as Armenia, Tadjikistan, Moldova and Georgia.

The roots of the recent crisis can probably be traced back to 1999 when the NATO intervened in Serbia in favour of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). This action was strongly criticized by Russia. The political response to this action was the deployment of Russian "peacekeepers" on the airport of Pristina before NATO forces could reach it. This political dispute between Washington and Moscow became highlighted again when Kosovo was recognized as an independent state by the UN. This brought the frozen conflicts back to the foreground. These frozen conflicts remained largely unknown in the west but were known in Russia and Eastern Europe. It were conflicts in ex-Soviet states such as Armenia, Tadjikistan, Moldova and Georgia.

The intensity of the conflicts is partly influenced by nationalists who want to protect ethnic Russian minorities in the ex- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) sphere. Another influence is the constant search for the Russian identity since the fall of imperial and communistic Russia. The former borders of the then existing empires could give something to hold on.¹⁰ It is the long existing discussion of the ethnic Russian

¹⁰ Concerning borders, one needs to understand that Russia anno 2008 is geographically the Russia of the 17-18th century, not that of the 19th or 20th century. It is a huge change concerning national borders in only one decennium.

identity (small ethnic Russia) versus the civilian interpretation (large multi-ethnic Russian Federation). Even when the western world does not consider the identity crisis as an important factor for the problem of the frozen conflicts, the State Duma does so. The law of the 17th of December in 2001 gives a new dimension towards the frozen conflicts. It's a law that creates the possibility to accept states or parts of former states as new subjects of the Russian Federation. This makes it legally possible to expand the territory of the Russian Federation. The first step in the procedure was taken by Russia in September 2008: the official recognition of the newly independent states of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. The Russian support for the referenda in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2006 concerning secession of Georgia created a hostile environment between Georgia and the Russian Federation. An environment that became only more hostile since 2006. In 2006 there were a gas pipeline sabotage incident, the ban on Moldavian and Georgian wines in Russia, the 2006 Kodori crisis, the espionage controversy and deportation of Georgians in Russia. All incidents contributed to severe damage of the Georgian-Russian relations.

Particularly the "espionage controversy" created a chain reaction of incidents and measures between the countries. This controversy started in September 2006, when Georgian police forces arrested four "Russian diplomats" and accused them of fuelling the conflict between the breakaway states and Georgia. They were not considered as diplomats by the Georgian government, but only as agents of the GRU (the Russian military intelligence service). Russia repelled diplomatically by recalling the Russian ambassador, locking a resolution in the UN Security Council, suspending the withdrawal of Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and disregarding an invitation of the presidents

of the breakaway regions for an official meeting in Sochi. The situation escalated in October 2006 when the "spies" were handed over to the OSCE. The Russian government and State Duma took steps against ordinary Georgian citizens on the Russian territory.

In 2006 there were a gas pipeline sabotage incident, the ban on Moldavian and Georgian wines in Russia, the 2006 Kodori crisis, the espionage controversy and deportation of Georgians in Russia. All incidents contributed to severe damage of the Georgian-Russian relations.

This policy was widely condemned by "human right watch" and "freedom house" as a non-humane treatment. The deportation of the "illegal" Georgian immigrants was not huge in scale but it could count as a symbolic signal.¹¹ This was not the first time such treatment occurred. Another example took place when Moscow banned Georgian and Moldavian wine in March 2006 because they were "unhealthy and falsified". A controversial decision that coincided with the pronouncement of pro-NATO and pro-EU declarations from the Georgian government. The dispute became fuelled by statements of Irakli Okruashvili in 2005 that Georgia exported falsified wine towards Russia because that was the only market that accepted the "bad wine". Another statement that added to the troubled situation came from the former Georgian minister of defence who declared that Russia would lose a military conflict when it

¹¹ It is estimated that around 1 000 000 Georgians live and work in Russia and the monetary transfer they generate is about 20% of Georgia's GDP. Just about a hundred were deported but it was still a frightening measure to aim at plain civilians to put pressure on the government Saakhasveli.

should attack Georgia military. Like many other politicians, he denied such statements but evidence was recorded on tape. These statements give an example of the non-ending story of propaganda and disinformation concerning the conflicts.



The Russian school in Tbilisi stopped its activities towards Georgian Citizens. One of the measures to hit ordinary Georgians.

Direct confrontations escalated during 2007. It was no longer a political dispute fought on the diplomatic battlefield, but more and more it became a dispute with military implications. One of the hotspots was the Kodori valley, which fell in hands of Georgian police forces during 2006. It became the first time the de jure Abkhazian government (appointed by the Georgian government) resided in Abkhazian territory. This symbolic action created not only a derailed relation with the separatists, but also with the Russian Federation. The shooting of a plane and a non-confirmed attack of Mil-Mi 24 gunships in the Kodori-valley indicated that something was going on since then in Georgian airspace. Both sides blamed each other which did nothing for the undeniable fact that the hostile environment had changed into a violent one.

The Russian-Georgian relations did not improve in 2008. In March 2008, the State Duma decided to lift the CIS sanctions on trade with Abkhazia. This decision took place on the

background of the international recognition of Kosovo and the Georgian push for joining a NATO action plan, with the possibility of membership in the future.¹² The shooting of a Georgian UAV-drone (unmanned aerial vehicle) above Abkhazian territory by a MiG-29 (coming out of Russian airspace) brought extra oxygen to the smouldering conflict.¹³ The decision to stop CIS sanctions on Abkhazia created a new situation for the frozen conflicts and was possibly the unofficial start of a de facto and de jure recognition of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia by the Russian authorities. It created also a new environment for business. Gazprom was planning to boost the trade with Abkhazia and the Abkhazian government opened Sukhumi airport for international flights. The Kodori valley became hotspot again in 2008. Moscow accused Tbilisi of frequently using UAV's, which is a violation of the 1994 Moscow agreement and United Nations Resolution on Abkhazia, and of developing a military capacity in the valley. Those accusations however were not sufficiently grounded according to the UN observers. This message formed an opportunity for a military build-up of Russian peacekeepers in the region and it was effectively used under that pretext on the 29th of April when Moscow announced it would increase its forces to the maximum possible with the force to retaliate when necessary.¹⁴ From the Georgian side, it was given to understand that additional Russian forces would be perceived as aggressors. On May the 6th of 2008, Temur Iakobashvili, the

¹² Particularly the George W. Bush' administration supported a future membership of Georgia of the NATO. Germany and France are moderate opponents to a possible membership for Georgia.

¹³ The Russian government did not recognize the video images of the UAV as evidence for Russian involvement. But the attack was clearly conducted by a MiG-29, an aircraft that Georgia and Abkhazia do not possess.

¹⁴ It concerned 2545 Russian peacekeepers, whereas the maximum number of Russian peacekeepers by former agreements is 3000.

Georgian minister of integration, announced that Georgia was on the verge of war with Russia.

The Abkhazian government asked security guarantees from Russia (with possible military integration of airspace) while Russian forces were increasing and Caucasian volunteers were preparing to boost the military capacities of the militias of the breakaway regions.

In this tense atmosphere the next incident added even more fuel to the hostile environment. On May the 18th Russian peacekeepers (mounted infantry with armored personnel carriers or APC) were detained by Georgian police after “they hit” a Georgian civilian vehicle. Other incidents followed quickly:

16/05/2008: The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB)

arrests a so-called Georgian spy, involved in terrorist attacks in Southern Russia

21/05/2008: Automatic weapons firing and grenade blasts were reported in Abkhazia. The targets were civilians. Both sides blamed each other.

31/05/2008: Russian railway troops are entering South-Ossetia to “repair” the railroads. They increase their security after an “attack” on them

14-15/06/2008: Exchange of gunfire and mortar fire between South-Ossetians and the Georgian army.

15/06/2008: Rumours are spreading, talking of Russian forces building up strength and bases in Abkhazia.

17/06/2008: The Russian foreign minister warns the Georgian government that a renegotiation of the status of the peacekeeping force could unfreeze the conflict.

18/06/2008: Four Russian peacekeepers are detained by Georgian police and accused of non-authorized weapon transports. The Russian officials responded with the message that in such a scenario Russian forces would

use their weapons from then on to guarantee their freedom of movement.

3-4/07/2008: New exchange of gunfire and mortar fire in South Ossetia.

9/07/2008: Russian military jets fly in Georgian airspace as a sign of military supremacy. The Russian government recognizes the involvement of Russian jets.

14/07/2008: The Georgian ministry of defence plans to increase its military capabilities with 15% (up to 37.000 extra troops) on the frontline with Abkhazia and South-Ossetia.

28/07/2008-02/08/2008: South-Ossetians are building fortifications on the border with Georgia with a cutting edge tension as result. Gunshots are exchanged.

05/08/2008: The Russian ambassador warns the Georgian government Russia backs the breakaway regions in case of a war.

07/08/2008: The South-Ossetian – Georgian war starts. The position of the Russian forces in this period is still unknown.

09/08/2008: Russia joins the separatists in the fighting's and starts hitting Georgia directly.

...

This gives an indication of the never-ending list of mutual provocations (since 2006) between both sides which resulted in open war. The role of Russia was from the start substantial. They supported and armed the militias of the breakaway regions from the beginning of the war. The pre-war (2008) arrangements created a legal framework for support to the militias and closeness of substantial Russian forces in the region. Some questions still remain: what after the war? Who is to blame? What is the post-war situation?

Reflections

It is not useful to find the “real aggressor”. Both countries did not hesitate to use military force to enforce political concessions. All participants

got what they wanted: a war. Russia was able to restore its status as an regional power. The astonishing fast reaction of Russia can only be explained by a preparedness of the units (the 58th army in particular). The fast reaction gives a new impression of the reasons behind the deployment of railroad troops in July 2008 in South-Ossetia. The railroads were prepared to give the 58th army enough logistic support when necessary. The offensive of Russian-Abkhazian-Caucasian forces in West-Georgia and the Kodori valley also gives the impression Russia was prepared for the war.

It is not useful to find the “real aggressor”. Both countries did not hesitate to use military force to enforce political concessions. All participants got what they wanted: a war.

The Georgian side tried to portray itself to the outside world as the victim of the Russian aggression. To some point it was. Gunfire was never definitely silenced on the Georgian border of the breakaway regions despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers. Just as we can blame Russia for its military preparedness in this conflict; we can blame Georgia for its attack. It was true that violence was rising on the border with South-Ossetia but the blunt military actions were hardly justifiable.¹⁵ It was the perfect “casus bellum” for the Russian Federation to intervene in the conflict. This offensive was probably well prepared and not ad hoc prepared as a small punishment expedition. Okruashvili even stated during an interview in 2008 that those plans dated from 2005. This former minister of defence could have given an incentive to the Georgian

¹⁵ The proportion of the Georgian punishment expedition was out of control when armoured units were used against the South-Ossetian militias.

government to use military force against the breakaway regions. Okruashvili, always a supporter of the military solution, was arrested in 2007, triggering anti-governmental protests. The uniting image of the Georgian government after the Rose revolution began to fade and the danger of a Georgian political split came on the foreground. Certainly when Georgia’s interior minister released tapes of opposition members talking with Russian officials about actions against the government. This escalation in internal politics could have influenced the idea of another option to the breakaway countries instead of following Saakashvili’s “peaceful” option. A strong action could create more political unity in Tbilisi against a common opponent instead of disagreements.

Post war situation

Russia and the world

The military victory of the Russian led army against the Georgian one did not guarantee the political victory it was counting on. The western world (cfr. EU, UK and US) chose in different degrees the side of Georgia emphasizing the out of proportion sized Russian response to the conflict. The attacks on Gori and other military targets added with atrocities committed by the volunteer corps were considered totally out of proportion. Paul A. Goble talks about the “*mistake of Russia*” to attack Georgia military. According to him, the offensive created a military victory but a political defeat. It created a dangerous situation in the Caucasus towards Russia because the basic idea of the Russian foreign politics became one of double standards. If regimes support Moscow, they will help to protect their national borders (cfr. Kosovo case). If regimes do not support Moscow, they will support extreme opposition and secession parties. The question remains in the region: Why is an independent South-

Ossetia and Abkhazia "ok" but an independent Chechnya "not". An idea used by some South-Ossetians is to merge South-Ossetia and North-Ossetia in an independent country. A new Chechnya could be the consequence of such thinking. The "*independence question*" of breakaway regions in the Caucasian region has thus the potential to explode in the face of the Kremlin.^{16 17}

The unilateral decisions of Medvedev were not appreciated by Western nations because of the consequences they implicated with regard to the accession of Russia to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and G8. Internally, the action was supported by the majority of the Russians when we believe sources connected to the Russian Federation. However, this does not take away the fact that there remains serious discontent in Russia concerning the use of the military option. Paul A. Goble points in this case at the \$8 billion net capital outflow in the two working days after the Russia intervention in the conflict. However others like Noel Maurer disagree with the hypothesis that the Russian financial markets suffered by the war. The Russian actions undermined more than underlined the regional power of the "new Russia" on the political field. Some argue that

¹⁶ RAJAN M. and GRAHAM F. (Foreign affairs, 2000) have written about the fragile equilibrium between Moscow and the Caucasian Republics. According to the authors, the Russian Federation is not considered as an "ally" or seen as legitimate but more as a colonial mechanism benefiting Moscow. Only when Moscow grants wealth (not possible during the late nineties) or creates fear (cfr. Chechnya) the republics respect the will of the Kremlin. However the economic costs to control the region military is without any doubt much too costly for the Russian Federation. Without a new legitimacy, the Kremlin will lose sooner or later the control of the north-Caucasian region.

¹⁷ Very interestingly is the loyalty of Basayev towards Russia. Chechens under the command of Basayev supported military in Abkhazia and gained training and weapons from Russia. Two years later they were killing Russian soldiers in the streets of Grozny, Chechnya.

this will be the new Russian foreign policy as stated by Medvedev. He declared that Russia would protect Russian citizens wherever they are. It is a reintroduction of the nationalistic idea of "the near abroad" but interpreted more broadly and implying a much stronger Russia.¹⁸ Next to the "Islamite threat" (used in Chechnya), it is the (anti-Russian) western threat that gains importance in the discourse.¹⁹



Ethnic Russians (dark) in the former USSR

This interpretation of the statements of Medvedev could announce problems for Ukraine with a strong Russian minority in the Krim region. This idea however is probably an exaggeration. Ukraine is not Georgia and Georgia is not Azerbaijan. Russia uses a different approach to all these countries with different capabilities and preferences. The new context of lowering oil prices undermines further revenues for the Russian state. Also, a hopeful message was launched in October 2008 when the Russian government considered a possible closing of the military harbour of Sebastopol and did not view it as a huge problem for

¹⁸ This idea was already in use during the Russian empire when the Russian tsars employed the idea that they had the responsibility to protect the Orthodox people in conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. The protection of the Russians is a more modern interpretation of this old idea.

¹⁹ "Western" is largely interpreted here as the American influence.

Russian-Ukrainian relations.²⁰ This gives an impression of the specific way Russia tries to guide its foreign policy; with many sides and sometimes totally unpredictable. However one thing changed. In the past, Russia always protested against the expansion of the NATO by means of diplomacy. Now it becomes unclear if Russia withholds itself from using more aggressive means to block further expansion of the NATO (the western security organization in concurrent position towards the CSTO and associated with the GUAM). The Russian operations however do not only highlight Russia's military strength but also reveal its weaknesses concerning the military. The use (and loss) of an expensive "Backfire" indicates the weaknesses in Russian reconnaissance operations. Also the statement that "*no new material was used*" by the Russian supreme commander and the employment of old T-62 & T-72 tanks indicates that the Russian army is not yet a modern equipped army. An important observation is the Russian foreign policy should become more readily to use violence.

Georgia

The future of Georgia remains uncertain. At the NATO summit in Bucharest of 2008, only the US firmly supported the possibility of NATO-membership of Georgia. After the war, Merkel changed her position somewhat towards the possibility of membership. However, would other NATO members be willing to take the risk and guarantee article 5 to a country with a troubled relation towards Russia and its own breakaway regions? One thing remains sure for the near future. The military capabilities of Georgia are restrained since the war because of the losses suffered in the war and because of

the stronger control from Russia to prevent rearmament of the Georgian army. An open question remains the future preparedness and position of Russian, Abkhazian and South-Ossetian forces. Are they willing to pull back completely and definitely or will they use the changed military balance as leverage for anti-Georgian policies. This takes me to another point. How stable is the Georgian government after the war? Is Saakashveli still supported by the population and seen as a national saviour, or is he considered as a bad gambler? How will the different Georgian factions react to the new situation; will they support a "national idea" or blame each other?

The problem however is that these recognitions only serve to solidify the frozen conflict, because thanks to them there is now a legal base for cooperation with those newly created countries or even incorporation.

The rally against the president on the 7th of November proves the already long-lasting troubled relation between government and opposition. However, the number of protesters remained low (+/- 10 000) which indicates the relatively low support for the thesis that "Saakashveli caused harm to the Georgian nation and needs to resign".

Breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The data out of the Kodori valley are for the moment not conclusive enough to speak of ethnic cleansing. Different sources however are reporting ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia by harassment of Georgian citizens in South-

²⁰ This is in contrast with former statements of Russian government officials.

Ossetia and in the north of Gori.²¹ This ethnic cleansing was primarily conducted by “volunteers” looting ethnic Georgian towns. Looting tolerated by Russian armed forces if we may believe the Daily Telegraph. A political message was also conveyed by the South-Ossetian president, when he stated in the Russian newspaper “Kommersant” that he gave the Georgians a corridor to leave the country but would not allow the return of them. Messages of harassment after the ceasefire by South-Ossetian volunteers towards returning refugees shows these words were not empty.

This ethnic result of the war resembles a milder version of the ethnic cleansing of Abkhazia during the civil war.

On the 26th of August, the Russian government recognised the independence of the breakaway regions on the request of the State Duma. This recognition was condemned by NATO, OSCE, EU, G7, US, UK and Ukraine. Others expressed their support, for example the People’s Republic of China, but it was only Nicaragua who recognized the regions’ independence beside the Russian Federation. The problem however is that these recognitions only serve to solidify the frozen conflict, because thanks to them there is now a legal base for cooperation with those newly created countries or even incorporation.

Personal reflections and thanks

I hope I gave you an insight in the problems surrounding Georgia and the region with this article. Maybe we can consider the Caucasian region as an east-European variant of the

Balkan, with the same history of violence and recent memories of ethnic cleansing. It is like the Balkan; a patchwork of ethnic groups and loyalties²². But in the nineties, Russia was focused on the west and remained silent when NATO forces bombarded the Serbian militias. Now the global picture is different. Russia can use energy as a political leverage and is becoming increasingly assertive, specifically since 1999. China gets economically stronger every minute and is politically affiliated with Russia. The Bush administration on the other hand is trying to put his footprint in the Caucasus. New options can be opened by the new Obama administration but he has also supported Georgia strongly when the conflict broke out in August 2008. Power games return to a fragile region where armies can disappear (like experienced in Chechnya) and history can be painful.

My thanks go to the volunteering writers of Wikipedia²³ and the Eurasian daily monitor who gave me the great amounts of information I needed to write this article. Special thanks also go to Ha thi Mong Lan who helped to finish the article.

²¹ Newspapers: Daily telegraph, Novaya Gazetta, The Sunday Times, ...
Politicians: Kouchner (Fr., EU), Alexander Stubb (Sw and OSCE chairman)
Organizations: OSCE, UNHCR

²² See map on page 16

²³ Many illustrations originated from there.

Ethnolinguistic Groups In the Caucasus Region



EXTRA: A map of the ethno linguistic relations in the Caucasus (source: Wikipedia)

Wind of Change? El Salvador 2009 Presidential Elections

By Iene VANMANSHOVEN

Sunday, March 15, El Salvador: amid a sea of red flags and T-shirts, people are celebrating the victory of Mauricio Funes, the presidential candidate of the former Marxist rebel party FMLN. For the first time in 18 years, the conservative ARENA party had to face defeat in the presidential ballot. Comparisons with Obama's victory abound, and change seems to have reached Central America as well – or has it?



With 51,3 % of the votes, Funes managed to win from his right-wing ARENA opponent Ávila. Clearly, division between the left and the right in El Salvador remains strong, and the FMLN will have to form a coalition in order to obtain a firm majority in Parliament. This will likely prove to be difficult, since the only option is the PCN (National Conciliation Party, former PDC), which is traditionally a right-wing party, although it has been working on a more moderate image. Moreover, when former television journalist Funes will take office on the 1st of June, he is in for a rather tough job: the consequences of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992) are still being felt, and the country is confronted with

widespread Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, poverty, drug trafficking, gang violence, economic inequity and natural disasters.

History of violence

Both the ARENA and the FMLN party drag along a violent political past: During the civil war, the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was founded as an umbrella movement for the left-wing guerrilla groups who fought against the military junta. The junta took power in 1979 after a military coup and mainly profiled President Duarte (PDC) as a frequent representative along the civil war period. In the Cold War context, this right-wing government was heavily supported by the U.S. governments of the Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations, as a part of their global battle against communism. During a national television address in 1984, Reagan defended the US Latin American foreign policy stating that "San Salvador is closer to Houston, Texas, than Houston is to Washington, D.C. Central America is America; it's at our doorstep, and it has become a stage for a bold attempt, by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua, to install Communism by force throughout the hemisphere."

During a national television address in 1984, Reagan defended the US Latin American foreign policy stating that "San Salvador is closer to Houston, Texas, than Houston is to Washington, D.C. Central America is America; it's at our doorstep"

The ARENA party was founded in 1981, as a right-wing counter-reaction to some of the reformist policies of the military junta. Roberto D'Aubuisson, founder of the ARENA party,

became associated with the organization of military death squads, who terrorized and killed suspected left-wing citizens. Also, in 1993, the UN investigated and confirmed D'Aubuissons involvement in the high-profile assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero.

In Salvador's Civil War, more than 70.000 people were killed. The victims were mainly peasants killed by the military, but also other opponents sympathetic to the ideas of the guerrillas, such as clergy, political activists, and journalists. Under the auspices of the UN, the government and the FMLN initiated peace agreements in 1991, and a final version was signed one year later (Chapultepec Peace Accords). Complaints of political violence registered by the Truth Commission were directed primarily against the Salvadoran armed forces, in addition to complaints against civil defence units, death squads and the FMLN. After demobilizing their armed forces, the FMLN became incorporated in the democratic process as a legitimate political party.



Graffiti calling for government negotiations with the FMLN, one year before the end of the Civil War. Photo: Martin Adler / Panos Pictures

The challenge for change

It was ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance Party), however, who dominated political life in

El Salvador ever since the establishment of the new democracy. Already in 1988-89, after the disappointing results of the Duarte administration (PDC), ARENA won legislative and presidential elections for the first time, and became actively involved in the peace agreement ending the Civil War. During the past two decades, they gained the support of business groups, and due to their free market initiatives and conservative fiscal management the Salvadoran GDP has been growing steadily. However, the inequality in the distribution of income remains huge, and economic migration to the US is commonplace.

“A lot of families get \$500 from their family in the US on a Thursday, and on Friday they are at Pizza Hut.”

In 2006, it was estimated that \$2.5 billion, or 17% of GDP, was sent back to El Salvador by US based immigrants. Most of this money was spent on direct consumer spending, and since El Salvador is far from self-sufficient in consumer goods such as food, this money is unable to have a positive impact on the Salvadoran economy itself, since almost none of it is invested in local businesses. Or, as one woman put it: “A lot of families get \$500 from their family in the US on a Thursday, and on Friday they are at Pizza Hut.”

The two main themes of both campaigns during the presidential elections were creating jobs and reducing crime. It is not hard to understand why ‘fighting’ violence is a priority in El Salvador: it experiences some of the highest murder rates in the world, and most of them are gang-related, with the infamous mara's (e.g. MS13, Calle 18) roaming the streets. Poverty and unemployment drive more and more young people (from the age of eight) into the mara's, occupied with theft, drug and human trafficking. In El Salvador, the amount of gang

members is estimated at 35.000. An additional situation the country is confronted with are the frequent natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic activity, heavy rainstorms and severe droughts, which have led to death and the destruction of housing and crops.



"This is the happiest night of my life, and I want it to be the night of El Salvador's greatest hope," future president Funes said on the eve of his victory. Even though his opponents depict him as a communist, and his party FMLN as a tool in the hands of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, Funes adheres a more moderate, social-democratic ideology. His campaign slogan Sí, podemos clearly referred to Obama's Yes, we can, and while the ARENA party strongly identified with the Republican Government in the US (El Salvador was the

only Latin American country with troops in Iraq), Obama's victory is seen as another opportunity to back the change in El Salvador politics. The FMLN is still critical with regard to the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, but it seems to have left hard line communism in the past. Funes has declared that he will not repeal the Central American Free Trade Agreement or the dollarization of the Salvadoran economy, even though the FMLN opposed these measures when they were installed. By assuring that he will not endanger foreign investment and will defend democracy, he stands closer to Brazilian Lula da Silva than to Chávez. In addition, freelance journalist Beeson remarks that "The opportunity for the Obama administration is also real: By engaging an ex-guerrilla group that is decidedly pro-United States, the Obama administration could take a first step toward dialogue with other leftist governments -- eventually even Cuba or Venezuela." Time will tell whether the US wind of change has spread itself South, but considering the fact that Funes is the first President in El Salvador who can disconnect from the violent past of his party, the door seems to be open for a new period of politics in El Salvador.

Interview with Fatima Valdes, election observer El Salvador

By Iene VANMANSHOVEN



Fatima Valdes is Salvadoran, but lived in Norway for many years. She was an election observer at the 2009 elections in El Salvador. Her comments, in the form of three articles, are available at the website of the Norwegian Latin America Research Network (NorLARNet). A direct witness to the situation in El Salvador, Global asked her to comment on a few questions, which she did with a lot of enthusiasm:

How did you experience the consequences of the civil war in El Salvador?

"The civil war obviously still has a lot of consequences in El Salvador. On a personal level, my siblings and I have moved abroad. In general, one third of the Salvadoran people live abroad: because of the war and its practical consequences there is simply no work in El Salvador. The problem of the mara's is directly related to this situation: the children of people who work abroad spend their time on the streets and get into trouble, such as in California. They were later sent back to El Salvador as criminal offenders, but many of them could not speak Spanish any more. This created of course only more problems, and they continued to be involved in criminal activities.

On the political level too, there are many problems that have to be conquered. The recent changes in political life are very important."

Who are the main supporters for the right and for the left political parties in El Salvador and why?

"It is not easy to identify a particular kind of people with the specific parties. Fortunately, today, there is no fear in El Salvador to express which party you support. For example, during the elections, you could see flags everywhere: in the cars, by the houses...

Funes has a great appeal for many people, especially in the media. He wants changes but not in an extreme way. His supporters are mainly people from the middle class and students, who favour the moderate left. His rhetoric is different from his predecessors. Some people even say that he does not represent the FMLN. For example, there is a group called 'friends of Funes'. They support Funes but not the FMLN. Thus, there are a lot of political changes going on in El Salvador, most importantly within the political parties themselves.

One third of the Salvadoran people live abroad: because of the war and its practical consequences there is simply no work in El Salvador.

Rich land owners tend to support the right, but also poor people do. To illustrate this, the ARENA candidate, Ávila, was for example depicted in the newspapers wearing a typical sombrero, a farmers hat. In coastal provinces such as Ahuachapán or Sonsonate, there are many farmers who support the right. The land owners also influence the voting behaviour of their employees.

A remarkable event was that Tomás Chévez decided to support Funes and the FMLN. Chévez was the ex-presidential candidate of the PCN party, but when the PCN decided to drop out of the race, he disagreed. Due to the legal system of the election he was unable to run without a supporting party, but he and his vice-president then decided to support Funes and the FMLN instead. This moderate right support for a new, moderate left was also unseen before."

Do you believe that the election of Funes will bring change to El Salvador? In what manner?

"Yes, I believe it will. There have been a lot of tensions around the elections, and fear for violence. There were discussions about whether or not Funes would be operating for powers within the FMLN... A lot of rumours about fraud, too. However, despite parallels being drawn between Funes and presidents such as Ortega and Chavez in political media campaigns, his rhetoric was very clear on this, and he stressed a peaceful democratic transition.

Once he was elected, Funes decided to visit Lula da Silva in Brazil instead of accepting Ortega's invitation to Nicaragua. This sent a very strong message: he was not the Chavez that some had predicted him to be. Obviously, Funes has a lot of work in front of him, but I

believe that, if he is given the chance and nothing extraordinary happens, he can definitely improve the situation in El Salvador."

What are the main challenges for politicians in El Salvador?

"The democratic transition is very important. In this respect, Funes brings with him a whole new group of people. Politics in El Salvador still experiences many shortcomings. For example, when a candidate for a certain function is to be appointed in a party, it was not the custom to conduct internal debates or elections... Voting for the one or the other political party was, as a matter of fact, rather choosing between una manzana podrida y otra menos podrida: between a rotten apple and one less rotten."

What about the role of the US in Salvadoran political life?

Obama represents a new hope, also for Latin America and El Salvador. There was no pressure from the US on the elections in El Salvador. The US relations remain very important for El Salvador, especially with respect to the many Salvadoran people who live there."

Thank you Fatima!

Amnesty International

Israël/Gaza: Wapens uit VS en Europa voeden mensenrechtenschendingen

Door Pieter STOCKMANS

Afgelopen week onthulde Amnesty International dat Israël een nieuwe levering Amerikaanse wapens heeft ontvangen. Dit doet vragen rijzen over de toewijding van de Amerikaanse president Obama om te voorkomen dat de VS nieuwe Israëlische oorlogsmisdaden tegen burgers aanwakkeren, zoals recentelijk in Gaza. Volgens nieuwe informatie zou het Duitse vrachtschip de Wehr Elbe ongeveer 300 containers uitgeladen hebben in de Israëlische haven van Ashdod, op 40km ten noorden van Gaza. Het schip werd gecharterd en gecontroleerd door de US Military Sealift Command. Op 20 december, een week voor de Israëlische aanval op Gaza, verliet dat Duitse schip Amerika en zette het koers naar Israël. Het schip vervoerde toen 989 containers met wapens, elke container was 6 meter lang met een totaal geschat gewicht van 14.000 ton. Deze informatie bevestigt de bevindingen van Amnesty in het recente rapport 'Fuelling Conflict: foreign arms supplies to Israel/Gaza'. Met wapens afkomstig uit de VS en Europa heeft Israël buitensporig veel burgerslachtoffers gemaakt. Zijn deze burgerslachtoffers een te betreuren neveneffect van de oorlog of is er meer aan de hand? Een terugblik.

Directe aanvallen op burgers

Het Israëlische leger heeft directe aanvallen op burgers en burgerdoelwitten uitgevoerd. Een politieceremonie van pas afgestudeerde verkeersagenten werd gebombardeerd, waarbij tientallen stierven. Televisiestations, VN gebouwen en scholen, universiteiten en

moskeeën werden bestookt. Bovendien werden precisieraketten afgevuurd vanuit onbemande toestellen met camera's die elk detail van het doelwit kunnen zien. De raketten kunnen uiterst precies op een doelwit worden gericht.

Sinds 27 december hebben zij nochtans honderden burgerslachtoffers gemaakt, waaronder een familie die in de tuin thee zat te drinken, een 13-jaar oud meisje dat in haar bed lag te slapen, een 13-jaar oude jongen op een fiets en 8 secundaire schoolstudenten aan een bushalte. De Britse krant 'The Guardian' deed een onderzoek naar het gebruik van deze onbemande toestellen en precisieraketten en bracht er als eerste gedetailleerd verslag over uit in een reportage. Meestal komen zowel de onbemande toestellen als de raketten uit de VS.



Label op raket die drie hulpverleners en kind doodde. ©AI

Indiscriminatoire aanvallen

Het Israëlische leger heeft ook talloze 'indiscriminatoire' aanvallen uitgevoerd. Dat zijn aanvallen waarbij onvoldoende onderscheid wordt gemaakt tussen burgers en strijders. In de meest dichtbevolkte stedelijke gebieden in de Gazastrook loopt de bevolkingsdichtheid op tot 20.000 mensen per 1km². Als deze gebieden worden gebombardeerd of beschoten, dan zijn de aanvallen automatisch 'indiscriminatoir' en

vallen er vrijwel zeker doden en gewonden onder burgers. In dat geval is een aanval inherent onwettig, en een oorlogsmisdaad, zoals ook de Speciale Rapporteur van de VN-Mensenrechtenraad Richard Falk stelde.

Luchtaanvallen met zware bommen van 1,5 ton hebben een massale vernieling aangericht. Iedereen binnen een reikwijdte van 3 voetbalvelden riskeerde te worden verwond en hoe dicht bij plaats van inslag, hoe meer risico men liep te worden gedood. Amnesty vond restanten van zulke bommen in heel Gaza. Israëlische tanks hebben ook artillerievuur afgeschoten in dichtbevolkte gebieden en zo honderden slachtoffers gemaakt. Artillerie is een wapen bestemd voor open slagvelden en kan absoluut niet precies op één doelwit worden gericht. Op 6 januari sloeg artillerie in dicht bij een VN school Jabalia, waarbij 41 mensen werden gedood. Op 17 januari sloeg artillerie met witte fosfor in een klaslokaal van een VN school in Beit Lahiya. In de school schuilden 1600 mensen voor het oorlogsgeweld. Op het moment van de inslag sliepen 35 mensen in het klaslokaal. 2 kinderen werden gedood en 14 mensen raakten gewond, waaronder de moeder van de kinderen, die haar benen moest laten amputeren.

Zelfs na de start van het Israëlische offensief eind december en zelfs na meldingen van zware mensenrechtenschendingen met de wapens, bleef de VS wapens transporteren.

Aanvallen met witte fosfor in dichtbevolkte gebieden zijn onvermijdelijk 'indiscriminair'. Witte fosfor is bestemd om een rookgordijn te creëren in een open slagveld. Israël gebruikte het in dichtbevolkte woongebieden. Human Rights Watch publiceerde hierover een omvattend rapport. Witte fosfor werd

herhaaldelijk gebruikt tot op het laatste moment van het offensief, wat een bewust beleid van bovenaf doet vermoeden. Bovendien was het Israëlische leger op de hoogte van de effecten van witte fosfor.



*Israëlisch leger gebruikt witte fosfor in Rafah
©Iyad ElBaba/UNICEF-oPt*

Tijdens het offensief maakten Israëlische militaire dokters rapporten over aan legerofficieren, waarin werd gesteld: "When the phosphorus comes in contact with living tissue it causes its damage by 'eating' away at it." Characteristics of a phosphorus wound are: chemical burns accompanied by extreme pain ... the phosphorus may seep into the body and damage internal organs." Bovendien had het Israëlische leger een minder schadelijke niet-chemische variant van witte fosfor in zijn wapenarsenaal. Als het doel werkelijk was om witte fosfor legaal te gebruiken, wat Israël claimt, dan waren er dus alternatieven. Aanvallen met witte fosfor in dichtbevolkte gebieden zijn daarom ook disproportionele aanvallen. Op 10 januari raakte een 16-jarige meisje Samia Salman Al-Manay'a zwaar gewond toen, terwijl zij sliep in haar huis in het vluchtelingenkamp Jabalia, witte fosfor op de eerste verdieping in haar slaapkamer landde. De artilleriegranaten waarmee witte fosfor werd afgevuurd, droegen de markeringen M825 A1, een door de VS geproduceerde munitie. Op 15 januari gingen miljoenen dollars aan hulpgoederen in rook op

nadat opslagplaatsen in het VN hoofdkwartier met witte fosfor waren bestookt.

Het Israëlische leger heeft ook flechettes gebruikt. Dat zijn metalen pijltjes, 4 cm lang, met een scherpe punt. Er zitten tot 8000 flechettes in hulzen die meestal vanuit tanks afgevuurd worden. De hulzen ontploffen in de lucht en verspreiden de flechettes over een gebied van ongeveer 300m breed en 100m lang. Flechettes zijn eigenlijk bedoeld om dichte beplanting te doorboren en mogen niet gebruikt worden in dichtbebouwde woongebieden. Op 4 januari werd een ziekenwagen geraakt, de dokter overleed ter plaatse. Op 5 januari werd een familiehuis geraakt, een zwangere vrouw en een kind werden doorboord met flechettes. Israëlische militairen hebben zelf over deze flechettes gezegd: "The Israeli military obtained these weapons from the USA after the 1973 war and we have thousands of old shells in warehouses. The weapon is not regarded as reliable or effective and gunners have a difficult time in aiming this properly."

Aanvallen met witte fosfor in dichtbevolkte gebieden zijn onvermijdelijk 'indiscriminatoir'. Witte fosfor is bestemd om een rookgordijn te creëren in een open slagveld. Israël gebruikte het in dichtbevolkte woongebieden.

Ook de Palestijnse raketten kunnen niet op een specifiek doel worden gericht. Palestijnse gewapende groepen vuren bewust raketten af op dorpen en steden met de bedoeling burgerslachtoffers te maken. Binnengesmokkelde Russische Grads hebben een bereik van 35km. Zelfgemaakte Qassams hebben een korter bereik. Voor het eerst bereikten raketten de grotere Israëlische stad Beersheba. Dat zond een schokgolf door Israël

en de wereld. Sinds het begin van het gewapende conflict werden 643 raketten afgevuurd. Meestal landen die raketten in lege velden, maar sinds 2000 hebben ze toch 21 Israëlische burgers gedood, waarvan 3 tijdens het recente gewapende conflict. Op 27 december werd een man in zijn appartement in Netivot gedood, een dag later een man op een bouwsite in Ashkelon en nog een dag later een vrouw in het centrum van de stad Ashdod.

Welke wapentransporten voeden deze oorlogsdaden?

Sinds 2001 is de VS veruit de belangrijkste leverancier van conventionele wapens aan Israël. Van 2004 tot 2007 verhandelden Amerikaanse bedrijven commercieel \$1313 miljoen aan wapens en munitie naar Israël. De VS exporteerde in deze periode in totaal \$7855 miljoen aan wapens naar Israël. Bovenop deze handel en export geven de VS elk jaar massale financiële steun aan Israël om wapens aan te kopen, in strijd met Amerikaanse wetgeving die dergelijke steun aan zware mensenrechtenschenders verbiedt. Sinds 2002, tijdens de regering-Bush, ontving Israël meer dan \$21 miljard aan Amerikaanse militaire steun. De VS sloten in 2007 een nieuw 10 jaar durend akkoord met Israël ter waarde van \$30 miljard.

De Israëlische militaire interventie in de Gazastrook lijkt in grote mate uitgevoerd met door de VS geleverde wapens, munitie en militaire uitrusting betaald met geld van de Amerikaanse belastingbetaler. Zelfs na de start van het Israëlische offensief eind december en zelfs na meldingen van zware mensenrechtenschendingen met de wapens, bleef de VS wapens transporteren. Sinds begin december 2008 is de US Military Sealift Command druk in de weer om grote hoeveelheden wapens, waaronder witte fosfor, te transporteren van

North Carolina naar de Israëlische haven van Ashdod vlakbij Gaza. Het contract werd toegekend aan een Duits transportbedrijf.



Elektriciteitspaal bij vernielde gebouwen: "This Damage Made in USA" ©AI

Maar ook Europese landen leveren wapens aan Israël, hoewel in veel mindere mate als de VS. Van 2003 tot 2007 waren Frankrijk (€446 miljoen), Duitsland (€214 miljoen), het Verenigd Koninkrijk (€80 miljoen), België (€23 miljoen) en Roemenië (€17 miljoen) de grootste wapenleveranciers aan Israël. Servische en Bosnische bedrijven hebben de laatste jaren \$8 miljoen aan munitie en artillerie verhandeld naar een Israëlisch bedrijf dat levert aan het Israëlische leger. Het Verenigd Koninkrijk voert veel onderdelen uit. De Britse regering zegt dat die onderdelen meestal verder worden verwerkt door het Israëlische militair industrieel complex en dan verder worden uitgevoerd en niet de Israëlische militaire capaciteit zelf versterken. Soms is het traject van die onderdelen nog moeilijker te traceren: het Verenigd Koninkrijk voert veel onderdelen uit naar de VS. Amerikaanse bedrijven verwerken de onderdelen in bijvoorbeeld F16's die de VS dan wel naar Israël uitvoert om te worden gebruikt door het Israëlische leger. Zo kunnen de meeste regeringen niet garanderen dat hun wapenexport niet bijdraagt aan het schenden

van mensenrechten. Er is nood aan waterdichte eindgebruikercontrole.

Sommige Europese landen hebben na het begin van het Israëlische offensief hun wapenexport aan Israël teruggeschroefd, waaronder België. Daaronder zijn meestal niet de wapenexporten begrepen die de Israëlische militaire capaciteit niet zouden versterken en die Israël verder naar een derde land zou uitvoeren. Voor wapenleveringen die de militaire capaciteit van Israël niet versterken, vraagt ook België slechts een 'zo groot mogelijke waakzaamheid'. Maar opnieuw, de werkelijke eindgebruiker van de wapens valt zonder een waterdichte eindgebruikercontrole moeilijk te verifiëren.

Wapenembargo nu!

Amnesty vraagt de Veiligheidsraad onmiddellijk een omvattend wapenembargo in te stellen tegen Israël, Hamas en andere Palestijnse gewapende groepen totdat er effectieve mechanismes worden geïnstalleerd om te verzekeren dat wapenleveringen niet zullen worden gebruikt om zware schendingen van het international humanitair recht en de mensenrechten te begaan. En totdat de verantwoordelijken voor het misbruik van wapens in het recente conflict in Gaza voor het gerecht zijn gebracht. Elk land moet bovendien onmiddellijk unilateraal alle wapentransporten aan de regio stopzetten, inclusief de wapentransporten die indirect in de regio kunnen terechtkomen, totdat er geen substantieel risico meer bestaat dat deze wapens zullen worden gebruikt voor zware schendingen van het international humanitair recht en de mensenrechten. De meest duurzame manier om te vermijden dat met wapenleveringen de mensenrechten worden geschonden is een globaal Wapenhandelsverdrag waarin deze 'Golden Rule on Human Rights' wordt opgenomen.

Amnesty schreef minister De Gucht aan opdat België bij de VN en de EU zou pleiten voor een embargo op alle wapenleveringen aan Israël en aan Palestijnse groeperingen. Verder werd de minister ook gevraagd aan te dringen bij de VS naar een onderzoek over onrechtmatig gebruik van Amerikaanse wapens door Israël. België ondersteunt de eis van een effectief en globaal Wapenhandelsverdrag, maar om de geloofwaardigheid van deze eis niet te ondermijnen, is het noodzakelijk om onmiddellijk een einde te maken aan elke vorm van militaire transfers van zodra er het minste risico bestaat dat het materieel zal aangewend worden voor grove schendingen van de mensenrechten of van het internationaal humanitair recht. België en de gewesten, verantwoordelijk voor de wapenexport, hebben dus de verantwoordelijkheid om erover te waken dat Belgische luchthavens niet gebruikt worden voor de transfer of het overladen van wapens met bestemming Israël.

Uit het jongste jaarrapport van het Vlaamse Vredesinstituut blijkt dat de Vlaamse wapenexport naar Israël verviervoudigd is. Het gaat vaak om wapens waarvan Israël niet de eindgebruiker zou zijn. Amnesty International verklaart geenszins dat de regio's bewust wapens leveren die de militaire vermogens van Israël zouden versterken. De vraag die zich vooral stelt is of de regio's vandaag wel degelijk een significante controle kunnen uitvoeren op de eindgebruiker. Met andere woorden: bestaan er voldoende garanties dat wapenexport voor derden naar/via Israël de militaire capaciteiten van Israël niet verhoogt en wordt er gebruik gemaakt van instrumenten die toelaten het afgelegde traject van uitgevoerde wapens adequaat te traceren? Het risico bestaat immers dat de uitvoer, die op het eerste zicht verloopt conform de strikte normen van zowel de Belgische staat als de regio's, bij nader inzien

toch bepaalde componenten bevat die de militaire macht van Israël verhogen. De afwezigheid van betrouwbare en performante controlemechanismen op de eindgebruikers zou bovendien de mogelijkheid van publieke en parlementaire supervisie van wapenleveringen door België verhinderen.

Onderzoek en rekenschap?

Binnen het Internationaal Strafhof leeft er een grote bereidheid om de oorlogsmisdaden in Gaza te onderzoeken. Er is eerst nog onderzoek nodig of het Hof wel bevoegd is, maar er wordt alles aan gedaan opdat het Hof een rol van betekenis kan spelen. Niet zonder reden. Dit is immers in het grootste belang van het voortbestaan van het Hof en de geloofwaardigheid van het internationaal strafrecht zelf. Als het Hof enkel zaken behandelt die 'politiek niet gevoelig' liggen, dan zullen het concept van internationaal strafrecht en het Hof geen lang leven meer beschoren zijn. De internationale roep naar een onafhankelijk onderzoek naar oorlogsmisdaden in Gaza klinkt steeds luider.

Een aantal weken geleden riepen zestien gezaghebbende onderzoekers, rechters en persoonlijkheden (waaronder Desmond Tutu en vooraanstaande rechters van de Joegoslavië- en Rwanda tribunalen) VN-secretaris-generaal Ban Ki-Moon en de leden van de VN-veiligheidsraad op tot een diepgaand, onafhankelijk internationaal onderzoek en rekenschap voor oorlogsmisdaden. Maar het waren vooral de tientallen schokkende getuigenissen van Israëliische soldaten zelf die deze oproep het meest kracht bijzetten. De soldaten beschreven de lakse "rules of engagement", die de soldaten schijnbaar toestonden om het vuur te openen op ongewapende burgers en zelfs op hulpdiensten die geen bedreiging vormden. Na al deze

onthullingen heeft defensie-minister Ehud Barak een intern onderzoek doen instellen, maar het leger deed de getuigenissen af als "van horen zeggen". Het onderzoek werd dan ook al na 11 dagen afgesloten. Amnesty eist een onafhankelijk en onpartijdig onderzoek naar alle schendingen begaan door alle partijen.



Richard Goldstone

Dat onderzoek lijkt er nu te komen. De VN-Mensenrechtenraad benoemde de Zuid-Afrikaan Richard Goldstone tot leider van een fact-finding missie die alle schendingen van het internationaal humanitair recht tijdens het recente conflict in de Gazastrook en Zuid-Israël zal onderzoeken. VN Secretaris-generaal Ban Ki-Moon legt rond 22 april bovendien het definitieve rapport van de huidige 'UN Board of Enquiry' over aanvallen op VN gebouwen en personeel in Gaza voor aan de Veiligheidsraad, waar verdere stappen zullen worden overwogen. De Veiligheidsraad kan in een later stadium beslissen om de zaak te verwijzen naar het Internationaal Strafhof op basis de resultaten van het onderzoek bevolen door de VN Secretaris-generaal en de resultaten van het onderzoek van de Mensenrechtenraad onder leiding van Richard Goldstone.

De Veiligheidsraad heeft ook een grote verantwoordelijkheid om erop toe te zien dat alle partijen, Israël en alle Palestijnse gewapende groepen en de Palestijnse Autoriteit, hun volledige medewerking verlenen aan het onderzoek van Goldstone. Doortastend politiek leiderschap van de EU lidstaten zal essentieel zijn om te komen van een onderzoek tot een volledige rekenschap. Frankrijk en het Verenigd Koninkrijk nemen in de Veiligheidsraad, hét orgaan dat nu het verschil kan maken, geen sterk standpunt in. Dat heeft veel te maken met het gebrek aan een gemeenschappelijk EU-standpunt. Dat komt ook voor de EU bijzonder ongelegen, op een moment dat er een doorbraak werd geforceerd in een zaak waarin de EU wel druk uitgeoefend heeft, namelijk ervoor zorgen dat de president van Soedan voor het Internationaal Strafhof zou verschijnen. Sommigen zien in het Internationaal Strafhof nu al een vorm van 'selectieve gerechtigheid': oorlogsmisdadigers uit 'arme landen' worden ter verantwoording geroepen, terwijl oorlogsmisdadigers uit de VS, uit Israël, ... vrijuit gaan. Als de EU nu niets doet voor rekenschap voor oorlogsmisdaden in Gaza ondergraaft ze haar eigen geloofwaardigheid om in de toekomst nog op te roepen tot rekenschap in andere gevallen. Het voortbestaan van het systeem van internationale gerechtigheid staat op het spel en het internationaal humanitaire recht en het internationaal strafrecht, de laatste jaren toch bezig aan een opmars, dreigen hier een fatale klap te krijgen.

Binnen de EU zijn vooral Duitsland, Nederland, Tsjechië, Denemarken, Polen, Italië en Spanje ofwel terughoudend ofwel weigerachtig om de eis van rekenschap voor oorlogsmisdaden te ondersteunen. Een aantal lidstaten pleiten al dan niet publiekelijk vóór een omvattend onderzoek, waaronder Ierland, Portugal, Slovenië, Zweden en België. België is dus niet geïsoleerd in zijn standpunt voor een onderzoek

naar en rekenschap voor oorlogsmisdaden. Deze landen zouden samen de druk kunnen opvoeren op de lidstaten die een gemeenschappelijk standpunt pro-rekenschap blokkeren.

België heeft een belangrijke rol te vervullen om alles in het werk te stellen een gemeenschappelijk Europees standpunt te verwezenlijken.

De EU blijft betalen voor Israël

De EU roept niet zelf op tot een omvattend onderzoek en rekenschap. De EU heeft tot vandaag ook enkel gesproken over garanties voor Israël dat Hamas geen wapens meer Gaza zou binnensmokkelen, niet over de veel omvangrijkere wapenexport naar Israël. Dat zijn signalen aan Israël dat de EU oorlogsmisdaden stilzwijgend goedkeurt, een vrijbrief voor toekomstige schendingen.

Bovendien betaalt de EU ook keer op keer voor de schade en blijft het tegelijkertijd de wapens leveren die nieuwe schade aanrichten, hoewel Israël als bezettingsmacht de plicht heeft onder internationaal recht om in te staan voor het welzijn van de bevolking onder bezetting. De enige manier om deze spiraal van geweld en straffeloosheid te doorbreken, is een duidelijk signaal aan Israël. Pleiten EU lidstaten, als zij geld voor de heropbouw op tafel leggen, tegelijkertijd voor een omvattend wapenembargo op alle wapenleveringen aan Israël en Palestijnse groeperingen en voor een onderzoek naar oorlogsmisdaden, om niet enkel te betalen voor Israëls beleid van vernieling, maar om Israël er ook ter verantwoording voor te roepen en toekomstige schendingen te voorkomen?

*** Gaza pagina op de website van Amnesty International:**

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/gaza-crisis>

