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# Why Europe must keep its word

By **Valdas Adamkus**

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**Resuming talks with Russia before it has withdrawn its troops from Georgia would be a disaster.**

How slow we were to wake up to the first war of the 21st century. How long it took – to the point of indifference – for us to notice the plight of Georgia, the Russian tanks chewing up roads, bridges and houses. Even the implications of the intensive bombing of the oil pipeline from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey and the West seemed not to sink in very quickly.

The words 'freedom' and 'democracy' started to be uttered only once Russian tanks were 30 kilometres from Tbilisi. The inhabitants of the capital were by then hiding in underground shelters, expecting the worst.

Are we, Europeans living in the cradle of freedom and democracy, to allow all this taking place in the 21st century? Is it to be recognised as normal?

The Sarkozy-Medvedev plan at least stopped the tanks. It was a bold, immediate and correct move towards saving a small independent democratic country from the big player of the Cold War era. The second step was a commitment to rebuild a young democracy and to commit European public money to doing so; European taxpayers' money.

But I fear that we are on a fast track to legitimise the occupation of a sovereign European country. For the occupation troops are still in Georgia, despite the Kremlin's promises.

Russia has not only recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, sovereign parts of Georgia, but actually increased the number of 'peacekeeping' troops in those areas internationally recognised as part of Georgia.

Having made large strides into Georgia, the Kremlin presented its small steps back as an enormous sacrifice in the interests of stabilising Georgia. Russian 'peacekeepers' are still in Georgia in excessive numbers and no one dares even to ask them to pull out and to question what they are doing there. And why we, Europeans, are so shy.

The truth is that the Kremlin has brushed aside the provisions of the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreements of 12 August and 8 September. We stopped the tanks, but not the occupation and division of a UN member state, a close ally of the EU and NATO and a country in which the rest of Europe, and the world's energy community, have huge interests.

This looks very like 1940 in the Baltics all over again. Are the new elites in Russia to be allowed to trample once again over European values? If yes, where do they stop?

It appears strange to me not to insist on promises being kept. Failure to do so is a clear signal to the Kremlin that its triumphalism will not be challenged, that the



PEACEKEEPERS? Russian troops are still in Georgia. REUTERS

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Europeans do not make trouble if the Kremlin breaks the rules.

What sense does it make for us to accept this mockery, or to go along with the proposal of 'business as usual' as if nothing had happened?

It is much too early to resume talks on a new EU-Russia partnership agreement. "Until troops have withdrawn to the positions held prior to 7 August, meetings on the negotiation of the partnership agreement will be postponed," the EU pronounced on 1 September.

Resuming the talks now would expose the EU's weaknesses for all to see. That would be a disaster. Today's troubled world needs a strong EU, ready to provide guidance, hope and inspiration in the face of rising global challenges – not a collection of member states united only by their agreement to disagree.

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