

Choices for the West

David Miliband

I have come to Ukraine today for one reason above all others: in the midst of the Georgia crisis, I want to re-affirm the commitment of the United Kingdom to support the democratic choices of the Ukrainian people.

We offer this support bilaterally, following the highly successful visit by your President to London, and his agreement with our Prime Minister to deepen the wide-ranging partnership between the UK and Ukraine, from energy to Euro 2012. An important part of the joint statement by the President and the Prime Minister was agreement that together we would remember the Holodomor. I am glad that today I will have had the chance to pay my respects to the millions who died in this appalling man-made tragedy.

We also make this commitment multilaterally, through the UK's leadership role at the UN, in the EU and in NATO. It is this wider relationship that I want to talk about today.

My visit is designed to send a simple message: we have not forgotten our commitments to you. Nor shall we do so.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has seemed that new rules were being established for the conduct of international relations in central and Eastern Europe and central Asia. The watchwords were independence and interdependence; sovereignty and mutual responsibility; cooperation and common interests.

I think they are good words. But they need to be defended.

The Georgia crisis has provided a rude awakening. The sight of Russian tanks in a neighbouring country on the fortieth anniversary of the crushing of the Prague Spring has shown that the temptations of power politics remain. The old sores and divisions fester. And Russia is not yet reconciled to the new map of this region.

Yesterday's unilateral attempt to redraw the map marks a moment of real significance. It is not just the end of the post Cold War period of growing geopolitical calm in

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and around Europe. It is also the moment when countries are required to set out where they stand on the significant issues of nationhood and international law.

The Russian President says he is not afraid of a new Cold War. We don't want one. He has a big responsibility not to start one.

My purpose today is to set out our perspective on the next steps forward. My argument is as follows:

- That the choices you have made in the two decades are rightly seen by most people as a liberation.
- That Ukraine is a leading example of the benefits that accrue when a country takes charge of its own destiny, and seeks alliances with other countries.
- Your choices should not be seen as a threat to Russia or an act of hostility. Equally your independence does demand a new relationship with Russia – a partnership of equals not the relationship of master and servant.
- Russia must not learn the wrong lessons from the Georgia crisis: there can be no going back on fundamental principles of territorial integrity, democratic governance and international law.
- But neither must the West learn the wrong lessons. We need to support your rights, and raise the costs to Russia of disregarding its responsibilities.

Russia has shown in deed in the last two weeks what anyone could have foretold: that it can defeat the Georgian army. But today Russia is more isolated, less trusted and less respected than two weeks ago. It has made military gains in the short term. But over time it will feel the economic and political losses. If she truly wants respect and influence, and the benefits which flow from it, then Russia needs to change course.

Changes since 1991

Prime Minister Putin has described the collapse of the Soviet Union as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe' of the 20th century. I don't see it that way. More important, most people of the former Soviet bloc or Warsaw Pact don't see it that way either. And it will only be a tragedy for Russia if it spends the next twenty years believing it to be the case.

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The Soviet Union collapsed above all because its systems of economic, political and military control could not satisfy the aspirations of its people.

Far-sighted leaders saw that. So did brave people – in Russia and across central and Eastern Europe – who argued against the injustice and inhumanity of the Soviet system, often at great personal cost. The changes were driven by you not imposed by the West.

As I look around this extraordinary city, I see the fruits of the democratic choices made by the Ukrainian people. Three sets of free and fair national elections since December 2004 have each leading to a peaceful transfer of power. A free, lively and diverse media. A civil society full of energy and ideas. And however much there remains to be done in developing Ukraine's economy, people are a lot better off too.

This path is the right one, not only for Ukraine but also for its neighbours, to the east and to the west. I am sure leaders, and led, have made mistakes in the search for statehood, security and prosperity. But isn't that the point? National leaders, and their peoples, have been free to make their own choices.

The West's contribution has been to embrace your aspirations for partnership. Ten EU and NATO members were once inside the Warsaw Pact. They have sought and found an anchor for stability, democracy and economic development. We have offered membership to those who qualify and want it and partnership to all our other neighbours.

We know from 20th century history the cost of division in Europe. Three generations of people in every part of this continent paid the price. This is not about one empire challenging another. It is about democracies coming together and recognising that in doing so they threaten no one; they benefit all. It is about success built on shared European values that underpin our common endeavour. It is a story of achievement that should include Russia.

Approach to Russia

It was George Kennan, US Ambassador to Russia and author of the famous 'Long Telegram,' who said that the 'jealous eye of the Kremlin can distinguish, in the end, only vassals and enemies; and the neighbours of Russia, if they do not wish to be one, must reconcile themselves to being the other.'

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That should not and must not be the case. That is why it has always been our hope – and the hope of successive governments in the UK – that Russia itself will find a way of developing a partnership with these successful networks of cooperation that stretch from the Atlantic to the Urals.

The reason is simple. A divided and unstable Russia is not in our interests. We want Russia to be a respected and responsible member of the international community because it has a big contribution to make from nuclear proliferation to energy security and climate change.

Since 1991 there has been no ‘stab in the back’ of Russia. In fact we have offered Russia extensive co-operation with the EU and NATO; membership of the Council of Europe and the G8. Summits, mechanisms and meetings have been developed by the EU and NATO not to humiliate or threaten Russia but to engage it. The EU and the United States provided critical support for the Russian economy when it was needed, and Western companies have invested heavily. And Russia has made substantial gains from its reintegration into the global economy.

These are actions that seek to promote prosperity and respect for Russia. But they have recently been met with scorn.

I will not lecture you on your own recent history, or ours. But the record from suspension of Russian participation in the Conventional Armed Forces to harassment of business people and cyber attacks on neighbours is not a good one. And now we have Georgia.

The Georgia Crisis

We can argue about the history of South Ossetia. We can argue about who fired first in early August. There are serious allegations levelled against South Ossetians and Georgians: it is right that these are independently investigated.

But what Russia has done goes far beyond the bounds of peacekeeping.

- By invading a sovereign country, Russia has acted in defiance of UN Security Council Resolutions, including one supported by Russia in April reaffirming Georgian sovereignty.

- Russian forces have blockaded Georgia's port, blown up bridges, tunnels and other infrastructure and presided over the mass exodus of ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia and its environs.
- By continuing to occupy parts of Georgia, Russia has failed to live up to the terms of the ceasefire, brokered by President Sarkozy.
- And now Russia has recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, after the populations have been substantially cleared of Georgians and others, in defiance of international rule and process.

People talk and ask about unity in Europe. Russian action has produced unity in Europe. Unity in demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops to August 7th positions. Unity in rejecting the use of force as the basis for redrawing the map of the Caucasus. And unity in support of the democratically elected government of Georgia. As former President Kwasniewski of Poland argued on Monday in Le Monde, Europe cannot have its destiny settled on the basis of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 or Yalta in 1945.

Russia therefore faces three critical questions that will determine its future place in international politics.

Russia needs first to clarify its attitude to the territorial integrity of its neighbours. Of course Russian can and should have interests in these countries, and like everyone else, it can earn influence.

But this is not the 'post Soviet space' to which Prime Minister Putin has referred. The collapse of the Soviet Union created a new reality – sovereign, independent countries with minds of their own and rights to defend.

Until yesterday, I would have said that the UN discussions now taking place – about the reiteration of a longstanding UN Security Council commitment to Georgian territorial integrity – would define Russia's attitude. Its decision on recognition yesterday is a torpedo aimed at those discussions.

It is a decision that will inflame tensions on the ground and expose Russia's double standards.

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Second, Russia needs to clarify its attitude to the use of force to solve disputes. Some have argued that Russia has done nothing not previously done by NATO in Kosovo in 1999. But this comparison bears no serious examination.

Leave to one side that Russia spends a lot of time arguing in the UN and elsewhere against 'interference' in internal affairs, whether in Zimbabwe or Burma. NATO's actions in Kosovo followed dramatic and systematic abuse of human rights, culminating in ethnic cleansing on a scale not seen in Europe since the Second World War. NATO acted over Kosovo only after intensive negotiations in the Security Council and determined efforts at peace talks at Rambouillet. Special Envoys were sent to warn Milošević in person of the consequences of his actions. None of this can be said for Russia's use of force in Georgia.

And our decision to recognise Kosovo's independence came only after Russia had made clear it would veto the deal proposed by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, former Finnish President Ahtisaari. Even then we agreed to a further four months of negotiations by an EU-US-Russia Troika in order to ensure that no stone was left unturned in the search for a mutually acceptable compromise.

Over Georgia, Russia has moved from support for territorial integrity to breaking up the country in three weeks and relied entirely on military force to do so. In between it signed a ceasefire agreement which included international mediation as the way forward. If her word is not her bond then she will not be trusted by anyone.

Finally, Russia needs to ask itself about the relationship between short term military victories and longer term economic prosperity.

At the time of the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968 no one asked what impact its actions had on the Russian stock market. There was no Russian stock market.

Now, Russia can ill afford not to ask that question. Russia's economy has been growing at about 7 percent a year for the last seven years. But no country can live in isolation in a globalised world, not even a very rich one. Certainly not one whose population is falling by some 800,000 a year with under-investment and inequality rampant.

Meanwhile the conflict in Georgia has been associated with a sharp decline in investor confidence. In one week Russia's foreign exchange reserves fell by 16 billion dollars. In just one day the value of Gazprom fell by the same amount. Prime Minister Putin's attack on the coal and steel producer Mechel shook investors; and risk premia have sky-rocketed.

Politics and economics are intertwined in the modern world. They both rely on the rule of law. President Medvedev has made this a key element in speeches. His actions tell a different story.

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But there are choices for the west too. Some call for a policy of 'isolation.' Others suggest the West is impotent. Both are wrong.

Isolation is not feasible – Russia is too enmeshed in the world economy. It would be counter-productive – its economic integration is the best discipline on its politics. It would only strengthen the sense of victimhood that is the fuel for intolerant nationalism. And it would compromise our own interests – in tackling nuclear proliferation, addressing climate change or stabilising Afghanistan.

But neither is the international community impotent. Even in the energy field, Europeans need Russian gas, but Gazprom needs European consumers and investment. The reality of interdependence is that both sides have leverage, and both sides can change the terms of trade.

Our approach must be hard-headed-engagement. That means bolstering our allies, rebalancing the energy relationship with Russia, defending the rules of international institutions, and renewing efforts to tackle 'unresolved conflicts.' Let me explain how.

First, we must support our allies. Ukraine has strong links to Russia and this is firmly in both countries' interests. But Ukraine is also a country of great European history. This city is a cradle of European civilisation. Back in the 10th and 11th centuries Kievan-Rus was one of the largest and most prosperous powers in Europe. And Ukraine has strong current links to the EU which we should be seeking to strengthen.

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It is clear to me, standing here today, that this is a European country. Ukrainian leaders have spoken of their aspiration to see their country one day as a member of the EU. Article 49 of the EU Treaty gives all European countries the right to apply for membership. The prospect and reality of EU membership has been a force for stability, prosperity and democracy across Eastern Europe and it should remain so beyond.

So the British Government's position about the long term goal is straightforward: once Ukraine fulfils the criteria, it should be accepted as a full member, and we should help you get there. There will be difficult decisions as part of this process, but the goal is a good one

In the meantime, we support negotiations for a New Enhanced Agreement and a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. And we must reinvigorate the European Neighbourhood Policy, not as an alternative to membership but as an additional tool for reform and modernisation.

As for Ukraine's relationship with NATO, we already have an extensive partnership. We are helping to build the capacity of your armed forces through technical and financial assistance, joint exercises, training and military planning.

This is not a threat to Russia. It is about strengthening your democratic institutions and your independence – things that will benefit Russia in the long term. Membership of NATO is an agreement freely entered into. It must be your choice. At Bucharest NATO said it would welcome you – if you want it. Now we should use the NATO-Ukraine Commission to chart the route to a choice about membership.

Second, we must re-balance the energy relationship between Russia and Europe.

Our priorities are clear: we need to invest in storing gas to deal with interruptions. More interconnections between countries and a properly functioning internal market will also increase our resilience. We need diverse, secure and resilient gas supplies. Europe needs to act as one when dealing with third parties like Russia. And we will be reducing our dependence on gas altogether: increasing energy efficiency, investing in carbon capture and storage technology for coal, and in renewables and nuclear power.

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Russian gas will and should play a significant role in our energy supply. But changing the terms of trade means we must reduce our reliance on gas, and Russian gas in particular.

Third, in all international institutions, we will need to review our relations with Russia. I do not apologise for rejecting knee jerk calls for Russia to be expelled from the G8, or for EU-Russia or NATO-Russia relations to be broken. But we do need to examine the nature, depth and breadth of relations with Russia.

Within the G8, there will be renewed impetus behind the unprecedented G7 discussions of the last two weeks.

In the EU, there will be new caution about the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. We must focus our engagement with Russia around tightly defined European interests. Following the emergency European Council meeting on 1 September, we need an audit of EU-Russia relations to ensure that on each and every aspect of our relationship what we are giving Russia is worth what we are receiving in return.

In NATO, we will stand by our commitments to existing members, and there will be renewed determination that there should be no Russian veto on the future direction of NATO.

And in the OECD it will be hard for it to pass the test of like-mindedness that is the basis of membership.

Fourth, the unresolved conflicts that mark the end of Empire should not be ignored. The world's attention is currently on South Ossetia and Abkhazia. But the conflicts in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabagh must not be overlooked. Each has its roots in longstanding ethnic tensions, exacerbated by economic and political underdevelopment.

We need a united international effort to resolve each of these conflicts peacefully. I have today written to the Chairman in Office of the OSCE, Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb, proposing that the OSCE reinvigorate its engagement with the peaceful resolution of unresolved conflicts in this region. No-one should ever be able to say that there isn't a diplomatic process. The conflicts may be frozen for now; we certainly mustn't allow the peace processes to be.

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Conclusion

This is an important moment for Georgia and its people. Over 100,000 people are now homeless. Foreign troops are still on its soil. But because of the circumstances this is also an important moment for the rest of us.

For you in Ukraine, there are gains to be defended and new opportunities to be exploited. I paid tribute earlier to Ukraine's democratic choices – at every recent critical juncture, Ukrainians have tried to find a way forward through democratic means. If ever there was an important moment for Ukrainians to come together to show their unity in a quest for a prosperous and secure Ukraine that is part of Europe, now is the time. I have spoken to the President and Prime Minister about this: democratic debate is your strength and must be your route to unity not division.

For us in the West, there are choices too. Not to sponsor a new cold war. But to be clear about the foundations of lasting peace. That has been my focus today.

David Miliband is the British Foreign Secretary.