



#6

January 2009

## *NATO after the Georgian Conflict: A New Course or Business as Usual?*

By Marek Madej

### Was NATO a mediator or a party in the Georgian conflict?

**The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, unlike the European Union, could not have played a mediating role in the Russian-Georgian conflict.** This was primarily dictated by the position of Russia, which was opposed to NATO involvement in the region and which saw NATO as a *de facto* party to the conflict. Georgia, on the other hand, has long expected an unequivocal decision by the Alliance concerning its Atlantic aspirations and membership, not to mention NATO's immediate support for its position in the conflict. This placed NATO in an exceptionally delicate situation as a mediator, especially if one considers the Alliance's present members' diverging views on the question of Georgia's NATO membership and their doubts and differing assessments of the causes of the conflict and where to lay the blame for its outbreak. Another question is whether the Allies would have succeeded, considering the scale of the differences between them at the time, in formulating a mediation position acceptable to all members. In such circumstances, **any important NATO involvement in the resolution of the conflict would not only have led to its escalation but also could have had a negative impact on the ongoing mediation efforts of the European Union. NATO did, however, demonstrate significant support for Georgia, both in political terms and in the form of humanitarian assistance to that country. In addition, the Alliance criticized Moscow in a clear and sustained manner,** characterising Russia's military operations in Georgia as illegitimate, disproportionate and, consequently, as leading to the escalation of tensions. At the same time, the Alliance tried to avoid making unequivocal pronouncements concerning the responsibility of either party for the outbreak of the conflict, and went out of its way to avoid placing exclusive responsibility on Russia.

Immediately after the fighting began on 8 August, the NATO Secretary General called on both sides of the conflict to cease fighting immediately and initiate direct talks. During a meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in Brussels on 12 August, the Alliance expressed support for the efforts of the EU and the OSCE aimed at the resolution of the conflict and demanded that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia be respected. At the same time it condemned Russia's use of disproportionate force and called for an immediate ceasefire and a return to the *status quo ante*. At the next special NAC meeting in Brussels on 19 August, in order to facilitate consultations between the Alliance and Tbilisi, the council established the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC), a body analogous to that established between NATO and Ukraine. Such a tightening of NATO-Georgian cooperation was an evident and much-needed sign of support for Georgia. It was also supposed to emphasize that NATO would not make decisions about Georgia's Atlantic aspirations under the current pressures of Russian aggression. Moreover, NAC decided that further political cooperation between NATO and Russia within the framework of the Russia-NATO Council was no longer possible in its present form (the NAC communiqué stated '*...we cannot continue with business as usual*'). Russia's reaction to this decision was to freeze military cooperation with NATO.

The Alliance also condemned Russia's decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as being in breach of UN Security Council resolutions and as infringing on Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty (the declarations of the NATO Secretary General and NAC of 26 and 27 August).

The activities of the NGC were launched during the next special NAC session in Tbilisi on 15 September. On this occasion, the Framework Document defining the aims and principles of the NGC's functioning was adopted (one of its tasks is to assist Georgia in reconstruction following the conflict) and demands were reiterated for Russia to withdraw its recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as for a rapid and complete realization of the provisions of the six-point plan of 12 August. The council also reaffirmed the decisions made during the Bucharest NATO Summit on Georgia's and Ukraine's eventual membership in NATO. The next meeting of the council took place on 10 October on the occasion of an informal meeting of NATO defence ministers in Budapest. However, this meeting was mainly devoted to detailed and technical matters (including questions having to do with the reform of the defence sector and cooperation in the monitoring of Georgian airspace).

**Considering the circumstances mentioned above, the attitude of the Alliance during the crisis should be viewed positively.** The calling of two special NAC sessions on such short notice reflects the seriousness with which the Alliance viewed the matter. **Such decisive political support of Georgia in conjunction with the condemnation of the disproportionate and aggressive steps taken by Russia probably constituted the maximum degree of support that NATO could have offered without running the risk of weakening the Alliance's internal cohesiveness and escalating the conflict.** Despite the closer cooperation between NATO and Georgia, the country still remained outside the Alliance and, thus, was not covered by the collective defence obligations of NATO. The decision to create the NATO-Georgia Commission, even if implemented in haste (the document adopted on 19 September defined the framework, principles and aims of the cooperation in very vague terms), clearly indicated that Georgia was considered a close NATO partner and that the Alliance did not intend to backtrack on its intention to intensify cooperation with Tbilisi. The steps taken by the Alliance towards Russia were consistent with the position NATO had adopted in Brussels (particularly in the matter of the responsibility of the parties for the outbreak of the conflict) and proportionate to the means of action available to it. It seems that in this case NATO did not have any instruments to effectively counter Russia's actions given the Russian authorities' determination to destroy Georgian military capabilities. Presumably, however, the position of NATO – along with that of the EU and the US – affected Russia's plans to unseat President Saakashvili during the crisis. Admittedly, the conflict brought into the open and sharpened existing differences between NATO member states on how to shape the Alliance's relations with Georgia, Ukraine and Russia, but it did not, however, keep NATO from formulating a common position during and immediately following the crisis.

## The Most Important Implications of the Conflict for NATO

**The consequences of the Russian-Georgian conflict for NATO, especially in the long-term, should not be overestimated or considered outside of their wider context.** Without a doubt, this conflict constitutes an element that will affect NATO's evolution in a significant manner. The conflict will also help to accelerate a number of processes which had already been under way in August 2008, such as ongoing discussions of a new NATO strategy. The assessment of the impact of the conflict on NATO policy and the Alliance's internal condition is influenced by factors such as political changes in Ukraine; other Russian confrontational moves against NATO, its member states and states aspiring to membership status (presumably taken to some degree independently of the Georgian conflict); and such ongoing developments as the arrival of a new presidential administration in the USA and the global financial crisis.

In addition, with the passage of time, the effects of the Russian-Georgian conflict along with those of various other factors become increasingly blurred and indistinguishable from one another, making the precise definition of the impact of the August conflict on the functioning and development of the NATO alliance even more difficult.

**The greatest impact of the Russian-Georgian conflict has been on NATO enlargement policy,** in particular on Georgia's and Ukraine's process of integration with NATO. The outbreak of fighting in August demonstrated Russia's determination to prevent the forging of closer ties between NATO and post-Soviet states interested in joining the Alliance. It can be assumed that any attempt to accelerate the process of those states' integration with European and transatlantic institutions will meet with decisive Russian countermeasures. Russia could, for example, hamper the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, block any progress on arms control and disarmament agreements, re-deploy troops near NATO borders, or exert economic pressure on some of the member states. In the view of many Allies, these possible retaliations by Russia seem to confirm that further enlargement to the East would bring the Alliance as a whole, and some of its individual member states, more troubles than benefits.

Undoubtedly, NATO must not tolerate any form of Russian blackmail and should maintain firmly the position that decisions on enlargement will be made exclusively by the Allies. Also, the promise of future membership already given by NATO to Ukraine and Georgia at the Bucharest summit cannot be forgotten in this context. Nevertheless, **it cannot be denied that the conflict over Ossetia is the principal, though not the only, cause of the significant slowdown in the process of Georgia's and Ukraine's integration with NATO.**

As far as Georgia is concerned, the August events reinforced the reservations of many NATO members, including Germany, France, Spain and Italy, concerning the granting of guarantees based on article 5 of the Washington Treaty (WT) to a state with unresolved territorial disputes. In the opinion of those members, the guarantee granted Georgia would entail too great a risk of drawing NATO into conflicts which, in terms of their interests, are peripheral, and which could lead to a direct confrontation with Russia. Not questioning this line of argumentation in general, it should be noted that acceptance of such logic by the Allies would grant Russia an excellent opportunity to hamper or altogether block the efforts of its neighbours to integrate with NATO (not only in the case of Georgia, but also that of Ukraine) by provoking or inciting tensions over territorial disputes, minority rights or borders, which would result in the destabilization of these countries.

In addition, the Russian-Georgian conflict changed the way in which many NATO member states perceived Georgia itself and its readiness to join the Alliance. During the war, Georgian armed forces had been destroyed and disorganized and most probably would need years of rebuilding efforts. This has limited the value of Georgia as a contributor to NATO operations. Above all, the conflict has greatly diminished the credibility of the Georgian authorities, particularly President Mikheil Saakashvili, in many NATO member states, including the USA, which remains the strongest proponent of Georgia's accession to NATO. The Georgian authorities' co-responsibility for the outbreak of the fighting and their attempts to manipulate international public opinion, together with their attitude towards the political opposition which, following a period of unity during the conflict, has resumed its criticism of the government, are the reasons why president Saakashvili and the present Georgian government are viewed in many NATO member states with increased reserve.

**In the next few years, the Alliance will most probably avoid making unequivocal declarations on the subject of Georgia's integration with NATO. At the same time, it will continue to express its symbolic support for Tbilisi and to reiterate the obligations NATO has undertaken in this respect.** This has been made clear by, among other things, the creation of the NATO-Georgia Commission, which most probably will, at least for a time, be a substitute for more definite solutions, such as granting the Membership Action Plan to Georgia. NATO's likely stance is also indicated by the decisions taken at the NAC ministerial session of 2-3 December 2008 and the NGC meeting that accompanied it. These did not go significantly beyond the vague, in terms of a time frame, membership promise made at the Bucharest NATO Summit in April.

**The Russian-Georgian conflict has had a somewhat different impact on Ukraine's NATO membership prospects.** The nature and scale of Russia's actions in Georgia made many NATO member states more aware of the possible strategic advantages to be gained from Ukraine's membership in the Alliance. These actions reinforced the view that Ukrainian membership could significantly increase the Alliance's potential and bring more stability to its Eastern borders while at the same time diminishing substantially the opportunity for Russia to interfere in the internal politics of the CIS countries. **The chances for accelerating the process of Ukraine's integration with NATO were however seriously hurt by other factors which only had limited relevance to the war in South Ossetia.** The first of these is Ukraine's growing internal political instability and the increasingly weak position of the staunchest supporters of Ukraine's accession to NATO, including President Victor Yushchenko, on Ukraine's political stage. The second is the still low level of public support in Ukraine for joining NATO (however, one should remember that public support is formally not a condition of accession). Taken as an expression of Moscow's aggressive policy towards pro-Western post-Soviet states, the conflict between Russia and Georgia undoubtedly contributed in some measure to Ukraine's political instability and affected Ukrainian society's attitudes towards NATO. It did so in conjunction with other Russian steps taken directly with regards to Ukraine during the conflict and following it, such as the granting of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens and the dissemination of anti-NATO propaganda. However, **this 'shock effect', which could potentially increase the determination of Kiev to speed up the process of obtaining NATO membership, failed to produce any kind of breakthrough.** Keeping additionally in mind the fact that Ukraine faces a severe economic crisis, which diverts attention from the NATO issue, its present chances for rapid integration with NATO should be judged as just as small as those of Georgia.

**Another important problem in the context of the Russian-Georgian conflict is the linkage between Ukraine and Georgia created by earlier discussions about NATO enlargement.** In the

present situation – in which the two countries' reduced chances for making significant progress toward NATO integration depend on factors that are in some measure different – attempts to speed up Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO (not necessarily through MAP alone, but also through practical cooperation) could be seen as an indication of a NATO decision to 'abandon' Georgia enlargement due to the efficacy of Russia's forceful tactics. Perhaps for this reason one should not expect any attempts to break the linkage, even if it should be seen by some as improving Ukraine's chances for NATO membership.

It is also not probable that NATO's integration with other countries will accelerate following the Russian-Georgian conflict. The conflict has only had a minimal impact on the situation in the Balkan states and, furthermore, the Balkan states are now, with the exception of the specific case of Macedonia, in the relatively early stages of integration with the Alliance. Signals of interest in NATO membership sent out immediately following the conflict by some neutral countries, especially Finland, but also Sweden, also did not lead to any concrete steps.

All of the above-mentioned factors indicate that NATO's **'open door' policy and enlargement will recede into the background and that the Alliance will not be enlarged within the next few years**. This does not have to signify that Georgia's and Ukraine's preparations for accession will be stopped. In their case, MAP will most probably not be granted early on, but the activities serving to prepare both of them for NATO membership can be conducted using other mechanisms, such as the Annual National Programmes offered to Ukraine and Georgia in December 2008. The formula of bilateral commissions and intensified dialogue offers extensive possibilities in this respect. In fact, NATO may in the future abandon the enlargement mechanism based on MAP. At the end of November, the US, among other members, made hints to that effect, although, for the time being, these proposals were reportedly approached with some scepticism by at least ten other members, including France, Norway, Spain and Italy. There is universal recognition among NATO members, however, that any enlargement of the Alliance should take place only after a number of more fundamental matters are resolved, most importantly the future aims and tasks of the Alliance itself.

**The Russian-Georgian conflict has undoubtedly affected the nature and intensity of cooperation between NATO and Russia, although the changes were not as serious as expected at the beginning of the hostilities.** The NAC decision on 19 August to suspend the NRC meetings (until the Russian Federation fulfills all the provisions of the peace plan of 12 August) was more indicative of the true state of Russian-NATO cooperation even before the conflict than a sign of some sort of a sudden worsening. Particularly since 2006, political cooperation within the framework of the NRC has weakened, a condition reflecting the growing differences between the parties on many questions, such as the Treaty on Conventional Weapons in Europe, the US missile defence system, NATO enlargement and the independence of Kosovo. The conflict surrounding South Ossetia has only underscored an existing trend, making any constructive political dialogue within the framework of NRC essentially impossible.

The freezing of military cooperation with NATO announced by Russia in response to the NAC decision did not lead to any significant consequences, although it deepened the existing crisis in mutual relations. Cooperation has been limited and Russia has only suspended its participation in certain common projects, while continuing to participate in selected areas, such as the exchange of intelligence or underwater rescue. NATO operations have been affected only to a limited extent by the suspension of NRC activities and the freezing of military cooperation by Russia. Russia's attitude in this respect is significant almost exclusively within the context of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Even Russia's termination of the April 2008 agreement on the transit through its territory of 'non-lethal' supplies to the forces in Afghanistan has not affected the Alliance's situation directly since the agreement was never implemented due to a lack of authorization from Central Asian states. Granted, such a decision would deprive the Alliance of a possible alternate route for supplying ISAF, one that is attractive on account of the low costs of rail transportation and the political instability in Pakistan, the current principal supply route to Afghanistan. Though termination of the agreement cannot be ruled out, the fact that Russia continues to implement bilateral understandings on the transit of supplies for ISAF forces with two NATO member states (France and Germany), and has even extended their scope (on 20 November, 2008, Russia agreed to the transport of supplies through its airspace to the Spanish contingent), seems to indicate that it does not consider hampering the ISAF mission and weakening NATO's position in Afghanistan to be in its interest.

**The curtailing of Russia-NATO cooperation following the Russian-Georgian conflict in fact had mainly a political and symbolic significance, failing to lead to any significant change in Russia's position. This explains the growing desire to resume cooperation with Russia within the Alliance** (reflected in the formula often heard in NATO discussions that 'no business as usual doesn't mean no business at all'), especially after the EU's resumption of talks with Russia on the

subject of a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. For this reason, at the NAC session of 2-3 December, 2008, it was decided to resume, gradually and conditionally, political cooperation with Russia by agreeing to informal talks on the NRC forum. These talks, limited exclusively to political issues and of an informal character, were planned to begin in 2008 (and were in fact initiated with the informal lunch of NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and the Russian representative to NATO Dmitri Rogozin on 18 December). It was stressed, however, that this gesture does not signify a change in the Alliance's negative position on the Russian actions with regard to Georgia or an acceptance of its other confrontational steps (such as the threat to deploy Iskander missile launchers in the Kaliningrad District) and that these talks would have no bearing whatsoever on the possible full resumption of cooperation within the NRC. For this reason, these decisions should not be viewed as a concession to Russia, but rather as an expression of realism on the part of the Allies. If, however, NATO strives, consistent with its present declarations, to conduct a dialogue with Russia that addresses issues of real importance for its participants, and not only on less controversial (but at the same time of secondary importance) matters, the Alliance will assuredly meet with hard resistance on Russia's part regarding the Georgian issue. Russia will stress that it holds President Saakashvili, supported by NATO, fully responsible for the outbreak of the Georgian conflict. This, in turn, will slow down any renewal of relations.

**The Russian-Georgian conflict also enlivened the much-delayed NATO discussion about the goals and tasks of the Alliance.** One of the direct consequences of this conflict was the increased interest on the part of NATO allies in the state of the Alliance's contingency plans in the event of an armed conflict involving European member states, particularly the Baltic States and Poland. This type of confidential scenario details the operations of the Alliance's armed forces in reaction to the outbreak of an armed conflict and warrants requirements with regard to the armed forces of member states and the development of NATO infrastructure. The absence of the updated contingency plans reduces the credibility of the Alliance's guarantees pursuant to article 5 of the WT. Work on such plans should take place discretely, however. For this reason, announcing the fact that work had begun on such plans in case of an attack on NATO member states from Central Europe (particularly the Baltic States), in order to restore the credibility of allied defence pledges, would be a mistake. Russia would view such an announcement as a confrontational step and would use it for propaganda purposes to prove NATO's aggressive intentions with regard to Russia.

From a more general and long-term perspective, **the Russian-Georgian conflict, and especially other security related steps Russia took after this conflict (the fervent opposition to the American missile defence shield manifested in various ways, including threats concerning certain disarmament agreements), demonstrated the need for a rapid, serious and comprehensive NATO debate on a new strategic concept** redefining the Alliance's goals and priorities. Although the majority of NATO members had noticed this need earlier, only the August conflict and the Russian foreign policy 'offensive' provided a sufficiently strong impetus to break down members' fears of taking up this challenge. The conflict itself demonstrated the continued relevance of traditional threats to the security of NATO member states and the prospect of having to invoke art. 4 and 5 of the WT, as well as the impact of the regional conflicts in NATO's immediate vicinity for the Alliance's stability. This has led to a stronger emphasis in discussions on the new strategic concept of countries such as Poland, which not only call for the formal maintenance of the primary role of collective defence among the Alliance's functions, but also for the reinforcement of the Alliance's actual ability to do so. Without a doubt, following the conflict surrounding South Ossetia there has been greater understanding in the Alliance for Eastern European member states' apprehensions with regard to Russia (one expression of this is the already-mentioned talks about contingency plans, the updating of which does not require the formulation of a new strategic concept and can be carried out more rapidly). This does not mean, however, that countries that primarily see NATO as a structure able to act globally and in an expeditionary capacity (the majority of countries from Western and Southern Europe, Canada and, to some degree, the USA) fully share and accept the point of view of more 'traditionally'-minded members, especially as such a turnaround in NATO strategy would, by definition, be of a confrontational nature with regard to Russia (and certainly be viewed as such by Moscow). In addition, such a conservative agenda could limit the Alliance's involvement in out-of-area type missions. Considering the scale and complexity of the issues that require NATO member states to compromise when working on strategy (controversial issues include developing the ability to employ the 'comprehensive approach' and use non-military resources in operations, the direction and tempo of further military transformation, and NATO's policy on nuclear weapons), the discussion on the new strategic concept will be a long one and the impact of the August 2008 events on its course will gradually diminish.

In the present circumstances, it seems that **the most probable scenario for NATO development is a return of sorts to “the traditional”**. NATO countries have to embark on a long-delayed reflection on the role, tasks and nature of the Organization while, at the same time, continuing the present operations which are taking up a considerable portion of the Alliance’s resources. All NATO members are interested in maintaining the alliance and in increasing its effectiveness, particularly as there is no real alternative. Given Central European NATO members’ greater determination following the Georgian conflict and the confrontational course of the Russian policy, **this will presumably lead in the near term to an increased significance of the Alliance’s traditional functions, such as collective defence and its role as the mechanism for consultations in times of threats**. This, in turn, should be reflected in a new strategic concept. It also means that the reinforcement of the obligations arising from article 5 of the WT (updated contingency planning and the building-up of NATO infrastructure in the countries of the ‘Eastern Flank’) could take place at the cost of suspending the process of Eastern European aspiring members’ integration with the Alliance or even result in a *de facto* giving up on the idea of their membership – an outcome less probable in the case of Ukraine, but more so in the case of the countries of the Caucasus.

Despite the promise of membership given to Ukraine and Georgia in Bucharest, the issue of further NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe would most probably be – as was already mentioned – moved to the back burner for quite a long time. Therefore, **it cannot be ruled out that proposals for granting these countries (as well as other potential candidates, particularly from the CIS) some special status by creating new institutional arrangements would be put forward**.

One such concept could be that of a “sleeping” membership. During peacetime, this arrangement would take the form of some kind of distinctive partnership. However, in the case of a crisis, the country would automatically become a full-fledged ally. A different model would be that of an associate membership, one that would not involve guarantees arising from article 5 of the WT. However, for a number of reasons, **any effort to transform such ideas into effective institutions would not only ultimately be futile, but also counterproductive**, especially from the perspective of the proponents of Eastern enlargement.

Firstly, **implementation of such proposals would create ambiguity over the character of the relations between countries with this special status and the Alliance**. The first model – “sleeping” membership – will in fact mean granting a so-called “sleeping” member all rights of current allies but the name. All in all, the pledge of collective help in a time of crisis is the very essence of all alliances. Therefore, such a proposal would hardly be acceptable to those members sceptical of the idea of further enlargement. Moreover, it is quite probable that even the states to which such an offer would be directed could have their own serious reservations. Proposing them a *de facto* membership without labelling it as such could lead to doubts over the credibility of the NATO pledge of collective defence in case of need. In the second model – “association” – the offer will not differ significantly from the current forms of distinctive partnership and definitely will not include collective defence obligations (which, in fact, is a *sine qua non* condition of becoming a member of any alliance).

Secondly, **introducing such peculiar institutional inventions could also result in the weakened credibility of collective defence obligations among the Allies**. Creating a new category of “special” membership could give an impression that collective defence obligations from the Washington Treaty are somehow gradable. As a consequence, the controversies from the 1990s regarding the issue of “second class membership”, could return. In particular, those countries that joined the Alliance in the last two waves of enlargement could come to doubt the actual character and ‘category’ of their membership.

Lastly, there is the **question of the duration of such solutions**. Inventing the new categories of “special” membership, even with the understanding that they are transitory, would create the danger that such a state of affairs would ultimately be petrified. In other words, **temporary status of an associate member at the beginning could turn out to be a permanent secondary status at the end**. From the perspective of aspiring countries, accepting such proposals would entail the credible risk that they may never become full-fledged members of the Alliance. Therefore, the attractiveness of such offers would be very limited.

Add to all these arguments the current discrepancies in positions on enlargement among the Allies, and it seems that such concepts will eventually bring more problems than gains. Moreover, they could even be harmful to NATO’s credibility and cohesion as an alliance. Therefore, all proposals of this kind should be treated with extreme caution and prudence.

An altogether different proposal would be to adopt a **politically binding declaration, in which NATO would assume the role of a quasi-guarantor of the inviolability of borders in Europe** (not exclusively in the context of Ukraine and Georgia) **and oblige itself to react when such a violation occurs**. Similar ideas were already presented by the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Mr. Radosław

Sikorski, in his speeches at Columbia University in New York on 25 September, 2008, and at the Atlantic Council meeting in Washington on 19 November, 2008. Adopting such a solution will not exclude any option concerning future enlargement, an advantageous position to take in the context of the current disputes within NATO on that still delicate issue. The main problem, then, appears to be the credibility of any such guarantee, given the differences within the Alliance on the role and main tasks of NATO, and its reaction to particular crises. **It is difficult to assume that the Allies would agree upon a general obligation for the Alliance to react, especially militarily, to any violation of the borders of a European non-NATO state.**

NATO's concentration on its relations with Russia in the second part of 2008, largely as a result of the August conflict in Georgia, also means that in the near future the Alliance will maintain its involvement on the global stage only at its present levels, with the possible exception of Afghanistan, where it might strengthen its forces. In such circumstances, it would be increasingly important to revive the cooperation, albeit a difficult one, between the Alliance and the European Union, something that would also be useful in establishing a 'common position' of Western institutions towards Russia and any engagement with Ukraine and Georgia.

Undoubtedly, NATO's evolution will depend on a number of factors that are only marginally related to the situation in Georgia. In this context, the future of the operation in Afghanistan, the future course of Russia's foreign policy as such, the evolution of the situation in the Greater Middle East, the impact of the global financial crisis, the foreign policy of the new US administration and the further evolution of the EU will be much more significant.