

Friday, May 15, 2009

[Prof. Neil MacFarlane on the August war and its implications](#)

How has the politics in the region changed after the August war? Professor Neil MacFarlane gave a public lecture at the Center for Social Sciences of Tbilisi State University on May 13, 2009. His lecture was devoted to the *Implications of the War in Georgia for the International Relations of the Caucasus*.

According to Professor MacFarlane, the war has fundamentally changed international relations in the South Caucasus. He noted that although it is too early to draw final conclusions, but some shifts following the war can be highlighted already.

Increased Russian influence in the region – After restoring political order and recovering from the economic turmoil of the 1990s, Russia's sphere of interest in the near abroad was next on Putin's list of tasks. According to Dr. MacFarlane, control over the South Caucasus makes control over the North Caucasus easier for Russia. However, Georgia had been challenging Russian's aspirations for control in the region by declaring itself a liberal, democratic western-oriented country. By intervening with its military, Russia showed that it is both capable and willing to assert its influence.

Reduced US engagement – The change of the administration in the US and the financial crisis played decreased US engagement in Georgia. The Obama administration is seeking to restore the US relationship with Russia and will not sacrifice that relationship for Georgia's sake, according to Dr. MacFarlane. Moreover, due to the financial crisis, one of the first cuts the US will make will be in money given for aid.

Increased EU involvement – Professor MacFarlane described the Western response to the war in August as "shameful". Moreover, most of the steps (albeit symbolic) taken by the EU during the crisis were rather personality driven (referring to Sarkozy). However, after the war the EU has increased its presence in the region through its monitoring missions and moderators.

Prospects for the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict – The war provided an incentive for Armenia to diversify its relationships and reduce its security dependency on Russia by starting talks with Turkey. The positive developments in the Armenia - Turkey relationship may lead to Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement.

Professor [Neil MacFarlane](#) is the Head of the Department of Politics and International Relations at St. Annes College, University of Oxford. Professor MacFarlane is a specialist on the regional dynamics of the former Soviet Union. He is also interested in the impact of international organizations in the management and resolution of civil conflicts and in the political and economic transitions of former communist states. Professor MacFarlane works with the Center for Social Sciences and comes for regular visits. You can consult the [CSS](#) website for further information.