



Derek Henry Flood / IHS JER

NAME ▶ Kaha Imnadze

POSITION ▶ Georgian ambassador to the United Nations

BACKGROUND ▶ Before being appointed ambassador to the United Nations in July 2013, Kaha Imnadze spent a decade working in political science in Georgia and the United Kingdom.

Imnadze was the spokesperson for former president Eduard Shevardnadze from 2000 to 2003 and deputy secretary of the National Security Council from 1998 to 2000. Shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia suffered bitter secessionist conflicts in what became the breakaway republics of Abkhazia on the Black Sea coast and South

Ossetia abutting the Russian Federation's North Caucasus Federal District. These became Georgia's 'frozen conflicts'.

In August 2008, Russian armoured columns entered Georgia, and the Kremlin declared the two entities to be independent republics. Moscow's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine's Donbass region are potentially fomenting a more activist Euro-Atlantic community. Georgia, while not formally a NATO member, is gaining prominence as a potential partner nation.

Kaha Imnadze, Georgian ambassador to the United Nations, spoke to *IHS Jane's* following the 4–5 September NATO summit in Newport, Wales, where security in the western periphery of the post-Soviet space dominated debate following Russia's role in eastern and southern Ukraine.

In an address on 3 September in Tallinn, Estonia, US president Barack Obama declared, "We have to do more to help other NATO partners, including Georgia and Moldova, [to] strengthen their defences." During a visit to Tbilisi on 6–7 September, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel described the NATO summit as "an important milestone in Georgia's efforts to join the alliance".

Speaking to *IHS Jane's* from his office in New York, Imnadze said the discussion about Georgia at the NATO summit was "recognition of the success Georgia has achieved" and demonstrated that his country was a "strong and reliable partner" for NATO. However, he added that Georgia had not yet reached a deep level of integration in international security architecture.

Georgia also signed an EU Association Agreement in late June that has already begun to take effect. Imnadze told *IHS Jane's*, "For Georgia, Europe is a civilisational choice. Georgia has always been a part of European civilisation while at the same time being at a crossroads [between East and West]." He claimed that Georgians sided with European perspectives on issues such as human rights and gender equality.

Imnadze highlighted the pragmatic reality of Georgia serving as an historical crossroads between East and West in an inevitably interdependent world. He noted, "I don't think that Georgia being in Europe will be a black

and white game where it will have to cut all relations, particularly trade, with other parts of the world... Zero-sum games can be used in rhetoric, but when it comes to reality there is no such thing as a zero-sum game, whether in economics or politics."

He explained that Tbilisi works in dual cultural-economic and political tracks in its often fraught relations with Moscow through a special representative of Georgian prime minister Irakli Garibashvili. Imnadze said, "There is unofficial dialogue going on to discuss economic and cultural issues with Russia. However, that ongoing dialogue is not to the detriment of the official political process that is going on in Geneva with the co-chairs of the United Nations, OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe] and the European Union. It is a two-pronged process."

Imnadze was highly critical of Russian border construction projects attempting to permanently demarcate the 'administrative boundary line' that acts as the de facto border between Russian-occupied South Ossetia and Georgia.

The construction of a variety of fences since the 2008 conflict has happened under the direction of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), according to Georgian security sources interviewed by *IHS Jane's* in October 2013. For Imnadze, the fence-building project is an anachronistic effort running against "the path of history" in a world now connected by social media, in which he said physical borders have become "increasingly transparent".

Following a produce import ban imposed by Russia from 2006 to 2013, Imnadze said, "We now have Georgian produce back in Russian markets. I think both the Georgian and Russian economies have benefited from

this." Despite some economic progress, Imnadze was emphatic that Georgia would not relent on its dedication to upholding its national sovereignty and territorial integrity. He expressed sympathy for Ukraine, saying, "Changing borders by the use of force in the 21st century is totally unacceptable. This is something that the international community should not accept. It is the road to nowhere."

Although the Georgian authorities have to carefully calibrate their positions due to the country's location on the Russian border, this has not led the government to be reticent in aligning with Western polices in the region and the government in Kiev.

Georgia occupies a unique political geography encompassing vital energy routes, such as the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, and balances diplomatic relations as diverse as Washington and Tehran. Imnadze noted, "As Georgia evolves along a democratic path, we will have the capability of playing a stronger diplomatic role." ■

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