How to Shock NATO: Resisting Western Warmongering | Tbilisi Forum

If you want to rally against NATO, you go neutral. That's the topic of our first panel: Can neutrality offer an alternative to NATO membership and military blocs? Pascal Lottaz, Heinz Gärtner, Sakari Linden and Petre Mamradze debate the historical lessons and practical challenges of staying outside great power conflicts. Drawing on Austria, Finland, Switzerland and Georgia, they examine sovereignty, foreign bases, economic relationships and diplomatic room for manoeuvre. Recorded at the Tbilisi Forum on Neutrality on November 5, 2026, this panel explores what neutrality could mean for Georgia and why its advocates challenge prevailing security assumptions. Panel Links: Tbilisi Forum on Neutrality — programme and speakers: https://tfn.ge Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com Support Neutrality Studies: https://neutralitystudies.com/donate Neutrality Studies shop: https://neutralitystudies.com/shop Time Stamps 00:00 Introductions and historical lessons in neutrality 15:30 Georgia, Russia and the NATO question 23:56 Finland’s NATO turn: Sakari Linden’s critique 30:31 The Austrian model, Ukraine and alliance entanglement 40:01 Pascal Lottaz: Why neutrality is not taking sides 46:17 Swiss neutrality, sanctions and constitutional rules 50:15 What would neutrality change for Georgia? 57:10 Audience Q&A: Foreign bases, security and regional neutrality

#Moderator

The first panel will be dedicated to the historical experiences, current realities, and future prospects of neutrality. Before I introduce our panelists, let me also introduce myself briefly. I'm Nino Helaya. I'm a political scientist living here in Tbilisi, Georgia, and I'm also Georgian. I'm also part of the analytical team at Georgian Public Broadcasting. With that, let me introduce our panelists who will be joining the discussion today. Pascal Lottaz is an associate professor at Kyoto University and the founder of Neutrality Studies, an international research initiative dedicated to the study of neutrality and non-alignment in international relations.

Professor Heinz Gärtner is a political scientist from the University of Vienna and the chair of the Advisory Board of the International Institute of Peace, a non-governmental organization based in Vienna, Austria, dedicated to promoting peace through research, dialogue, and international cooperation. Sakari Linden is a Finnish politician, geopolitical analyst, journalist, and former political advisor in the European Parliament. And also joining us will be a Georgian speaker, Batoni Petre Mamradze, a Georgian political analyst and former statesman who served as the head of the State Chancellery of Georgia, as chief of staff from 1995 to 2008, and as a member of Parliament from 2008 to 2012.

#Moderator

So thank you all for joining us today. Just briefly about the rules: we have one hour, and I propose that we divide it into three rounds. In the first round, I'll start with a general question addressed to everyone. Then, in the second round, I will ask individual questions. In the third round, we can take some questions from the audience. For those in the audience, you can scan this QR code here. Anyone who wants to ask us questions can send them through this channel, in a very modern way. I will receive these questions and read them out for you. All right. Let's begin with the first question, which is about the relationship between neutrality as a general principle and neutrality as a concrete political and security arrangement.

And also the historical aspect of all that. So neutrality is a very beautiful and very nice idea, and it's very appealing to many people because of its promise of security and peace, obviously. But this concept has also taken very different shapes in different countries and historical periods, so to speak. So I would like to ask all of you this question: What are the defining characteristics of neutrality today? And is there some common understanding of what it means for a country to be neutral today? Or is it still something that is very much historically defined? Maybe we can start with this row, please.

#Paneslist 1

Thank you very much. I think the main characteristic of neutrality is not taking part in great power competition and acting as a bridge instead of a wall, as was said in the earlier speeches. That kind of neutral position can bring benefits in terms of political independence, economic leeway, as well as military security—not taking part in great power competition. Just to remind you, you have three minutes. If there is a need for more time, we can also be a bit more flexible.

#Panelist 2

Thank you, Nina, for organizing this. I also want to thank the organizers for making this important event possible, and the panelists for participating and sitting here with me. So I will draw a little on the Austrian experience and come to more general principles at the end, because historical analogies are important for the lessons that other countries can learn. And as you know, Austria was divided after the Second World War and occupied by the four victorious powers: France, Great Britain, the U. S., and the Soviet Union.

And the question was how to remove the foreign troops from Austrian territory. There was a debate until 1955, and all parties were for neutrality. But actually, it was the Soviet Union that began to stall on the concept of neutrality. In early 1955, the Soviet Union said that neutrality was not enough because of German militarism, and that a German peace treaty was needed. And that's in contrast to the historical narrative in Austria. The historical narrative is that the Soviet Union forced neutrality upon Austria. Actually, the opposite is true.

The Austrians wanted to have neutrality, but the Soviet Union's Prime Minister Molotov delayed the debate until the fall of 1954, when it was clear that Germany would join NATO without Austria. So that was a fear. Before that, the Soviets had offered Austria a state treaty without neutrality. So there is some confusion: the state treaty and neutrality in Austria are very different concepts. The Soviets said, "Okay, you can have your state treaty, but we will keep military bases and some troops in Austria." Only when the Soviet Union accepted neutrality did it also agree to remove all foreign troops from Austria. That became a reality in October 1955, and the state treaty was signed in May 1955. So these are two separate concepts.

So, to turn more to the general principles, the state treaty provides a very fine definition of neutrality. With my students, I developed 21 concepts and types of neutrality, which I will not map out here because Nino wouldn't let me. But the neutrality law adopted in 1955 has some succinct principles. It means, first of all, not joining a military alliance. That's true today because we do have military alliances.

We do have NATO. But I want to stress here that neutrality is very compatible with the European Union. So the European Union is not a military alliance under that definition, but NATO is. So, first, not joining any military alliances. Second, not allowing foreign troops to be deployed on Austrian territory. And third—and that's a little bit complicated—permanent neutrality. Permanent doesn't mean eternal. It means neutrality not only in wartime, as with occasional neutrality, but also in peacetime. So in peacetime, you have to make clear all the time that you will remain neutral in a foreign war. Of course, you can defend yourself according to the UN Charter in a foreign war. And neutrality in peacetime means that your neutrality has to be credible and useful.

So armed neutrality is part of credibility, but so is being useful: offering mediation, hosting international summits and international organizations. That's how Austria developed its neutrality, and its neutrality can go far beyond this. Bruno Kreisky, the chancellor, developed or coined the concept of active neutrality, but now Austria has moved beyond the seventies. Austria is part of the European Union, takes part in NATO's Partnership for Peace, and also has plenty of peacekeeping troops outside Austrian territory. So I call this—and I'll stop here—engaged neutrality. Engaged neutrality means engaging as much as possible and staying out as much as necessary.

#Moderator

Thank you very much. So, as you mentioned, neutrality has multiple conceptualizations. In a way, it resembles the concept of democracy, which also comes with various adjectives—like 23 adjectives for democracy. That's how the theory of democracy class actually begins. So it takes some effort to really understand the meaning of neutrality. Yes, please.

#Pascal

Thank you. And it's very good that you just mentioned that, because I was just about to say that, you know, the word neutrality is like the word democracy. It means very little if you don't give it a proper definition and explain what we understand its content to be. And we could talk for a long time about the history of neutrality. It goes far back. It goes back to Greece, to Thucydides, the Melian Dialogue. It also goes back to India, to Kautilya. It goes back to the Chinese. We've seen time and time again that whenever we find warfare or conflict, we usually find neutrality—actors that try not to be part of that. And so, when we talk about the core concept of neutrality, what I try to do in my research is to say, look, if we imagine neutrality as standing in between, in the middle, then that's not a useful metaphor, because it camouflages the main issue.

If you think of standing in the middle, then you think that somebody's to your left and somebody's to your right, and you have to deal with that. And I say, no, we should change that image. We should think of it as a triangle. The neutral actor has two relationships, one with this guy and one with that guy, but the main thing is that these two guys also have a relationship with each other. And the problem with the relationship between these two, between actor one and actor two, is that they're at war or in a conflict. And the neutrality of the third actor, the third party, is actually directed toward that conflict. Neutrals are neutral toward a conflict. They're not neutral toward their partners. With their partners, they're at peace.

What they want is to maintain a normal relationship with those who are at war or in conflict with each other. And that, of course, is naturally difficult because both sides will make demands on you. They will tell you, "Oh, you're my friend, but why the hell are you still in touch with that guy? Because he's clearly evil, he's clearly bad, so stop it." And we see that right now in international relations. So it's a very natural phenomenon. Now, when we talk about Georgian, Swiss, Austrian, or Finnish neutrality, what we talk about is a national policy, again, where you then start filling the word and this concept with concrete content: what should be done in the context of these countries and for all of our countries.

The moment we became neutral and adopted that as a national policy was one of intense geopolitical conflict. For Switzerland, it was in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, where we asked for neutrality and then actually received it from the great powers. For Austria, it was in 1955, as a way to end the occupation by the Soviet Union and the victors of the Second World War. For Finland, it was a way to do something very similar: to find a solution with the Soviets and not be drawn into the Warsaw Pact. And Finland did that very cleverly and said, "Okay, fine, I will guarantee that no harm will come to you, Soviet Union, through our territory. But in return, you don't force us into the Warsaw Pact." I mean, there was never a discussion like that, but this was the understanding that then developed. And it worked very successfully for many, many years and maintained what I call wiggle room, room to maneuver.

So neutrals usually try to use their neutrality policy to avoid being sucked completely into one camp or the other, because then you lose a lot of sovereignty. You just have to go along with the policies

of the others. So, on a conceptual level, I think it's important that we keep in mind that neutrality is always directed toward a conflict. So we need to talk more about the conflicts, the real ones or the potential ones in the future. And secondly, what is the checklist that we need to include in that definition for the specific situation? But as I said earlier, situations change. So neutrality also changes. Swiss neutrality has changed at least five or six times over the last 200 years.

#Moderator

And it's changing as we speak as well.

#Pascal

Hey guys, autumn spirit is here, and we've launched our new merch. For instance, the monster from our Kiel Symposium has arrived on T-shirts, tumblers, and magnets. The little fella is really cute. Check it out. Any purchase helps us directly to keep the lights on. So thanks a lot, and see you soon.

#Panelist 3

I want to say a few words about the situation in Georgia and our starting point, because it's so different from what it was in Finland or Austria. We know this history, of course, and, you know, it was amazing how Finland followed this path of strategic patience for so many decades. Now, where are we in Georgia, and what happened? Shockingly, in 1995, Shevardnadze, just a few weeks before his election as president, signed an agreement with Russia allowing Russia's military bases to remain in Georgia for 25 years. And after doing that, he addressed the nation on TV and said, "People ask me why we have perfect relations with our neighbors—Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan. Okay, perfect."

But we did it because it was necessary to calm our giant neighbor, Russia, and to save Georgia from future dismemberment. Because, you know, already at that time, Russian peacekeepers were in Abkhazia under UN auspices. Russian peacekeepers were in South Ossetia under OSCE auspices. Yeah, and the situation was not so stable. But then there were calm years. But to cut it short, I will tell you: the last Russian ambassador, Kovalenko, came in February 2007, before this well-known summit in Bucharest. He had been in Moscow. And he said, "We, Russia, want to see Georgia independent, sovereign, and neutral. That's our dream, to see Georgia like this." And please keep in mind that he said it publicly.

Before that, of course, there were, you know, negotiations behind closed doors. And Kovalenko also said, "Please stop this flood of anti-Russian rhetoric: 'Occupiers, occupiers, occupiers,' etc." Then came the Bucharest summit, and few people remember that Putin arrived in Bucharest and made his speech. He said, "Now we stop it. NATO will not move even one single meter closer to Russia's borders. Forget about it." A tough speech. And then the decision was made that Ukraine and Georgia would become members of NATO without a MAP, without any secrecy. And then came August 2008. I won't explain this now, but, as planned, it actually ended in two days.

Saakashvili started his military-political adventure on the 7th of August. On the 9th of August, you know, Robert Gates, who was the U.S. Secretary of Defense, said, "It's over in Georgia." Fifty-five Russian jets controlled Georgia's skies, etc. It was over. Russia deployed two strong military bases in Georgia and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Russia has not annexed them so far, so far. But Russia's tanks and artillery are standing 30 kilometers from the borders of Tbilisi, even now. And with all that in the Kremlin's hands, you know, it's very hard to do anything. Now, that starting point is a very special starting point. And we're starting in a country where, years ago, it was impossible to say this word: "neutral."

If you say this word, the same day you are labeled a Kremlin agent, a traitor, Putin's agent, and so on and so on. I am so happy that, you know, something happened. I'm still alive at 74, and I'm witnessing it and even taking some part in it, you know. But it's impossible. Now, the war in Ukraine. It's February 2022, and the Georgian government is voting at every forum—the UN, the Council of Europe, you know—alongside the U.S. and the West, condemning occupation, condemning aggression. And Georgia even initiated a criminal case against Putin. It was really more than anybody expected. And we survived. It's a miracle. I was ready, you know. I knew what could happen. And then there was Ambassador Kelly Degnan. I have to quote her. She said, "Yes, the Georgian government voted, you know, as all of us did."

"But you Georgians, you have a common enemy with Ukraine, you know, and that's Russia." A public statement. "Now the time has come for you to prove which side you're on and whom you're fighting alongside. Are you fighting with Ukraine against Russia, or are you on the Kremlin's side?" Well, I think we don't need any comment here. But the situation is changing. You know, we're hearing the first voices from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Before, they were saying, "We'll never, ever negotiate with a state that wants to join NATO." You know, of course, about this mistake: the Dream party changed the constitution and put in this Article 78, saying that we have to join NATO, the European Union, et cetera, et cetera. Let me tell you just my first thought. From the very beginning, and especially after August 2008, it was just a delusion—or an illusion, whatever you call it, you know.

Nobody in Brussels was going to let us into NATO or the European Union. And I spoke to big shots there, you know. They were saying sincerely, "Forget about it. Never, ever. Never, ever." And for so many years, NATO hasn't said that Georgia has to do any homework. They dropped it. Now one carrot is still there: the European Union. Like the carrot they put in front of a donkey, you know? A man sits on the donkey and holds out this carrot, and the poor donkey keeps walking and walking, but it never ends. Now, neutrality means that we have to put an end to this, and we have good chances, believe me. There are positive signals, public signals, from the Kremlin. For the first time, they say, "We don't feel that there is any threat from the Georgian side." They say, "Good, good." You know, this is the way. So we can speak about it later, but I think I am ahead of my time. Thank you.

#Moderator

Yes, thank you. It's kind of paradoxical that the term “neutrality” itself, which is supposed to mean being neutral, is understood as being very pro-something. So, in Georgia's historical context, it used to be interpreted as a very pro-Russian term. And then whoever used it was given labels and called all sorts of names.

#Panelist 3

We are not fighting with Ukrainians. Okay, you are pro-Kremlin, you are pro-Russian. Sorry.

#Moderator

Yeah. All right. Thank you very much. Now I’ll move on to another round of more detailed questions, and maybe I’ll start with you, Mr. Linden. Finland offers a different perspective on this discussion, having moved from a long tradition of neutrality and military non-alignment to NATO membership. How do you explain that decision? In your view, what changed in Finland’s security environment, and why do you consider continued non-alignment a better solution? And with that, maybe a related question would be: What lessons can be learned? I mean, I’m sure you’ll be hearing that question a lot today, but I have to ask you also: What from that experience could be useful for Georgia?

#Paneslist 1

Yeah. It's true that there has been a great change in Finland's foreign and security policy. We abandoned our old line of neutrality, which provided us with political independence, economic prosperity, and military security. And I can't see any good reason for that, because our national interests are being undermined at the moment. We are practically not an independent country anymore. In foreign and security policy, we are always following the line of the United States and Central European Union member states. We can no longer trade with the markets that are most beneficial for us. Eastern markets, especially the Russian market, have always been very, very important for the Finnish economy.

And in the long term, it has been the only means of increasing the degree of processing of Finnish industrial products. And at the moment, military tension around Finland is extremely high. We have given permission for the United States to move troops to 15 military bases on Finnish territory, and NATO forward land forces have started operating in Lapland, in northern Finland, very much as German troops arrived in Lapland in February 1941, just a few months before the start of Operation Barbarossa. In response, Russia has started to construct military bases on its side of the border, in the Republic of Karelia. Before Finland joined NATO, Russia didn't concentrate its troops close to the Finnish border because it considered that a secure border.

But by joining the Western military alliance and submitting ourselves to Western great powers, we have made ourselves a pawn on the chessboard of Western great powers. And at the end of this road, I'm afraid that there could be a war on behalf of Western great powers. So my stance is very

clear: Finland was much better off being neutral, and joining the alliance has brought Finland only negative things. And the lesson to be learned from this is that, in its national interest, a state always has to adapt to its geographical and geopolitical realities. And Finland's problem is that our political class is obsessed with Western identity. Belonging to the West is an absolute value for the Finnish political class. Our language is not even European.

We have a Finno-Ugric language, which is more Eurasian than European. And many have doubted whether Finns are a European people. And this has produced a big self-esteem problem among Finnish elites. By being more Western than the so-called real Western countries, the Finnish political class has tried to compensate for its low self-esteem, in my view. And also, for example, Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, has revealed on several occasions that the United States used huge resources in neutral countries of Eastern and Northern Europe to make them align with U.S. foreign policy goals and join NATO. I don't have personal knowledge of whether this has happened in Finland, but looking at how it went in Finland, I could imagine it has happened here as well.

#Moderator

Yes, thank you very much. It seems like questions of European identity are causing similar feelings of subordination in the European peripheries, because European identity is also something that has created a sense of non-Europeanness and subordination in a lot of post-socialist societies, including Georgia. Okay, my next question is for Professor Gatner. It's about the paper you wrote in 2018 called "Neutrality as a Model for a New Eastern Europe."

And there you argued that a European-style neutrality arrangement for Georgia would have to include the withdrawal of Russian troops, including from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Tskhinvali region. So do you still consider this arrangement feasible today? And if so, under what specific conditions? And with that, I would also like to return to what you already mentioned about the Austrian example. Do you think the conditions that made Austria's neutrality possible could be present elsewhere? I will ask the Georgian speakers later whether or not these conditions are actually present, but from your perspective, maybe you could elaborate a little bit on that.

#Panelist 2

Thank you, Minoo, for the important question. Let me first go back a little to the Finnish example. I have to say, Finland did not dare to use the term "neutrality" before Austria became neutral. Finland had a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. At that time, Finland started keeping out of great-power conflicts but did not use the word "neutrality." So after Austria became neutral, Finland started to use it as well. And there was always a conflict between the Soviet Union and Finland. Finland always said, "Neutrality, independence." And the Soviet Union would always say, "Friendship treaty, friendship treaty."

So it was after 1968, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, that the Soviet Union deleted the word "neutrality" from all the bilateral treaties between Finland and the Soviet Union. And that was reversed when Gorbachev came to power. "Neutrality" was the word to use. Neutrality was possible in the world and also in bilateral relations. So that was also an example for Finland. Coming back to your question about Georgia, a small anecdote: On March 3, 2014, I published an article, "Ukraine Should Look at the Austrian Model," and I mapped out two scenarios for Ukraine. That was before the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, but after Maidan.

So my two scenarios in 2014 were that Ukraine would be permanently neutral or permanently divided. Unfortunately, it turned out that Ukraine now seems to be permanently divided. Even so, I think a neutrality option is still possible for Ukraine—unification along the lines of German unification. A unified but neutral Ukraine would be possible. So my two concepts, of course, were based on these two historical examples: Germany, permanently divided after the Second World War, and Austria, permanently neutral. That means neutrality based on international law and enshrined in the Austrian constitution. Then, of course, the definition of neutrality is flexible. It has evolved.

Austria adopted some additional amendments to the constitution so that it could participate in European Union peacekeeping operations. That doesn't contradict the principle of neutrality. But after 1990, we had this Fukuyama moment. The Fukuyama moment was the end of history, no blocs anymore. And of course, the opponents of neutrality would argue that the end of history meant the end of neutrality. It soon became clear, of course, that there was no end of history, but they would still argue that this was the end of neutrality. But when the Fukuyama moment disappeared, evaporated, we saw a new polarization in the world. You see this between NATO and Russia, and between the US and China. We do have polarization. In times of polarization, small states have only two possibilities, two options.

One is joining an alliance or aligning with a big power. American political scientists would call this entanglement, which, of course, offers security guarantees but also involves security commitments. It's not only that you get a guarantee. If push comes to shove, you have to go to war for another country, especially a big country. So it's a sort of entanglement. And basically all American presidents since George Washington warned Americans that the U.S. should not be entangled in foreign wars. So it's nothing new, and it's even more important for small states. And the second option is neutrality, in whatever form. It can be a non-aligned type of neutrality. So it's flexible. And neutrality, especially, is a means to stay out of possible entanglements.

And there was a survey conducted until 2024 by the European Council on Foreign Relations. That's a very transatlantic think tank in Brussels and London. So the question was, "Which side would you stand on if it came to a conflict between the U.S. and China?" It wasn't even a question about military conflict. The question was about conflict. European Union citizens were asked, not governments, not governments. Not so many would side with China, but still about 10 or 11 percent. Not so many would side with the U.S. either, about 30 percent. So about 60 percent would say, "We'd rather stay neutral. We don't want to be entangled in a foreign conflict, a foreign war." Since

2024, the Council hasn't asked that question anymore. That means neutrality has some rationale in people's minds. So there are only these two options.

And when it comes to the European Union, because you mentioned it before, the European Union has an article similar to NATO's Article 5: Article 42.7. But there are exceptions, so don't be deceived by comments in the international press. There are exceptions for neutral states. It doesn't call them neutral states, but states can participate according to their constitutional requirements. But there's also an exception for all NATO states. NATO states will decide first whether they would observe this European Union Article 42.7. So there's an exception for all European Union member states. Basically, it's a paragraph that has no effect. Of course, you can participate. Neutral states can also say, "We'll participate if it's in accordance with our constitutional requirements." But that doesn't make the European Union a military alliance. So I would say NATO membership is a no-go for neutral states, but European Union membership would be possible.

#Moderator

Thank you. I liked that you called Fukuyama's "end of history" a moment. So, please...

#Pascal

Maybe let me come back to this entanglement issue and the pro-something issue. Avoiding entanglements and staying out of firm alliance structures is one thing where a lot of people will say, "Yeah, you don't participate, so you are negative, right? Neutrality is negative because you don't want to participate." Well, the thing is, if you avoid entanglement and hard alliances, what you do—and what most of these actors who seek that actually want—is to have a positive relationship with all parties. So if people say Georgian neutrality is pro-Russian, then I would say it is also pro-EU. It is also pro-US. It is also pro-China, pro-Iran, pro-Turkey. That's the whole point.

You avoid entanglement in order not to be sucked into one of these conflict constellations, but to maintain a position from which you can trade with everybody and have a positive relationship with everyone. Now, that is inherently difficult, but it is based on rejecting this zero-sum game mentality. And unfortunately, a lot of people in the West actually have a zero-sum mentality. They think, "If this is good for Russia, it's bad for us. Therefore, Georgia, stop it." And that's the point where neutral states constantly need to explain, "Look, look, look, this is also good for you, by the way." The Swiss during the Second World War were surrounded by the Axis powers: Germany, Italy, occupied France, Austria, of course, right?

For the entire Second World War, Switzerland maintained a trading relationship with the UK because they negotiated with the Germans and said, "Dear Germans, you need to allow us a minimum of trade with the UK. Otherwise, they might start bombing the facilities where we produce stuff for you." And actually, the Germans, in the end, said, "Yes, okay, fine." So Swiss trade was small. It wasn't very big or very significant. But a minimum of trade was maintained with the UK and the

other Allied powers, as well as with Germany, and so were diplomatic relations. So you constantly need to explain again why this is good for the other side as well. And here I just need to add, on the conceptual level, that political neutrality can apply to a country or even to organizations like the Red Cross, for instance, the ICRC. There are some actors that are not countries that are still neutral.

But the political neutrality of an actor is never outcome-neutral. This is also a confusion between two levels. An actor that is politically neutral will still affect the whole system because it trades with both sides or has a relationship with both sides. And that will be perceived as more beneficial to one side or the other by one actor or another. So right now, what we are witnessing in Europe is that the whole idea, especially among the NATO crowd, is that we must defeat Russia. Anything that helps us defeat Russia is good. Anything that doesn't help us is bad.

And a neutral stance, saying, "Okay, I will not impose sanctions, I will not join the war alliance, I will not send weapons," is not outcome-neutral. It is not outcome-neutral in the sense that it doesn't support this approach of fighting the Russians. Hence, that side will say, "Well, you're not neutral. You are not helping us. You're not helping us in our primary goal." And this, then, is the problem for the neutrals, who need to say and explain time and again, "Look, I am very sorry for the war that is going on, but I'm sorry on both sides. I'm sorry on all sides. I'm sorry for the Ukrainians who are dying. I'm sorry for the Russians who are dying. I'm sorry for everybody who's dying. And I would love the dying to stop."

But I cannot help the dying to stop if I send weapons into this conflagration. And then, naturally, one or the other side will tell you, "Well, that's not good for us. Hence, we don't perceive you as a neutral actor." And neutral actors cannot escape that, but they can work with it. Because, again, if you manage to avoid these hard entanglements, what you get is the leeway to trade and to work and to negotiate with both sides. It is very difficult. But that's why, I mean, this kind of accusation that neutrality is pro-Russian is very natural. Of course, the other side will say that. And usually, by the way, when we have a conflict—it can be a great-power conflict or a direct one—the stronger side in the direct conflict will make the accusation against the neutral actor.

Because the neutrality of the neutral is usually comparatively more beneficial to the weaker party. Because, again, the stronger party will try to eradicate all the neutrals in order to cut the enemy off from any kind of relationship. The weaker party will usually say, "I'll let you be neutral because it's still better for me that we have a trading relationship, even if you trade with the other guy." So it's quite often the stronger party that will put additional pressure on neutrals to stop being neutral. But that's just what it is. And that's one of the things that needs to be considered when formulating a neutrality policy and approach.

#Moderator

Yes, thank you. I have a more specific question for you before we proceed to the next speaker. It relates to the Swiss experience. I'm asking you as a neutrality scholar, but also as someone from

Switzerland. How precisely is neutrality defined in Switzerland? That's also a conceptual question, because it raises the issue of to what extent neutrality is defined by formal rules and how much it is shaped by political interpretations. To me, it seems like neutrality is as much a formal rule as a political practice. Also, in light of the recent discussions that are probably taking place in Switzerland at the moment, could you explain the difference between stricter approaches to neutrality and more flexible ones?

#Pascal

Yes, thank you. So we just failed in Switzerland to actually write a proper definition of our neutrality into the constitution. That was a public referendum that we had in September, and it was rejected by 70% of the population. I belong to the 30% who wanted to do that and who said this was a good idea. Switzerland has the word "neutrality" in its constitution in two places, but it doesn't define it. The constitution doesn't say what it actually means. So, for the last 200 years, it has been up to the Swiss government to create white papers and strategy papers and so on, and define how we interpret it.

Right now, the basic formula is that we understand neutrality as it is defined in international law, mainly in the two Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. There are hard rules in there, like no military bases of foreign powers, no foreign soldiers passing through your territory, and so on. There are a few rules like these. Actually, any neutral state is free to send weapons to a military conflict. But if you do that, you're supposed to do it equally to both sides. So the Swiss said, "Well, we don't really want to send weapons to Russia, so we're not going to send weapons to Ukraine either." But that's, again, a political decision.

But then, beyond that, Switzerland said, "But we're going to impose sanctions on Russia after 2022." And the referendum that we just had proposed that we should understand Swiss neutrality in a stricter way: no weapons to any side of a conflict, but also no sanctions in principle, except when mandated by the United Nations. And that interpretation was rejected. The majority of Swiss people still think that it is good to impose sanctions on only one of the two sides in a conflict, especially against Russia. But the political discussion was then reframed by the opponents as a discussion about sanctions on Russia. We never discuss, obviously, sanctioning the United States for attacking Iran.

But, well, that's what it is. The other side managed to reframe this. But it was a good example of a moment when, in Switzerland, we again debated what should actually be contained in the word "neutrality" and how we want it to be defined in the constitution. Or do we want to give the government the leeway to draw up the concrete rules for our neutrality? And the decision, unfortunately, in my view, was, "No, no, the government can do it. We just have a general principle in the constitution." Even the Austrians have a stricter kind of constitutional law when it comes to their neutrality because they have a minimum definition in there. There are various ways of doing this.

#Moderator

All right. Thank you. So my next question is for you. I would like to come back to this link between the general principle and concrete ways of implementing neutrality, so to speak. In the context of Georgia, my question is: what would actually change for Georgia as a country if it became neutral? Let me explain what I mean. For instance, if Georgia renounces its aspirations to join NATO—and you mentioned in your previous talk that there is a constitutional provision about this that is currently in force—what comes next, right, given these conditions?

And another question related to that is: what changes in diplomatic relations? What consequences might it have for strengthening Georgia's military capabilities? Should one start discussing things like military industrial production, right? Because, I mean, we know that, for instance, Switzerland has a lot of discussions about where arms come from, who supplies them, how to produce enough, and where to buy them. So all these questions would probably emerge if Georgia were to adopt neutrality at some point. That's the question: what exactly changes, and how? It's hard to say.

#Panelist 3

It's hard to say what will happen in the future, you know, because of the dynamics in this transforming world. You know that leading scholars write about it. By the way, Fukuyama published his article in The National Interest in 1989, before the dissolution of the USSR, before the Berlin Wall was torn down. And in the next issue, John Gray, a great scholar who is still alive and active, published his response to Fukuyama from a realist perspective. And he was saying that, yes, the USSR is going to dissolve, but don't expect the end of history. No, no. Classical history, with all its violence, with that period when strong powers do what they want to do, as Thucydides was saying, and weak powers have to suffer, is coming back.

A time of wars is coming, you know, of internal conflicts and intrigues and closed-door diplomacy, etc., etc. Even Malthusian times could appear soon. That is what John Gray was saying in his seminal short article at that time. So now we are in it. What I know for sure is that we have to move now and act step by step, starting with a neutral foreign policy. Well, they are doing much better now, our government and the Dream Party, but not enough. They are still voting from time to time at the UN and other forums on issues on which, may I say it here openly, our neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan abstain from voting, avoiding, you know, these delicate issues that could make the Kremlin angry. But our government is still doing it, like in August this year.

So stop it. Stop it and, you know, follow suit. Well, about the European Union, what happened, happened. Now, with this situation and attitude toward Georgia, and the continued blaming and slander that the elections were rigged, etc., etc., they cannot take these words back. But what can the European Union do? It is in a deep crisis, you know, a political crisis. There are articles saying that the European Union remains a geopolitical dwarf. They can issue statements and resolutions,

and they are doing it, you know. But they cannot do any more harm to Georgia than that. And here we are in a very complicated situation, as I told you, with our territory, bases, etc., etc.

Now, even in terms of military capabilities, even if every Georgian—small children, women, etc., you know—became a soldier, we could not defend Georgia from our giant neighbor or from our other giant neighbor, you know. And we remember that Erdogan declared several times, "We Turks and Azeris are one nation living in two different states." He said it several times, and he acted accordingly. This is how the Karabakh conflict was solved, you know, six years ago, etc. So, we have perfect relations so far with Azerbaijan, with Turkey, etc., but forget about defending Georgia with military capabilities. Its resources are not enough. We cannot do it. We are not resilient in that location, etc., etc. So the only state in the world that presented its neutrality to the United Nations after three years of moving step by step is Turkmenistan.

The only state in the world. And at that time, 35 years ago, all member states unanimously voted for it. But who were the co-sponsors of that resolution for Turkmenistan? Let's list them: Russia, the United States of America. Two co-sponsors. Not so bad, huh? Two members of the UN Security Council. Then Iran, Turkey, Pakistan. Look at the map. And it happened. So, who knows? The transformation should end. We have to be cautious. Perhaps one day, Russia, the USA, and, you know, China will appear together as co-sponsors for Georgia. Max Weber was saying that the task of a real politician is to work on some incredible, impossible missions to make them possible tomorrow or the day after, in the future. That's where we are. Thank you.

#Moderator

Thank you very much. We have some time for questions from the audience. Unfortunately, we're not able to hear them publicly, but we received them through a new platform, and I will read them out for you. Most of the questions are for Pascal, probably because you're defining a lot of the concepts, but maybe some others can also respond to them. I will read all of them out together, and then we can decide who will respond. Bashar Mamedov is asking, "What impact will developments in the Middle East have on Georgia's relations with the European Union?" Okay. The next question is whether neutrality establishes different economic interests during times of war and peace.

What kind of economic development platform should Georgia create to make its neutrality sustainable? So this question is more about internal economic development. And the third question is framed as follows: "Much has been said about how neutrality is beneficial during military confrontations between other countries. During our meetings with the public, we explained that neutrality is also beneficial for addressing internal territorial issues, more so than other political arrangements. Could you please assess whether we are correct or mistaken in these explanations?" This question is posed by the political party Left Alliance. Yes, please. Maybe we can start with Pascal, and if anyone wants to add to that, they can.

#Pascal

It's very difficult to answer these questions briefly. I mean, the conflict in the Middle East, in my view, is currently making the future neutrality of the Gulf states almost inevitable. The Gulf states right now are some of the victims of this conflict. And what we are seeing is that the U.S. bases in the Gulf states are a huge liability, right? It's obvious the Gulf states are being bombarded because the United States decided to have a war with Iran. And they are the direct targets now. So I do think that, in the long term, this will lead to the Gulf states at some point phasing out the provision of bases for the U.S. So it will lead to greater neutrality on their part in that sense.

And this is a signal. So I do think this signal is being looked at right now. And also, hearing what Sakari said about Finland, foreign bases do not necessarily make you better off security-wise. They make you a target. So the whole question we need to ask is: how do we want to define security? Are we only secure if we follow the NATO crowd that says you must use deterrence? We need to deter, deter. Well, why does Germany not deter France, and France not Germany? Why are these two safe? Historically, they had a lot of problems with each other, right? They don't deter each other anymore. Why? Because they created a framework.

The framework is the EU, NATO, and others that guarantee their security. The security of one is the security of the other. That's a framework, and that's a useful framework. Now the question is how to create a framework over here. And this party is actually saying neutrality should be the framework through which we then create mutual dependence in order to have friends instead of enemies. And you don't need to deter friends. So the whole question is how to build friendship. And I actually find that a much more useful question than the question of deterrence, because deterrence will always breed the security dilemma. And I'm sorry I didn't go into the other questions.

#Moderator

Maybe you would like to, and we can finish with that.

#Paneslist 1

Okay, yeah. I would also like to comment on the situation in the Middle East. In my view, the war in Iran is accelerating the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, and it has also shown the military limits of the United States in the world. And that, in my view, could alienate the European Union from Georgia, for example, because the European Union has made it very clear that it's part of the hegemonic project of the United States. And as different centers of power outside the West rise, they gain in importance and influence.

And in this region here in the South Caucasus, you are at the crossroads of different spheres of influence, which enables you to balance very quickly, effectively, and efficiently. In the case of Finland during the Cold War, our neutrality was very defensive towards the Soviet Union because the

Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc were by far the weaker of the great power blocs. Nowadays, however, the West is weakening, and its relative importance and influence are declining. This enables Georgia to be much more proactive in its neutrality, in my view.

#Moderator

Thank you very much. Yes, please. You have maybe one or two minutes.

#Panelist 2

Yeah, once again, I will draw on some historical analogies because you mentioned the United Nations. Actually, Austria's neutrality and its recognition under international law were also based on the United Nations, because Austria submitted its neutrality concept and neutrality law to the United Nations for notification. And if there was no objection to its neutrality, then it was basically recognized by the United Nations as well. So that's international law. I have to say, it was not the Soviet Union; it was Eisenhower who strongly supported Austrian neutrality in the '50s. The Eisenhower administration made several statements that they would prefer neutrality.

Actually, he mentioned Finland as well. And there is an example. We now have this anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. And the Soviet Union suspected Austria of hosting insurgents, which may or may not have happened. And they threatened Austria. Then the American foreign minister said that if Austria's neutrality and sovereignty were violated, it would be a reason for a third world war. So if neutrality is credible, it is recognized by big powers as well. You need not be a member of an alliance. You have to present your neutrality credibly. You have to make it clear all the time.

So passivity contradicts neutrality. It's not only neutrality and military alliances that are contradictory. Passivity and neutrality are contradictory as well. That's why I call it engaged neutrality. One other lesson learned—because it's not the Middle East I'm talking about, but Central Europe—is that there's a historical example of regional neutrality. I'm not talking about the Stalin Note, but ten years after the Second World War, Austria was united and neutral, and Germany was divided. And then some Western pundits came along and said, “We have to do something about it.” So the idea was not only to unite Germany, but to create a united Central Europe, according to the Austrian model.

So there was a bipartisan initiative. Senators Knowland and Humphrey issued a statement calling for a neutral Central Europe, including not only Germany and Austria, but also Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The leader of the British Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell, said the same thing. And on top of that, Rapacki, the Polish foreign minister, said in 1957, “OK, Austria’s state treaty establishes it as a non-nuclear-weapon state. So Austria is one of the first non-nuclear-weapon states. That’s enshrined in the Austrian state treaty. Why not apply it to Central Europe?” So Rapacki was the first one who suggested a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone for Central Europe.

Of course, there were strong opponents to this concept. There was Adenauer on the one hand, who said neutrality was a poison used by the Soviet Union. But, of course, we had the Soviet Union on the other hand, and the Warsaw Pact had already been created. But that doesn't mean these concepts couldn't serve as models for the future as well: regional disengagement zones, nuclear-weapon-free zones. But, of course, neutral states have to do something for it. They can very well act within the European Union. You can be active in the European Union, offer services, offer peacekeeping troops, and host international organizations. So that's not really a contradiction. But passivity and neutrality—that's a no-go.

#Moderator

Thank you. But only if you want to add something, because all the other speakers have spoken, and it would not be fair to exclude you. Only if you want to.

#Panelist 3

A short sentence. Yes, please. In March 1952, Joseph Stalin—as you know, of course—sent a strong note to the USA, Britain, and France, proposing the unification of Germany, saying that a state such as Germany should not be divided, on the condition that there be a referendum in Germany and neutrality. And they refused. As German historians write, and some of my German friends have told me, Adenauer survived in Germany because he was sitting on American bayonets, because there was a serious political crisis in the Bundestag. They wanted unification. So this is history, you know. This is history because sometimes it's very, very difficult to explain that, you know, we have to be neutral, etc., when some strong powers are saying, "No, either you are our enemies or forget it."

#Panelist 2

Just to add, of course, there are historians—and Pascal and I know this historian, Ruggenthaler, for example. He wrote such a thick book on the Stalin Note. And his conclusion was that Stalin issued this note because he knew that Adenauer would object to it, and that this would amount to recognition of the division of Germany. But actually, the examples I mentioned go way beyond the Stalin Note as a regional concept.

#Pascal

And there's also another historian, Michael Gehler, who actually wrote an even thicker book saying, "No, no, Stalin actually meant it." We don't have a consensus on this one.

#Moderator

All right. Thank you very much to the speakers for this interesting discussion. And thank you to the audience for your patience and for listening. I hope these discussions will lead to more interesting sessions in the upcoming panels. Thank you very much.