How Small Stats Can DEFEAT Warmongers. #NotMyWar

To escape war, small states must cooperate with all great powers around them—for better or for worse. This panel explores how Georgian neutrality could strengthen cooperation across the South Caucasus. Pascal Lottaz, Rein Müllerson, Pietro Shakarian and Lasha Kasradze discuss relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, territorial reconciliation, trade corridors and the risks of military alignment. A recorded contribution from Mohammad Marandi adds an Iranian perspective on regional security and Western pressure. Recorded at the Tbilisi Forum on Neutrality on November 5, 2026, this panel examines how Georgia might become a bridge between competing powers while protecting its sovereignty and prosperity. 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: Neutrality in the South Caucasus 04:51 Regional cooperation, trade and foreign military bases 20:12 Pascal Lottaz: Georgia as a neutral bridge 24:21 Rein Müllerson: Lessons from Ukraine 32:06 Pietro Shakarian: Reconciliation and peace between societies 42:45 Audience questions, territorial integrity and regional dialogue 55:09 Lasha Kasradze: Small states in a multipolar world 01:00:45 Mohammad Marandi: Iran’s perspective on neutrality and NATO

#Moderator

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon, dear friends. I welcome the prominent experts and participants in our forum. Before I introduce the panelists, I will say a few words about myself. My name is Zviad Avaliani. I'm a TV host at Post TV, a political commentator, and a documentary maker. I would say that today is a very important day for Georgia because we are discussing the possibility of neutrality for Georgia for the first time, as far as I remember, at such a high level. I see prominent international scholars, popular politicians, and representatives of the media and embassies here today.

So for me, it's an honor to moderate one of the panels at this forum. And actually, this is a very interesting panel. Over the next hour, we will be discussing the idea of neutrality for Georgia in the context of the South Caucasus region. And now, with your permission, I will introduce our panelists. Let's start with Pascal Lottaz, associate professor at Kyoto University, founder of Neutrality Studies, and co-organizer of this forum. You are doing a great job, Pascal. Thank you very much. Please welcome him.

#Moderator

Professor Rein Müllerson, former First Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia and former member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Professor Müllerson has made a long journey from London to join us and participate in this forum. Please welcome him. Pietro Shakarian, lecturer in history at the American University of Armenia. Pietro's participation is especially important for us today because we are discussing the neutrality of Georgia in the context of the South Caucasus region. Please welcome him. And Mr. Lasha Kasradze. He is Georgian, but he has also made a long journey to join us today and participate in our conference. He came from the United States of America, where he now lives and works. Please welcome him. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for participating in this forum.

Your participation and your opinions are very important to us. Before I ask the first question, I would like to add that we were supposed to have one more participant on this panel: Mr. Mohamed Marandi from Tehran University. Unfortunately, he couldn't attend our forum in person, but we have talked with him and discussed all the topics we have for this panel. At the end of this panel, you will have the opportunity to hear his opinion. So, let's start. Before I ask the first question, I would like to remind you that you have three minutes for each question. The first question will be a general question, and then we will move on to more specific questions for each participant. So, let's start from the beginning. Let's start with the motivation. Georgia actually has a…

#Moderator

Georgia has an official policy of joining NATO. And to change this policy, you need a strong motivation. So let's start. Why are we discussing the idea of neutrality at all? What benefits can it give to Georgia, especially in the context of the South Caucasus? How would it affect relations among the three South Caucasus nations, politically and economically? And would it increase the economic, logistical, or geopolitical role of the region if Georgia became neutral? Pascal, give us the motivation. You have three minutes.

#Pascal

Well, thank you very much. I spoke a lot on the previous panel, so I will keep this comment shorter. But the point of Georgian neutrality would, of course, be first and foremost to signal, again, to all partners that Georgia will work for their benefit, and that would include trade. So, develop the Middle Corridor, become a bridge, and do more trade with everybody, as much as possible. Looking ahead, of course, it would also mean a better relationship with the two provinces that are currently under occupation and creating a framework for future unity. That's very much how I understand the name of this political party, right? It is United Neutral Georgia—united as in a united territory.

So the offer basically is to create a framework under which it should become possible to assure all partners, including the Russians, the EU, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, that a neutral Georgia—one that will not be part of one bloc or the other and will not be used as a stepping stone by anyone against somebody else—is in their best interest. And if that succeeds, then the trade prospects are

quite fantastic. I mean, Georgia is in a wonderful region, has a wonderful climate, and has a wonderful opportunity, again, to be a bridge and to basically function as a connecting corridor between the Caspian and the Black Sea.

So the question is how to sell that kind of vision to the outside world, and then, secondly, how to make it a reality at home. Because, as you said, the constitutional requirements for Georgia to become a NATO and EU member are very strong at the moment. But then again, there's no piece of paper that cannot be amended or changed over time, and that includes the constitution. But the question is, of course, how to convince enough people. I think what we are doing here is part of that. It's like, okay, let's have the discussion. Let's have the debate. And then let's see what comes out of it down the road. This is, of course, a multi-year approach. Thank you very much.

#Moderator

Professor, in your opinion, if neutrality becomes possible for Georgia, how would it affect relations between the three South Caucasus nations?

#Panelist 1

First of all, can you hear me? Yes. First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me once again to Georgia. I have been here many times, and I like Georgia and Georgians and Georgian food, and therefore I am very happy and glad to be here. I come from a small country, Estonia, which is much smaller than even Georgia. But I have probably been spoiled by a kind of great-power mentality or imperial mentality, because I worked for many years in Moscow. I was President Gorbachev's adviser, and I also worked with your president, Shevardnadze, when I was in Moscow. For the last 35 years, I have been living in London, also in an imperial capacity, and so I have this spoiled mentality, I believe. But it helps me, I believe, to understand both sides: the ideas and desires of great powers, and what small states can achieve or do within this changing geopolitical landscape in the world.

Recently, I read a book by Robert Cooper. I don't know whether you've heard of him. He's a British politician and historian, and his book is called The Ambassadors. In it, he discusses the role of different politicians in the world, from Mazarin and Richelieu to Kissinger. There are many interesting episodes, and one is the 1962 Caribbean conflict, when the Soviet Union started putting nuclear missiles on the territory of Cuba. Cooper writes that this would have increased the security of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the United States, but it would have decreased the security of Cuba vis-à-vis the United States, because the launch sites for these missiles would have been within range of American missiles.

So therefore, I think that, for example, NATO military bases in Estonia don't increase the security of Estonia. On the contrary, they decrease the security of Estonia. They may increase the security of the United States or some other NATO countries, but not of this small country. And I therefore

believe that this also applies in the case of Georgia and other Caucasian countries: their neutrality, their refusal to have foreign military bases on their territory, would increase their security. And therefore, I believe neutrality is the best way for smaller countries. Of course, Russia will never be neutral. China will never be neutral. The United States will never be neutral. But this is the policy for smaller players. If there are any other questions, I would like...

#Moderator

I'll come back to you for sure. Pietro, your opinion is very important to us because you are from Armenia, and we are discussing the possible effects of all the relations between... Yeah, yeah.

#Panelist 2

Well, personally, I think about Georgian neutrality in two ways: not only how it affects relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan and the larger region, but also how it affects Georgia's internal unity, the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, confidence-building measures with the Abkhaz and the Ossetians, and dialing down the tension with Russia. It's very important to facilitate that kind of unity among the people of the Georgian state, including the Abkhaz and the Ossetians. So that's the first thing. The second thing is, we also have to think about the idea of having a balance of power. You know, the idea of balancing is incredibly, incredibly important for this region, for all the countries of this region.

Armenia, I have to say this, you know, historically was attempting to pursue a much more balanced policy. But unfortunately, you know, ladies and gentlemen, we're seeing now, before our eyes, a government in Yerevan that is actually pulling Armenia into the thicket of great-power competition, which is something that most people in Armenia are quite worried about. You know, I mean, officially, we have this so-called victory of Pashinyan in the last election, but unfortunately for us, it was not a very fair election. But he is trying to push the Armenian people into this East-versus-West confrontation. Georgia, I think, actually provides a very good example for Armenia. I mean, if you go with this new, more balanced Georgian position, it would provide a good roadmap.

And I think that actually what's most interesting is that when you had the rise of the Georgian Dream Party, one of the things Ivanishvili was talking about was this idea of the Armenian way, because he thought Armenia had something there. There's something they're doing that is correct. And now what's kind of funny is that it's like the reverse. Now we Armenians will be learning from you because you guys are making the right moves or moving in the right direction. And I think neutrality is the best option for you, especially for your internal unity and for taking confidence-building measures with the Abkhaz and the Ossetians. It's extraordinarily important to make them feel at home because nothing can be resolved, by the way, through a military conflict with the Abkhaz and the Ossetians.

You know, when they say that Georgia has to be involved in the Ukraine war, what they really mean, Zviad, is that they want to throw not only the Georgians into a conflict, but also the Abkhaz and the Ossetians. All these people would die needlessly in this conflict. You know, it's not in the interest of the people of the Georgian state. And so I think, at the end of the day, you're onto something with this. And it's something that the current administration in Armenia can learn from. It's not very smart. It's not very balanced. We can say that. There is something we can learn from what you are doing now, especially holding a wonderful forum like this. I just want to thank you again.

#Moderator

Thank the organizers for organizing this. It was wonderful.

#Panelist 2

It's wonderful, and what more can I say? Thank you so much.

#Pascal

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

#Moderator

Thank you for participating. Your opinion is very important to us. Lascha, please share your opinion with us.

#Panelist 3

Absolutely, but first I want to say a few words in Georgian.

#Translator

First of all, thank you very much. It's a great honor and privilege for me to speak to my audience and my communities here in this format. I would like to thank the organizers, Mr. Pizini and Mr. Pascal, of course. I think this is a very timely and useful concept.

#Panelist 3

Thank you.

#Translator

And I really support events like this because, strategically, they will be very useful for our public, of course. Thanks again. It's a great honor and privilege for me to be here.

#Panelist 3

Georgia's regional and global foreign policy is institutionalized in the region, and it is compatible with realism. It is compatible with structural realism. And, you know, some of the criticism that you hear today is that it can only be a balance of power, a sort of harsh balance of power. You know, I disagree with that idea. I think it can be soft balancing.

I think, you know, for a small state like Georgia, many writers, from Matthias Maass to—I think it was Robert Rothstein, one of the champions of the literature on small countries—agree that small countries survive better in a multipolar world order. There is plenty of literature, including historical literature, to suggest that, to prove that. And so we are experiencing that world order now. I think soft balancing, focusing on trade, and making sure that we have a sort of zero-hostility policy towards anyone can help. We just simply can't afford hostility as a small country. Sort of putting neutrality on top of that only helps.

And it's not a perfect system, just as no other theory in IR is perfect. But neutrality certainly carries a sort of institutionalizing mood, if you will, a sort of sociopsychological disposition, if you will, towards enhancing Georgia's foreign policy and making it stronger, better, and more pragmatic. So, yes, absolutely. I think it's a great thing that the concept of neutrality has finally been brought up at this level. And I think from this point on, we just have to sustain that effort and keep at it so that neutrality will become more and more institutionalized. And another thing I have to say about neutrality is that we have to decide what kind of neutrality we want.

Obviously, experts here will talk about what kind of neutrality it's going to be. I think armed neutrality is out of the question for Georgia. I think that will create a security dilemma, this really nasty concept in international relations where, if you arm even for your own defense, your neighbor will assume that you are arming against him. And that will trigger a security dilemma. And I think we have a very bitter experience with that. So I think perhaps we can expand on this more in terms of understanding what kind of neutrality we're looking for. But I think, in terms of developing trade relations and diplomatic relations, neutrality is extremely compatible with these ideas.

#Moderator

Thank you very much, Lasha. So let's move on to more specific, personal questions. Pascal, you have said and written several times that Georgia should position itself as a neutral bridge connecting the European Union and Russia rather than being forced into a binary geopolitical choice. In your opinion, are these global players interested in having such a bridge? Or what should we do to get these global players and our neighbors in the South Caucasus interested in a neutral Georgia?

#Pascal

It's a very good question. You know, one of the nice things about the word neutrality is that it means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. And that's something that Georgia could work with. On the one hand, of course, for a national policy, it would be necessary to actually have at least a white paper or something on it in the end. Again, the biggest roadblock is this constitutional requirement for all branches of government to strive toward NATO and EU membership. However, what is Georgia at the moment? Georgia is not a member of the EU. It's not a member of NATO. Georgia is on its own, and it is surviving. And I would actually argue it's even thriving at the moment.

So the question is just, you know, how to reinterpret what Georgia is already doing within a more general global framework in order to achieve even more and have unity with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And that will require not just Georgia going and taking them back. It will require Abkhazia and South Ossetia to say, like, "Hey, we want to come home. I think it's time to come home." So what we're talking about is Georgia preparing a home and saying, like, "By the way, guys, bad things happened in the past, but we still belong together, don't we?" And actually, one of the most important observations to me is that, when it comes to Ukraine, the cases are very similar. Of course, Russia was involved in this war ever since 2014. But until February 2022, Russia did not recognize the two Donbas republics.

It did recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent. But what then happened for Ukraine is even worse, because Russia actually wrote into its own constitution that these territories—all four of them that they're fighting over—are part of its state territory. But with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Russians didn't do that. They didn't say, like, "This is my state territory." They actually leave that open. They just recognize them as independent. But what this means for Georgia is that if it can offer a common Georgian home for everybody, and that common Georgian home, by the way, is also good for Russia and good for the region, well, then you have a very, very strong case for reconciliation, right? And for actually getting the buy-in.

You need the buy-in from Abkhazia, from South Ossetia. You need the buy-in from the Russians. And in the end, the question is how to get the buy-in from the EU and from EU member states. My gut feeling is it's going to be much easier to get buy-in from individual EU member states than from the EU center. And the way to do that is to, again, adjust the neutrality talk. You talk neutrality with the Russians in one way, with the Ossetians in another way, and with the EU in different ways. You adjust it to the person listening to you. I do not precisely know how that should happen in detail, but that is something that could be discussed down the road with very capable Georgian diplomats and so on. But the thing is, we need to know the significant others and what they want. Thank you very much.

#Moderator

Thank you very much, Professor. During the first round, we discussed what benefits neutrality can bring. But now let's discuss what dangers or threats can arise when you are not neutral. What has the example of Ukraine shown us? Can the aspiration to join military blocs lead to confrontation with neighboring powers, large or small?

#Panelist 1

You know, I published an article in March 2014.

#Panelist 1

The article was published in one of the Oxford University journals. It is called "Ukraine, a Victim of Geopolitics." I worked in Moscow for years, and I personally knew—and still know—many, many Russians and many Ukrainians as well. And sometimes you don't even know who is Ukrainian and who is Russian. For example, my fellow student Anatoly Peskov's grandmother was Ukrainian, and Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, is also of Ukrainian descent. He's a nephew of Anatoly Peskov, my friend. So the Ukrainian conflict has touched me personally very much because of this friendship with both Russian people and Ukrainians.

And in my article, even then, I spoke about this torn country, because Ukraine is composed of different parts, which all have different histories and are also different religiously. Therefore, trying to drag it either to the West or to the East would have torn this country apart. This was foreseeable to me already, at least in 2014. But I would like to mention one nuance. Recently, I read a book by Jean Clavany, who was an adviser to President François Mitterrand. In his book, which was published recently, he wrote that as early as 1991, when Mitterrand was told that Ukraine was becoming an independent state, Mitterrand said, "Then we will have a war in Europe."

I can't explain why, and Clavany didn't explain why Mitterrand thought that way. But this is a very interesting nuance. My interpretation is that Mitterrand also understood that Ukraine is such a torn country that dragging it to the East or to the West would create a conflict in Europe. So now, having seen what has happened in Ukraine, I believe Ukraine will either, in the worst-case scenario, become a rump state—a landlocked state, even, because if the conflict continues, Russia will probably take even Odessa—or Ukraine will become a potentially prosperous, neutral state, which will be a bridge.

#Panelist 1

Between Russia and other European countries. Because, in my opinion, Russia is also a European country. De Gaulle's idea of a Europe from the Urals to Lisbon is one of the great ideas of the previous great French leadership. I am not thinking about Hollande or the current president, Macron. And this is one of the problems in Europe, by the way. You may not like Putin, or you may not like Xi

Jinping, or even Modi, but nevertheless, they are statesmen, in my opinion. Current European leaders are much weaker. There is no de Gaulle in Europe, unfortunately. Therefore, I am quite skeptical about the fate of Europe and the European Union as well.

By the way, one aspect I would like to touch upon is that it was said several times today that Ukraine may become a member of the European Union, but not NATO. The European Union has also become militarized. Not only does it have close links with NATO, but, you know, the idea of having a military component in the EU is very strong. And by the way, in my opinion, the reason Russia is not against Ukraine becoming an EU member is that Ukraine will never become an EU member. I don't know whether Putin thinks so or not, but that is my opinion. Therefore, Russia may agree to EU membership for Ukraine.

#Moderator

Thank you very much, Professor. Pietro? Actually, Georgia already has some experience of being neutral, at least in the context of the South Caucasus. During the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Georgia maintained a policy of strict neutrality and diplomatic balancing. And it did work. Actually, it did work. What do you think? Is this a good example to give to those who say that neutrality is not possible at all for Georgia, especially when there are wars around?

#Panelist 2

Well, I think, frankly, Georgia is extremely important if we're talking about conflict resolution. Why? Because when we talk about the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it's not just the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, Artsakh. It's also, you know, several other issues. I mean, Azerbaijan now has new territorial claims against Armenia, this kind of thing. And we can also say, unfortunately, that this is about the deficiencies of the current Armenian leadership. Mr. Pashinyan effectively betrayed the people of Artsakh, Nagorno-Karabakh.

But going to your specific role, why is Georgia so important? Because when we're talking about resolving conflicts, it's not just about the presidents getting together and signing an agreement, and then everything is perfect and everything is fine. It's not just about the political leaders. It's also, fundamentally, about the people and the dialogue among them. And what I'm trying to say is that Georgia has provided both Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, particularly Azerbaijan, with an opportunity for young people from Azerbaijan and Armenia to come to Georgia and have face-to-face interactions with each other.

Because in Azerbaijan right now, Armenians are very much dehumanized. They're villainized, that kind of thing. But if young Azerbaijanis come to Georgia, they can meet an Armenian, they can talk to an Armenian, and they can see that this Armenian is a human being, that maybe there's some basis for some sort of resolution here, right? We don't need to be fighting with each other all the time. So it's about breaking down that barrier of dehumanization. It's not as big an issue in Armenia,

but unfortunately, in Azerbaijan today, the dehumanization of Armenians is an incredibly major problem.

And Georgia allows young people from Azerbaijan to meet young people from Armenia, to see each other face to face, and to see that there's a possibility for resolving the conflict—not only in terms of signing some documents and making some agreements or giving Aliyev what he wants or whatever, but actually allowing real peace to take place, which is peace between people, peace between the societies. You cannot have real peace in the Caucasus without peace between the societies. And Georgia's role is incredibly important because it provides that space for, again, like I said, young Azerbaijanis to meet young Armenians, to actually see each other as people. Otherwise, you can't have a resolution to a conflict like this, which is really heated. The other thing I want to mention about Georgia's neutrality, which is really quite important, is the dynamic of the social question.

So in all three of our post-Soviet Caucasian countries, we have a problem with poverty. We have a problem with unemployment. We have a problem with jobs. And if Georgia is forced to go into NATO, it's going to be forced to spend a lot more on the military. And in fact, if Georgia becomes neutral, it not only provides the groundwork for an internal resolution involving the Abkhaz and the Ossetians, but it also provides the groundwork for greater investment in addressing the social question: actually providing economic mobility for the people in the regions and job opportunities for people. Because you cannot have real democracy without some sort of economic component, without the people. It's about demos. It's the people who make the decisions. It's about the people's rule. That's the whole idea: you cannot have a real democracy if people do not feel empowered.

And if people do not feel like they have mobility. But neutrality would enable that. So I would say neutrality would actually enhance the democratic aspirations of Georgia. Those in Georgia who are saying, "Oh, no, no, no, no, we should be in some entangling alliances and military alliances, and we should be kind of part of these, you know, East versus West wars and all this and that"—what would end up happening? Georgia would actually become less democratic. In fact, if Georgia were neutral, it would be more democratic because it would allow greater investment in the social economy, which would allow people to feel like they have more of a stake in the system. It would allow for more participation. And that's the bedrock of what a democracy is. So that's really all I have to say about that. But thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much, Pietro.

#Moderator

Lasha, Georgia is a country divided by conflicts, unfortunately, and this is one of Georgia's biggest problems, if not the biggest. When we discuss the idea of neutrality, what is your opinion? Could it increase the chances of Georgia's peaceful reintegration and resolving these conflicts? It absolutely could, yes.

#Panelist 3

But before I go into that, I want to join the professor in what he said about François Mitterrand's remarks. He was a remarkable president, by the way. We all know that when Russia talked about Ukraine's neutrality, the collective West categorically denied it and tore that argument apart. If Ukraine had been neutral—and I would also add, if the Bush administration at the time or later administrations had allowed Ukraine to keep the nuclear weapons—this would not be happening, right? This is on a more strategic level. And there was a concern back then that without security guarantees and the Soviet nuclear arsenal, this would happen. I would also add that, from George Kennan to William Perry, the former defense secretary, they all said that Ukraine was a big red line for Moscow.

And even liberals in Moscow and in the highest echelons of Russian politics were against Ukraine's membership in NATO, not to mention the brilliant books that were written about this subject. So I think, you know, had Ukraine been given neutral status, it would have avoided this national suicide. Coming back to Georgia, of course, neutrality would institutionalize Georgia's peaceful existence. It would give another layer of protection. Because I think it should be common sense that, you know, in a multipolar world, as a small state, you've got to survive. Survival is the main concern of any state. And, you know, in today's multipolar world, I think we should play the balancing game. But with neutrality, it would be much easier because it would be an institutionalized status.

Now, that has to be achieved. That has to be granted. Others have to recognize us as neutral. But I think, you know, in theory, this is a very helpful concept and increases the chances of Georgia's survival as a small state. And regarding Petro's comments on domestic politics, yeah, I think it would calm things down if Abkhazians, South Ossetians, and Georgians knew that, through neutrality, Georgia was not going to use force, right? Hence neutrality. And then our chances of sort of fixing these separatist problems—problems where Russia played a decisive role, we should also say that—will increase. So, you know, I think giving Georgia institutionalized status as a neutral state in the region will also make it wealthier.

Because it will create a much more stable geoeconomic, trade, and energy environment, you know, extending from our friends in Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea all the way to Europe. We need this connectivity. We also know, unfortunately, that trade does not prevent conflict. You know, since the early ’90s, when Shevardnadze basically put Georgia on the map strategically through the relationship with Azerbaijan and geoeconomic projects, we still experienced nasty conflicts that eventually culminated in the 2008 war. An extremely foolish strategic decision, of course. But with neutrality, I think it would calm fears about security problems in Georgia and in the South Caucasus, and it would give us the luxury of focusing strictly on trade. So absolutely, neutrality has sort of multi-vector benefits, if you will.

#Moderator

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Lasha. We have one more round, but we have many questions from our audience as well. So this time I will give priority to the audience. Our audience

has several questions for Pascal. Here is a question from Mr. Dimitri Lotki-Panidze: "In the context of neutrality, and considering Georgia's role as a bridge between geopolitical players, how effectively can the country determine the political price of its territorial integrity within the current system of international relations?" I don't understand the question. "In the context of neutrality, and considering Georgia's role as a bridge between geopolitical centers, how effectively can the country determine the political price of its territorial integrity within the current system of international relations?" We have another question as well. Maybe we have already discussed this topic.

#Pascal

The price for territorial integrity—if what is meant by that is what Georgia would have to give up for territorial integrity—that's a very valid question. Actually, it's one that we're engaging with here. I think most of us here who are supporters of a neutral Georgia would argue that one of the things that needs to be given up is the aspiration to join a military alliance, right? The only military alliance that there is. I mean, there aren't many of them, right? There's really only NATO. So, giving up the aspiration to join NATO in return for a political framework that can offer what I said before: an offer to the South Ossetians and Abkhazians to recreate the common Georgian home. So, giving up the aspiration of taking it by force in return for a way to offer a common Georgian home.

#Moderator

Thank you. Thank you very much. Professor, my next question is for you. We know that two years ago, Tallinn University revoked your emeritus status for attending a conference organized in Russia. Now, the president of Estonia is saying almost every other day that it's time to start negotiations with Russia. Strange. In your opinion, has Europe really changed over the past two years? And what are your expectations? Will Europe finally accept the fact that the unipolar world order is gone and it's time to learn how to survive in a multipolar world?

#Panelist 1

In my opinion, there is a big difference—this has already been mentioned—between political elites in Europe and the people. And this is also the case in Estonia. I don't remember exactly which year it was, but at least two years ago, I participated in the St. Petersburg Economic Forum. I was on a panel with Dmitry Medvedev, the former president of Russia. As we both spoke Russian on the panel, it was a very lively discussion. He had read my books when he was a student studying international law. It was shown on TV, and this was not well received in Estonia. Therefore, they revoked my status as emeritus professor at Tallinn University.

Now it seems that I am too old to go back to Estonia to become president or prime minister, but I think that times are changing, and even the political elite, at least part of it, is no longer so aggressively hostile towards Russia. By the way, I would say that the political elite is quite Russophobic, but not all of them have imbibed this Russophobia with their mother's milk. They are

opportunistic Russophobes, meaning that it was good for getting a post in Brussels. For example, Kaja Kallas, the former prime minister of Estonia, is now the foreign policy chief in the European Union.

And I believe it is due to the fact that she was very Russophobic when she was the prime minister of Estonia. But things are changing. I think that it is a major turning point that the president of Finland and the prime minister of Norway approached President Putin and talked to him. But nevertheless, it also shows that even the political elite of the European Union is trying to have some say in the future of Europe. Because, as I already said before, I don't think we can talk about peace in Europe if Europe remains hostile towards Russia. So Russia should be a part of the new European security structure, and that structure should not be hostile towards Russia. Europe will not be safe against Russia, only together with Russia.

#Moderator

Thank you very much. Pietro, it was very interesting when you said that it's very important to have a country where young people from Armenia and Azerbaijan, or from other countries divided by wars and conflicts, can meet and see that the other person is a human being as well. Great words. But let's discuss economics this time. What do you think? Could a neutral Georgia be more economically attractive to its neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan?

#Panelist 2

Yes, absolutely. And not only to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia, or Turkey, but also to Iran. We have to think about the fact that Georgia has, in addition to the European vector, a Eurasian vector. And it's extraordinarily important because Georgia could play an enormously, enormously important economic role when we talk about North-South trade. We always talk about East-West trade, but Georgia could also be a major vector in terms of North-South trade, enhancing economic cooperation with Iran and trade with Tehran. I think Professor Morandi may be able to speak more to this question, but it would also help, I think, defuse, dare I say it, some conflict between the United States and Iran.

I mean, Georgia could play a very, very useful role in this respect. And again, not only in terms of the east-west vector, but also north-south. And the economic prospects for that would be absolutely enormous. It would be amazing. And it would help Iran. It would help Georgia. It would help Armenia. It would help Azerbaijan. It would help Turkey. It would help Russia. It would help everybody in the whole neighborhood, actually. So there are only benefits, you know, from a new kind of structure like this, specifically along the north-south vector—not only east-west, but north-south. That's why, actually, I like your flag a lot, you know, this neutral Georgia flag, because it has this idea of north-south and east-west, right?

And also, it kind of looks like the plan of a church, which is kind of interesting if we look at Georgian churches, or even Armenian churches, too. They have quite similar architecture. But you get the idea: Georgia could be benefiting from all of this, from the north-south vector and the east-west vector. It could be reaping the benefits, the best of all worlds, right? So I would actually say, why not? Why not? It enhances Georgian sovereignty and the prospects for the unity of Georgia. It enhances the prospects for democracy. It enhances the prospects for, you know, I guess you could say, economic mobility and economic growth. So why not have a neutral Georgia? I think that would be the best thing. Thank you.

#Moderator

Thank you, Pietro. And before I ask Lascha the next question, we have a comment from the representative of the Embassy of Azerbaijan concerning your words about the dehumanization of Armenians in Azerbaijan. He thinks that these kinds of words may be inappropriate for this kind of event. I think there was a misunderstanding and you didn't mean to offend the state of Azerbaijan or anything like that. Anyway, we are here to create platforms for peace and reconciliation, so I think we can understand each other. And I think Pietro didn't mean to offend anyone in Azerbaijan.

#Panelist 2

I don't mean to offend any individual. You know, I'm just going to say again: Georgia plays a very, very important role in bringing young Armenians and young Azerbaijanis together to see the humanity in each other, right? That's what I'm going to say. That's what I'm going to stress. It's all about Georgia providing a platform—especially, I will emphasize this, for young Azerbaijanis to see the humanity in young Armenians. So that's my point.

#Moderator

All right. Thank you. Thank you, Pietro. So let us really play the role of moderator. I think the misunderstanding is resolved. Lascha, the last question is a more global one. You often say that the emerging multipolar world order creates more possibilities for small countries. In your opinion, is neutrality really more possible in today's emerging world order? And what can it offer small countries?

#Panelist 3

Yes. Again, we're back to the same logic, which is that in a multipolar world, you have better chances to practice neutrality and pursue it through realpolitik and realism. I do believe that, according to realist theories, a balance of power comes first as a precondition. You have to have some preconditions—I think Mohamed talked about that—before you actually institutionalize neutrality. But a balance of power in the region is almost impossible, because who are we going to

balance with against Russia? There's not a single South Caucasian state that can do that. We have, in many respects, different trajectories when it comes to our respective foreign policies. But, you know, look, the main problem is security.

If the South Caucasus, particularly Georgia, stops being looked at as a proxy against Russia, then everything will be much better in terms of security. That's the only way that Georgia's security can be guaranteed, and that's the only way our northern neighbor can feel more comfortable. It will not be 100 percent comfortable. It will always be concerned with security. That's the heartbeat of, you know, relations among states. If we can achieve that, and then if we can sort of top it off with neutrality and institutionalize our neutrality as a guarantee that no security concerns will ever arise out of the South Caucasus, then we have a pretty good chance of achieving neutrality. This does not mean that we shouldn't pursue it. Absolutely, we should pursue it. And we should continue to talk and discuss and dissect this issue as much as we can.

But the $64,000 question is: how do we make sure that globalist politics, unipolar logic—liberal internationalist logic—does not suck us back into what was happening previously? So, you know, I think, thankfully, with the return of multipolarity, we have a better chance to practice realpolitik alongside neutrality. And if we can achieve neutrality by practicing realpolitik and pragmatism, then we absolutely have to explore that direction, because that would be the only way to persuade some folks that, you know, Georgia will never be used as a weapon. And a lot of people will ask, is this sort of a contradiction? Here we are, a small state.

With all due respect to our army and every single member who serves in the Georgian army, we just cannot use the army in a traditional sense to regain our territories. You know, it would be a catastrophic mistake. So how can such a small state pose a threat to a major nuclear power to our north? Well, apparently it can if you allow it to become a proxy and, you know, sort of a battering ram against that power. And history proves that it can be done very well. And obviously, the classic example of it is Ukraine. So, you know, I think if we can eliminate that security problem, if you will, then it will open the doors to pursuing neutrality. And I think it will finally put an end, in my view, to this concern about Russia and NATO expansion and all that.

#Moderator

Thank you. Thank you very much, Lasha. Thank you to all the participants, and thank you to the audience. Before the break, let me remind you that we have a fifth participant on this panel, Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran. We have discussed with him all the topics we have just covered, and now we can listen to his views and answers. Mohammad Marandi, Professor of English Literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran.

#Mohammad Marandi

Thank you very much. It's a pleasure being here online, addressing your esteemed guests. I'm sorry that I could not make it to the conference. I was planning to travel and attend, but unfortunately, under pressure from the United States, the Georgian government has halted direct flights from Iran to Georgia, and that made traveling difficult for me. So hopefully, in the future, there will be other opportunities to meet good friends and to make new friends. Well, that is a complicated question with a complicated answer. Obviously, the fact that I could not attend your conference means that the Georgian government is under pressure from the United States, and it imposes sanctions on Iran that have been imposed by the United States and its allies.

And so that makes it difficult for any country to be considered completely neutral. Now, I'm sure that many of our Georgian friends would say, "We don't want to be forced into this position," but in any case, that is the reality that we are living with. So the United States is bullying countries in order to force them to take positions that are not in their interests. The Iranian people and the Georgian people have historic ties, and they have good relations with one another. There's no reason for limitations to be imposed on the relationship. But that is what the United States does, not just with Georgia, but also between the people of Iran and Azerbaijan, and the people of Iran and Armenia. But in any case, Iran will continue to resist.

We will probably see a major war in the coming days. My belief is that while this war will most probably cause horrific damage and pain for people across the world, and lead to enormous economic hardship thanks to the Zionists, Netanyahu, and Trump, ultimately it will lead to the United States backing down and moving away from the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. NATO is a sinister force, and joining NATO makes one complicit in the crimes of NATO. And there's no other way of looking at it. During the first two months of this current war of aggression against the people of Iran, according to the NATO chief, 5,000 flights took off from airports across Europe, meaning European members of NATO assisted the United States in murdering Iranian women and children. Schools were bombed. Hospitals were bombed. A wedding was bombed. Sports complexes were bombed. Over 40 universities were bombed.

And the list goes on. In my neighborhood, a hospital was bombed directly, and an apartment building was bombed as well. The whole apartment building, full of ordinary people, is completely destroyed. So NATO is an offensive alliance that aims to impose hegemony. And of course, Iran has an obligation to protect itself and resist hegemony. So joining NATO would send a very strong signal to the Iranian people that that country would be prepared to join in hostilities against the people of Iran. You know, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan actually began through American provocation.

Brzezinski, who was the U.S. National Security Advisor under Carter, had a plan to support the so-called mujahideen in Afghanistan in order to hold the Soviet Union at bay. He wanted to create the Soviet Union's Vietnam. And Jimmy Carter approved. And this plan was implemented. And months after it began, the Soviet Union did indeed invade. Now, what the Soviet Union did was unacceptable. But it was the Americans who used a country with millions of people as a sacrificial

lamb for their own agenda. And that is what the United States does everywhere. It does not care about the people of Ukraine, and it does not care about the people of Georgia.

If Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia had been promoting and pushing for normal ties with one another, without U.S. or NATO interference, we would not have the war in Ukraine, and we would not have the territorial issues between Georgia and Russia today. So the West, the United States in particular, is willing to sacrifice any country and any people in order to gain control and power and to weaken its adversaries. So hopefully, in the future, the people of Georgia and the people of Russia will look at one another without taking into consideration the provocations being put forward by third parties. And hopefully, in the long run, the relationship will normalize and become brotherly.

#Moderator

You just heard the opinions and comments of Mohammad Marandi from Tehran University. Thank you very much again, dear participants, panelists, and audience members. As far as I know, we now have a break.

#Panelist 2

Didi madloba.