

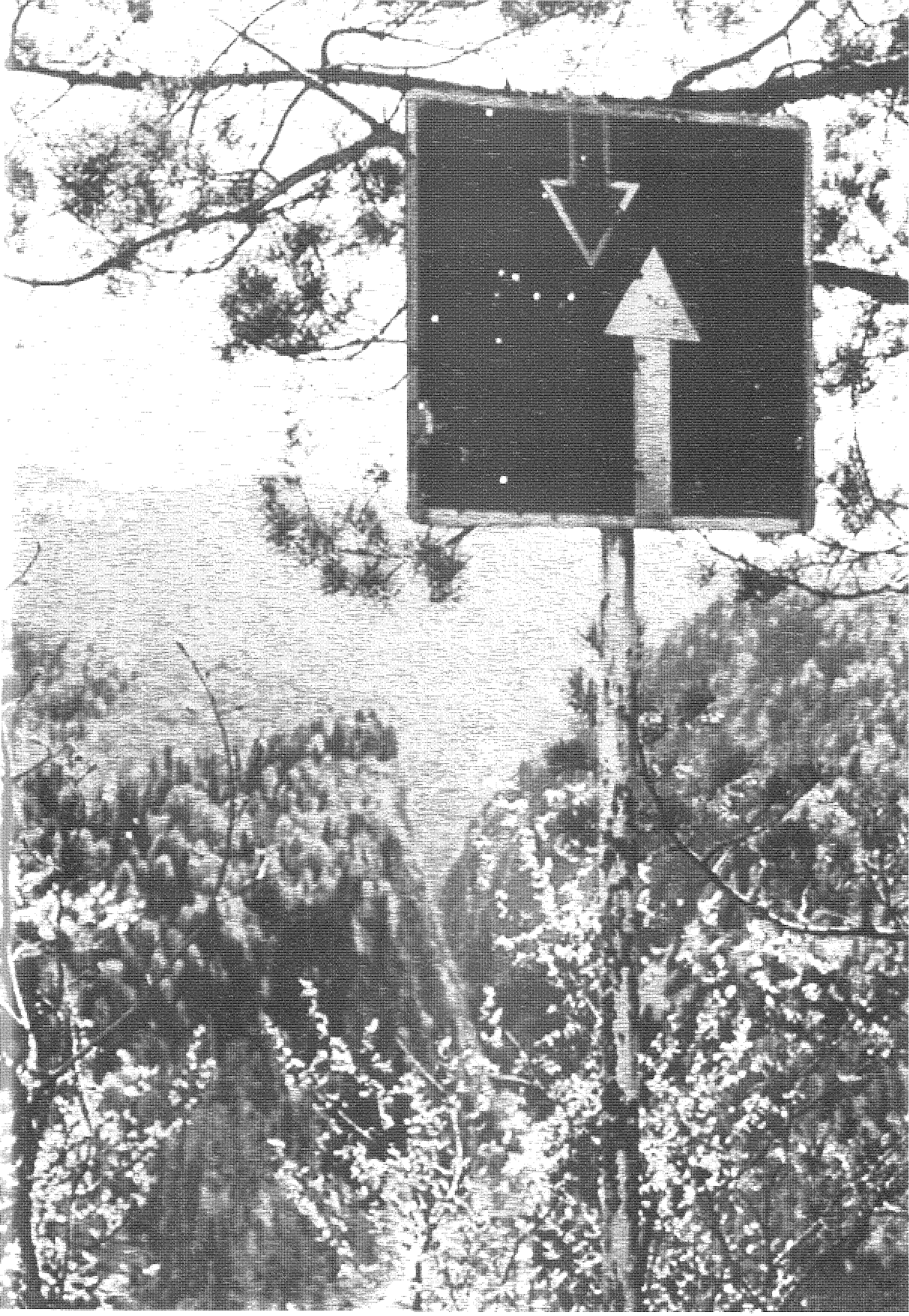
Accord

A question of sovereignty

The Georgia–Abkhazia peace process

Conciliation Resources

London 1999



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Source: Yuri Mechitov/Georgian Image Bank

On the road to Lake Ritsa, 1999

Source: Peter Nasmyth



ТАСИОРТ

ТУСКАННИС

Саргисовна

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Acknowledgements

**This issue of Accord is dedicated to
Martin Schümer, an inspirational
friend and colleague.**

Accord Programme Supervisor	Andy Carl
Accord Series Editor	John Lattimer
Production	Simon Finch
Marketing	Rebecca Abraham

Special thanks to the authors of the articles and to Jonathan Aves, Viacheslav Chirikba, Rachel Clogg, Felix Corley, Catherine Dale, David Darchiashvili, Nicola Duckworth, Mia Foster/Alicia Patterson Foundation, Laura Gibbons, Paata Gurgenedze, Morgan Johnson, Stephen Jones, Vladimir Kakalia, George Khutsishvili, Abesalom Lepsaia, Anna Matveeva, Guus Meijer, Stephen Mulvey, Peter Nasmyth, Andrew Wilson, the United Nations Department of Political Affairs; and to the UK Department for International Development and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their financial support.

Published by

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Website <http://www.c-r.org>

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Design	Hoop Associates
Printed in the UK by	Viking Associates
UK charity registration number 1055436	

Foreword

A comparative perspective on peace agreements

Christine Bell

Christine Bell is Director of the Centre for International and Comparative Human Rights Law, Queens University of Belfast and a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission set up under the Belfast Agreement. She is currently writing a book on peace agreements, human rights and international law.

The 1990s have been both the decade of ethnic conflict and the decade of the peace process. A number of high profile peace agreements such as those in South Africa, the Middle East and Northern Ireland ended what had seemed to be intractable conflicts and symbolized the possibility of historic compromise on the road towards a just and lasting peace. The reality is that agreements wax and wane, are negotiated and are implemented, or collapse, stall and are renegotiated. The Accord series therefore provides a vital service to those in conflict situations who seek to look beyond their own process and to understand its patterns and rhythms, hopes and failures, in a comparative context. While narrative accounts of a conflict can be useful, too often the documentary record of its agreements can be difficult to track down. Yet it is in the detail of such agreements that devices for compromise, which are capable of being transferred from one process to another, can be found. In Northern Ireland, for example, the device of 'sufficient consensus' – that any proposal needs the agreement of a majority of each side to be accepted – was borrowed from South Africa's peace negotiations and incorporated into the structure agreed for devolved government, providing a crucial safeguard for both Irish Nationalist (Catholic) and British Unionist (Protestant) communities.

While a few agreements have grabbed world headlines, a wider comparison indicates that such agreements often mark a breakthrough in a process rather than a definitive solution. They are inevitably preceded and succeeded by other agreements. Most peace processes leave a complex documentary trail as different issues are dealt with at different stages, as political actors come and go, as agreements are accepted and rejected, and as agreements themselves begin to shape the conflict.



A classification of peace agreements

Peace agreements can loosely be categorized in three stages. In the first stage, pre-negotiation agreements deal with how to get everyone to the negotiating table. Issues that typically need to be dealt with include: the return of negotiators from exile or their release from prison; the safeguarding of future physical integrity and freedom from imprisonment; and the limitations on the conduct of the war while negotiations take place. These matters can be addressed by amnesties for negotiators, ceasefire agreements, human rights protections and monitoring violations of both ceasefires and human rights. Such agreements often set the agenda for talks as parties begin to sound out the other side's positions. Often pre-negotiation agreements are not inclusive but form bilateral agreements between some of the players.

The second stage involves what may be called framework or substantive agreements which tend to include the main groups involved in waging the war by military means. They begin to set out a framework for resolving the substantive issues of the dispute. The agreement usually reaffirms a commitment to non-violent means for resolving the conflict, begins to address some of the consequences of the conflict (such as prisoners, refugees, emergency legislation and human rights violations) and provides for interim arrangements on the exercise of power. It sets an agenda, and possibly a timetable, for reaching a more permanent resolution of substantive issues such as self-determination, democratization and elections, policing and security, armed forces, demobilization and disarmament, rights protection and reconstruction. These framework agreements may or may not hold. Even when signed up to by all parties they may come to an abrupt standstill due to the death or assassination of one of the parties, as happened in Rwanda and Israel, or to a change in those in power, or to a lull that often accompanies an election campaign. Thus agreements are often renegotiated to alter the timing or sequencing of the framework or even substantive issues. Peace processes may have a number of framework agreements and the

distinction between pre-negotiation agreements and framework agreements may be unclear and to some extent artificial.

The final stage is the implementation of agreements which develops aspects of the framework, fleshing out the detail. By their nature implementation agreements involve new negotiations and often in practice see a measure of renegotiation as parties test whether they can claw back concessions made at an earlier stage. Implementation agreements typically include all of the parties to the framework agreement.

Agreements do not, of course, fit neatly into the above classification. Pre-negotiation agreements often do include an agenda-setting element that begins to create the framework for how the process will be continued. Agreements which are intended to be substantive, but where a key party is excluded, reneges after signing, or signs and is then ousted from power, may better be thought of as pre-negotiation agreements.

Human rights – a central issue

In many of the more successful agreements, human rights protections have formed a central part of the peace blueprint. These protections play different roles at different stages of the process. At the pre-negotiation stage humanitarian standards and human rights monitoring can play a part in limiting the conflict and creating the minimal level of trust needed for the parties to engage in dialogue. At the framework stage, human rights standards can change a zero-sum game where the sides fight over political power, to one that contains 'win-win' elements. For example, a robust individual rights framework can create a society where neither side is penalized on the basis of ethnicity or national identity, no matter who is in power or where borders are drawn. Accord's next issue will focus on Northern Ireland. The Belfast Agreement aimed not only to provide for equality of individuals, but equality of national groupings, affirming both the aspiration of

Union with Britain and of Union with Ireland as equally legitimate. It set up a framework which implicitly acknowledged that absolute sovereignty is a thing of the past and pure majoritarianism is recognized as an impoverished form of representation. When this is recognized a whole set of options open up which can simultaneously be accepted by both sides as consistent with their (opposing) demands or, better still, as beginning to transcend the national dispute in its traditional form.

At some point, most societies face crises in the implementation of peace agreements. In their different ways Georgia–Abkhazia and Northern Ireland highlight this. These crises may be inherent in prevailing approaches to negotiating peace agreements which focus on political elites and outside pressures. This often results in an agreement rooted in word formulations that mean different things to different people. Not enough attention is given to how the agreement will be implemented and who will be involved. Failure to implement agreements can generate a political vacuum and lead to further violence. Unofficial initiatives can provide outlets for creative thinking to overcome obstacles and generate support for agreements on the ground. These ideas can filter through processes to agreements and can even earn civic society a place at the negotiating table or representation in new structures. It may be helpful to approach peace agreements in terms of formulation and evaluation, not as one-off settlements which succeed or fail, but as documents which can begin to provide a common language for the conflict and as structures through which it can be continually negotiated in a non-violent way.

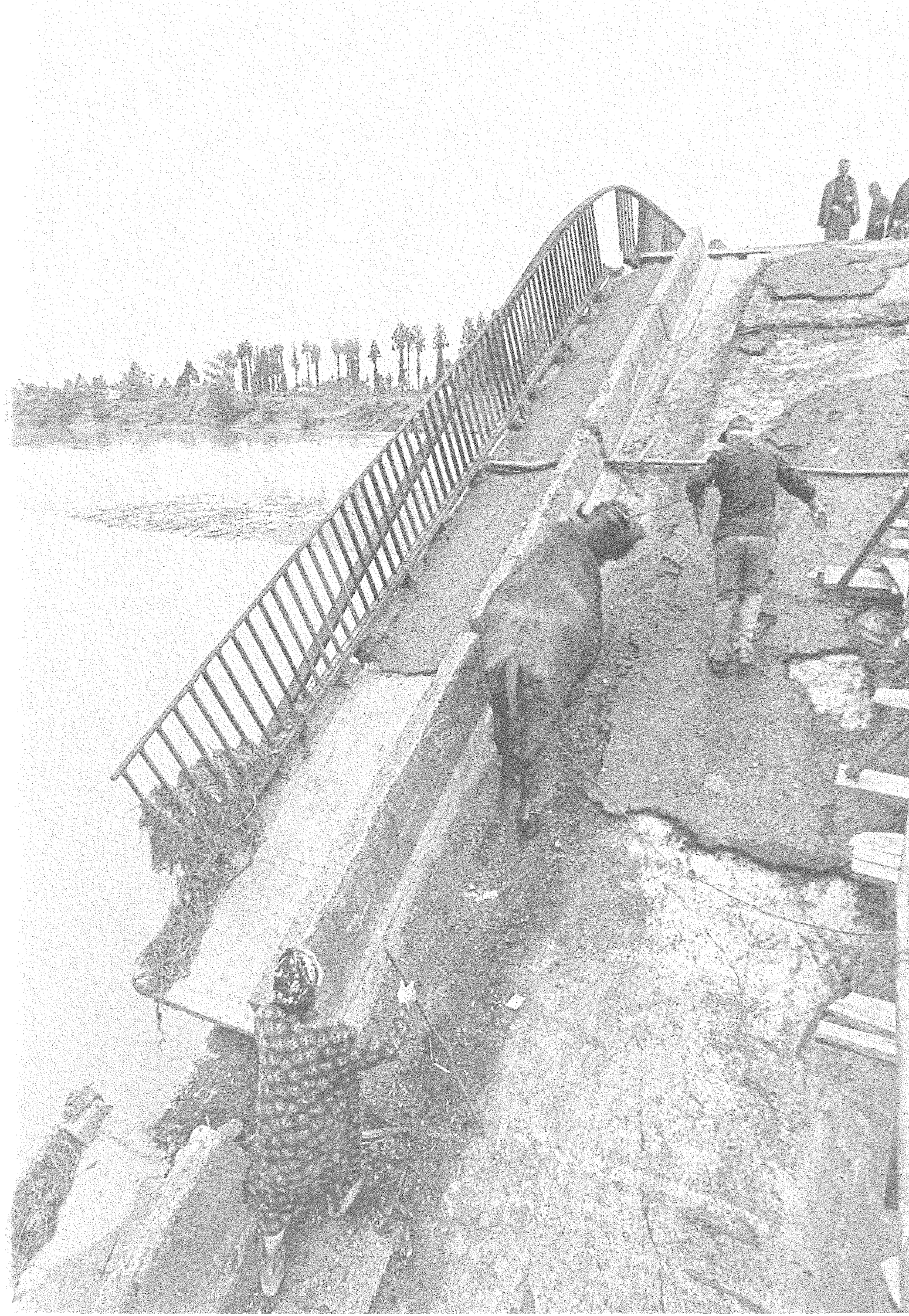
Introduction

Trapped between war and peace

Jonathan Cohen

Jonathan Cohen is a Programme Associate of Conciliation Resources. Previously he was Deputy Director of the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations in The Hague, working with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. In conjunction with the Berghof Centre and UNV he has facilitated a number of training and dialogue meetings with participants from the Caucasus.

The collapse of the Soviet Union generated instability throughout the Caucasus and rapidly undermined established political structures and economic practices. Long suppressed aspirations were unleashed and, more than any other of the newly independent states that arose from the debris of the Soviet Union, Georgia became the location of a series of violent conflicts. The conflict over Abkhazia has proved the most intractable of these. An unstable stalemate has marked relations between Abkhazia and Georgia since a ceasefire in May 1994 formally brought an end to the thirteen-month war of 1992–93. Negotiations have oscillated between dialogue and deadlock, punctuated by periods of heightened tension, which in May 1998 almost resulted in full-scale military conflagration. A framework agreement was signed early in the peace process, but it has been subject to conflicting interpretations. Subsequent exchanges of draft proposals and counter-proposals have rarely been able to address the fundamental issues separating the sides. While Georgia and Abkhazia are not inclined towards a renewal of war the efforts of international organizations, individual states and non-governmental organizations have failed to shift the process towards resolution. There is little common ground for a resolution of the underlying conflict on the political status of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz demand sovereignty; Georgia is prepared to grant autonomy within an asymmetric federation. Georgia requires the safe return of people displaced by the conflict before the issue of Abkhazia's status can be resolved; the Abkhaz authorities demand the determination of the political and legal status of Abkhazia before the issue of the displaced can be resolved, fearing that large-scale repatriation would leave the Abkhaz in a minority within Abkhazia.



This issue of *Accord* explores the context in which negotiations have taken place, the needs and fears of Georgians and Abkhaz and the way in which different actors have intervened. The key texts, reproduced here, reveal a negotiation process that has grappled with the conflicting interests and visions of Georgians and Abkhaz. The texts also display the complexity of negotiations conducted under the auspices of the UN but with the very active involvement of a regional power, the Russian Federation, which has had an ambiguous involvement in the generation of the conflict and as a mediator. The setbacks encountered suggest that sustainable peace requires far more than a political settlement. Economic reconstruction, social and political justice, demilitarization and the realization of security, reconciliation and the healing of traumatized societies are also vital. These issues are difficult to pin down, especially when the mistrust the parties have for the long-term intentions of the other undermines the search for political accommodation.

Challenges ahead

The psychological and political inheritance of the Soviet period as well as the war exert a powerful grip on the peace process. If sustainable peace is to emerge from the cycle of violence a number of contentious issues will have to be tackled. Whether Georgians and Abkhaz can be convinced that they have not lost what they fought for or that security priorities are not compromised is questionable. But this will be critical to the achievement of a settlement that is not short-lived.

Conflicting perceptions of territorial integrity and self-determination bedevil the negotiations process. Confederal, federal and autonomy-based solutions have been proposed, but the long-term implications for political and financial accountability, social policy, policing and foreign policy have been left unclear. If popular respect for politicians and thus confidence in an official peace process is to be strengthened governance at central and local levels will have to be rethought.

The peace process has by and large been the preserve of the political elite, yet marginalizing the public from the process is dangerous. Communities have been in turn mobilized by war and rendered passive by the socio-economic burdens of transition. As a result they may not be ready to compromise or abandon animosities cultivated by the media and nationalistic political leaders. However, engaging the public in the peace process is difficult when government structures and civil society remain weak. Abkhaz fear of cultural extinction and Georgian concerns about political disintegration and Russian interference make leaders cautious about compromise. As long as vocal groups on both sides harbour aspirations of victory compromise will be difficult

to achieve. Nevertheless, policies based on ethnic inclusiveness and political openness would help to foster long-term stability by channelling conflict into politics and away from violence.

Justice and reconciliation

Conflicting perceptions of justice in terms of history, atrocities committed during the war and the needs of marginalized and displaced people make compromise difficult. Finding ways to process the past that will lead to mutual understanding rather than recrimination will not be easy. To date political leaders have not been inclined to promote reconciliation. Whether this is a question of conviction or an attempt to balance competing internal constituencies is difficult to discern. The association of justice with vengeance does not help. Neither does the fact that holding the perpetrators of wartime atrocities to account will be costly in political and financial terms.

Expectations are influenced by hopes that peace and development can be delivered by external actors – by the UN, Russia, the United States or even NATO. Yet intervention to date has stabilized the conflict but not moved it towards resolution. At best intervention will create conditions that are conducive to the parties themselves reaching an accord. The transportation of oil from the Caspian basin is another external factor that will lubricate change. This will inevitably bring more benefits to some than to others and the possibility of further conflict as well as development. The scope for political manoeuvre is limited by the fact that there is no decisive peace dividend. Demands on international aid to promote reconstruction will be considerable and will have to be met in a complex and unstable regional context.

Politicians and their constituencies on both sides need to engage more thoroughly with the challenge of democratization, economic co-operation and new political relationships as a real incentive for different communities to live together. However, the existence of vested interests that might not benefit from peace, the psychological heritage of separation that is accumulating and the lack of sufficiently strong peace constituencies make it difficult to turn war fatigue into peace hunger.

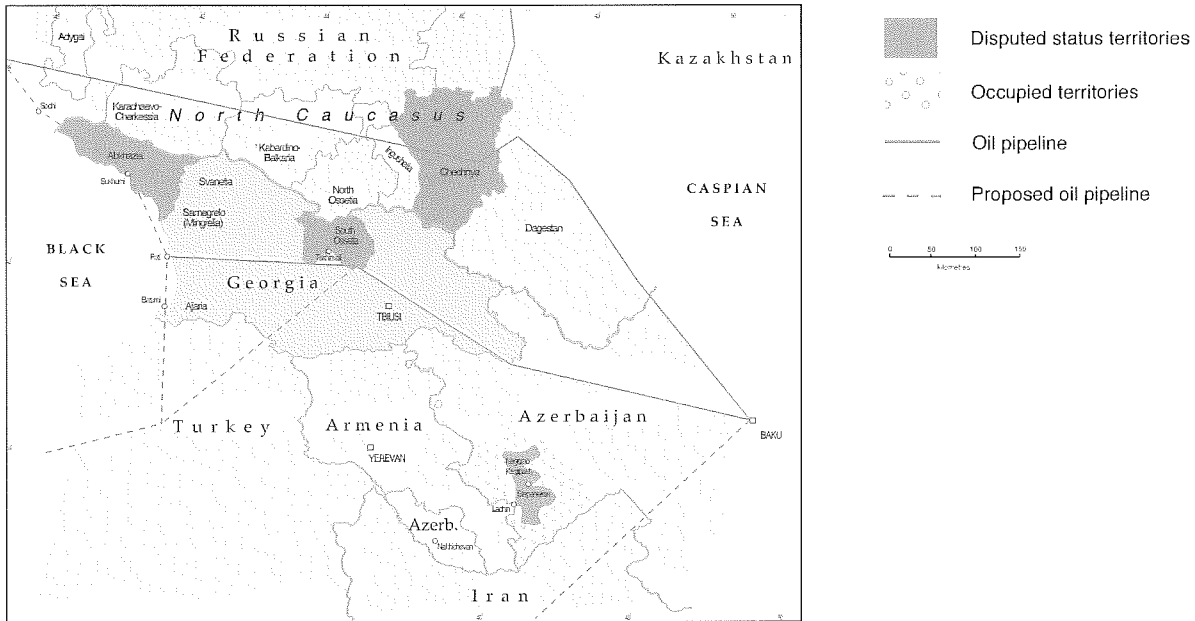
Note on spelling

Abkhaz and Georgians spell a number of place names differently. For example, where the Abkhaz use Sukhum, Gal and Ingur, the Georgians use Sukhumi, Gali and Inguri. In the article by Liana Kvarchelia Abkhaz spelling is used, otherwise spellings that are normally employed in international discourse on Georgia are used. This is done without taking a position on the underlying political debates concerning language usage.

The Caucasus

The border between Ingushetia and Chechnya is unconfirmed.

Based on: GEOATLAS WORLD VECTOR



The Georgia–Abkhazia conflict zone

Based on: UNITED NATIONS Map No. 3837 Rev. 21 July 1999



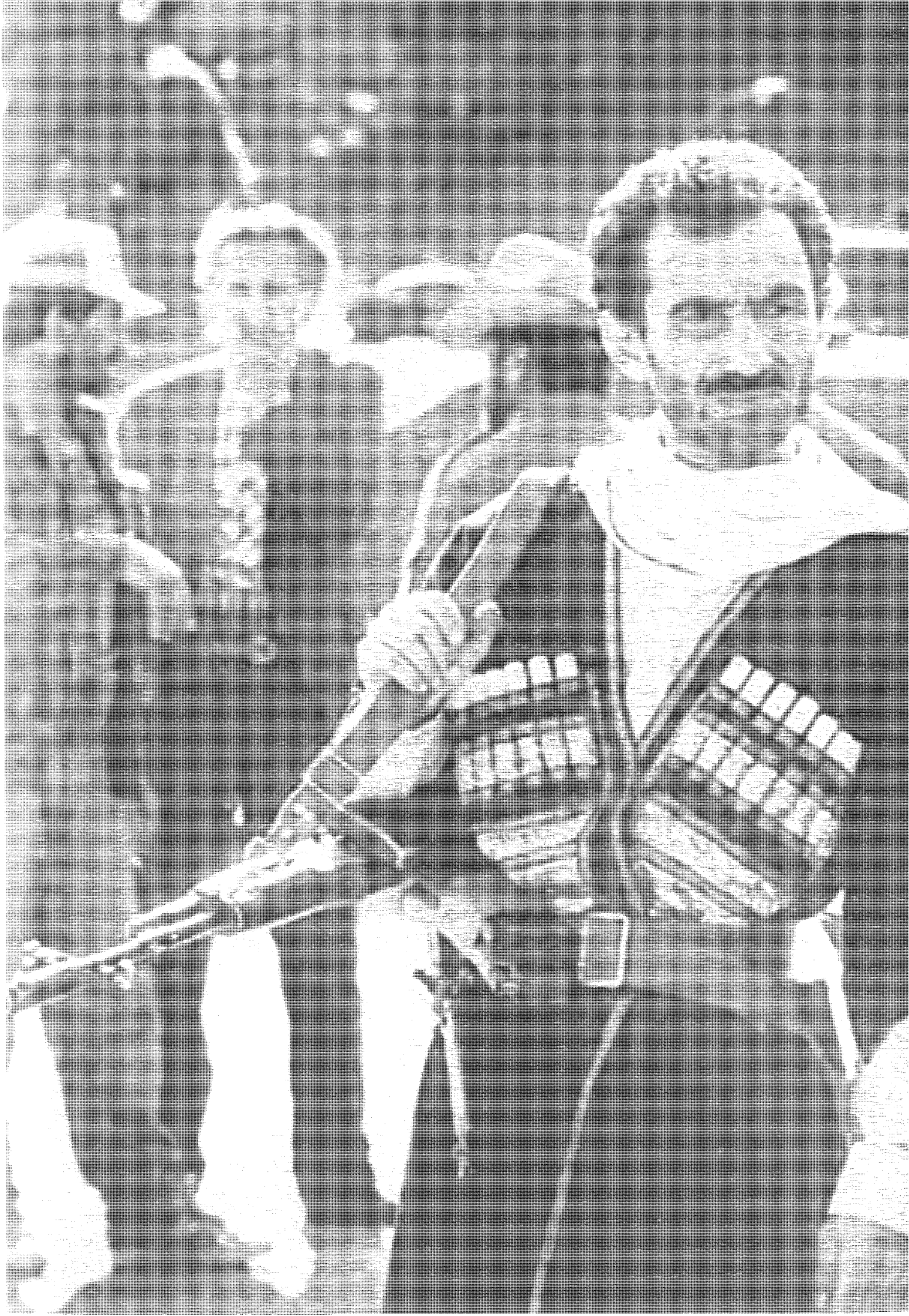
The roots of the conflict

Bruno Coppieters

Bruno Coppieters is Associate Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and has facilitated a number of academic dialogue initiatives with individuals from Georgia and Abkhazia.

Before the war of 1992–93 Abkhazia had a population of half a million. Squeezed between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains it had been known as the Soviet Riviera in the 1970s and 1980s, when millions of tourists came every year to enjoy its beaches and subtropical climate. Its agriculture supplied Soviet markets with tobacco, precious woods and citrus fruits. At the end of the 1980s, however, this peaceful area became a violent zone of conflict in the Soviet Union and Abkhazia became a symbol for the failure of Soviet policies to accommodate competing ethnic claims. What went wrong with Soviet policy and why did Abkhazia in particular become the scene of a bloody war that cost several thousand lives?

Soviet nationalities policy granted political status to the major nationalities which composed the Soviet state and ranked them in a hierarchical federal system. Their place in the hierarchy depended on a number of factors such as population size, geographical location and political leverage with the Communist Party elite. In the Soviet ethnofederal construction, the union republics had the highest status, followed by the autonomous republics with the autonomous regions in the third rank. The political status of all units could change over time according to circumstances and the political considerations of the Moscow party leadership. Each national group which had received the right to constitute one of these units was recognized as its 'titular nation'. The Abkhaz were thus the titular nation of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia and the Georgians the titular nation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia. In the Soviet view, this type of system could not be called ethnocentric, despite the political privileges given to the titular nations, because the Communist Party and its internationalist ideology claimed to preserve the rights of all minorities and all citizens,



independent of their nationality. The centralist exercise of political power was seen as the most effective means of avoiding discrimination in a federal state. With the disintegration of the Communist Party at the end of the 1980s, this institutional guarantee for minorities disappeared.

With the democratization of the Soviet system and the collapse of centralized power, the legitimacy of the federal order and hierarchical relations between union republics, autonomous republics and autonomous regions became one of the main subjects of dispute. Some national movements in autonomous republics and regions refused to be considered part of a union republic. In most of the Russian Federation, these conflicts were settled by mutual agreement, but in the North and South Caucasus the crisis of legitimacy led to political tension and in some cases to violent clashes between the capitals of the union republics and their subordinate units. In Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the legitimacy of the Soviet federal hierarchy was challenged by all sides. The political leadership of the autonomous region of South Ossetia strove to upgrade the status of the region through reunification with the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic (which lay within the Russian Federation). In a counter move Tbilisi abolished South Ossetia's autonomous status in 1990. Georgian nationalists considered such autonomy as a Soviet instrument to divide and rule its dependencies in the South Caucasus. Furthermore the Georgians did not regard the Ossetians as indigenous.

In the Georgian view, the Abkhaz were different. They had the right to preserve their political status as an indigenous people, provided that the rights of the Georgian population in Abkhazia were significantly extended. Georgians made up some forty-five per cent of the population and were challenging the political privileges of the Abkhaz titular nation, which comprised only eighteen per cent. The political leadership in Tbilisi did not see any reason why the Soviet hierarchical system should not be preserved and even enforced after the achievement of independence. The politically privileged position of the Abkhaz minority was unacceptable to them. The leaders of the Abkhaz national movement refused to acknowledge the authority of the Georgian political leadership in Tbilisi and before the dissolution of the USSR had already striven to upgrade Abkhazia's status from autonomous republic to union republic. After its dissolution they demanded equal status with Georgia in a loose federative framework. This form of withdrawal from the authority of the Georgian state would, in the view of the Georgians and of Abkhaz radicals, have paved the way for full secession and the establishment of an independent Abkhaz state.

The conflict over political status reached its climax with the war of 1992–93 when Georgian troops, consisting mainly of paramilitaries, intervened in the political conflict between the two main nationalities of Abkhazia. They were driven out by Abkhaz troops supported by nationalist movements from the North Caucasus and by the Russian military. As a consequence of this victory the Abkhaz authorities attempted to consolidate their position by changing the demographic situation. The majority of the Georgian inhabitants of Abkhazia fled to Georgia and these internally displaced persons (IDPs) were not allowed to return. To date no solution has been found to the political and humanitarian dilemmas at the heart of the conflict. Russian troops were deployed on the ceasefire line between the parties in 1993, formally becoming the CISPKF in 1994. The United Nations has sent military observers to the conflict zone and is mediating between the two sides, with Russia acting as facilitator, but negotiations on political status have not led to significant results. Since 1997 the negotiation process has concentrated on economic and humanitarian co-operation, also without substantial progress. Indeed, in May 1998 violence erupted in the Gali region of southern Abkhazia again, causing a major setback in relations. Over the previous three years the spontaneous return of IDPs to the Gali region had, in the Abkhaz view, provided cover for Georgian guerrillas. Clashes between them and Abkhaz militia led to a resumption of hostilities, resulting in a new wave of IDPs fleeing the region. In order to avoid the accusation of ethnic cleansing, the Abkhaz authorities began to organize the return of Georgian IDPs to the Gali region from March 1999 but refused any direct Georgian involvement in securing their safety. The Georgian government considers bilateral agreements giving security guarantees for the returning IDPs to be vital. The Abkhaz government, however, sees the lifting of the CIS-imposed blockade as a necessary first step in a process of normalization.

There is no commonly accepted analysis for the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict among either those who are politically involved or among outside observers. Different explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but each explanation has specific political implications which determine the type of resolution that is most appropriate.

Understanding nationhood

The conflict may be seen primarily as a consequence of conflicting views and of existing fears with regard to the preservation of language, culture and national identity. The Georgians feared the Russification of Abkhazia by cultural means and the loss of the 'historical' Georgian character of this region. They criticized the close links between the Abkhaz leadership and Moscow. The Abkhaz feared that the Georgianization of Abkhazia, which in their view was far

advanced under the Soviet regime, would be completed through the integration of Abkhazia into a Georgian framework. They were concerned that a rise in the number of Georgians through further 'colonization' would lead to the exclusion of the Abkhaz from political power in their own homeland and limit their rights. In the view of both parties, political sovereignty – which meant in practice full control of the state apparatus of Abkhazia – was the sole instrument to counter that fear of extinction. Concepts such as shared sovereignty had no practical meaning for politicians whose experience was restricted to Soviet practice. The Leninist regime had never recognized any form of division of powers as legitimate. A federal division of political power into various levels of authority with separate jurisdictions was unknown in the Soviet Union.

Those citing fear of cultural extinction as the cause of the conflict emphasize the ethnic and cultural understanding of nationhood by political elites. The Georgian and Abkhaz concept of the nation is based on language, religion and common descent and emerged as a consequence of the modernization of the region at the end of the nineteenth century. The debates between historians and linguists from both communities on national descent were linked to territorial claims on Abkhazia. Some Georgian historians claimed that the Abkhaz had settled in the area only a few centuries ago. From the Abkhaz perspective, Georgians had settled in Abkhazia as a result of Tsarist and Soviet colonization policies. According to this type of explanation, the national projects which both communities developed included claims of an exclusive right to sovereignty over Abkhaz territory. The root of the conflict is seen in the ethnic nature of Georgian and Abkhaz nationalism, which was bound to have explosive results as the communist regime weakened. Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika did indeed lead to a radical redistribution of power between the national elites. The leaderships of Georgia and Abkhazia proved incapable of reaching agreement in renegotiating their political relations after the disappearance of an overarching Soviet framework, which left the use of force an increasingly likely possibility.

This focus on ethnic nationalism calls for a solution based on the creation of a more civic type of national consciousness with individuals voluntarily associating themselves in a state, and with common values and democratic institutions as binding forces. The democratization of political institutions and the creation of a civil society are seen as part of an overall strategy to create new links between individuals which are not based on ethnicity. Scholars of nationalism would, however, stress that idioms of nationhood found in Georgia and Abkhazia have characteristics which tend to persist throughout the whole process of nation building and which change only very slowly. But it is also true that a peace settlement and the creation of a new institutional framework in Georgia

and Abkhazia may have a positive influence on the political practices and attitudes of the elites. Their search for legitimacy will require a more pluralistic, assimilationist and inclusive understanding of nationhood as opposed to the previous exclusive idiom. The Georgian authorities have already had to respond to the universalistic legal obligations imposed by organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. Although not recognized by these organizations, the Abkhaz government is unwilling to be seen as a pariah in terms of the observance of human rights standards. It also has to find legitimacy among the Armenian, Russian and Greek communities in Abkhazia and integrate the returning Georgian IDPs. A peace settlement may further encourage a gradual transformation of the state and nation-building process on a civic rather than an ethnic basis.

Geopolitical factors

The lack of legitimacy of the new states that emerged on the post-Soviet scene and the eruption of violent conflicts between national communities may be understood as a consequence of geopolitical factors which are not ideological. According to such a perspective, the conflict between Georgians and Abkhaz was generated first by the Soviet and then by the Russian authorities in a desperate attempt to retain their hegemony on their southern borders. The key to the solution of the conflict is therefore to be found in Moscow. This explanation is based on the presupposition of a continuity in imperial domination of the periphery by the centre from Tsarist through to the Soviet and Russian political eras. The conflict between the Georgians and Abkhaz, which is so detrimental to the interests of both communities, should be seen as a consequence of a deliberate divide and rule policy designed in Moscow. In 1992–93 pro-Abkhaz forces in Russia would have supported the Abkhaz secessionists in order to take revenge on the Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze who, as Soviet foreign minister, had, in their view, sold out all Soviet interests to the West. This Russian imperial policy secured Georgia's entry into the CIS after its military defeat in September 1993 as well as the stationing of Russian bases on Georgian territory. Russia might, according to this type of explanation, have used the conflict to influence the negotiations between Western oil companies and governments on the routing of oil pipelines from the Caspian region to the world market. One of these routes – the so-called western route – passes through Georgia to the Black Sea port of Poti. A destabilization of the western route would have made the northern route, which passes through the North Caucasus in the Russian Federation to Novorossiisk, more attractive. Moreover, an agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia would strengthen the position of nationalistic anti-Russian forces in the Caucasus region and facilitate Georgia's



Source: Gia Chikharashvili

integration into Western political and military structures, which is not in Moscow's interest. NATO's increasing presence in the region through programmes such as Partnership for Peace should not be underestimated in an assessment of Russia's policies. Russia's divide and rule policy would on the other hand gain nothing by allowing Abkhazia to be independent, as this would strengthen instability and separatism in the North Caucasus.

Georgian public discussion focuses almost exclusively on the Russian factor. For Tbilisi, this is useful in mobilizing support among Western powers, which are receptive to the argument that Russia retains imperial ambitions that ought to be counterbalanced with more support to the countries along Russia's southern belt. This approach implies a harmony of interests between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities that would have continued but for outside manipulation, a view that is obviously problematic. The contrast between the harmonious relations that are supposed to have existed in the past and the violent character of the war focuses exclusively on external factors of conflict. To say that the key to the solution of the conflict is to be found in Moscow distracts attention from a serious discussion of the difficulties in overcoming the antagonistic relations that both communities have been building over a long period. It also impedes a fruitful discussion of the federalization of Georgia. Many believe that granting any form of self-government to Georgia's numerous minorities would give Russia an instrument with which to exploit ethnic divisions in the country.

The critique of an exclusively external approach to the conflict does not invalidate the geopolitical explanation. The poor record of Russian mediation in the conflict is partly due to the fact that Russia has particular interests to defend in the region. Russia's past as a colonial power makes it poorly suited for the role of peacemaker. Both parties to the conflict depend on Moscow, but at the same time have a deep distrust towards its policies and intentions. The Georgians blame Moscow for the failure of the negotiations, while the Abkhaz blame Moscow for the economic blockade.

Any perspective of a political settlement to the conflict based on federal principles has to take into account the geopolitical context. No federal system may be considered stable if outside powers constantly intervene. Some authors therefore plead for a policy of neutrality for Georgia and Abkhazia. Only by refusing to be part of a 'great game' between external powers would both communities be able to reach a stable federal arrangement in which they would not constantly seek external support.

Another option would be the constitution of a larger framework of political integration for the Caucasian countries which would include Russia and which would receive support from the West including the USA. Both options presuppose that a policy based on the balance of power between stronger states would destabilize any political arrangement between less powerful states such as Georgia and Abkhazia.

Demographic change in Abkhazia 1897–1989

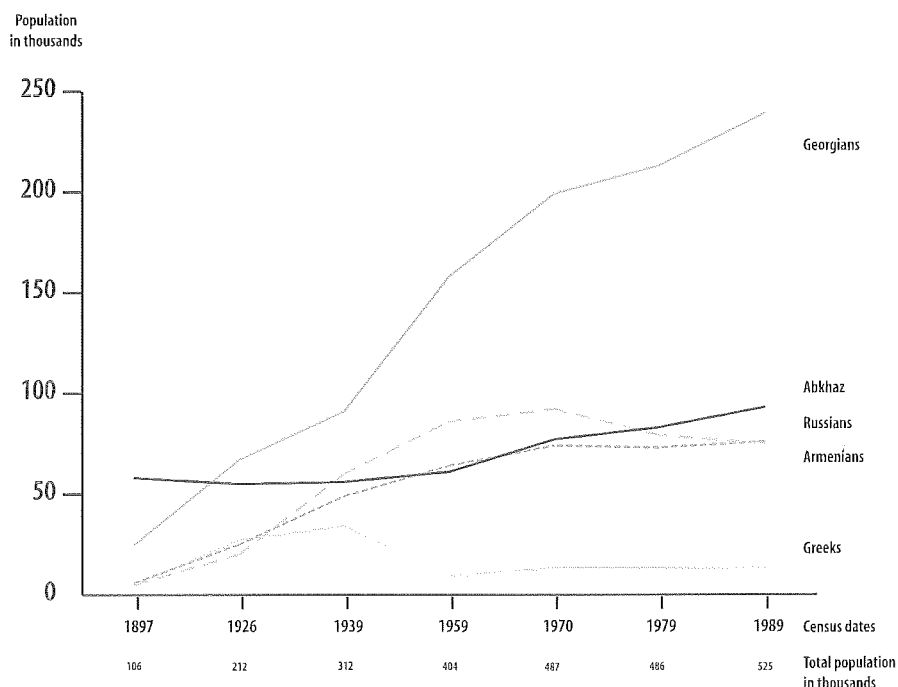
These census figures are disputed on a number of grounds including the way in which ethnic groups have been defined.

By 1992 the population of Abkhazia was estimated to have been 535,000. Numbers displaced by the war are disputed.

The UN Needs Assessment Mission in 1998 estimated the population of Abkhazia at between 180,000 and 220,000, whereas Abkhaz sources present a figure nearer 300,000.

In 1989 the Georgian population was 5,443,000 but large-scale economic out-migration occurred in the early- to mid-1990s.

Source: Russian, Soviet and Georgian population censuses



Legitimate rule

Just and legitimate rule are crucial concepts for explaining a political conflict and for its resolution. In the case of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict, historians have extensively researched the historic grievances of both communities. The French historian Papin described in 1824 the ‘state of perpetual hostility’ in which the Abkhaz were living ‘with their neighbours the Russians from Doudjouk-Kal and the Mingrelians’. Events such as the Caucasian war, which ended in 1864, the deportation of a large part of the Abkhaz population by the Tsarist regime in the wake of the failed uprisings of 1866 and 1877, the Georgian colonization of the country and the establishment of Soviet rule, are grievances still held by Abkhaz today. The subjugation of the Abkhaz by stronger powers such as Russia, Georgia or the Soviet regime failed to secure their loyalty even though it was usually enshrined in some kind of treaty. The demise of the Soviet Empire could be seen, according to this type of explanation, as having created a window of opportunity for the Abkhaz leadership.

At the end of 1991 Georgia was plunged into a civil war in which President Zviad Gamsakhurdia was ousted by his former supporters and later replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs. In Abkhazia the majority of the Georgian population had supported Gamsakhurdia, and was, moreover, involved in a severe conflict with the Abkhaz representatives. None of these competing authorities was strong enough to impose its will on the territories of Georgia or Abkhazia. No arrangement could be found which could be considered legitimate. An attempt to overcome the destabilizing consequences of rule by the largest ethnic group was

sought in a system of ethnic quotas for the elections to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, implemented in 1991 under Gamsakhurdia but considered ‘racist’ and a form of ‘apartheid’ by his successor Shevardnadze. As a consequence, the power relations between the various political actors in Georgia and Abkhazia had to be measured by other than democratic and peaceful means. The war should be seen as a result of the failure of the previous agreements and institutions to gain acceptance.

Explaining the roots of the conflict in terms of legitimacy calls for the creation of a federative system – a ‘common state’ as it has been called in the negotiations – which would be based on the principles of equality, liberty and self-government for all major national communities. The legitimacy of such a federative arrangement would depend on the ability of both parties to make compromises that are acceptable to public opinion. Institutionalization on its own, however legally sophisticated, could not survive without popular support.

The negotiations on political status may be combined with the other two conflict resolution strategies – the development of a more civic approach to state and nation building and a neutral foreign policy. The creation of a pluralistic and democratic ethnofederal system, accommodating the claims of all national communities, could prevent the destructive consequences of ethnic nationalism. The parties to the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict have presently failed, however, to change the logic of confrontation. It may be years before all those who consider Abkhazia to be their homeland are able to accept the simple truth that dialogue and accommodation may be more rewarding than the present stalemate.

Georgian perspectives

Ghia Nodia

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The Georgian government contends that Abkhazia is legally part of Georgia and has autonomous status within it. This position is in part grounded on Georgian acceptance of the legality of the Soviet constitution under which the Abkhaz ASSR was part of the Georgian SSR. As one of the successor states of the USSR Georgia, as defined by its Soviet borders, was recognized by the international community. While this legal reality defines the international perception of the conflict, it is not sufficient for the parties as neither fully accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet institutional structure. The current Georgian state derives its legitimacy from the independent Georgian Democratic Republic of 1918–21 that was recognized by a number of Western powers and Communist Russia. Abkhazia was part of that state with the 1921 Georgian Constitution providing for its autonomous status. In 1991 Georgian independence was restored rather than instituted anew because the 1921 annexation by Communist Russia is considered by Georgians to be an act of military aggression. This is important because Abkhaz claims to independence are partly based on the idea that the status of Abkhazia within Georgia was the result of an arbitrary decision made in 1931 by Joseph Stalin, an ethnic Georgian, and hence could be regarded as an act of Georgian aggression. Georgians insist that Abkhazia was never completely separate from Georgia in Soviet times (accepting that the 1931 decision was a demotion for Abkhazia) and that since all changes in Abkhazia's status and ethnic demography were implemented by a foreign occupying power Georgia cannot therefore be held responsible for them.

Georgia justified its deployment of troops in Abkhazia in August 1992 by the need to guard communications links in the conflict between the new Shevardnadze

ABKHAZIA
IS THE
HOME PROBLEM
OF
GEORGIA





Source: Peter Nasmyth

government and supporters of the recently ousted President Gamsakhurdia. It argues that attempts by aggressive Abkhaz separatists' to disrupt this operation provoked the war but as political conflict with Sukhumi already existed it is reasonable to assume that when Georgian troops entered Abkhazia they were intent on 'solving' the Abkhaz question. Formally, the Georgian assessment of the episode has not changed but Georgian leaders, including President Shevardnadze, have recently admitted partial responsibility for the war. The lion's share of blame is, however, apportioned to Tengiz Kitovani, then leader of the National Guard. His actions in Abkhazia allegedly defied the political authorities and forced Shevardnadze to accept the war as a fait accompli.

Although the Georgian government does not recognize the Ardzinba government because of the conflict and the ethnic cleansing that removed almost all ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, it acknowledges that Ardzinba is the only

possible interlocutor at the negotiation table. Of the two major issues to be negotiated – the political status of Abkhazia and the return of the refugees – Georgia gives priority to the latter.

The refugee issue

The return of the refugees is the more pressing issue. Their ongoing suffering represents a potentially destabilizing factor for Georgia. While Georgian and Abkhaz positions on status are far apart, the return of refugees, at least to the Gali region, seems a realistic goal. There is also an obvious strategic consideration. If all or most of the refugees return they will outnumber the Abkhaz, and the secessionist government will have even less legitimacy to speak on behalf of the whole population of Abkhazia when the question of status is decided. This is precisely why the Sukhumi government is so reluctant to accept the refugees. The prospect of mass return also plays on

Abkhaz fears for their cultural and economic security, especially beyond the Gali region, where the pre-war population had been mixed and bitter memories of brutal fighting makes future cohabitation especially problematic. The Georgian government insists that adequate security guarantees be provided for the returnees and the hostilities of May 1998 emphasize the need for this. In practice, forces other than Abkhaz will have to provide security, but to date the Abkhaz find this unacceptable. The decision of Ardzinba's government to start the return of refugees to the Gali region unilaterally from 1 March 1999 was dismissed by the Georgian government as propaganda. To date most refugees have not taken up the offer of return because of inadequate security guarantees, continued harassment by the Abkhaz militia and a reluctance to take up Abkhaz citizenship.

The status issue

Georgia's major concession regarding status has been to accept a federal solution. Although details may vary as negotiations proceed Georgia's bottom line proposal is that Abkhazia should have autonomous rights within a (probably asymmetrical) federal framework while retaining the major governmental functions which are held by the centre in most federations. This is contrary to Abkhaz proposals to have a federation (or confederation) so loose that it makes the idea of a common state meaningless for Georgians. However, no substantive discussion has ever taken place (at least not publicly) on the kind of federal (or confederal) solution that could be applied. This may be due to a lack of political will to change the situation or a belief that playing with terms like 'federation' or 'confederation' will result in an advantage over time.

Military and economic pressures

In the wake of the war the Georgian leadership has repeatedly expressed its commitment to a peaceful, negotiated solution which it has pursued through talks mediated by the UN and Russia, as well as through bilateral talks. Despite Shevardnadze's having said he does not rule out force in the event of political failure, a meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba in Tbilisi in August 1997 resulted in a pledge not to use force, since when the Georgian government has refrained from any new threat of force. Nevertheless, in southern Abkhazia a Georgian guerrilla movement has developed. Despite consistent accusations that the Georgian government backs the guerrillas, both the government and guerrilla representatives deny any connection. The government has not condemned the guerrillas, rather it says their activities are the legitimate response of desperate people. As a result of the events in May 1998 and subsequent negotiations between August and October of that year, the Georgian government accepted a more active role in

'fighting terrorism' in Abkhazia. Some commentators saw this as an indirect recognition of their past support for the guerrilla movement. Frequent criticism of the Georgian government for 'persecuting Georgian partisans', voiced by advocates of a tougher line, however, suggests that the Georgian government is no longer using the partisans to gain political advantage.

Whatever the real involvement of the Georgian government with the guerrilla movement, it seems clear that a new military campaign is not considered an option for the foreseeable future. It is widely understood that a new war would undermine Georgia's prospects for economic development and have dire consequences for the country's international standing, especially in the aftermath of accession to the Council of Europe. With no military option, economic pressure and international isolation of the Sukhumi government are the major levers at Georgia's disposal. The Georgian government demands the maintenance of the economic sanctions against Abkhazia instituted by the CIS at Georgian insistence. Some voices in Georgia oppose these sanctions saying that government should not cause deprivation among its own citizens. The authorities appear to be open to the idea of lifting them – but only in response to concessions from the Abkhaz side on the refugee issue. In order to reach such a deal (to which the parties were reportedly close in October 1998) Georgia would not only use economic sanctions as a stick but also add co-operative economic projects as a carrot.

The Russian role

Georgian–Russian relations constitute the most controversial part of the problem. Nobody in Georgia doubts that Russia helped the Abkhaz during the war and continues to use the conflict as a lever to influence Georgia. Russia's central role as a mediator is easily construed as damaging to Georgian interests. At the same time, the government believes that to exclude Russia from the conflict resolution process would be counter-productive as Russia still has the resources to destabilize Georgia either by opting for more open support for the Abkhaz or by meddling in other regions of the country.

From late 1993 until early 1995 there was a rapprochement with Russia. Georgia clearly hoped to reach a deal whereby it accepted Russia's military strategic domination, the long-term maintenance of its military bases in Georgia and its role as prime mediator in return for help in regaining Abkhazia. Although Russia never formally undertook this obligation, assurances were reportedly made. The Georgian side implied this in spelling out that an agreement on military bases would come into force only after Georgia regained jurisdiction over Abkhazia.

From Georgia's perspective, Russia failed to fulfil its part of the bargain. From 1995 Georgian policy therefore began to change. While not openly renouncing the 'strategic partnership' nor initially asking for peacekeepers or military bases to leave, Georgia started to use their uncertain status to pressure Russia to support and implement economic sanctions against Abkhazia. The Georgian government began pursuing a strategy to increase international, in particular Western, involvement in the conflict and replace the Russian peacekeepers, in whom they have no trust, with an international force. In 1997 Shevardnadze spoke in favour of using the 'Bosnian model' for settling the conflict. He proposed seeking Security Council legitimization for the use of force to achieve a peace settlement, as in Bosnia, but not that Georgia and Abkhazia should form two separate entities united in a 'Bosnian way'.

Other mediators

The UN is another outside actor involved in mediation and is represented in the region by a military observer mission (UNOMIG) as well as a Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Initially, the Georgian government entertained considerable hopes that the UN would play a decisive role in the conflict settlement; its failure to do so has invited sharp criticism. This failure can be explained by, on the one hand, Russia's reluctance to give up its leading role in the conflict and, on the other, by insufficient interest from the major Western powers. As this interest increased, a Friends of Georgia group comprising the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Russia was created but its attempt to change the format of negotiations by taking on a central role for itself was crushed by the obvious Abkhaz and less obvious Russian opposition. More recently other regional countries (Turkey and Greece) have proposed that they play a more active mediating role in co-operation with the UN. While these initiatives have failed to bring substantial change, they are welcomed by the Georgian government as a way of balancing Russia's dominating role in the conflict and increasing the chances of a settlement in the long run.

Retaining commitment to Abkhazia

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the official Georgian position, it is often asked how strong Georgia's commitment is to Abkhazia. With the war lost and the chances of regaining the territory by political or military means at best uncertain, why does Georgia not simply accept secession or a face-saving deal providing for a legal fiction of a 'common state' without any effective Georgian sovereignty? There are several reasons for Georgian persistence.

Probably the most basic reason for Georgian persistence is the way Georgians imagine themselves as a nation.

A nation defines itself, against a backdrop of historical experiences and political opportunities, by the idea of 'country' which individuals collectively hold and by the kind of recognition they expect from the 'world'.

Once constructed and translated into political action, such 'national projects' display amazing persistence: they may be negotiated on the margins, but rarely changed in essence. The way Georgians and Abkhaz constructed their national projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries clashed. On the demise of the Soviet Union this made conflict, though not necessarily bloodshed, inevitable. Georgians overwhelmingly consider Abkhazia to be a legitimate part of their country and attempts to cut it off are linked to a (neo-) imperial Russian conspiracy, just as Abkhaz consider this Georgian position an expression of 'Georgian imperialism'.

The Abkhaz are not the only, or even the largest, ethnic minority in Georgia. At the fall of the Soviet Union there were more Armenians, Azeris, Russians and Ossetians in Georgia than Abkhaz. Compact pockets of mainly Armenians and Azeris live on the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively, while in Adjara the majority of the population is ethnic Georgian of Muslim background. If the Georgian state were to accept the legitimacy of Abkhazia's secession on ethnic grounds the precedent might lead to further disintegration, jeopardizing the viability of the Georgian state, which has already proved weak and vulnerable in its first years of independence.

Many Georgians consider the launching of the war in Abkhazia in 1992 to have been a mistake, and some of them are ashamed of the way Georgian troops (or the unruly militias which fought in the name of the Georgian state) behaved there. But few Georgians, however liberal minded, believe that the Abkhaz cause per se is more just; that the Abkhaz strategy of changing the ethnic demography of Abkhazia by purging Georgians is acceptable; or that Georgians do not have the right to defend what they believe to be their territory. Even those prepared to accept the secession of Abkhazia would do so on pragmatic grounds ('we have lost the war and should accept the consequences') rather than on moral grounds ('the Abkhaz are right and we have to accept this').

There are strong pragmatic reasons for continuing the status quo. Far-reaching and humiliating concessions to the Abkhaz would be extremely unpopular and endanger political stability in Georgia. Opinion polls show that although giving up Abkhazia would be unpopular, and the vast majority of refugees insist on returning, most people consider the economy to be the most urgent issue. This may suggest that the commitment to Abkhazia is not strong, but also that it is possible to live without a final settlement of the Abkhaz issue.

Georgians will only accept fundamental concessions if the alternative is demonstrably disastrous. But it is not absolutely clear in whose favour time is working. On the one hand, the longer Abkhazia stays effectively independent, the more the current status quo will become entrenched and the more Georgian refugees will die, settle elsewhere in Georgia, or give up hope of return. On the other hand, the government can argue that its 'no peace, no war' strategy is working. Owing to international isolation and uncertain prospects for the future, the situation in Abkhazia is steadily deteriorating, and will continue to do so, while Georgia recovers and continues to develop, as political stabilization and economic growth rates appear to confirm. Western influence is growing in the region at the expense of Russian domination. This suggests that the balance of forces will change in Georgia's favour. If this trend is realized the trauma of the war could lose its psychological power, and being part of Georgia again instead of an isolated territory with no prospects could be increasingly attractive to the Abkhaz public. At some point, according to this reasoning, the Abkhaz leadership will have to accept a compromise.

International experience confirms both parties in their current tactics. The lesson of Yugoslavia is that nothing happens until the USA becomes involved. At this point the leaders on both sides will realize that the political costs of failure to reach a settlement are greater than those of making unpopular concessions. Until then, it pays to persist with current policy, not to take premature steps towards the other party, to improve your negotiating position (also by military means if it is opportune), to look for more allies and to promote your cause in the West. The final settlement will depend less on ideas of fairness or on international law than on the durability of the ceasefire line and the midway-point between the demands of the parties.

Prospects for change

Unless there are dramatic changes in the international environment there is little likelihood that Georgia's official position will change in the foreseeable future. But strong pressures from within may have an impact.

The refugee community loses most from the 'no peace, no war' policy and is the source of calls for a tougher line. Tamaz Nadareishvili, chairman of the 'government-in-exile' and the most prominent representative of the refugee population, criticizes the government's commitment to the negotiations process and openly calls for a military solution, strongly supporting the guerrilla movement. He and other leaders of the refugee community are outspoken in calling for the immediate withdrawal of the CISPKF. However, not all refugees trust Nadareishvili and the refugee community has fragmented, possibly

diminishing its political clout. But there is no politically active refugee organization espousing a conciliatory stance, which casts a pall over political debates in Georgia.

While many Georgians would accept a military solution as legitimate, the idea of starting a new war in the absence of a real army is hardly popular. Because of this, Nadareishvili was compelled to invent a vague slogan of returning to Abkhazia – 'not through war, but by force'. Some nationalist parties may lean towards a military solution, but it is too unpopular to become a central issue. Periodically, refugees organize protests either in Tbilisi or Zugdidi, but they are unable to push the Georgian government beyond its general position.

Alternative proposals

While the government is widely criticized for the failure of its Abkhaz policy, hardly any serious alternative proposals have been put forward that are likely to prove acceptable. Ivlian Khaindrava's Republican Party published a proposal for the territorial division of Abkhazia in 1997, but it was not met with enthusiasm on either side. A number of meetings between NGOs have facilitated the exchange of information, provided forums for dialogue and created personal contacts useful for confidence building in the long term, but no alternative plans for resolving the conflict have emerged.

The most encouraging recent sign may be the more active direct negotiations between Georgian and Abkhaz leaders. Intense exchanges between Tbilisi and Sukhumi and a series of reciprocal visits by high-level officials Lordkipanidze and Bagapsh from August to October 1998 brought expectations of a breakthrough on the return of refugees. The agreement fell through over the failure to resolve the issue of security guarantees for the returnees. However, this was probably the first instance when the sides negotiated in earnest instead of pretending to negotiate while seeking a deal with the allegedly omnipotent Russians. While those expecting a breakthrough have been bitterly disappointed, both sides may have found a genuine common interest in not being dragged into a new war (the disaster of May 1998 showed how possible this is). Now that the illusion of the 'Russian solution' seems to have faded away and while other powerful players (like NATO) drag their feet, the parties may learn how to manage, if not solve, the conflict themselves.



The South Ossetia case

Lara Olson

Lara Olson was Project Co-ordinator for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Georgia (1996–98), managing repatriation and assistance efforts in South Ossetia and co-ordinating the Georgian–Ossetian Dialogue Project with the Conflict Management Group.

Although a full-scale political settlement to the Georgia–South Ossetia conflict remains elusive the negotiation approach and the synergy between formal and informal channels show more promise of a positive outcome than in the Georgia–Abkhazia case.

Internal and external factors deter both South Ossetia and Georgia from committing themselves to firm decisions on status now. With the conflicts in Abkhazia, Chechnya, North Ossetia–Ingushetia and Nagorno-Karabakh unresolved both hope to gain more by waiting. Russia's shifting policies and influence in the region continually alter the balance of power, and Georgia's internal divisions over federalism and vocal opposition leave its parameters for a settlement unclear. In South Ossetia deep bitterness among the population and eight years of *de facto* self-rule have created strong resistance to real concessions. Elections in both Georgia and South Ossetia in 1999–2000 will further reduce incentives for compromise in the short term as candidates do not want to appear too soft. The May 1999 parliamentary vote in South Ossetia has already returned a Communist Party majority opposed to the leadership's stance.

Georgian and Ossetian leaders have as a result put the issue of political status on the back burner. Though status negotiations were launched in Moscow in March 1997 the process has been allowed to founder. Proposals for an interim agreement have also stalled. The lack of protest over this slow pace suggests that neither side views a quick political settlement to be in its best interest.

However, through formal and informal channels progress has been made on issues such as demilitarization, refugee return, trade and reconstruction. Unlike in Abkhazia, economic and humanitarian programmes have not been made conditional on a final political settlement but have been supported by the injection of international funding.

Since the 1992 ceasefire the Russian-sponsored Joint Control Commission (JCC), involving Georgia, South Ossetia, the Russian Federation and the Republic of North Ossetia has played a key role along with the OSCE's mediation efforts and military monitoring. With the stabilization of the security situation the JCC has steadily reduced the joint Russian–Georgian peacekeeping force to symbolic levels. In 1997–98 the JCC programme of voluntary refugee return, with participation and funding from UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), helped eight hundred families return to the conflict zone. Roughly fifty thousand people remain refugees or IDPs, more than thirty thousand of whom are in North Ossetia, ten thousand in Georgia and five thousand in South Ossetia.

Lack of resources and political uncertainty have prevented the implementation of agreements and impeded investment. However, a \$2 million UNDP reconstruction programme, praised for its joint Georgian–Ossetian decision-making model, and a 3.5 million ECU EU project planned for 1999 may prove to be catalysts for economic development.

Informal meetings of key political figures facilitated by the Conflict Management Group and NRC have made an important contribution to progress in the negotiations. The OSCE and NGOs such as Vertic/Links have facilitated direct contact between Ossetian and Georgian journalists, parliamentarians, academics, youth and business people. Often overlooked, these efforts are a critical support to the basic premise of the negotiations – that Ossetians and Georgians can only reach a mutually acceptable political solution once personal, community and economic ties are rebuilt.

An Abkhaz perspective

Liana Kvarchelia

Liana Kvarchelia is a community facilitator in Abkhazia. She has previously worked with the Centre for Humanitarian Programmes, a Sukhum-based NGO working on projects related to conflict resolution, and has extensive experience of participation in meetings with NGO representatives from Georgia.

The negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia that have been under way since 1993 have failed to resolve the differences between them and left relations frozen in a condition of 'neither war nor peace'. Indeed, Abkhazia and Georgia now seem further away from political agreement than in April 1994 when the Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz Conflict and its appendix the Quadripartite Agreement were signed.

Negotiations have been primarily about the settlement of state and legal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia and the return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia. On the first issue, the principles underlying the positions are diametrically opposed. Georgians consider Abkhazia to be an inalienable part of Georgia with at most the status of an autonomous republic. From the Georgian perspective any other arrangement might lead to further disintegration of the Georgian state, which is already troubled by its lack of control over Adjara and Javakheti, not to mention South Ossetia. The Abkhaz argue that, as Abkhazia was forcibly incorporated into Georgia by Stalin's regime in 1931, the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent unilateral annulment by Georgia of legal measures joining the two countries in one republic merely confirmed Abkhazia's legal and moral right to independence. Furthermore, Abkhaz claim that the war unleashed by Georgia in 1992 has resulted in de facto independence. From the outset of the conflict the Georgian side pronounced the inviolability of the territorial integrity of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and the inadmissibility of any internal reorganization of Georgia on federal principles. The Abkhaz representatives did not set out their position so unequivocally. The lack of clarity over whether Abkhazia has been seeking independence or confederal relations



ЧИТАЙТЕ
ГОЗЕТУ
РЕСПУБЛИКА
АБХАЗИЯ

КАЖДОМУ
БОЛЬШО
ИНТЕРЕСНО

КИОСК ГАЗЕТЫ
РЕСПУБЛИКА АБХАЗИЯ



with Georgia is a consequence of constant pressure, including the threat of force, exerted throughout the negotiation process by the West and Russia. The majority of UN Security Council Resolutions have been openly pro-Georgian. This reflects the bias inherent in the negotiation process conducted under the auspices of the UN to which Georgia belongs and Abkhazia does not. In December 1994 Russia introduced restrictions at the Russian–Abkhaz border under the pretext of its military action in Chechnya and in January 1996 implemented the CIS decision to introduce economic sanctions against Abkhazia at Georgian insistence. Pressure on Abkhazia increased further with the creation of the Group of Friends of Georgia, comprising the USA, the UK, Germany, France and Russia. The ambassadors of the ‘Friends’ have actively joined the negotiation process, especially since 1997. As a result they are now better informed about Abkhazia and its demands, but this has not in itself contributed to any significant change in the substance of the negotiations.

Seeking compromise

Forced to consider compromise formulations accommodating both Abkhazia’s sovereignty and the international community’s demand for the observance of territorial integrity, Abkhazia has looked for a model within the framework of one entity. However, Abkhazia has insisted that negotiations be about the reconstruction of state and legal relations between the two republics rather than the political status of Abkhazia within Georgia. The Abkhaz argue that this compromise was accepted by Georgia, initially in a draft proposal prepared by UN Special Envoy Eduard Brunner in Geneva in April 1994 (although Georgia did not sign this) and then in the joint Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement which Georgia did sign. The compromise was confirmed by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who stated in his report of 3 May 1994 that ‘efforts are being made to find a solution within which Abkhazia would be a subject with sovereign rights within the framework of a union State to be established as a result of negotiations’. The joint Declaration stated that the parties had reached a ‘mutual understanding regarding powers for joint action’ in the fields of foreign policy and foreign economic ties, border guard and customs arrangements, transport and communications, ecology, energy and insuring human and civic rights. From the Abkhaz perspective this model of relations, based on mutually delegated competencies and the equal rights of subjects within the union state, could have served as the basis for a treaty. That it did not was underlined in July 1997 when a draft protocol detailing the procedures regulating legal relations between the parties was prepared through Russian mediation. The Georgians refused to sign at the last minute. They considered themselves to be the central authority of the union state with authority to delegate

responsibilities to Abkhazia, while in the Declaration and in the Abkhaz view, authority within the union state should be derived from two equal subjects leading to the mutual delegation of competencies to the union state. Georgia has since advocated a federal model that differs little from the pre-war period.

This climate is not conducive to constructive negotiations and inevitably the parties have adopted different strategies. Georgia constantly attempts to use its fluctuating relationship with Russia to exert pressure on Abkhazia to become more accommodating. For example, a precondition for the continued presence of Russian military bases in Georgia is the reintegration of Abkhazia into Georgia. Furthermore, Georgia plays Russia against the West by advocating the replacement of the CISPKF with an international force, while also advocating that the CISPKF mandate be widened to include police functions to secure the mass return of refugees. The prospective oil pipeline from Baku, the undesirable precedent which secession in Abkhazia would set for the Russian Federation, and the insistence on the return of the refugees before the issue of political status can be addressed are other levers used by Georgia.

Abkhazia has much less room for manoeuvre. The Abkhaz are accused by Georgia and the West of a pro-Russian orientation, but their increasing reliance on Russia is a direct consequence of the Georgian-instigated, Russian-imposed blockade. However, despite the isolation it causes, the incomplete nature of the blockade means that Russia is the only realistic route for external travel and the best option for trade, regardless of whether or not this is a preference. The Abkhaz do not want this isolation, but neither do they want to be integrated into the international community through Tbilisi.

The Abkhaz have few illusions about Russia whose strategic interests in the region militate against recognizing Abkhaz independence, which would mean the loss of Georgia and the creation of a precedent for its own federal subjects, above all with regard to Chechnya. However, recognition of Abkhaz sovereignty within the framework of Georgia provides Russia with a lever to influence both republics. Transferring the initiative exclusively to Georgia – in other words, to the West – is not in Russia’s interests either. The status quo is therefore convenient. Furthermore, any decisive Russian moves against Abkhazia could destabilize the situation in the North Caucasus thereby renewing the threat to the territorial integrity of Russia itself.

Negotiations going nowhere

For the last five years Georgian–Abkhaz negotiations have reflected the struggle between Russia and the West for spheres of influence over the perimeter of the Eurasian corridor. Declarations by both mediators that the conflicting parties should engage in direct dialogue and that only the parties themselves can decide the shape of their relations can hardly be taken at face value given the geopolitical context.

Nevertheless, there have been negotiations and increased direct contact between the parties, particularly at a high level, as well as between representatives of civil society. But while direct contact, including between the presidents and their envoys, has improved dialogue within limited confines it has not led to meaningful progress. Meetings also arise out of the practicalities of living in a conflict zone and the need to address issues concerning cross-border trade or security and the exchange of hostages. These contacts occur mostly in the Gal region between the Gal population and people from neighbouring villages, and between heads of village and town administrations, on either side of the Ingur River.

More structured meetings, often characterized by the involvement of NGOs seeking dialogue as an alternative to war, have been held under the banner of long-term confidence building. The UN has also tried to engage the two communities in confidence building, especially in meetings held in Athens in October 1998 and Istanbul in June 1999 but no NGO representatives with experience in civic peace initiatives were invited. The meetings did not result in any reconciliatory moves and were in fact a pretext to bring the chief negotiators together in an informal environment. Abkhaz society believes that this absence of progress reflects the lack of confidence in the UN caused by the perceived bias it shows to Georgia, a member state. UN-supported confidence building is more likely to succeed through the implementation of agreements that have already been signed, particularly under the UN's aegis, rather than through such meetings.

Deadlock between the parties over issues of status and return in the first years of negotiations challenged the mediators to look for agreement in other spheres. The creation in November 1997 of a Co-ordination Council within the framework of the Geneva Process, and a UN Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia in February 1998 to evaluate the economic situation, created the temporary illusion of a breakthrough. However, Georgian reluctance to have the mission report acted upon revealed yet another impasse. It became clear that the international community regards economic and even humanitarian aid to Abkhazia as directly dependent on progress towards a political settlement within the framework of a Georgian

state. But the use of economic development by Georgia and the Western negotiators as an inducement to Abkhazia to integrate into the Georgian economy would be a compromise too far for Abkhazia. Russia's continuing policy of sanctions against Abkhazia serves only to highlight the lack of alternatives.

Not expecting Abkhazia to compromise in exchange for economic assistance, from early 1998 President Shevardnadze began to refer to the 'Bosnian model' of settlement and demanded a change in the nature of the peacekeeping operation, arguing that peace through coercion could achieve the conditions for the safe return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia. However, peace based on such coercion would not be sustainable.

The refugee dilemma

Analysis of the roles of the UN and OSCE and the nature of UN Security Council Resolutions reveals a markedly tougher stance with regard to Abkhazia than to other conflict and refugee situations in the Caucasus. For example, the Security Council expressed at most serious concern about the demographic changes in Nagorno-Karabakh, while demanding of Abkhazia the return of refugees with no prior conditions and before the differences which had provoked the conflict were resolved. The Security Council stressed the unacceptability of linking the process of the return of refugees to a political settlement, whereas they have not exerted similar pressure on the Armenians over Karabakh.

For the Georgian leadership the return of the refugees is above all a political question. A long-term policy of Georgianization resulted in Georgians constituting the largest ethnic group of Abkhazia's pre-war multinational population. With the departure from the Georgian – occupied territories of the Greek and Jewish populations during the war and the economic migration of some Russians, Armenians and Abkhaz, mainly to Russia and Armenia, the mass return of Georgian refugees alone would create a demographic situation clearly favouring Georgia. After its recent defeat in the war Tbilisi has no confidence in its ability to resolve the 'Abkhaz problem' on its own and is trying to use the Georgian population from Abkhazia, under the cover of international organizations, as an instrument for forcing a resolution of the conflict in its favour. This strategy lies behind the revived proposal to expand the Security Zone beyond the Gal region and give the peacekeeping forces police functions. Many in Abkhazia believe this would simply create a larger area of instability and further embroil the peacekeepers in conflict since it is in the Security Zone that the Georgian guerrillas are most active.

In Abkhazia the Georgian refugees are generally distrusted. Those who fought with or supported the Georgian forces are often regarded as traitors. In these circumstances Abkhaz society could only countenance the return of Georgians who did not fight on the Georgian side once Abkhazia receives recognition as an independent state. Given the history of Georgian–Abkhaz relations only international recognition would convince Abkhaz society that the return of the refugees would not represent a threat to its security. What is more, the Abkhaz believe that descendants of Abkhaz refugees from the nineteenth century Caucasian War now living mostly in Turkey, should be allowed an equal right to return, whereas Russian sanctions ban the entry into Abkhazia of foreign citizens.

While the humanitarian plight of the refugees is a factor that looms over the negotiation process, those who claim to represent them play a negative role. The Georgian government does not formally support the ‘government-in-exile’ (the ethnic Georgian former members of the government and parliament of Abkhazia, now mainly based in Tbilisi and Zugdidi and linked to guerrilla groups sent into Abkhazia). Nevertheless, there is constant reference to them as an alternative if Abkhazia does not agree to the compromises Georgia wants. The Abkhaz refuse to negotiate with representatives of the ‘government-in-exile’, because this would narrow the subject of negotiations to relations between two communities from Abkhazia, instead of between Georgia and Abkhazia.

In October 1998 leaders of the ‘government-in-exile’ founded the Party for the Liberation of Abkhazia which adopted a resolution stating that the return of Georgian refugees would be possible only after Georgian jurisdiction has been established over the whole territory of Abkhazia. Inflammatory language and the threat of mobilizing refugees for future campaigns in Abkhazia has done nothing to promote reconciliation, rather it has inclined Abkhaz to be increasingly negative about return. However, the refugee leaders’ only option is to return to Abkhazia victorious. The Abkhaz will not allow them back with other refugees because they consider them to be responsible for the war of 1992–93 and the following terrorist activities. In this context the Abkhaz are unlikely to let them be a party to the negotiations. Nevertheless, when a political solution is achieved it is with refugees that Abkhaz society will have to rebuild relations, however antagonistic they currently are.

The return of refugees to the Gal region of Abkhazia, which before the war was populated predominantly by Mingrelians who did not on the whole participate in military action on the Georgian side in 1992–93, has been regarded in Abkhazia as a less painful option. By the beginning of 1998, international organizations estimated that more than sixty thousand people had returned to the

region. However, in 1998 alone thirteen civilians, thirty-six Abkhaz militiamen and eight peacekeepers died at the hands of terrorists. In May 1998 the situation changed drastically with the sharp rise in terrorist activity by Georgian paramilitary units. This led to clashes with the Abkhaz militia and an unsuccessful attempt by Georgia to seize the Gal region, as a result of which some thirty thousands residents were again displaced. Having experienced another defeat the government in Tbilisi, which had until then distanced itself from the ‘partisans’, practically admitted its responsibility for the events by signing an agreement on a ceasefire and separation of forces. The Gagra Protocol of 26 May 1998 obliges Georgia ‘to take effective measures to halt the penetration into Abkhazia of terrorist and sabotage groups, armed bands and individuals’, but no criminal case has yet been instituted in Georgia in connection with terrorist activity. On the contrary, Zurab Samushia, the commander of the White Legion terrorist unit gives press conferences in Tbilisi and terrorists continue to penetrate the Gal region and occasionally beyond.

Georgia’s bad faith frequently goes unchallenged by the international community, repeating a familiar pattern in which the Abkhaz are censured for their activities but abuses committed by the Georgians go largely unmarked. The August 1992 invasion of Abkhazia is ignored and no condemnation is levelled at Georgia for the mass human rights violations and killings during the war, while Abkhazia is accused of ethnic cleansing. In January 1999 on the eve of the UN Security Council session the Abkhaz president called on Tbilisi and international organizations to support Abkhazia’s unilateral decision to allow the return of refugees to districts which previously had compact Georgian populations – namely the Gal region. However, the Georgian government, despite its own previous demands for the return of the Georgian population to Abkhazia prior to a political solution, now linked the safe return of the refugees to a political settlement, understanding by this the establishment of Georgian jurisdiction over Abkhazia. The Security Council responded to the Abkhaz initiative on 29 January 1999 by referring to the Lisbon resolution of the OSCE, which interpreted the mass exodus of the Georgian population during the liberation of Abkhazia from Georgian armed forces in September 1993 as ethnic cleansing.

Abkhaz society will not be ignored

The Security Council is not the only source of pressure on the Abkhaz leadership. If agreements are signed limiting the de facto independence of Abkhazia, its leaders will have to answer to their own people. President Ardzinba has already been publicly attacked for his visit to Tbilisi in August 1997 and there has been fierce criticism of the draft agreements on the creation of a common state with



Source: Mia Foster/Alicia Patterson Foundation

Georgia. Nevertheless, in general there is a passive attitude to the negotiation process in Abkhazia, partly explained by the grind of daily survival and partly by the fact that most people do not believe the president was sincere in his intention to unite with Georgia. Experience, however, shows that society is instantly mobilized by the slightest deterioration in the situation as in 1994 when a Russian general in charge of peacekeeping operations attempted to open the Abkhaz–Georgian border to the mass return of refugees.

Abkhaz society is consolidated around the idea that the Abkhaz nation, like any other, including the Georgian, has the right to freedom and independence. The Abkhaz cannot understand why the desire of other nations for independence is so problematic for Georgian society. The answer may be found in the evolution of Georgian mass consciousness which has for decades been influenced by descriptions of Georgians as hospitable ‘landlords’ who have given shelter to ‘members of other nationalities’.

The past decade has stirred the historical memory of the Abkhaz who for over a century have regarded Georgia as a source of aggression. The attempt to resolve the ‘Abkhaz question’ once and for all by force removed all trust in Georgia. While revanchist policy is frequently aired in the Georgian media, calls by Georgian intellectuals to reject the policy of sanctions receive no positive response from

the government, still less the public. In the absence of a conciliatory tone or any sense of culpability for instigating the war, many Abkhaz believe that Georgia, whose democratic credentials have yet to be proven, is an unattractive partner with which to build a common state.

It is difficult to gauge the viability of a settlement that forces the Abkhaz to adopt the Georgian idea of coexistence. The history of relations with Georgia suggests that only statehood, underpinned by international guarantees, will achieve conditions of security and the preservation not only of the identity of the Abkhaz nation but of its physical survival. Being within Georgia, as the recent war has shown, does not provide such guarantees. Georgia also needs to decide whether territorial integrity in the traditional sense is more important than stability and a flourishing economy.

Whatever form relations between Georgia and Abkhazia take, it will be possible to speak of genuine peace and security in the region only if the principle of equal rights lies at the foundation of these relations. Whether this principle is achieved through the signing of a treaty on peace and good-neighbourliness by two independent states, or within the framework of a Georgian–Abkhaz confederation, or through the creation of supranational, Caucasus-wide structures depends on how far the interests of realpolitik are aimed at achieving an enduring resolution.

Economic dimensions

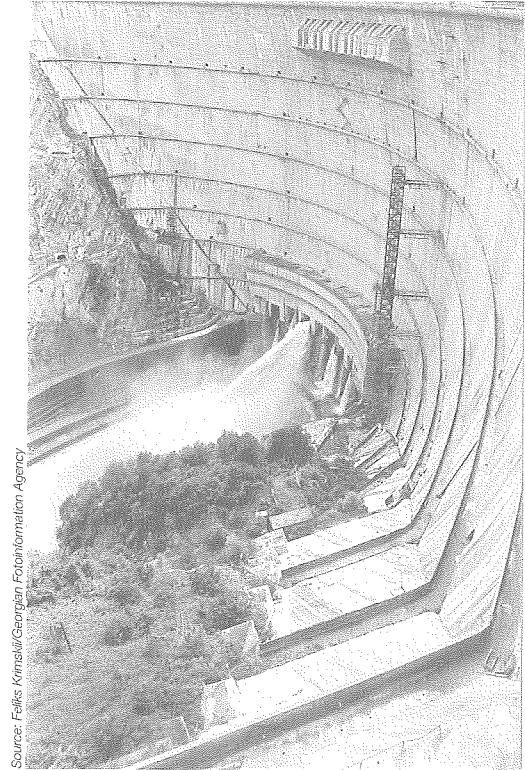
Incentive or obstacle?

Jonathan Cohen

War and the collapse of the Soviet economic system have devastated Abkhazia's industrial production, physical infrastructure and agriculture and restricted Georgia's progress to economic stabilization. But Georgia has been able to attract international investment and has begun to overcome the economic chaos that enveloped it in the early 1990s. This is not the case for Abkhazia where the long-term viability of the economy remains questionable, social distress is considerable and the likelihood of international investment minimal. Although both sides could benefit economically from peaceful co-operation economic interests work both to prolong the political stalemate and to provide an incentive to conflict resolution.

Many black marketeers, local monopolists, border guards, troops and militia members benefit from the unregulated economy and are unlikely to promote an end to the conflict. Economic and ethnic relationships between entrepreneurs and criminals are blurred when profits are to be made. Despite the sanctions imposed on Abkhazia which have severely restricted trade and the mass displacement that has reduced the skilled workforce hazelnuts, citrus fruit, petrol, scrap metal and timber continue to be traded across the Inguri and Psou Rivers and across the Black Sea with Turkey. Trade restrictions cause much hardship in Abkhazia but instead of forcing the Abkhaz to make political concessions isolation generates a siege mentality that reduces the propensity to compromise. It also contributes to the development of a criminal and national resistance economy that undermines prospects for the entrenchment of the rule of law.

Both sides might benefit economically from the return of displaced people to the Gali region – Abkhazia through reinvigoration of the agricultural sector and Georgia through the easing of the economic and political burden of



Source: Feilke Krimelidze/Georgian PhotoInformation Agency

catering for a substantial displaced population. But proposals for the joint administration of Gali, the lifting of sanctions and the reopening of the railway through Abkhazia which would accompany repatriation are politically sensitive. Additionally, the prospect for Abkhazia of being left out of oil and freight transport developments (including the EU's TRACECA programme) which the Georgian government regards as the foundation of future economic prosperity, could be severe. Without a resolution Abkhazia will be unable to benefit from its position as a key link between Russia and the South Caucasus and, while a trickle of Russian tourists may have returned to Abkhazia's beaches, as long as the conflict remains unresolved Abkhazia will be unable to develop the infrastructure to become once again the Black Sea's Riviera.

Yet the prospect of economic development appears to be an insufficient temptation to encourage the Abkhaz to compromise their long-term political goals, despite the cost of isolation. An infrastructure for co-operation between Georgians and Abkhaz is not yet in place and removing the trade restrictions will not on its own change this. In the past two years mutual economic interests have become part of the negotiations and in some cases, such as the Inguri hydroelectric operation, economic co-operation has taken priority over political confrontation. So far, however, these discussions have not broken the political deadlock.

The Inguri power complex

Paula Garb

The Inguri dam and hydroelectric power plants, which lie in the heart of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict zone, have become integrally related to the struggle between the two parties. The complex has enormous economic importance. It is the only source of electricity in Abkhazia and is vital for sustaining *de facto* independence, rebuilding infrastructure ravaged by war and maintaining economic and social well-being. For Georgia the facility is important to state building since it provides most of the country's electricity. Both sides therefore need the complex to continue to generate electricity, but with the dam on the Georgian side of the border and the power plants on the Abkhaz side they have been forced to co-operate.

In the absence of a formal structure of management, decisions on operational matters are made by senior officials from both sides who meet on site twice monthly in the presence of the Russian commander of the CIS forces. Since September 1997 they have also attended UN-facilitated co-ordinating committee meetings. Even during the periods of heaviest fighting, Abkhaz and Georgian officials and engineers maintained electricity generation to the benefit of both sides.

Despite the co-operation there remain serious differences between the parties. Ownership of the complex is undecided. The Abkhaz insist that ownership value should be determined by the cost of building the physical structures (giving forty per cent ownership to the Abkhaz) and that the generated electricity should be distributed accordingly. The Georgians argue that the criterion for the complex's value should be the amount of electricity each side consumes (giving the Georgians eighty per cent ownership). The Abkhaz counter that the Abkhaz need for electricity will increase with economic development and that if it has more electricity than it needs it can sell the surplus to Russia, Georgia or

elsewhere. The facility also has military and strategic importance. If Abkhazia retains control of the power plants and the ability to turn off the electricity supplied to Georgia it maintains *de facto* independence. If Georgia were to gain full control of the complex, depriving Abkhazia of bargaining power, it would be in a strong position to force Abkhazia to remain part of the Georgian state. Both sides have, as a consequence, used the site as a weapon against the other. In April 1997, the Abkhaz cut off electricity to Georgia in response to the Georgian disconnection of long-distance telephone lines in Abkhazia. Talks led to the restoration of electricity to western Georgia in return for the restricted use of long-distance telephone lines in Abkhazia.

The complex is also important in the international arena. It provides the Russians with electricity and it is not surprising, therefore, that CIS troops guard the complex. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development agreed in October 1998 to allocate \$38.5 million to finance badly needed reconstruction. In making a joint memorandum on co-operation a condition it not only accepted an economic and security interest in the complex but also helped reinforce the joint management arrangement.

The co-operation over Inguri River water resources was born of economic and social necessity. It demonstrates that even in the context of an unresolved war, economic and security considerations can force parties to collaborate. Engineers and managers working on the Inguri complex and politicians believe that this joint management effort is leading the peace process, not following it, and could become a model for co-operation in rebuilding railway, communication and transport ties, but to date there has been little tangible influence on other areas of co-operation.

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The role of the UN

S. Neil MacFarlane

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The UN has been involved in the conflict in Abkhazia since Georgian forces stormed the Abkhaz parliament in Sukhumi in August 1992, triggering a war that remains unresolved today. In 1993, the UN and the CSCE agreed that the international lead on the conflict in Abkhazia should be taken by the UN, while that in South Ossetia should go to the CSCE.

In the same year the UN, faced with urgent requests from the government of Georgia to deploy a peacekeeping force to Abkhazia, decided to establish an observer mission for Georgia (UNOMIG) to monitor implementation of the July ceasefire agreement between the two sides which had been mediated and guaranteed by the Russian Federation. The decision to send an observer force rather than a fully fledged peacekeeping force reflected the desire of the Russian Federation to take the lead in the management of conflict in the 'former Soviet space', and the unwillingness of the other permanent members of the Security Council to challenge Russian prerogatives. There was also a general concern that the peacekeeping apparatus of the UN was overloaded, and disagreement among the parties as to what the mandate of a more substantial force would be.

The UN Secretary-General also designated Swiss diplomat Eduard Brunner as Special Envoy for the conflict. He served until 1997 when Liviu Bota, a Romanian diplomat, was appointed Special Representative (SRSG) for the Abkhaz conflict. Both were responsible for the mediation of a process of negotiation leading to a political settlement of the conflict. Bota has had a more or less permanent presence in the conflict zone, whereas Brunner was only delegated to visit intermittently. Russia's special status in this process was recognized in its designation as 'facilitator'





Source: Peter Nasmyth

of the talks. In the early years of negotiation matters were not helped by the passive attitude taken by the Special Envoy to mediation of the conflict. The UN's failure to take a more engaged approach was one factor among several contributing to the obvious lack of movement towards a political settlement in 1994–96. The fact that the more proactive approach adopted by Liviu Bota has also not produced a settlement would suggest, however, that the extent of UN activism is not the determining factor in conflict resolution. While the first personnel of UNOMIG were being deployed, the ceasefire collapsed and hostilities resumed. The UN Security Council condemned the renewal of conflict and associated displacement of population and demanded that the parties cease fighting. They also decided to extend the mandate of UNOMIG pending clarification of the situation.

Humanitarian intervention

The rapid exodus of displaced persons from Abkhazia, many of whom fled via mountain passes into Svanetia in winter conditions and with no shelter, created a humanitarian emergency, occasioning a second UN response, this time by specialized agencies including UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF. These agencies and their partner NGOs moved quickly to stabilize the situation of the internally displaced. They also assisted in addressing the humanitarian consequences of Georgia's economic collapse, the product of the country's multiple wars and the collapse of the Soviet command economy. Over the period 1994–97, UNDHA mounted three consolidated interagency appeals for the Caucasus, with approximately \$87 million going to UN agency and NGO activities in Georgia. In the first years of UN involvement in the humanitarian response to the emergency in Georgia, the statist nature of the organization revealed itself in the exclusion of areas under Abkhaz control from needs assessment and delivery of services by the UN. This

omission may have impeded the negotiation of a settlement by enhancing the Abkhaz sense of isolation and creating an appearance of UN bias in favour of Georgia's central government. In consequence, the ground was left to NGOs such as the ICRC and Médecins Sans Frontières.

UNHCR took a prominent role in early efforts to secure a return of the displaced to Abkhazia. This role was most obvious in the negotiations in 1994 which led to agreement on the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force to be interposed in a security zone between the two parties and the associated agreement on return of displaced persons. The CISPKF was deployed in mid-1994 and secured the line of contact, but the agreement on return failed miserably with only 311 families out of the estimated 240,000 affected people actually being approved for return. This was largely due to the provision within the agreement that the Abkhaz side had the right for security reasons to vet those returning. The 1994 agreement on return also failed to address the security needs of Georgians returning to Abkhaz-controlled areas. In this respect it was probably a good thing that so few did return. More broadly, UNHCR's involvement in the process of negotiation raised important questions about whether its status as an advocate for the welfare and rights of IDPs and refugees had been jeopardized by its diplomatic role.

The failure of the 1994 agreement on return did much to poison the atmosphere in talks on a resolution of the conflict. From the Georgian perspective, the Abkhaz behaviour reflected bad faith in the effort to resolve a humanitarian issue that was creating a substantial burden on government resources and contributing to the propensity for instability in Samegrelo. To judge from subsequent events, however, there is some validity in Abkhaz concerns about the security consequences of indiscriminate return.

Working with peacekeepers

The deployment of CISP KF resulted in a change in the circumstances of UNOMIG. The observer mission was expanded from 40 to 136 (in early 1999 it stood at 102 from 20 countries), given the task of observing the activities of CISP KF in the security zone and monitoring compliance with provisions for a weapons exclusion zone on both sides of the security zone. The mandates of both CISP KF and UNOMIG included provision for the promotion of conditions conducive to the return of the displaced population. The mandates of both forces have been renewed at six-month intervals since the beginning of their co-operative deployment in 1994. The six-month renewal process has the advantage of bringing the Georgian issue back to the Security Council on a regular basis. On the other hand, reopening the issue invites regular posturing and mutual recrimination by the parties. This does little to further the peace process. Moreover, the CIS has repeatedly failed to renew the mandate of its force in a timely manner, raising doubts about the legal status of the force during periods when the mandate has lapsed and increasing uncertainty and tension on the ground.

It is worth stressing that the interaction between the UN and the CIS in peacekeeping in Georgia is an important example of the sharing of security tasks between the UN and regional organizations. The collaboration has not been easy, although it has improved with time. Russian soldiers deployed to the security zone in the early days were ill suited to peacekeeping, were perceived by both Georgians and UN personnel as lacking impartiality and frequently engaged in harassment of the local population. UN and Russian norms regarding rules of engagement differed markedly. UN personnel were troubled by the corruption evident in some Russian units. Initially, UN observers had difficulty in securing full access to, and freedom of movement in, their areas of operation.

These problems have not disappeared. Accusations by Georgians that CISP KF has been complicit in Abkhaz sweeps through the Gali region, or by Abkhaz that it has failed to prevent the penetration of guerrillas, continue. However, those familiar with the operation generally accept that the Russian performance has improved, in part because the presence of UN personnel and the reasonably close contact between the forces has served as a transmission belt for international peacekeeping norms. On the other hand, the neutrality of the force continues to be questioned by many Georgians, despite the presence of UNOMIG.

Addressing instability

The organized return of the displaced failed in 1994, resulting in a gradual process of spontaneous return in 1995–97. This occasioned substantial and repeated violations of the human rights of the civilian population in the Gali region. Initially, neither CISP KF nor UNOMIG made any serious effort to prevent these incidents, arguing that the protection of human rights lay outside their mandates. This damaged the credibility and impartiality of both.

After serious human rights violations in 1995, CISP KF and UNOMIG took a more proactive approach to the protection of the returning population, despite the fact that their mandates did not entirely provide for this. Other attempts to address this issue have included the establishment of a joint UN/OSCE Human Rights Office in Sukhumi in 1996 (although it only really became active in 1999) and increased discussion since Spring 1999 about the establishment of a joint investigation unit to explore violations of agreements as well as some cases of criminal activity in the security zone. This has yet to be agreed upon.

The number of returnees to Gali grew gradually through 1996 and into 1997. These returnees were accompanied by guerrilla groups who attacked both CISP KF and Abkhaz personnel. By the spring of 1998 the security situation deteriorated to the point that CISP KF ceased patrolling in the security zone while UNOMIG closed its team bases and concentrated its personnel in Gali and Zugdidi. The Abkhaz de facto authorities then renewed their attacks of the returning Georgian population in May 1998, leading to further mass displacement. This renewed violence might have been prevented or moderated had CISP KF and the UN taken a more proactive stance at this time. The impunity with which the operation was conducted reflects the erosion of the credibility of both the CISP KF and UNOMIG.

Instability also spilled over into Georgian-controlled areas. The UNOMIG sector headquarters in Zugdidi were invaded in February 1998 and several members of the force were kidnapped. This was linked to efforts earlier in the year to assassinate President Shevardnadze and coincided with a number of serious terrorist attacks on government targets in Zugdidi, signalling a general decline in the situation. In July, a UN employee who had previously worked in Sukhumi was murdered in Tbilisi. The problem was not limited to Georgian-held territory. In the summer NGO personnel involved in the demining programme were attacked in Abkhazia. In the autumn, UNOMIG headquarters in Sukhumi was targeted in a series of grenade incidents and three members of the force were wounded during an assault on a UNOMIG vehicle. This series of events led one important contributor to UNOMIG (the United States) to withdraw its personnel and to ban travel by its citizens to Abkhazia.

The diplomatic front

Ironically, perhaps, the same period was marked by a quickening of the long-stalled peace process, the result of a more proactive role taken by the newly arrived SRSG, Liviu Bota, who initiated the Geneva Process, an intensive series of meetings, among the parties and other interested states and organizations. UN activities were paralleled by a more active Russian diplomacy towards the conflict. The formation of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia and their formal association with the peace talks diluted the dominance of Russia in the process of mediation, as did the participation of OSCE representatives. In August 1997 President Shevardnadze met with the Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba in Tbilisi for bilateral talks under the patronage of Russian Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov. By the end of 1997 the Geneva Process had produced agreement to a programme of action on the peace process and the establishment of working groups to address three clusters of issues: non-resumption of hostilities, the return of refugees and IDPs, and economic and social issues. At this time, it was also agreed to establish a Co-ordinating Council for the peace process that would institutionalize the role of the group of friends. Bilateral contacts extended into 1998 with UN facilitation and UNOMIG logistical support, and despite the events in Gali in May. Subsequently, the SRSG organized two further meetings between the parties (in Athens and Istanbul) to push the process forward.

By the autumn of 1998 the two sides had prepared a draft agreement on repatriation of refugees after reiterating their commitment to a non-resumption of hostilities, but Shevardnadze and Ardzinba failed to meet and sign it. The issue of partial return remains unresolved with the two sides still quarrelling over such issues as whether women and children should be allowed to return first, with men of military age being subject to Abkhaz screening, and whether returnees would be obliged to take Abkhaz citizenship. Although UN agencies have assisted returnees since 1995, they have always been ambivalent about spontaneous return without a political settlement, not least as a result of well-founded fears for the security of returnees. The events of May 1998 have deepened this scepticism.

The acceleration on the diplomatic side was accompanied by serious exploration of the possibility of using economic assistance as a means of facilitating a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. In this context UNDP, drawing upon its success with similar activities in South Ossetia, mounted a needs assessment mission to Abkhazia in February 1998. A number of donors, including the USA and the EU, committed several million dollars to reconstruction and other assistance programming in anticipation of agreement between the parties on an approach to the reconstruction of Abkhazia.

Like many others this initiative failed, largely because the developmental objectives of the two parties remained far apart and because they could not agree on implementation. The Georgian side perceived such assistance to be a means of tying Abkhazia in practical terms back into an integrated Georgian economy. The Abkhaz side perceived reconstruction assistance as a way of rendering Abkhazia itself more viable.

The effectiveness of the UN

The collapse of UNDP's effort to use economic assistance to push the peace process forward is only one manifestation of the broader fact that there has been little progress towards a political settlement of the Abkhaz conflict. This dismal conclusion is the result of several factors.

It reflects issues and processes over which the UN has little control. Ultimately, the conflict is not yet ripe for resolution: the two sides remain unwilling to accept compromises on the key issue of status. Although the Abkhaz have retreated from the objective of full independence, the two sides remain divided on whether status should be confederal or meaningfully federal, on whether the relationship between Sukhumi and Tbilisi should be horizontal or vertical. Lack of progress on the matter of status prevents movement on other issues such as the return of IDPs and refugees and economic and social questions.

An additional problem is engagement in the conflict by external powers and notably Russia. The Russian Federation played a substantial role in the active phases of the conflict, apparently seeing it as a means of bringing Georgia back into the fold. A complete resolution of the conflict, particularly if this occurred in a negotiating process controlled not by Russia but by the UN would result in a further decline in Russian influence over Georgian politics and policy. There is little doubt that the existence of parallel UN and Russian tracks in the negotiations has impeded the effort to reach a compromise. The existence of a parallel channel has made it easier for the parties to resist concessions. However, given the other obstacles to successful negotiations it is unlikely that this has been a significant determining factor.

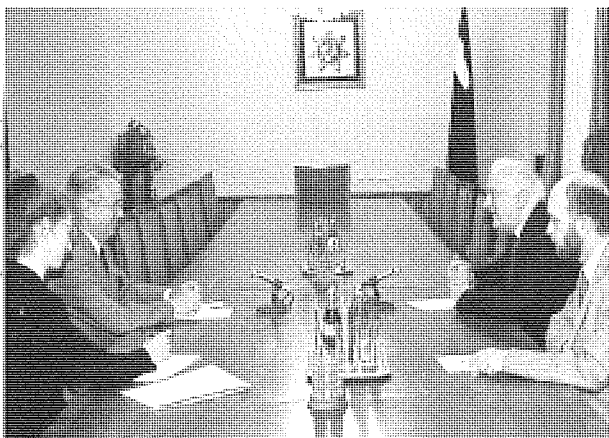
The failure of the UN in Abkhazia also reflects problems internal to the organization, most notably generating consensus at the level of the Security Council. The issue here is that the fundamental interests of the permanent members differ substantially one from another. The Western powers seek conflict resolution, the consolidation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states of the region, and the integration of their economies into a global economy dominated by the West. UN involvement

is seen as an instrument in the pursuit of these objectives. Russia, on the other hand, has for much of the post-Soviet period sought to maintain or to re-establish its influence over the Caucasus region and the dependence of the smaller states on Russia. It has claimed special rights and responsibilities in the region on the basis of its preponderance of power and its historical role there. Russia's control over the northern Caucasus is vulnerable to instability in the Caucasus itself, giving the Russians a more direct security interest in the affairs of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The completion of the Baku–Supsa oil pipeline and the consequent end to the Russian monopoly on oil export from the Caspian basin gives Russia yet another incentive to sustain its influence in Abkhazia. For Russia, a robust UN role might well be a threat to its regional agenda.

This said, it is not clear that UN effectiveness would be dramatically enhanced were Russia to change its policy. The other permanent members of the Security Council have remained unenthusiastic about a more direct UN peacekeeping role, despite Georgia's apparent desire to replace CISPKF with a genuinely multilateral force. This reflects the general crisis in UN peacekeeping in the post-Somalia, post-Bosnia context. Experiences in these cases and elsewhere suggest that the UN has neither the resources nor the will for robust and effective peace operations in civil wars. In the meantime, the disaster for US forces in the Somali conflict has removed any enthusiasm the Americans have for substantial participation in potentially dangerous UN operations. Nor have any viable regional peacekeeping alternatives appeared on the horizon. Notably, although NATO's operations in Kosovo have encouraged speculation about the possibility of similar operations in the Caucasus, there is very little likelihood that NATO would oblige.



Although the UN has not delivered peace (and it is not clear whether it could have done so given the attitudes of the two parties and the limited capacities of the UN itself) it has made a positive contribution to the management of the conflict and ceasefire. The presence of UNOMIG personnel in the field enhances transparency and limits the capacity of CISPKF to pursue a unilateral agenda in the conflict zone. It has probably had some effect in improving the security of civilians in zones patrolled by the mission, but has not curtailed the persistent, if low, level of violence and criminality in the region. UNOMIG has been of great use in facilitating humanitarian assistance in the Gali region and elsewhere in Abkhazia by providing a modicum of security of movement in often quite dangerous circumstances. More generally, the UN and other international agencies were instrumental in preventing what otherwise might have been a complete meltdown of Georgia and total collapse of order within its borders.



Eduard Shevardnadze and Liviu Bota in Tbilisi, 1998

The presence of the UN in the early days also reduced the sense of isolation and desperation on the Georgian side. Although the lack of involvement by UN humanitarian agencies on the Abkhaz side in the first years of the conflict may have had the opposite effect in Abkhazia, since 1996 the specialized agencies have made a conscious effort to pursue proportionality in its delivery of assistance to both sides.

Russia's role

Dmitrii Danilov

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Russia has played a variety of roles in the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict and peace process. Despite conflicting perceptions of its conduct during the war, Russia was instrumental in establishing the ceasefire that has lasted since 1994. Through the deployment of CIS peacekeeping forces and through its efforts as a mediator Russia, the major regional power, remains deeply engaged in the search for a settlement. But has Russia's involvement stabilized the conflict at the cost of freezing it and has its political manoeuvring and power politics undermined its authority and diminished its peacemaking capability?

Strategic interests

The Caucasus was a strategic borderland during the expansion of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation's attempts to secure its external borders following the collapse of the Soviet Union has emphasized that this is still so. The interrelationship of ethnic groups such as the Abkhaz and Adyghs has made the North and South Caucasus a zone in which instability flows across borders. Russia's strategic concerns include its military bases in Georgia, road and rail links to the South Caucasus running through Abkhazia, Black Sea ports, the tourist industry and the Russian minority in Abkhazia. Economic concerns, particularly those relating to oil pipeline routes, have become increasingly prominent aspects of Russia's relationship with the Caucasus and have merged into broader political interests.

Security and control assumed a new importance when conflicts erupted in the early 1990s. Russia wanted the international community to recognize its role as guarantor of the peace in the former Soviet Union. The search for security, co-operation and legitimacy has had a major influence on Moscow's regional strategy and its attitudes to peacekeeping and peacemaking. However, Russian policies have been inconsistent and at times contradictory,



reflecting a decade of struggle between neo-imperialist and isolationist political factions to determine foreign policy. Balancing these factions on the Caucasian stage has often led to a gulf between rhetoric and the practical fulfilment of policy.

Russia and the end of the war

Such was the nature of Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia that, coupled with Gamsakhurdia's rebellion in October 1993, its leadership feared the disintegration of Georgia itself. President Shevardnadze felt that Russian support was necessary to prevent Gamsakhurdia's rebellion succeeding and entered the CIS as the price for retaining power and holding the country together. Georgia's fragility provided the context in which negotiations with Abkhazia took place over the following months.

Intensive negotiations, under the aegis of the UN and with active mediation from Russia, were dominated by a number of strategic concerns. Georgia sought ways to redefine its relationship with Russia to ensure its territorial integrity and to regain Abkhazia. In February 1994 Russia and Georgia signed a series of agreements that provided for Russia to assist the development of the Georgian army, for the deployment of Russian border guards and, critically, for Russia's right to keep its military bases in Georgia. In return Georgia's territorial integrity was recognized but no specific arrangements were made for settling the conflict.

The Abkhaz entered the negotiation process concerned about the restructuring of Russia's relations with Georgia but also worried that Russian disengagement would jeopardize their military victory and the prospects of capitalizing on it politically. As a result the sides wanted a different type of ceasefire and peacekeeping force: the Georgians wanted the deployment of peacekeepers throughout Abkhazia to allow a mass return of IDPs whereas the Abkhaz wanted a clearly delimited ceasefire line along the Inguri River to demarcate the territory they had taken in battle. Russia's interest was to ensure that the peacekeepers and the peace process were under its control. The UN was prepared to hand Russia responsibility for peacekeeping, partly because of a lack of progress in reaching a political settlement, partly because it lacked capacity to deploy a peacekeeping force itself and partly due to a recognition that Georgia and Abkhazia were in Russia's sphere of interest. While Russia publicly expressed regret at the UN's failure to assume a more significant role, this suited its interests, allowing it to strengthen its roles as peacekeeper and mediator.

Assigning peacekeeping functions

The negotiations involving the UN and Russia culminated in the signing of a ceasefire agreement on 4 April and the Moscow Agreement on 14 May 1994 which confirmed the establishment of a peacekeeping operation. Although nominally a CIS force it was, and has remained, entirely Russian. The PKF was deployed to replace the Russian force that had separated the parties since November 1993.

The Moscow Agreement provided for a Security Zone of twelve kilometres on each side of the Inguri River dividing Georgian and Abkhaz territory, and extended a further twelve kilometres to form a Restricted Weapons Zone. The objective of the CISPKF presence has been to separate the conflicting parties and provide sufficient security for the return of IDPs. Despite maintaining the ceasefire, the size of the force (which rarely numbered more than 1,500 although technically it could comprise 3,000 troops), its mandate, its training and equipment and its co-operation with UNOMIG have not been adequate to ensure a rigid separation between the parties at all times. In fact the porous ceasefire line has been a major source of tension between the sides and has led to over sixty CISPKF fatalities. With this in mind the CIS Summit in March 1997 took a decision to expand the peacekeeping operation.

Criticism of the activities of the peacekeeping force increased sharply as a direct result of both parties' discontent about its role in the events of May 1998. The Abkhaz criticized its failure to prevent intrusions by Georgian guerrillas. The Georgians condemned it for not preventing the expulsion of Georgians from the Gali region, as well as for not providing greater security for them over the preceding years. General Sergei Korobko, the CISPKF Commander-in-Chief, concluded that both sides viewed the peacekeeping force as an instrument for achieving their own military and political goals. Not succeeding in this, Georgia has aimed at replacing the Russian force with an international one and argued for an expansion of the mandate to include peace enforcement and policing functions over the whole of Abkhazia.

Any changes in the mandate or its extension have to be agreed by both sides. On 31 July 1998, President Shevardnadze withheld approval for its prolongation, issuing instead a declaration about the inexpediency of the CISPKF withdrawal. At the CIS Heads of State Summit meeting on 2 April 1999, the mandate was retrospectively renewed to that date, but not continued further. As a result, not only is the brief of the peacekeeping mission under question, but also its legal foundation. The UN has displayed no inclination to take on peacekeeping responsibilities, and even less to authorize a peace enforcement operation. Its caution was shown by the modesty of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's May 1998

proposal to increase the number of internationally recruited, lightly armed personnel to protect the unarmed UNOMIG in the aftermath of hostage-taking incidents involving UNOMIG personnel.

Russia as a mediator

Throughout the peace process Russia has played a dual mediating role. On the one hand, acting on its own, Russia has convened separate and joint meetings with the parties, frequently aimed at developing proposals which could be adopted by the UN negotiating process. On the other hand, Russia has played an instrumental role in the multilateral forums of the CIS and the UN and as a member of the Friends of the UN Secretary-General on Georgia.

Russia has been able to initiate separate talks at a senior level on key issues dividing the parties precisely because it is an interested party with complex and long-standing political ties to both sides. Russian mediation has sometimes blurred the boundary between influence and pressure, pushing the parties towards concessions partly in search of a solution but also to retain the initiative itself. As early as July 1995, for instance, Russia succeeded in having the Protocol on the Settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz Conflict, which allowed for a federative structure, initialled by both sides. Abkhazia subsequently disavowed its representative's signature insisting on establishing confederative relations with Georgia instead. This indicates that Russia's use of pressure to get agreement was sometimes counterproductive.

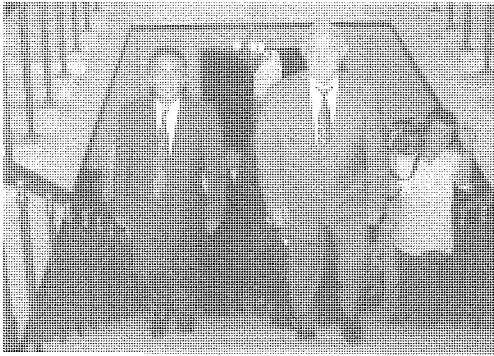
Russia only gradually established a proper diplomatic infrastructure to deal with the conflict. The Ministry of Defence negotiated the ceasefire, but since the beginning of the war in Chechnya and the appointment of Evgenii Primakov as Foreign Minister, the Foreign Ministry has assumed the leading role. Nevertheless, a gap persists between the military and political elements of Russian peacekeeping. The CISPKF command has to take decisions of a political nature on its own and its weekly consultations with the conflicting parties and UNOMIG officials in the security zone are used to address tensions on the ground. However, while making a certain political contribution to the settlement process, the CISPKF command has only limited influence. While Shevardnadze has spoken in favour of establishing a CIS mission head the Russian Foreign Ministry has not yet put the appointment of a high-ranking political official in the conflict zone onto the agenda.

The peace process has been characterized by a lack of clarity in the formation of Russian policy. In April 1998, the Ministry for Co-operation with CIS Member States, which included South Caucasian problems as a priority, was



Source: E. Kezashvili/Georgian FotoInformation Agency

Primakov, Ardzinba and Shevardnadze in Tbilisi, August 1997



Source: B. Keresashvili/Georgian Information Agency

Primakov, Ardzinba and Shevardnadze in Tbilisi, August 1997

disbanded due to its ineffectiveness. The distribution of responsibilities between other departments is not clear-cut despite a decision to hand co-ordination to the Foreign Ministry which continues to play the central role in the elaboration and realization of policy relating to the conflict. However, co-operation with the central executive authorities is not always co-ordinated. At the CIS Summit meeting in October 1997, for instance, President Yeltsin supported an amendment tabled by Shevardnadze in accordance with which the economic reconstruction of the region and the normalization of the border and customs regime would be postponed until the return of the refugees had been completed. The Foreign Ministry had previously spoken categorically against this.

While the State duma is not directly involved in the decision-making process regarding peacemaking and peacekeeping policy, it nevertheless exerts influence on Russian policy in the region, reflecting the predominance of the Communists in the duma. Sympathies lie with the Abkhaz, as indicated by several votes ranging from support for Abkhaz accession to the Russian Federation to the normalization of the border and customs situation on the Russian border with Abkhazia. Together with North Caucasian empathy for Abkhazia this acts as a constraint on Russian policy in the region.

Attempts have been made to facilitate top level meetings between the conflicting parties on the assumption that this is the best way to hammer out a deal. Such a meeting, brokered by the intensive shuttle diplomacy of Russian Foreign Minister Evgenii Primakov, took place in August 1997 in Tbilisi between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba. Although this helped the negotiation process move to a new phase, contributing to the development of the UN-sponsored Geneva Process in which the parties could meet more regularly than before, it could not change the basic parameters and underlying problems of the negotiations. After the May 1998 fighting, Russian mediators again worked to promote a meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba, the fourth since September 1992. But this meeting has not happened and anticipation of the meeting unrealistically raised expectations, despite the failure of previous meetings between the two to make substantial inroads in the fundamental divisions.

Russia and the CIS in the negotiations

Within the CIS there have been accusations that Russia uses this body as a tool for its own policy. However, since becoming a member of the CIS, Georgia has been able to use Heads of State Summit Meetings to its own ends. Trade restrictions on Abkhazia are imposed through the CIS, although Russia has been responsible for their implementation. Until summer 1999, when Georgian coastguards took over, Russia also patrolled Abkhazia's Black Sea coast where Russian and Abkhaz vessels have even exchanged fire. Furthermore, Georgia uses these summits as a forum to voice concerns about the conduct of Russian and CIS policy, stating that CIS resolutions on peacekeeping or on the return of refugees are good but never adequately implemented.

The personality factor is important in Russian diplomacy. Boris Berezovsky's involvement in the Russian Security Council and as Executive Secretary of the CIS represented Russia's attempt to strengthen its political role by means of economic levers. Berezovsky's period as Executive Secretary (April 1998 to March 1999) was characterized by a lack of co-ordination if not competition between the CIS Executive and the Russian Foreign Ministry, leading to criticism in the Russian duma, where a commission on the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict was established in autumn 1998.

Prospects

Efforts undertaken by Russia on its own, as well as in co-operation with the CIS and UN since 1994, have resulted in the disengagement of the parties and the maintenance of the security and restricted weapons zones. However, the failure to achieve a real political breakthrough has encouraged both sides to seek other solutions which the events of May 1998 confirm. It also led to criticism of Russia's dual role as peacekeeper and mediator which was used to good effect in stabilizing the conflict, but as time goes by and with resolution no closer it has started to produce contradictions. Georgia and Abkhazia hold diametrically opposed views on the political significance of peacekeeping. Georgia seeks to use it to impel Abkhazia to accept the restoration of Georgian territorial integrity, the return of refugees and the reinstatement of the government bodies loyal to Tbilisi. Russian peacekeeping is therefore considered an impediment to effective Russian mediation. For Abkhazia, on the contrary, the preservation of the CISPKF ensures equality in the negotiation process and prevents the renewed use of force – hence Russian peacekeeping is considered a prerequisite for effective mediation.

Russia has failed to find a balance between its peacemaking roles. The Russian Foreign Ministry notified Georgia in June 1998 that if acts of terrorism against the CISPKF continue, its presence would be reviewed. In raising the stakes Russia is seeking strategically to balance its roles and tactically to use the threat of disengagement to exert pressure on the conflicting parties. This position assumes that Georgia's call for the removal of the CISPKF is an attempt to internationalize the peacekeeping rather than reflecting a desire to create a security vacuum and likely explosion of violence that would accompany the removal of the CISPKF.

In political terms, given the mutual unacceptability of the parties' proposals on the future status of Abkhazia, there is little chance of a comprehensive settlement in the near future. Even progress on the return of refugees is problematic since ultimately it is tied to solving the question of political status. The return of the IDPs, which both Georgia and the international community see as a prerequisite to broader progress in the negotiations, would require the maintenance of Russian forces as peacekeepers and probably the enlargement of their mandate as well as more active participation of other CIS states. Any alternative move, including a UN decision to launch a peace enforcement operation, would risk upsetting the fragile status quo and escalating the conflict once more since it is not acceptable to both sides. It is highly unlikely that Russia would countenance such a development, since it believes this would weaken its position in the Caucasus and extend the area of conflict and instability towards the Russian republics of the North Caucasus. Stability is currently problematic in this region as highlighted by the possibility of renewed war in Chechnya, fighting in Dagestan and political tensions in Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

However, Russia's CIS partners show little desire or capacity to be directly and progressively involved in peacekeeping in Abkhazia. Greater CIS responsibility would increase Russia's dependence on its CIS partners and weaken Russian influence in CIS member states' internal politics. Ukraine's preparedness to deploy peacekeepers outside the CIS framework can be seen as an attempt to put pressure on Russia rather than a real desire to engage in peacekeeping.

It is unlikely that there will be significant changes in the Russian role in the foreseeable future. Despite the criticisms levelled by the conflicting parties, Russia believes it must maintain its presence on the ground



Civic initiatives

Susan Allen Nan

The conflict over Abkhazia has spawned a range of civic peace initiatives, but after six years of stalemate have these efforts succeeded in changing the way individuals and societies act or offered new prospects for resolving the conflict and attaining a durable peace?

In order to answer this question it is necessary to draw a distinction between first-track diplomacy conducted by officials, leaders and diplomats from Georgia and Abkhazia and international mediators, and second-track initiatives undertaken by individuals or groups who have no official status and represent only themselves and their own principles.

Some peacemaking interventions have been instigated by local academics, teachers or journalists affected by the conflict and searching for ways to address its consequences. In some cases such people in both Georgia and Abkhazia have formed NGOs to pursue their goals. Other initiatives have come from international NGOs or individuals outside the region. Activities and roles have changed over time, reflecting the dynamics of the political and security situation, the growing sophistication of local NGOs and the learning curve of their international partners. While there has been a randomness about some interventions, others have been motivated by the belief that civic initiatives offer space for dialogue and analysis which official negotiations seldom do, especially when one party (like Abkhazia) is not internationally recognized.

Some conflict resolution initiatives undertaken by Western European, American and Russian organizations began before the 1994 ceasefire, when the introduction of UNOMIG and the CISPKF provided sufficient security for international NGOs to begin exploring their potential contribution. The development of a United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, combined with greater stability on the ground from 1995 encouraged civic initiatives by providing information and analysis and by

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facilitating numerous INGO visits to Abkhazia. Working in a field where the personal meets the political, in which trust and respect are prerequisites to developing and sustaining initiatives, the continuous involvement of several individuals and organizations has been significant. The commitment of local activists has enabled the development of a civic peacebuilding process, but logistical and psychological difficulties in cross-communal dialogue have often required the involvement of external intermediaries.

Multifaceted activities

Civic interventions since the 1993 war have addressed humanitarian and environmental concerns, education, psychological trauma (especially of children), human rights monitoring, conflict analysis, the media, civil society development and democratization, some of which are directly related to the peace process. INGOs like International Alert (IA), Links, the Berghof Centre for Constructive Conflict Management and Conciliation Resources, as well as academics from the University of California, Irvine (UCI) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), have convened many meetings in neutral venues, which have provided opportunities for activists from the conflicting sides to build relationships and foster dialogue on substantive issues. Such meetings have provided valuable opportunities to break down stereotypes ingrained by the post-war separation and introduce new ideas and approaches to conflict resolution.

These initiatives are not about the exercise of power. They focus on relationships, attitudes, ideas and skills, and through the establishment of effective processes have encouraged the parties to address the hard issues dividing them. Training has provided a starting point for many interventions. IA organized three two-week workshops in 1993 and 1994 to promote discussion on conflict resolution and create an environment for people from the North Caucasus and Georgia to jointly analyse their conflicts. Similarly, in 1995 the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland brought together an individual from each of Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Azerbaijan and Armenia for a four month programme with the objective of training them to establish NGOs that could engage in conflict resolution work back home. The Abkhaz and Georgian participants helped to establish NGOs on their return. The Abkhaz participant subsequently became deputy foreign minister. According to the foreign minister his appointment was influenced by his participation in Maryland, allowing the insights gained there to be transferred to diplomatic forums. The relatively small politically active communities in Georgia and, especially, Abkhazia create a closely interconnected environment of civil and political actors and give non-official initiatives, potentially, great influence.

Since mid-1996 INGO civic initiatives have tried to move from improving relations to activities promoting dialogue on substantive issues. This is partly in response to the slow progress of the official negotiations and partly due to an enhanced understanding of political constraints. Many meetings have focused on the environment, youth or women's issues as a way of providing less sensitive frameworks for dialogue and considering how common needs could lead to common projects. But most endeavours have found it difficult to move from open dialogue processes to concrete measures that could foster confidence building and reconciliation. Donor policies have often encouraged joint activities, whereas Abkhaz participants have preferred to talk about parallel projects, not wanting to be forced into collaboration according to someone else's agenda. As a result, fundraising for sustained projects, especially for unilateral work in Abkhazia, has been difficult and has at times compromised the work of organizations or created artificial partnerships.

Unilateral work has become an important part of civic peace initiatives. Georgia has developed a vibrant NGO constituency with the support of international organizations. However, in Abkhazia, because of greater political and material constraints resulting from the societal decay induced by war, NGOs have been more isolated. This has had a negative impact on their preparedness to engage in constructive dialogue with their Georgian counterparts. The imbalance in opportunity has been addressed by the Berghof Foundation which supported a meeting in 1997 to aid local actors in developing their peace strategies, and by Conciliation Resources which, in collaboration with local experts and UNV, ran training workshops on conflict handling, strategic planning and professional skills for journalists and NGOs in 1998 and 1999. UCI has actively combined support for Abkhaz NGO development with dialogue meetings on environmental issues and the role of citizens' diplomacy.

A VUB exercise that was part academic and part political illustrates attempts to promote joint reflection and inject new ideas into the process. Georgian and Abkhaz scholars attended two seminars on the role of the international community in regulating the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict and on models of sovereignty. Subsequently scholars and officials made joint study visits to Switzerland and Belgium, and were exposed to comparative federal experiences. The academic co-operation aimed to stimulate much needed discussion among opinion formers as well as to encourage intellectuals from both sides to participate in an analysis of the roots of the conflict and the prospects for future settlement. The proceedings were published in Russian and distributed in the region. A copy of the book was lying on the desk of Vladislav Ardzinba when a Georgian television journalist interviewed him in 1999, indicating that the material reached the highest level.

Such initiatives can have a profound impact on the attitudes of individuals. In January 1997, UNV and the Berghof Centre brought twenty-two mainly non-governmental people from Georgia and Abkhazia to Stadtschlaining in Austria for a workshop on democratization in transitional societies. After one exercise a number of participants were shocked to see the extent to which opponents understood their needs and fears and yet remained steadfast in support of their own positions. While most civic peace initiatives have involved 'civil society actors', some, like the meetings organized by the Conflict Management Group in The Hague in 1994 and 1995, have brought officials and political leaders together unofficially.

A lesson that can be drawn from the myriad of meetings that have taken place is that political change does not come from creating trusting relations alone but from trading benefits and concessions, and from creating legal frameworks that accommodate conflicting relationships and broader attitudinal changes in society. While negotiations are the domain of official diplomacy, generating ideas is often easier in an informal civic environment. Transmitting these ideas upwards to the negotiating process and sideways to society at large, however, is no easy task.

Obstacles and constraints

Civic initiatives have encountered a range of political and logistical obstacles. Telecommunications with Abkhazia, from Georgia as well as from further afield, have been intermittent at best. Foreigners travelling to Abkhazia have often had to rely on UNOMIG helicopters, planes or armoured vehicles and the four-wheel drives of aid agencies for transport, or have simply had to walk across the Inguri Bridge.

Arranging travel abroad for Abkhaz has at times required liaison with the Georgian and Russian Foreign Ministries, as well as the acquisition of laissez-passer documents, since Abkhaz passports are not recognized. Some Abkhaz choose to take Russian or Armenian passports for convenience, but this allows opponents to question their commitment to Abkhazia. Sochi, across the Abkhaz border in Russia, has been the most common location for meetings, since only on very rare occasions since the war have Abkhaz civic actors travelled to Georgia or Georgians to Abkhazia. The complexity of Abkhaz travel illustrates the asymmetric relationship: Georgia and Russia have some influence over which Abkhaz can travel and thus over which meetings can take place. Georgia is reluctant to relinquish this leverage, even though it imposes a political and psychological constraint on all aspects of the negotiation process.

The composition of delegations at meetings is also problematic. In 1997 a meeting of Abkhaz and Georgian parliamentarians in the USA was undermined when a leader in the 'government-in-exile', with which Abkhaz are reluctant to engage, joined the Georgian delegation. However, inviting to meetings those who are more willing to talk does not necessarily bring together people who are influential or those between whom confidence will be most difficult to build – the Abkhaz and IDP representatives. This points to the fact that NGOs often deal with the people who they can access, not necessarily those who have most leverage over the peace process. Conflict resolution and confidence building processes have often been seen as elitist since the same people tend to be invited time and again. This is especially the case with Abkhazia where the circle of people involved has been much narrower than in Georgia. This has resulted in conflict resolution fatigue, particularly in Abkhazia, as innumerable fact-finding missions and invitations to meetings have exhausted key local partners. The small size of the groups involved in these activities has sometimes left them politically vulnerable and prone to accusations that they are detached from society at large, pawns of their governments or subject to government pressure.

The structure of meetings has been another sensitive issue. At times Abkhaz have refused to participate in bilateral meetings, as if these symbolize acceptance of status within Georgia, and have been keen to add a regional, Caucasian dimension. This has pros and cons. It has meant that contact has been sustained in broader forums when it might otherwise have dwindled and has provided solidarity for the Abkhaz. While regional integration and comparison with other Caucasian conflicts undoubtedly has a bearing on how a final resolution might be achieved, there is, nevertheless, a concern that regional meetings dilute discussion of the hard issues of political status and IDP return.

Confidentiality is also sensitive. Participants might be inclined to explore more radical ideas in confidential meetings, but there is less scope for discussions to filter back into the public domain. Unlike politicians, those who participate in meetings on their own account are often cautious because, although they have no mandate, they are often considered to be representing the wider community.

A Georgian view

Paata Zakareishvili

The public reaction to the first meetings of representatives of Abkhaz and Georgian NGOs was so negative that people in Georgia wanted to prosecute the participants. Despite damning public statements and press reports the meetings continued. By linking the resolution of the conflict with the respect and protection of human rights on both sides the meetings have initiated a process of reconciliation. Slowly this is contributing to a wider public understanding of the responsibility of ordinary citizens without which the creation of civil society, so crucial to long-term democratization, would be impossible. There remains a lack of debate about fundamental divisions and too often there is incomprehension about the other side's concerns. Contact has helped to dispel the enemy image, though not yet in society at large. The main goal of civic dialogue initiatives, within as much as between communities, must therefore be to breakdown negative stereotypes. Lasting resolution of this conflict can only be based on the willingness of Georgians and Abkhaz to come to terms with the political and social trauma that both have experienced. This requires greater awareness and to date it is predominantly civic peace initiatives that have tried to address these questions.

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Co-ordinating efforts

The number of overlapping civic peace initiatives calls for co-ordination or information sharing between the actors involved. However, such efforts face challenges of competition for funding, prestige and contacts; concerns about confidentiality; differences (to the point of contradictions) in approach, politics, analysis, and underlying theories; poor personal relations; and lack of resources to undertake explicit co-ordination.

Nevertheless, there is surprisingly effective ad hoc co-ordination of international efforts. UNV has informally kept other actors abreast of initiatives and jointly thought through intervention strategies with INGOs. There have been several meetings and increasingly frequent communication between those INGOs engaged in long-term Georgian–Abkhaz conflict resolution processes. In addition, Georgians and Abkhaz inform internationals about ongoing initiatives as they participate in multiple processes.

Evaluating civic peace initiatives

Civic peace initiatives should be evaluated through an examination of their relationship to and impact on first-track processes and society at large. While on a political level the UN has at times shown a benign wariness of INGO attempts to facilitate meetings, it has provided logistical support and frequent briefings. UNOCHA and UNV have gone further. The former provides a mail service between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. The latter, prompted by its field co-ordinator from 1996 to 1999, Martin Schümer, has funded and participated in an array of confidence and capacity-building activities involving local and international NGOs. Almost assuming a second-track character itself, UNV has created links between INGOs and other UN agencies. While INGOs benefit from these links they have rarely engaged the UN in structured discussions about the effectiveness of peacemaking strategies.

INGOs have made considerable efforts to establish relations with government representatives and politicians on both sides. Individual meetings outside the framework of dialogue or confidence-building initiatives also have an impact. This is particularly so in Abkhazia where opportunities to discuss issues are rarer due to travel constraints.

Attempts by INGOs to address the role of Russia in the peace process, however, have been rarer. This reflects the fact that Russia is generally seen as a grey figure lurking in the background. Russian NGOs have not found a role for themselves, stifled by perceptions of partiality, especially from the Georgian side.

It is more difficult to ascertain the extent to which ideas feed into official negotiations. Two examples indicate ways in which there might be cross-fertilization. Confidence building, previously promoted only by civic initiatives, assumed a more important role in the official negotiation process as a result of meetings organized 'to strengthen mutual trust'. Under the auspices of the UN and with assistance from the Greek and Turkish governments, delegations of businessmen, journalists, politicians and members of the cultural elite met in Athens in October 1998 and in Istanbul in June 1999. On the one hand, these confidence-building meetings aimed at rebuilding relationships, as many NGO initiatives have tried to do. On the other hand the presence of high level officials created opportunities for informal negotiations, covering both political and socio-economic problems as well as issues such as the exchange of newspapers and television news bulletins.

As early as 1996 civic initiatives openly dealt with economic co-operation, development and the impact of the blockade on the Abkhaz preparedness to negotiate constructively. While these issues were no doubt on the official negotiating table, there was minimal public discussion of them at that time. After a joint meeting in early 1997 Georgian participants called for economic incentives as a way forward, but they were heavily criticized. Yet by the end of the year, one of the three working groups of the newly established Co-ordinating Council was on socio-economic development. Subsequently, a UNDP Needs Assessment Mission promoted this as possibly the most promising area for progress. It is difficult to establish a causal relationship, but it was not insignificant that civic constituencies were prepared to raise the issues publicly, especially in Georgia.

The influence of civic peace initiatives on society at large is more difficult to ascertain. By their very nature civic initiatives imply an autonomy of action that was absent under Soviet authoritarianism. Western governments and INGOs have emphasized the development of civil society, however ill defined, as an antidote to ethnic nationalism and an aid to democratization. Civic peace initiatives bolster this process. Nascent NGOs have increasingly addressed conflict-related issues, attempting to widen discussions on matters of resolution and develop civic bodies as a means to create a social readiness for settlement. This does not necessarily mean that non-political actors are more open to compromise than political leaders, but it recognizes that settlements not acceptable to the public will be hard to sustain and that peacebuilding has to occur both at the high political level and at the level of society at large, at the same time. The lack of public debate about progress in or constraints on the negotiation process suggests that politicians and civil society are divorced from one another. Leaders have been

An Abkhaz view

Liana Kvarchelia

The motive behind NGO meetings is the promotion of dialogue as an alternative to violence though many in Abkhaz society believe that the Georgian hidden agenda behind such initiatives is an attempt to reconstruct a common state through efforts at a different level. As Abkhazia has not been recognized as a state this is perceived as particularly dangerous for Abkhaz aspirations. This explains the greater enthusiasm among Georgians for bilateral co-operation and why Abkhaz NGOs have tried to change the format of meetings to include wider Caucasian representation. Bilateral contacts have tended to focus on specific issues such as Black Sea pollution, the search for missing people or the role of civic initiatives. Practical results have been modest but relationships have been built. The greatest achievement to date has been the realization on both sides that there is an opportunity to develop a more realistic idea of each other's concerns and that dialogue, with social groups as well as elites, is the best way of achieving peace and stability in the region.





reluctant to mobilize support for compromise, fearing that people would not be receptive. Therefore, NGOs and social movements play a crucial role trying to bridge this gap and stimulate dialogue within as well as between communities shaken and fragmented by violence.

It is quite likely that despite all their efforts local and international civic groups are not directly influencing prospective peace accords that are being negotiated by political leaders and diplomats. After all, settlement seems a long way off and in neither Georgia nor Abkhazia are there strong peace constituencies. This makes it difficult to turn war fatigue into a desire for peace and reconciliation, but the work of local and international NGOs is both empowering and challenging people to become more engaged in processes of social change. If civic actors can promote a long-term programme of ongoing analysis of the fundamental issues and root causes of the conflict, this could help to bring about necessary political change and influence the choices societies make.

The author would like to thank Jonathan Cohen for his contribution to this article.

Displacement and return

Greg Hansen

Greg Hansen has worked as a UN Volunteer in Georgia and as a civilian observer in the former Yugoslavia. He has conducted peace research in Lebanon and Mozambique and in 1982 served with a Canadian contingent of UN peacekeeping forces in Cyprus. In recent years Hansen was a trainer and field liaison for the Local Capacities for Peace Project and a consultant on Caucasus issues to the Humanitarianism and War Project.

The brutal nature of the war in Abkhazia was characterized on both sides by ethnic sweep operations, terror, expulsions, looting and rape inflicted on civilians of the other ethnic group. Taking on an increasingly ethnic imprint, violence extended into villages and even families within which Georgians and Abkhaz had previously lived together peacefully. Personal experiences of ethnically based violence led to cycles of retribution, many of which were interrupted, but by no means finished, when the ceasefire was enacted in May 1994. The outcome of the war was a near complete separation of Georgians and Abkhaz, with many harbouring deep mutual hostility.

The forced flight of some 250,000 Georgians and Mingrelians from Abkhazia gave the Abkhaz a demographic advantage that they have proved reluctant to surrender. An en masse return would again put the Abkhaz in a precarious minority position. There are well-placed fears among the Abkhaz that post-return security arrangements would not be adequate to prevent uncontrolled Georgian fighters from seeking revenge for events during and after the war. These fears have generally not been recognized by the Georgians, nor have they been addressed meaningfully by the official peace process. In addition, land disputes can be expected to figure prominently once repatriation begins, since many Abkhaz have reportedly moved into the homes of displaced Georgians, often because of the destruction of their own homes. The number of ethnic Abkhaz and others who are displaced within Abkhazia, or who have fled as refugees, is unknown.

In 1994 the Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons which followed the



ceasefire led to a misplaced optimism that rapid progress could be made towards removing the major impediments to a political resolution of the conflict. Although many in the humanitarian community regarded a return as dangerously premature, UNHCR mobilized quickly for a major return operation. The anticipated quick fix failed due to the absence of meaningful security for returnees and Abkhaz insistence that returnees be screened so that participants in the war could be excluded. The experience highlighted the dangers inherent in approaching the conflict resolution process in a vacuum, without due regard for the humanitarian implications of political decisions.

Fuelled partly by its need to realize scarce income from fertile agricultural areas, Sukhumi has demonstrated a willingness to allow limited Georgian and Mingrelian resettlement in the Gali region. However, Sukhumi's unilateral effort in March 1999 to encourage those displaced from Gali to return has been regarded with scepticism at best and as a provocation at worst. Georgian militant groups and many Georgian politicians see the Abkhaz tactic of allowing a partial return as a threat to their all-or-nothing approach, which includes the return of Georgians to Sukhumi.

Estimates of spontaneous returnees to the Gali area have been as high as 55,000 in periods of calm, although numbers fluctuate with the ebb and flow of security conditions, the planting season, the hazelnut harvest and the availability of humanitarian assistance in Zugdidi. Despite limited reconstruction assistance many returnees have been able to muster the resources necessary to start anew. However, protection needs have been acute and largely unmet. Periodic ethnic sweep and registration operations by Abkhaz militia around Gali have typically been violent episodes with little CISPKF intercession on behalf of civilians, prompting people to flee across the Inguri River until calm returns and serving to discredit the peacekeepers. At particularly tense moments, some returnees have formed self-defence cadres to protect their homes and families. Security in the region has worsened since 1995 with escalating attacks by Georgian partisan groups and reprisals by Abkhaz militia. Many homes rebuilt since 1995 were burned again in the violence of May 1998 when up to 35,000 people were displaced for the second or even third time.

A humanitarian impasse

The extended period of frozen hostility since 1994 has resulted in a humanitarian impasse. Continued displacement for tens of thousands of Georgians and the perpetuation of difficult conditions for Abkhaz render political negotiations more difficult and the eventual consolidation of peace less certain. The right of return, as

well as reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance within Abkhazia, has become deeply subordinated to and contingent upon success in resolving what have proved to be intractable questions of political and territorial status.

The quality of life for people on both sides, already struggling to recover from the shock of the Soviet collapse, has been further undercut by the war, which disrupted normal transportation and trade channels and created the immense additional burden of providing for a large war-affected population. In light of its significant depopulation, Abkhazia's prospects for economic viability in the long term are marginal at best. Meanwhile, growing impatience and militancy among the displaced has meant diminished prospects for their safe and orderly return and diminished readiness among Abkhaz to welcome them.

Aid donors have indicated that they are unwilling to maintain the status quo indefinitely when there is negligible progress in peace negotiations. Five years after the ceasefire major aid agencies and donors are now openly discussing the propriety of disengaging, rightly questioning whether their limited resources would be more effectively applied to other conflict and post-conflict situations where tangible progress is being made.

The effects of prolonged displacement

Displaced ethnic Georgians tend to live visibly separate lives from their hosts and this has led to an increasing sense of estrangement between the two communities. There is considerable ill feeling between displaced and host populations who feel that IDP-owned business interests have enjoyed undue advantages and near monopolies over some aspects of trade and commerce. Coupled to this, as a visible drain on government resources the displaced have borne the brunt of resentment over Georgia's slow emergence from systemic economic collapse. International assistance earmarked for the displaced to the exclusion of the population at large has, at times, made matters worse.

Field studies conducted by UNHCR in 1997 revealed that among displaced Georgians and war-affected Abkhaz the prolonged experience of displacement, isolation and hardship has resulted in a hardening of resentment against the other ethnic group. Daily reminders of the war's violence, destruction and ensuing deprivation contribute to their self-identification as distinct, separate and victimized groups. Within these groups, which often have limited contacts outside of their own improvised post-war communities, the repeated telling of personal stories of war and ethnic cleansing has helped to keep wounds fresh. Surrounded by unrepaired war damage many Abkhaz fear the worst if displaced Georgians return en masse. Similarly, many displaced Georgians are not

convinced that their safety can be guaranteed if they return to live among the Abkhaz. Institutionalization of the ceasefire has ruled out most possibilities for constructive contact between the two populations across the lines of conflict. While large-scale bloodshed has been held in check by the ceasefire, the persistently unstable 'no war, no peace' situation has led to replication of the conditions under which animosities flourish.

Against the backdrop of a lacklustre peace process, fear, frustration and growing militancy among elements of the displaced population constitute resources that can be employed for political opportunism. Some observers hold that the Georgian government benefits from having a highly visible and politically mobilized IDP constituency which can garner international sympathies, maintain pressure on the Abkhaz authorities and lure the attention of the electorate away from Georgia's other pressing difficulties. Any significant integration of the displaced, therefore, would prove to be politically costly. Political organizations claiming to represent the interests of the displaced, notably the Abkhaz Liberation Party and the Coordinating Council for the Persecuted, have played on frustration and incited militancy. These organizations have sought to discredit the negotiating process, advocating a violent resolution of the conflict and raising false hopes about the imminence and conditions of return. Escalating guerrilla activity mounted in and around Abkhazia by the so-called White Legion and Forest Brothers has led to mutual recrimination between Georgian and Abkhaz interlocutors on a number of occasions, jeopardizing their ability to seek compromise solutions. Spontaneous returnees to the Gali region have been subjected to attacks and threats both from Abkhaz paramilitaries and from the Georgian guerrillas who purport to be protecting their interests.

The Zviadist factor

Prolonged displacement may be widening a potentially dangerous identity gap between the large numbers of displaced who are of Mingrelian (West Georgian) ancestry and the host population in other parts of Georgia. Since Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who had considerable support in Mingrelia, was ousted as Georgian leader in 1992, the gulf between Zviadists in western Georgia and the regime in Tbilisi has been allowed to fester as a continuing threat to Georgian statehood marked by low-level, sporadic violence. There is a widespread perception in western Georgia that Tbilisi has been repressive, undemocratic and unresponsive. Meanwhile, the more visible and internationalized conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have claimed greater resources from Tbilisi and international sources.

Although the fight between West and East Georgians was discontinued in late 1992 so that all could join in the fighting in Abkhazia, it was resumed briefly in late 1993 and into 1994. Memories of the bloody reprisal attacks, looting and lawlessness that prevailed in western Georgia remain relatively fresh. Increasing militancy within the displaced population may be due in part to the crystallization of a shared Mingrelian identity. Issues that have arisen within the increasingly restive IDP community have periodically taken on overtones of the Gamsakhurdia/Shevardnadze divide. Zugdidi has been an epicentre for IDP activism, with frequent demonstrations and disruptions in the city and nearby on the bridge separating western Georgia and Abkhazia over the Inguri River. The economic position in western Georgia has been worsened by the area's absorption of large numbers of displaced.

Impunity

Perhaps the greatest unmet challenge facing protagonists in the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict is their assumption of genuine responsibility for the welfare of the people they claim to represent. Their conduct of the war in Abkhazia and management of the ceasefire has not inspired confidence. Exemption from punishment remains a serious obstacle to mitigation and resolution of the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict in a variety of ways. Throughout the life of the conflict, Georgian, Abkhaz and CISPKF military and paramilitary personnel have repeatedly demonstrated a lack of military professionalism. Poor discipline, lack of adequate command and control and excessive and arbitrary use of force have been commonplace, with dire consequences for civilians. Georgian and Abkhaz authorities each disclaim responsibility for the existence or conduct of paramilitary and guerrilla groups that, for several years, have mounted lethal attacks on civilians, UNOMIG and the CISPKF in and around Abkhazia. Self-appointed leaders of the IDP community and the Abkhaz 'parliament-in-exile' have incited violence and raised false hopes among the displaced about the imminence and conditions of return. These groups have not been held to account by the Georgian authorities. A disturbing number of serious attacks on aid agency operations and personnel have gone unpunished and have jeopardized a continued humanitarian presence and assistance to those most in need.

Implications for safe and orderly return

As one aid worker in the region has observed, repatriation is a big word involving many incremental steps. Reconciliation may be an even bigger word. Among the roots of the conflict are perceptions of long-standing denials of security and justice, unfair and inadequate



access to resources, impingement on human rights, perceptions of threat and victimization, fear of genocide and demographic oblivion. Return agreements that are not sensitive to these issues may well result in a resumption of war. The deep-seated animosities, severe destruction and vulnerability of residents and returnees to fear and manipulation all point to the need for long-term investment by aid agencies, diplomatic actors, local authorities and civil society. Cutting corners in deference to political expediency, speed and frugality have proven to be dangerously counterproductive to the welfare of returnees and the sustainability of returns.

In the event of an agreement on the return of the displaced, a number of potential pitfalls will require careful management by humanitarian assistance agencies and diplomatic actors. The willingness of Abkhaz to receive or live alongside returnees will not be determined by signatures on political agreements. This will come through a mix of local factors including security concerns, the absorptive capacity of local infrastructure, the availability of proportionate reconstruction assistance on the basis of need and confidence that adequate safeguards will be in place to ensure that disputes will be resolved without violence. The attitudes that displaced Georgians and Mingrelians take with them upon return will be as important, if not more important, than the skills they possess. Prolonged displacement has heightened the need for a carefully conceived synergy of political and humanitarian measures to temper unrealistic expectations, address frustrations, ease isolation and promote a sense of community among potential returnees, host communities and residents in areas of return.

Security in areas of return

The potential for intercommunal violence is likely to be acute in some areas of return. Renewed blood feuds, revenge attacks, criminality and competition for scarce resources all have strong potential to serve as flashpoints for armed clashes between residents and returnees. Experience throughout the Caucasus suggests that meaningful protection cannot be entrusted to ill-disciplined and poorly trained local police, soldiers and militia. Nor would the track record of CISPKF, as it is presently constituted, inspire sufficient confidence. Political agreements will determine whether returnees and residents enjoy the protection of international police and peacekeeping forces. Meanwhile, assistance efforts which support local capacities for dealing with local conflicts such as training and provisioning of accountable local civilian police, and creative aid programming which improves the opportunities for people to live together peacefully, will be important adjuncts to political protection.

Return, reconstruction and rehabilitation

Since the war, aid to Abkhazia has been heavily conditioned by implicit donor biases against engaging in reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance in an insurgent area. Beyond life-saving humanitarian assistance, little has been done by the international community to help normalize living conditions for Abkhaz or to prepare Abkhazia for the absorption of returnees beyond the Gali region. The dearth of rehabilitation activity appears to have worked against progress in conflict resolution by feeding into pre-existing notions among Abkhaz that they are isolated and victimized, leading the Abkhaz authorities to be less inclined to co-operate with mediation efforts.

In the event of an organized return, aid-centred tensions in Abkhazia can be anticipated when large-scale reconstruction of homes and infrastructure begins. From village to village, war damage often reflected the ethnic origins of the homeowner or the ethnic make-up of the neighbourhood. Assessments of need for reconstruction assistance, therefore, are likely to identify beneficiary groups which are a mirror image of ethnic and other divisions. To be specific, it will mostly be Georgian homes that will receive first call on international assistance in the rush to get people resettled. Homes presently or formerly occupied by Abkhaz and others, some of which have been occupied without legal authorization, are already habitable and thus are unlikely to be targeted for assistance. Transparent and creative targeting strategies, including those which take collective or community needs into account, may prove useful for avoiding perceptions among Abkhaz and other minorities that aid is biased in favour of ethnic Georgians.

The challenges facing normalization in Abkhazia and a return of the displaced are formidable. Year by year the costs accruing from the intractability and lethargy of regional political authorities steadily mount. A safe, orderly and sustainable return process will rest on renewed commitment and a new-found sense of urgency from those who claim to represent the interests of people affected by the conflict.

Key texts

Documents relating to the Georgia–Abkhazia peace process

Documents in bold are printed unedited and other documents listed are available on the Conciliation Resources website <http://www.c-r.org>

UN Security Council Resolutions and Reports of the Secretary-General are available at the UN website <http://www.un.org/Docs>

- Ceasefire agreement, 3 September 1992
- Ceasefire agreement, 14 May 1993
- Ceasefire, 27 July 1993 (The Sochi Agreement)
- Memorandum of understanding between the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides at the negotiations held in Geneva, 1 December 1993
- Communiqué on the second round of negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Geneva 13 January 1994
- **Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict, 4 April 1994**
Original in English and Russian
- **Quadripartite agreement on voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, 4 April 1994**
Original in English and Russian
- **Agreement on a ceasefire and separation of forces, Moscow 14 May 1994**
(Includes the protocol concerning the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States)
Original in Russian
- **Proposal for the establishment of a coordinating commission, Moscow 11 May 1994**
Original in English and Russian
- **UNOMIG mandate adopted by Security Council Resolution 937, 21 July 1994**
Original in English
- Decision on measures for the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia and the resolution on the extension of the mandate of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces in the zone of conflict, The Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 19 January 1996
- Decision on the expansion of the operation for maintaining peace in Abkhazia, Georgia, The Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 28 March 1997
- **Statement on the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, Tbilisi 14 August 1997**
Original in Russian
- Protocol of the meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, Sukhumi 20 August 1997
- **Concluding statement on the outcome of the resumed meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, Geneva 17–19 November 1997**
Original in Russian
- **Record of the first session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, Sukhumi 18 December 1997**
Original in Russian
- Record of the first extraordinary session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, Tbilisi 22 January 1998
- **Record of the second session of Working Group I of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz parties on issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and to security problems, Tbilisi 22 January 1998**
- Decision of 28 April 1998 on additional measures for the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, The Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 28 April 1998
- Protocol of the fourth (second special) session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Tbilisi 22 May 1998
- Protocol on the ceasefire, separation of armed units and guarantees for the prevention of acts involving force, Gagra 26 May 1998 (Gagra Protocol)
- Concluding statement on the results of the second meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Geneva 23–25 July 1998
- Protocol of the fifth session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Sukhumi 2 September 1998
- Minutes of the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on stabilization of the situation along the line separating the sides, 24 September 1998
- **Athens meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence-building measures, 16–18 October 1998**
Original in Russian
- Protocol of the sixth session of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Geneva 17–18 December 1998
- Decision on the further measures on settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, The Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2 April 1999
- **Istanbul statement of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence-building measures, 7–9 June 1999**
Original in Russian

Declaration on Measures for A Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz Conflict Signed on 4 April 1994

1. The third round of negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict took place from 22 to 25 February 1994 in Geneva, from 7 to 9 March 1994 in New York and from 29 to 31 March in Moscow under the aegis of the United Nations with the facilitation of the Russian Federation and with the participation of representatives of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. The negotiations were held in accordance with Security Council resolutions 849 (1993) of 9 July 1993, 854 (1993) of 6 August 1993, 858 (1993) of 24 August 1993, 876(1993) of 19 October 1993, 881(1993) of 4 November 1993, 892 (1993) of 22 December 1993, 896 (1994) of 31 January 1994, 901 (1994) of 4 March 1994 and 906 (1994) of 25 March 1994.

3. By signing this declaration, the parties hereby commit themselves to a strict formal ceasefire from this date and also reaffirm their commitment to the non-use of force or threat of the use of force against each other as expressed in their communiqué of 13 January 1994 (see S/1994/32, annex).

4. The parties have agreed to and signed a quadripartite agreement, a copy of which is attached to the present declaration, on the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons. The agreement provides for the return of refugees/displaced persons in accordance with existing international practice, including the practice of UNHCR. A special commission on refugees/displaced persons, which shall include representatives of the parties, UNHCR, the Russian Federation, and CSCE in an observer capacity, shall begin its work in Sochi in mid-April 1994. The implementation of the agreement will begin upon the deployment of a peacekeeping force.

5. The parties reaffirm their request for the early development of a peacekeeping operation and for the participation of a Russian military contingent in the United Nations peacekeeping force, as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding of 1 December 1993 (S/26875, annex) and the communiqué of 13 January 1994. The plan for carrying out the peacekeeping operation will be agreed upon with the parties to the conflict. The realization of the peacekeeping operation should also promote the safe return of refugees/displaced persons. The parties again appeal to the United Nations Security Council to expand the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

6. Abkhazia shall have its own Constitution and legislation and appropriate State symbols, such as anthem, emblem and flag.

7. The parties held discussions on distribution of powers on the understanding that any agreement on this issue is part of a comprehensive settlement and will be reached only once a final solution to the conflict has been found. At this stage, the parties have reached a mutual understanding regarding powers for joint action in the following fields:

- (a) Foreign policy and foreign economic ties;
- (b) Border guard arrangements;
- (c) Customs;
- (d) Energy, transport and communications;
- (e) Ecology and elimination of consequences of natural disasters;
- (f) Ensuring human and civic rights and freedoms and the rights of national minorities.

8. The parties agree to continue energetic efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement. The Parties will set up an appropriate committee, which will work on a standing basis, taking into account the decisions of the Security Council under the chairmanship of the United Nations, with participation of representatives of CSCE and the Russian Federation and with the involvement of international

experts. This body will meet alternatively in Moscow and Geneva. Its first meeting will be held in Geneva on 19 April 1994. A phased action programme will be worked out and proposals on the re-establishment of State and legal relations will be elaborated.

9. The parties decided to take additional measures in connection with the search for missing persons and the reburial of the dead.

10. The parties, based on the fact that there is no statute of limitations applicable to war crimes, agreed to intensify efforts to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious criminal offences as defined by international and national law and bring the perpetrators to justice. Inevitable punishment shall also be inflicted on persons who try or will try to undermine the peace process in Abkhazia by resorting to arms.

*For the Georgian side:
(Signed) A. Kavsadze*

*For the Abkhaz side:
(Signed) S. Jinjolia*

*In the presence of:
From the United Nations:
(Signed) E. Brunner*

*From the Russian Federation:
(Signed) B. Pastukhov*

*From the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe:
(Signed) V. Manno*

Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons Signed on 4 April 1994

The Abkhaz and Georgian sides, hereinafter referred to as the Parties, the Russian Federation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Recalling Security Council resolutions 849 (1993) of 9 July 1993, 854 (1993) of 6 August 1993, 858 (1993) of 24 August 1993, 876 (1993) of 19 October 1993, 892 (1993) of 22 December 1993, 896 (1994) of 31 January 1994, 901 (1994) of 4 March 1994 and 906 (1994) of 25 March 1994,

Recognizing that the right of all citizens to live in and to return to their country of origin is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

Noting conclusions 18 (XXXI) and 40 (XXXVI) of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which constitute internationally agreed principles governing the repatriation of refugees,

Acting in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Parties on 1 December 1993 and especially paragraph 4, under which Parties expressed their willingness to create conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their permanent places of residence in all regions of Abkhazia,

Recalling that resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950, by which the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ascribes to the High Commissioner the function of providing international protection to refugees and of seeking permanent solutions for the problems of refugees, inter alia, by promoting and facilitating their voluntary repatriation,

Given the responsibility entrusted to the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees to act, under the Secretary-General's authority, as the international lead agency for the repatriation of displaced persons to Abkhazia,

Noting the desire of the Parties to cooperate with each other to achieve full observance of the principles and safeguards governing voluntary repatriation,

Considering the need, therefore, to establish a framework to define modalities of such cooperation for implementation of the repatriation,

Noting that the Parties agree that a repatriation operation to Abkhazia will imply, prior to its implementation, that the security and living conditions in the areas of return are guaranteed.

HAVE AGREED ON THE FOLLOWING PROVISIONS:

1. The Parties agree to cooperate and to interact in planning and conducting the activities aimed to safeguard and guarantee the safe, secure and dignified return of people who have fled from areas of the conflict zone to the areas of their previous permanent residence.

2. For the purpose of the present agreement, the parties will guarantee the safety of refugees and displaced persons in the course of the voluntary repatriation and rehabilitation operations to be organized.

3. In implementing this voluntary repatriation programme, the Parties undertake to respect the following principles:

(a) Displaced persons/refugees have the right to return voluntarily to their places of origin or residence irrespective of their ethnic, social or political affiliation under conditions of complete safety, freedom and dignity;

(b) The voluntary character of the repatriation shall be ascertained and respected through appropriate arrangements;

(c) Displaced persons/refugees shall have the right to return peacefully without risk of arrest, detention, imprisonment or legal criminal proceedings.

Such Immunity shall not apply to persons where there are serious

evidences that they have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity as defined in international instruments and international practice as well as serious non-political crimes committed in the context of the conflict. Such immunity shall also not apply to persons who have previously taken part in the hostilities and are currently serving in armed formations, preparing to fight in Abkhazia.

Persons falling into these categories should be informed through appropriate channels of the possible consequences they may face upon return;

(d) The Parties shall ensure that returnees, upon return, will enjoy freedom of movement and establishment including the right to return to the areas where they lived prior to leaving the conflict zone or to the area of their choice;

(e) The Parties shall ensure that refugees and displaced persons, upon return, will get their expired documents (propiska, passport) extended and validated for their previous place of residence or the elected place of return;

(f) The Parties shall ensure that repatriants, upon return, will be protected from harassment, including unauthorized charges or fees and threat to life or property;

(g) Returnees shall, upon return, get back movable and immovable properties they left behind and should be helped to do so, or to receive whenever possible an appropriate compensation for their lost properties if return of property appears not feasible.

The Commission mentioned in paragraph 5 below will establish a mechanism for such claims. Such compensation should be worked out in the framework of the reconstruction/rehabilitation programmes to be established with a financial assistance through the United Nations Voluntary Fund;

(h) Displaced persons/refugees who choose not to return to Abkhazia shall continue to be assisted and protected until acceptable alternative solutions are found for such cases;

(i) In accordance with the fundamental principle of preserving family unity, where it is not possible for families to repatriate as units, a mechanism shall be established for their reunification in Abkhazia. Measures shall also be taken for the identification and extra care/assistance for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable persons during the repatriation process;

(j) The Parties agree that refugees and displaced persons will be guaranteed unimpeded access to all available information on the situation in the areas where repatriation will take place. Such an information should be provided in the framework of a campaign to be launched by the Commission as mentioned in paragraph 9(b) below.

4. For the purpose of the implementation of voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees to Abkhazia, a quadripartite Commission is hereby established.

5. The principal tasks of the Commission shall be to formulate, discuss and approve plans to implement programmes for the safe, orderly and voluntary repatriation of the refugees and displaced persons to Abkhazia from Georgia, the Russian Federation and within Abkhazia and for their successful reintegration. Such plans should include registration, transport, basic material assistance for a period of up to six months and rehabilitation assistance.

In order to create the conditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons, the Commission will establish a working group of experts to undertake an assessment of the level of damage to the economic and social infrastructure in Abkhazia, the availability of housing and the extent of damage to houses in the areas of return as well as the projected needs in rehabilitation/ reconstruction, with financial implications. This survey should be undertaken region by region according to the plan of return to be worked out and accepted by the Parties, bearing in mind that the Parties have agreed to start the repatriation operation with the Gali region.

6. The Commission shall be composed of four members, one being designated

by each of the Parties and two representing the Russian Federation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In addition, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) will designate a representative to attend the Commission's meetings in on observer capacity. If circumstances do not allow the designated CSCE representative to attend such meetings, the Commission will keep the CSCE mission in Georgia informed on a regular basis on the progress of the Commission's work.

7. Any member of the Commission may, when attending any meeting of the Commission, be accompanied by such advisers as the Party designating that member may deem necessary. Where a member of the Commission is unable to attend any meeting of the Commission, the Party concerned may designate a substitute.

8. The Commission shall meet as often as required, but no less frequently than once every month. Meetings of the Commission may be convened at the request of any of the members and shall be held on the territory of the Russian Federation, except as the members of the Commission may otherwise agree. The Parties agree to guarantee the personal security of the members of the Commission and personnel involved in the activities agreed.

The first meeting of the Commission shall be scheduled as soon as possible and no later than one week after the adoption by the Security Council of a resolution on a mechanism ensuring the security conditions in the areas of return.

9. During its first meeting, the Commission will set out the modalities of the assessment mentioned in paragraph 5 above and will establish a plan concerning:

(a) The areas where repatriation will be primarily conducted according to the level of guaranteed security and preparedness;

(b) The implementation of an information campaign among the displaced person/refugee population to encourage voluntary return;

(c) The registration process of persons expressing their willingness to return;

(d) The activities needed to safeguard the safety of returnees based on the principles set out in paragraph 3 (a) to (j) above;

(e) The needs for financial, transport and basic material assistance to displaced persons/refugees as well as projected needs for rehabilitation/ reconstruction of the areas of return as mentioned in paragraph 5 above.

10. The Parties agree that representatives of refugees and displaced persons shall be provided with facilities to visit the areas of return and to see for themselves' arrangements made for their return.

11. In the event of disagreement within the Commission regarding the application and interpretation of this Agreement, where such disagreement cannot amicably be settled among the members of the Commission, the Commission shall refer such disagreements to the Parties and to the Russian Federation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

THE PARTIES, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES FURTHER AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

(a) UNHCR shall have direct and unhindered access to all displaced persons/refugees from Abkhazia in order to undertake activities essential to the discharge of its mandate and operational and monitoring responsibilities;

(b) Travel shall be facilitated between and within all areas where refugees and displaced persons are located and areas of return for the personnel of the United Nations and other relevant international and non-governmental agencies cooperating with the United Nations in repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. It shall include the free use of airspace and authorized airstrips and airports for relief flights and the exemption from taxes and duties of all goods imported for use in the voluntary repatriation programme of displaced persons/ refugees from Abkhazia and for the provision of relief integration and rehabilitation assistance to the Abkhaz

region by the United Nations and cooperating agencies, as well as the expeditious clearance and handling of such goods;

(c) The Russian Federation will guarantee unimpeded transit of humanitarian supplies through its territory for the purposes of the present Agreement;

(d) UNHCR shall establish local offices, as deemed appropriate, at locations to be approved by the Parties concerned, to facilitate voluntary repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation;

(e) The security of the staff and property of the United Nations and the cooperating agencies shall be guaranteed;

(f) The allocation and continued use by the Parties, the United Nations and the cooperating agencies of particularly designated radio frequencies for radio communications between their offices, vehicles, and staff, in areas where refugees and displaced persons are located and in areas of return, shall be provided.

This agreement shall enter into force with immediate effect and shall remain in force for the period required for the effective voluntary return of the displaced persons/refugees.

In witness whereof, the authorized representatives of the Abkhaz and Georgian sides, the Russian Federation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, have signed the present agreement.

Done at Moscow, this fourth day of April 1994 in four originals, three in the Russian language, and one in the English language, the four texts being equally authentic but the English text being authoritative for interpretation purposes.

*For the Abkhaz side:
(Signed) S. Jinjolia*

*For the Georgian side:
(Signed) A. Kavsadze*

*For the Russian Federation:
(Signed) B. Pastukhov*

*For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:
(Signed) J. Amunategul*

Agreement On A Ceasefire And Separation Of Forces, Signed In Moscow On 14 May 1994

In the Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian–Abkhaz Conflict, signed in Moscow on 4 April 1994 (S/1994/397, annex I), the Parties committed themselves to strict compliance with a formal ceasefire from that date, and once again reaffirmed their commitment to the non-use of force or threat of the use of force against each other, as expressed in their communiqué of 13 January 1994. That commitment remains valid. This Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces formalizes that commitment.

1. The parties shall scrupulously observe the ceasefire on land, at sea and in the air and shall refrain from all military actions against each other.

2. The armed forces of the parties shall be separated in accordance with the following principles:

(a) The area between lines B and D on the attached map (see appendix) shall constitute a security zone. There shall be no armed forces or heavy military equipment within this zone. The territory between lines A and B and lines D and E shall constitute a restricted-weapons zone. There shall be no heavy military equipment within this zone. The local civil authorities shall function in the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone. The police/militia employed for this purpose may carry personal arms;

Heavy military equipment includes:

(i) All artillery and mortars of a calibre exceeding 80 mm;

(ii) All tanks;

(iii) All armoured transport vehicles;

(b) The peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the military observers, in accordance with the Protocol to this Agreement, shall be deployed in the security zone to monitor compliance with this Agreement;

(c) The heavy military equipment to be

withdrawn from the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone shall be stored in designated areas to be determined by the parties and shall be monitored by United Nations military observers;

(d) Under the supervision of representatives of the peace-keeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States and United Nations observers, with the participation of representatives of the parties from the Kodori valley, the troops of the Republic of Georgia shall be withdrawn to their places of deployment beyond the frontiers of Abkhazia;

A regular patrol of the peace-keeping force and international observers shall be organized concurrently in the Kodori valley;

(e) All volunteer formations made up of persons from beyond the frontiers of Abkhazia shall be disbanded and withdrawn;

(f) The movement of units and subunits of the peace-keeping force and of the international observers outside the security zone in the relevant areas shall be subject to agreement with the parties;

(g) United Nations military observers shall also monitor the coastal waters and airspace between lines A and D;

(h) In the event of an attack or a direct military threat against the peace-keeping force, it shall take appropriate measures for its safety and self-defence.

3. The precise demarcation on a detailed map and a plan for the separation of forces in the initial phase of the deployment of the peace-keeping force shall be worked out by the command of the peace-keeping force with the participation of the parties in the context of a step-by-step, comprehensive settlement, with a continuation of the return of refugees and displaced persons and in compliance with this Agreement, in a working group, which shall begin its work to this end in Moscow within five days after the signing of this Agreement. It shall complete this task within five days. Disengagement shall commence five days after the working group has completed its task. The process of disengagement shall be

completed no later than 10 days after it has commenced.

4. A map indicating the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone is contained in the appendix.

Protocol. The Protocol concerning the peace-keeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States is as follows:

'The parties agree that:

'The function of the peace-keeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States shall be to exert its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed. Further, its presence should promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, especially to the Gali region. It shall supervise the implementation of the Agreement and the Protocol thereto with regard to the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone. In carrying out its mission, the force shall comply with local laws and regulations and shall not impede the functioning of the local civil administration. It shall enjoy freedom of movement in the security zone and the restricted-weapons zone and freedom of communications, and other facilities needed to fulfil its mission.

'The peace-keeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States shall operate under the Interim Unified Command and the Commander of the Peace-keeping Force.'

5. The process of achieving a comprehensive political settlement shall be pursued.

6. The parties appeal to the United Nations Security Council to expand the mandate of the United Nations military observers in order to provide for their participation in the operations indicated above.

7. On the basis of the statement by the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States dated 15 April 1994 (S/1994/476, annex), the parties appeal to the Council to take a decision on the use of a collective peace-keeping force within the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

For the Georgian side:
(Signed) J. Ioseliani

For the Abkhaz side:
(Signed) S. Jinjolia

Proposal For The Establishment Of A Coordinating Commission, Signed In Moscow On 11 May 1994

1. Both parties to the conflict agree to establish a Coordinating Commission to discuss practical matters of mutual interest (energy, transport, communications, ecology and so on). The Commission will be established for the transitional period until the conflict has been resolved.

2. The Coordinating Commission will work in the town of Sochi. At its first meeting, which will take place on 1 June 1994, the Commission will be chaired by a representative of the Russian Federation. Further meetings will be chaired alternately by representatives of both parties, unless agreed otherwise.

3. Both parties to the conflict will each designate four representatives of their choice to the Coordinating Commission. Both parties invite representatives of the United Nations, the Russian Federation and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to participate as observers in the work of the Commission. In discussion of matters affecting both the interests of the parties and territory of the Russian Federation, the representatives of the latter will take part in the work of the Commission with the rights of a delegation.

4. By the first meeting of the Coordinating Commission the parties to the conflict will prepare proposals for the programme of work of the Coordinating Commission, including those to be discussed at its first meeting. Both parties welcome the readiness of the observers to present their proposals for the programme of work of the Commission.

5. Proposals for the work of the Coordinating Commission will be prepared taking into account the provisions of paragraphs 3, 5 and 6 of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides of 1 December 1993 (S/26875, appendix).

6. The Commission will act without prejudice to the work of the standing committee agreed on in the Moscow declaration of 4 April 1994 (S/1994/397, annex I).

7. Both parties agree to take all decisions by consensus of delegations.

8. Participation in the Coordinating Commission will not prejudice the legal positions of both parties with regard to the future status of Abkhazia.

For the Georgian side:
(Signed) J. Ioseliani

For the Abkhaz side:
(Signed) S. Jinjolia

In the presence of:

From the United Nations:
(Signed) E. Brunner

From the Russian Federation:
(Signed) B. Pastukhov

From the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe:
(Signed) V. Manno

UNOMIG Mandate, adopted by the Security Council Resolution 937 21 July 1994

The mandate of an expanded UNOMIG, based upon the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report, shall be as follows:

(a) To monitor and verify the implementation by the parties of the Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994;

(b) To observe the operation of the CIS peace-keeping force within the framework of the implementation of the Agreement;

(c) To verify, through observation and patrolling, that troops of the parties do not remain in or re-enter the security zone and that heavy military equipment does not remain or is not reintroduced in the security zone or the restricted weapons zone;

(d) To monitor the storage areas for heavy military equipment withdrawn from the security zone and the restricted weapons zone in cooperation with the CIS peace-keeping force as appropriate;

(e) To monitor the withdrawal of troops of the Republic of Georgia from the Kodori valley to places beyond the boundaries of Abkhazia, Republic of Georgia;

(f) To patrol regularly the Kodori valley;

(g) To investigate, at the request of either party or the CIS peace-keeping force or on its own initiative, reported or alleged violations of the Agreement and to attempt to resolve or contribute to the resolution of such incidents;

(h) To report regularly to the Secretary-General within its mandate, in particular on the implementation of the Agreement, any violations and their investigation by UNOMIG, as well as other relevant developments;

(i) To maintain close contacts with both parties to the conflict and to cooperate with the CIS peace-keeping force and, by its presence in the area, to contribute to conditions conducive to the safe and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons.

Statement on the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties (Tbilisi, 14 August 1997)

The parties note with satisfaction that the arrival in Tbilisi of the Abkhaz delegation headed by V. Ardzinba and its negotiations with the Georgian delegation headed by E. Shevardnadze, with the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Y. Primakov, will undoubtedly give positive impetus to the process of a peaceful settlement.

The participants in the meeting noted with satisfaction the role of the Russian Federation in the Georgian–Abkhaz settlement, as clearly manifested in the initiative by the president of the Russian Federation, B. N. Yeltsin, of 1 August 1997.

On the anniversary of the start of armed actions in Abkhazia, 14 August 1997, the representatives of the Georgian and Abkhaz parties declare their determination to put an end to the conflict that has divided them and restore relations of peace and mutual respect.

The parties are convinced that the time has come to embark on a course leading to peace and prosperity, and, with a sense of dignity and mutual tolerance, to act jointly in a spirit of compromise and reconciliation.

The parties have assumed an obligation not to resort to arms to resolve the differences that divide them and not under any circumstances to permit a renewal of bloodshed. Any differences of opinion will be resolved exclusively by peaceful political means, through negotiations and consultations both on a bilateral basis and with the assistance and facilitation of the Russian Federation, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of representatives of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

It was noted that it had been possible to reach agreement on a number of key problems of the settlement. At the same time, on certain issues substantial differences still remain.

The parties agreed on the need to maintain constant contact for the purpose of resolving the problems that gave rise to the conflict.

*For the Georgian side:
(Signed) E. Shevardnadze*

*For the Abkhaz side:
(Signed) V. Ardzinba*

Concluding statement on the outcome of the resumed meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties held in Geneva from 17 to 19 November 1997

1. The resumed meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties was held in Geneva from 17 to 19 November 1997 under the auspices of the United Nations with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation acting as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the states belonging to the Group of Friends created by the Secretary-General in 1994 consisting of France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, acting as observers.

2. An exchange of views on the following points took place during the meeting:

- Review of the state of the negotiations on the main aspects of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict and identification of areas where concrete political progress could be made;
- Consideration of questions of the return of the refugees and displaced persons;
- Intensification of efforts in the economic, humanitarian and social areas;
- Elaboration of a programme of future activities and mechanisms for their implementation.

Representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs also took part in discussing issues of interest to them.

3. At the first part of the meeting (23 – 25 July 1997), the question was raised of the status of the countries of the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia. After extensive consultations, a decision was taken that the status of this Group of Friends of the Secretary-General of the United Nations should be analogous to the status of the other groups of friends of the Secretary-

General. They may participate in meetings and make statements and proposals on various aspects of the peace process, including a political settlement. They are not parties to the negotiations and shall not be invited to sign documents agreed upon during the negotiations by the parties.

4. The parties welcomed the proposals of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to strengthen the involvement of the United Nations in the peacemaking process aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement.

5. The parties welcome the positive outcome of the meeting between Mr. Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba in Tbilisi on 14 and 15 August 1997, organized with the assistance of the Russian Federation as facilitator.

6. It was noted that as of now, despite strenuous efforts applied in order to intensify the peace process, sought for progress has not been made on the pivotal issues of the settlement.

7. The parties reaffirmed their commitment made in the Tbilisi statement of 14 August 1997 to the non-use of force or threat of the use of force against one another. Any contentious issue shall be settled by the parties through exclusively peaceful means.

8. The meeting took note of the contribution made by the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (“the CIS peacekeeping force”) in stabilizing the situation in the conflict zone and noted the significant strengthening of cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force.

9. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, representatives of the OSCE and States members of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General call on the parties and the Russian Federation to support the continuation of the peacekeeping operation of the CIS peacekeeping force in order to secure favourable and peaceful conditions for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

10. The parties condemn acts of violence by armed groups and the placement of mines, which has resulted in a deterioration of safety conditions for the local population, returning refugees and displaced persons, UNOMIG personnel and CIS peacekeepers, and other international personnel working in Abkhazia.

11. The parties will take all necessary and effective measures to halt any activity by illegal armed formations, terrorist and subversive groups and individuals, including those penetrating Abkhaz territory from outside, which could destabilize the peace process and precipitate a resumption of hostilities.

12. The parties have agreed that progress towards strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means. They believe that the speediest possible agreement on and signature of the relevant documents on a settlement of the conflict would be a real step towards bringing about a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict. In this respect, particular attention was given to the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons to their place of permanent residence. At the same time, emphasis was placed on the need to resume the process of voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons and to create safe living conditions for them.

13. The parties agreed on the need to take measures to convene in the near future a joint/bilateral commission to resolve any practical issues that may arise.

14. The parties agreed to refrain from disseminating hostile propaganda about each other and to take measures to promote an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. The parties have agreed to institute exchange visits by parliamentarians, academics, intellectuals, journalists and other representatives of society in order to help achieve this objective.

15. The programme of action and the mechanism for its implementation are as follows:

(a) the parties shall establish a Coordinating Council and, within its

framework, working groups on the following areas:

- issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems;
- refugees and internally displaced persons;
- economic and social problems;

(b) the Coordinating Council and the working groups will meet under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations or by his authorized representatives, with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation as facilitator, representatives of OSCE, and with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General;

(c) separate groups of experts may be established to study specific aspects of issues relating to the comprehensive settlement of the conflict as and when such issues arise;

(d) the Coordinating Council shall be convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations during the first week of December 1997. The working groups shall start their work in December 1997. The working group on issues relating to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems will meet frequently, at least once a week.

16. Meetings of the sides will be held periodically to consider the progress of the negotiations on the main aspects of the comprehensive settlement of the conflict. These meetings will be chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. They will take place with the participation of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, with the OSCE, and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General under the conditions defined in paragraph 3 above.

(Signed) L. Bota

Record of the first session of the Coordination Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz Parties, held in Sukhumi on 18 December 1997

The first session of the Coordination Council, established on the basis of the concluding statement on the outcome of the meeting between the Georgian and the Abkhaz Parties (Geneva, 17 to 19 November 1997), took place in Sukhumi on 18 December 1997 under the auspices of the United Nations and the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Liviu Bota.

The Georgian Party was represented by a delegation consisting of Mr. Vazha Lordkipanidze, Mr. Rezo Adamia and Mr. Tamaz Khubua.

The Abkhaz Party was represented by a delegation made up of Mr. Tamaz Ketsba, Mr. Sergei Tsargush and Mr. Victor Khashba.

Opening the session, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General welcomed the arrival in Sukhumi of the members of the Georgian delegation, who were appointed by Mr. E. Shevardnadze and represent the Georgian Party exclusively in the Coordination Council.

Representatives of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the States belonging to the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General – France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America – acting as observers, participated in the work of the session.

Mr. Ardzinba made a statement at the opening of the session. Representatives of the Parties, the Russian Federation acting as facilitator, OSCE and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General also made statements during the course of its work.

The participants in the session adopted the Statute of the Coordination Council, the text of which is annexed.

After the conclusion of the session of the Coordination Council, meetings of the Working Groups were held under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Agreement was reached on the programmes of work of the Working Groups.

*Sukhumi, 18 December 1997
(Signed) L. Bota*

Statute of the Coordination Council

1. General provisions

The Coordination Council (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”) is established in accordance with the concluding statement on the outcome of the meeting held in Geneva from 17 to 19 November 1997.

The Council is established in order to implement the provisions of the concluding statement.

2. Composition of the Council and organization of its work

The Council shall meet under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia or his authorized representative.

The Council shall consist of three representatives each from the Georgian and Abkhaz Parties. Representatives of the United Nations, the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General shall also participate in the work of the Council under the terms set out in paragraph 3 of the concluding statement. Experts may be invited to attend meetings at the request of the Parties.

The meetings of the Council shall be convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and shall be held as necessary but at least once every two months, alternately in Tbilisi and Sukhumi or at other venues agreed upon by the Parties.

Each Party shall have the right to call for an extraordinary meeting of the Council, which shall be convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General within three days or, in the case of urgent matters, immediately.

A preliminary agenda for meetings shall be prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in accordance with the provisions of the concluding statement and previous decisions of the Council and shall be transmitted to the participants no later than 10 days prior to the convening of the meeting.

Each Party shall have the right to put forward proposals on changes in or additions to the agenda, which shall be transmitted to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General no later than five days prior to the meeting. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General shall hold consultations on such matters before the convening of the meeting.

The other participants in the Council may also put forward proposals concerning the agenda, which shall be considered by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and be agreed on by the Parties.

Decisions of the Council shall be taken on the basis of consensus between the Parties. In adopting decisions concerning the role and responsibility of the United Nations and the Russian Federation, and also decisions calling for the participation of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, their agreement shall be required. Decisions of the Council shall be binding on the two Parties. Obstacles to the implementation of the Council's decisions shall be considered at subsequent meetings.

Where there is no consensus for adopting decisions, the Parties may state their opinion on the question under consideration for the record of the meeting.

The working language of the meetings shall be Russian.

The office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General shall serve as the Council's secretariat.

3. Working groups

Working groups shall be the executive bodies of the Coordination Council. Working groups shall consist of two representatives each from the Georgian and Abkhaz Parties. The meetings of

the working groups shall be chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General or his authorized representative, with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation acting as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General under the terms set out in paragraph 3 of the concluding statement. Meetings of the working groups shall be convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. At the request of the Parties, experts may attend the meetings.

The working groups shall carry out activities in the following areas:

- Working Group I – issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and to security problems;
- Working Group II – refugees and internally displaced persons;
- Working Group III – economic and social problems.

4. Groups of experts

Individual groups of experts may be established by the Council, the working groups or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in order to examine specific aspects of questions relating to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, as such questions arise.

5. Jurisdiction of the Council

(a) Issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and to security problems.

Consideration of violations of the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces of 14 May 1994 and the relevant provisions of Security Council resolution 937 (1994) of 21 July 1994, and the adoption of decisions to prevent such violations.

Consideration of questions relating to the Parties' effective implementation of their obligations.

Adoption of effective measures to put an end to any activities by illegal armed formations, terrorist or subversive groups or individuals, including individuals who infiltrate into the conflict zone, as well as any activities that may destabilize the peace process or lead to a resumption of hostilities.

Assistance in mine clearance.

Working Group I shall investigate violations of the ceasefire regime, and terrorist or subversive activities, and shall draft proposals and recommendations on matters within its competence. Working Group I shall meet as necessary but at least once a week.

(b) Refugees and internally displaced persons

In accordance with the concluding statement of the Geneva meeting, consideration of proposals on the resumption of the organized process of the voluntary, safe return of refugees and displaced persons.

Working Group II shall deal with the drafting of appropriate recommendations.

(c) Economic and social problems

Consideration of questions of mutual interest to the Parties (energy, transport, communications, environment).

Consideration of proposals to remove obstacles to normal economic and social development.

Working Group III shall draft proposals and recommendations on the establishment of effective cooperation between the Parties in agreed areas.

(Signed) L. Bota

(Signed) T. Ketsba

(Signed) V. Lordkipanidze

Record of the Second Session of Working Group I, of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz Parties, on issues related to the lasting non resumption of hostilities and to security problems, held in Tbilisi on 22 January 1998

The Second session of the Working Group I on issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems, an executive body of the Coordinating Council, took place in Tbilisi on 22 January 1998 under the auspices of the United Nations and the Chairmanship of the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG, Maj. Gen. M. Harun-Ar-Rashid.

The Session took up the following points for discussion:

- a) Observance by the parties of the "Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces" of 14 May 1994;
- b) Incidents involving mines, booby traps and other explosives, as well as diversionary and terrorist activities in the zone of conflict;
- c) The strengthening of security in the zone of conflict.

In the Session the following were represented:

The Georgian Party, represented by the Head of WGI delegation Mr. Giorgi Alexidze.

The Abkhaz Party, represented by the Head of WGI delegation Mr. Givi Agrba.

The Russian Federation as facilitator, represented by Maj. Gen. Sergei Korobko.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, represented by

The states belonging to the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, represented by

Opening the Session, the Chairman of Working Group I, Maj. Gen. M. Harun-Ar-Rasbid, the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG welcomed the Heads of Delegations from Georgia and Abkhazia and the representatives of

the Russian Federation, the OSCE and the states belonging to the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General. During the opening remarks the Chairman gave his impression on the listed agenda points.

After the opening remarks by the Chairman, the representative of the Russian Federation, Maj. Gen. Korobko gave his impression on the Agenda points.

Thereafter, the Head of the Georgian delegation Mr. Giorgi Aleksidze took the floor and made a statement.

Thereafter, the Head of the Abkhaz delegation, Mr. Givi Argba took the floor and made a statement.

Thereafter, the Session openly discussed the agenda points. After deliberation the Session made the following recommendations:

1. On agenda point 1 the parties agreed to maintain status quo. On the issue of the outer boundary of the RWZ the parties agreed to put up respective proposals in the future sessions of the Working Group I.

2. On the second and third agenda points which are correlated, both parties agreed to cooperate with each other in eliminating the terrorist/banditry activities. It was further agreed that the following actions would be taken by both parties with immediate effect:

- a) establish contact points at the level of WGI Heads of Delegations.

- b) exchange relevant information regarding the terrorists/bandits as and when known to either party through the contact points.

- c) on receipt of information or complaint by either party, a joint investigation team will be formed under the chairmanship of the UN with representatives from Georgia, Abkhazia and the CISPKF. The investigation team will establish which party/parties are responsible for the sabotage/terrorist activity.

- d) the parties also agreed, in future Sessions, to put forward their respective proposals regarding preventive measures to be taken to stop terrorist/bandit activities.

3. The parties also agreed to continue the dialogue and to develop a Plan of Action for effective control of terrorist/bandit activity in the zone of conflict.

4. The Session also decided to meet again in first half of February 1998.

The Session concluded after word of thanks by the Chairman to all the participants.

Draft Communiqué

On Thursday, 22 January 1998, the second session of the Coordinating Council's Working Group III met in Tbilisi, Georgia, at the headquarters of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), under the auspices of the United Nations and the Chairmanship of the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Marco Borsotti.

The meeting was attended by

Mr. Temur Mosiashvili, representing the Georgian Delegation

Ms. Rita Lolua, representing the Abkhaz Delegation

Mr. Victor Khashba, also representing the Abkhaz Delegation

Mr. Valeriy Kushpel, representing the Russian Federation

Ms. Ina Lepel, representing the Federal Republic of Germany

Mr. Bernard Semeria, representing the Republic of France

Mr. Michael Hancock, representing the United Kingdom

Ms. Paula Feeney, representing the United States of America

Ms. Molly O'Neal, also representing the United States of America

Mr. Michael Libal, representing the OSCE

At the meeting, a proposal was fielded by the Chairman, for a United Nations assessment mission in Abkhazia to define social and economic needs, and to identify programmes and projects to address those needs.

After discussion, the Chairman's proposal for a Terms of Reference for the United Nations mission, was agreed to by Working Group III with some changes and clarifications.

The United Nations Needs Assessment mission will take place in the second half of February. It will carry out its functions in an integrated manner that will involve officials from various United Nations Agencies, representatives of the World Bank, and members of international organisations. The Mission shall prepare a report that will be reviewed at the next session of Working Group III before being forwarded to the Coordinating Council.

Under the auspices of the United Nations and within the framework of activities of the Coordinating Council's Working group III established on the basis of the Concluding Statement of the outcome of the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, a mission will assess and identify short and medium term needs in the economic and social spheres in the areas agreed hereunder:

AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

- Physical infrastructure
- De-mining
- Transport (Roads and bridges repair and reconstruction); identification of medium and long term needs including all transport sectors
- Power supply
- Telecommunication
- Water Supply and Sanitation
- Social Infrastructure
- Primary Health Care with special emphasis on preventive medicine
- Basic Education (obligatory school system)
- Housing and Shelter
- Food Supply to vulnerable population
- Post Conflict Trauma Counselling
- Confidence Building Initiatives for various groups of population
- Assistance on restoration of veterinary and sanitation services
- Private Sector Activities
- Development of Agricultural Activities
- Restoration of livestock

- Establishment of Micro Credit Facilities for Small and Medium Enterprises
- Public Sector Capacity Building
- Issues of/related to rational and effective local Administration

Expected Outputs

2. The team would prepare a comprehensive report outlining the needs in the different sectors, broken down into immediate rehabilitation needs and more medium-term development needs. An estimate of aggregate resources necessary for both should be provided. The report should, moreover, include a portfolio of project profiles which can be presented to donors for funding. To the extent possible, the projects should be conceived as components of more comprehensive programmes and, therefore, they should be inter-linked. The final draft of the report should be completed for revision by the parties no later than two weeks after the end of field activities of the assessment mission and shall be written in English. Translation of the report in other languages will be completed by the UNOP, once its text and proposals will be finally cleared by the SRSB.

The Composition of the Team

3. Participation in the needs assessment mission should be open to the relevant agencies of the United Nations, including UNICEF, WHO, ITU, ILO, UNIDO, UNESCO and FAO. Other bilateral and multi-lateral organisations will also be invited to participate, in particular representatives indicated by the World Bank. However, the total number of participants should be limited to secure effective co-ordination. The mission will be lead by a team-leader who will be designated by UNDP. The team leader should be a high ranking present or ex-UN official who has experience in leading similar kinds of missions. The team leader will be assisted by an experienced staff responsible who will act as executive secretary to the team and who will assist the team leader in the preparation of the final report based on the finding and recommendation elaborated by the other members of the mission.

Time frame for the Assessment Mission

4. Subject to the agreement of the parties, the mission should assemble in Tbilisi on 16 February 1998 and proceed to Abkhazia the following day, in order to complete its field operations within the following two weeks. The Team Leader, with the assistance of the Executive Secretary of the team, should then complete the preparation of the final draft of the mission report within the following week, thus completing the activities of the mission not later than March 7, 1998.

22 January 1998

Athens Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures 16–18 October 1998

The meeting in Athens of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures took place 16 to 18 October 1998 under the Chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, Mr. Liviu Bota. This meeting is an integral part of the Geneva Process begun on the initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General in order to step up the peace process and achieve a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The Athens Meeting was the most representative since the end of the armed conflict in 1993. The high-level delegations were headed on the Georgian side by Mr. Vazha Lordkipanidze and on the Abkhaz side by Mr. Sergei Bagapsh. They included representative of government bodies, members of parliament, businessmen, cultural figures, representatives from academic circles, members of non-governmental organizations, and journalists.

Representatives of the Russian Federation as the facilitator, the OSCE and also of the countries of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General participated in the meeting. The Executive Secretary of the joint/bilateral Coordinating Commission was also present at the meeting.

Such a meeting provided an opportunity for discussion of a broad range of questions of mutual interest.

The Athens meeting was convened in accordance with the closing statement adopted at the first Geneva meeting, 17 to 19 November 1997 which notes inter alia: "The parties have agreed that progress towards strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means."

In this context such measures include a broad range of concrete steps in the

following major areas: political statement, ensuring security, return of refugees, economic cooperation, cultural and humanitarian interaction.

During the course of the meeting both sides put forward concrete proposals, some of which require more detailed work.

The representatives of the Russian Federation, acting as facilitator, the countries members of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, and the OSCE also made proposals and rendered assistance to the sides in drawing up ideas for concrete confidence-building measures.

Agreement was achieved to continue holding such meetings to develop contacts between the sides and for the adoption of confidence-building measures and measures for mutual understanding.

During the meeting the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, representatives of the Russian Federation, as facilitator, and the countries members of the Friends of the

Secretary-General, gave the sides for their consideration the draft protocol on priority measures for a settlement to the conflict. It was proposed to the parties to state their view on this draft protocol at the next meeting of the Coordinating Council.

The parties agree on the following:

1. Having once again reaffirmed their commitment undertaken earlier regarding the right of refugees and displaced persons to voluntary return to the places of their former permanent residence, they agreed to speed up conclusion of work on the relevant documents.
2. To provide for full implementation of the provisions of the protocol of 24 September 1998 signed in Sukhumi.
3. To create a joint mechanism with the participation of representatives of UNOMIG and the CIS-PKF, to investigate acts of violation of the Ceasefire and Separation Forces Agreement of 14 May 1994 and for the prevention of a repetition of such acts, and also for the immediate consideration of complaints of one of

the sides regarding actions of the other side which might represent a threat to security in the conflict zone.

4. To conclude drawing up the order for interaction of the prosecutors of the sides in investigating criminal cases regarding subversive acts perpetrated in the security zone.

5. To ensure an operative link between the leaders of the military structures of the sides, inter alia, at the local level, for rapid response to situations and actions which may lead to an aggravation of the situation in the conflict zone.

6. To promote in all possible ways the implementation of programmes of demining.

7. Having noted the importance of the dialogue begun on the development of trade and economic relations between them, to promote the conclusion of direct working contracts in the areas of energy, trade, agriculture, construction, etc.

8. To conduct active investigation of cases involving persons missing during the hostilities and the handing over of the remains of the dead. To request from donor countries expert and material support in carrying out psychological social rehabilitation of post-trauma syndrome.

Other proposals put forward by the parties to the meeting will be further studied.

The implementation of confidence-building measures will be carried out within the framework of the activity of the Coordinating Council and bilateral meetings. The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General shall inform the Coordinating Council regarding the implementation of concrete confidence-building measures.

The sides and all participants in the meeting expressed to the government of Greece their profound gratitude for the invitation and warm hospitality, and for the creation of an atmosphere which promoted fruitful work.

(Signed) V. Lordkipanidze

(Signed) S. Bagapsh

(Signed) L. Bota

Istanbul Statement of The Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures 7-9 June 1999

The Istanbul Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures took place from 7 to 9 June 1999, under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Liviu Bota. The Meeting is part of the Geneva Process, begun at the initiative of the Secretary-General and aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Mr. Ismail Cem, addressed the participants of the Meeting at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

The delegation of the Georgian side was led by Mr. Vazha Lordkipanidze, and the delegation of the Abkhaz side was led by Mr. Sergei Bagapsh. The delegations comprised prominent individuals from the sides, including representatives of the intelligentsia, directors of major industrial and agricultural enterprises, elders, military who have participated in the armed conflict, and others.

Representatives of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the members of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General participated in and addressed the Meeting. The UNOMIG Chief Military Observer and the Executive Secretary of the Joint/Bilateral Coordination Commission for Practical Questions also addressed the Meeting.

The Meeting was convened on the basis of the Concluding Statement of the First Geneva Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides, held from 17 to 19 November 1997, in which the sides agreed that progress toward strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means.

The Meeting focused primarily on the question of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and also on economic problems.

The sides agreed as follows:

1. Within one week to hold a special meeting of plenipotentiary representatives to address the issue of the exchange of hostages and prisoners.
2. To support and cooperate with the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG in conducting joint investigation of incidents which may represent a threat stability in the conflict zone.
3. To revive the activities of the working groups within the framework of the Coordinating Council.
 - a) To convene within one week Working Group I. It will consider measures to implement the agreements achieved by the sides regarding ensuring security along the entire line of the separation of forces.
 - b) To convene within one week Working Group II for the consideration and agreement of urgent measures regarding the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons, and the establishment of conditions for their safety. The Working Group will also hear information from the parties regarding the situation in the Gali region.
 - c) To convene within one week Working Group III. It will address the question of interaction with the Standing Working Group of the Joint Bilateral Coordination Commission for Practical Questions. This Standing Working Group will promote the establishment of economic ties between economic entities and draw up specific proposals and submit them for discussion by the Coordination Commission. It will also address projects which serve the interests of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, including those designed to ensure uninterrupted functioning of the Inguri dam and power plant, and also the restoration of films with assistance of UNDP and other international and national organizations.

Financing of this Working Group will be implemented with support from UNDP.

4. To insure implementation of the commitment of the sides, provided for by the Protocol of 24 September 1998, on questions of stabilization of the situation along the line of separation of forces.

5. To develop cooperation at the local level Istanbul Meeting participants will continue contacts to study possibilities for specific types of cooperation in various areas, in particular in the economic area.

6. To organize meetings of political and public figures of the sides.

7. To develop and establish mechanisms for the regular exchange of information, including, inter alia:

a) To exchange information between representatives of the mass media of the sides, including the exchange of television groups to create reports, including interviews with high-level individuals. These materials will be broadcast by the respective local television stations.

b) The Abkhaz side will be able to receive three hundreds copies of each issue of Svobodnaia Gruzia and the Georgian side will receive an equal number of copies of Respublica Abkhazia, on the basis of funding and logistical support from the United Nations.

c) Transmission from each side to the other of their respective press service reports will be facilitated by the United Nations.

d) To hold a meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in Tbilisi in July 1999, and in Pitsunda in August 1999, to exchange information.

e) To request the BBC to sponsor training courses for Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in London.

8. The law-enforcement organs of the two sides will exchange available information on any preparations for illegal acts and will consult on measures to be taken jointly to prevent them. Direct communication links should be utilized for this purpose.

9. Representatives of the respective Commissions for Missing-in-Action cases of the two sides will meet within one month, to review the situation. They will meet regularly within the framework of the Coordinating Council.

Implementation of the above agreed measures will be carried out within the framework of the Coordinating Council and through bilateral contacts. The United Nations will provide logistical support as necessary, in the implementation of these measures.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General will report to the Secretary-General of the UN, who will then inform the Security Council on the outcome of this Meeting.

The sides and all participants of this Meeting expressed to the government of Turkey their deepest gratitude for the invitation to convene a meeting in Istanbul, for the warm hospitality shown, and for its active role in the creation of an atmosphere that facilitated substantive and constructive results.

The participants of the Meeting took note of the information concerning the invitation from the government of Ukraine to hold the next Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence measures in Yalta.

(Signed) V. Lordkipanidze

(Signed) S. Bagapsh

(Signed) L. Bota

Chronology

The Tsarist period

1783–1870s

The Russian Empire expands into the Caucasus. Eastern Georgia becomes a protectorate of Russia in the Treaty of Georgievsk 1783. By the early 1800s other Georgian areas voluntarily come under Russian rule. Abkhazia comes under the protection of Tsarist Russia in 1810, preserving its autonomy until 1864 when North Caucasian resistance to Russia is finally crushed. Abkhazia becomes the last Caucasian principality to be forcibly annexed to the Russian Empire. Mass migrations to the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East follow.

1917–18

Following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Abkhazia enters the Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus and is briefly a member of the North Caucasian Republic before coming under Georgian socialist (Menshevik) rule.

1918–21

A democratic legislature is established in the independent socialist Georgian state and great progress is made in Georgian educational and cultural development. Initially Abkhazia is granted a degree of autonomy, but Georgian policies towards minorities such as the Abkhaz and South Ossetians become increasingly oppressive, partly in response to the activities of Bolsheviks in these areas. The Georgian constitution of 1921 includes a vague clause allowing for Abkhaz autonomy but the Bolsheviks overthrow the Mensheviks in Georgia before a precise agreement on relations is reached.

The Soviet period

1921–31

Soviet power is established. Separate Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia and Abkhazia with equal status are created. A treaty of alliance is signed between the two, though the division of responsibilities is not made clear. In 1922 they enter the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. In 1925 Abkhazia promulgates a constitution sanctioning its status as a union republic with treaty ties to Georgia. An earlier reference to Abkhazia as an autonomous republic in the 1924 USSR Constitution remains unratified until 1931 when Abkhazia's status is reduced to an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR. The 1936 USSR Constitution restores Georgia's republican status, leaving Abkhazia as an autonomous republic within Georgia, but with centralized Soviet power in Moscow dominating.

1933–53

A period of widespread discrimination and oppression ensues in the Soviet Union. Georgians suffer Russification and extensive purges. Under the direction of Lavrentii Beria, head of the Communist Party in Georgia from 1931 and later head of the Soviet secret police, Abkhaz representation in local administration is restricted, Abkhaz schools are closed, the Abkhaz language is banned, Abkhaz intellectuals and politicians are repressed and large numbers of non-Abkhaz are moved from western Georgia and Russia into Abkhazia. This period is referred to by Abkhaz as the 'Georgianization of Abkhazia'.

1953–78

Following the deaths of Stalin and Beria repression throughout the Soviet Union is reduced. Abkhaz schools reopen, the Abkhaz language is reinstated and some restrictions on Abkhaz cultural life are lifted. Economic and cultural grievances remain and Abkhaz intellectuals petition Moscow in 1956 and 1967 to allow Abkhazia to secede from Georgia and join Russia. Georgia undergoes a period of industrialization and Georgian nationalism manifests itself on several occasions, including through opposition to Russification.

1978

Deliberations over the new Soviet constitution lead to protests in Tbilisi in defence of the Georgian language and demonstrations in Abkhazia over Georgian discrimination. A sense of continued oppression from Tbilisi prompts 130 Abkhaz intellectuals to petition Moscow to permit Abkhazia to secede from Georgia. The request is rejected but a number of concessions are made, including increased representation in the local administration and the establishment of an Abkhaz university and a television station.

1986–88

Glasnost and perestroika under Gorbachev foster Georgian and Abkhaz independence movements. Mass demonstrations in Tbilisi demand an end to discrimination against Georgians by Moscow. Sixty Abkhaz intellectuals write to Gorbachev requesting the restoration of Abkhazia's status to that existing between 1921 and 1931, before Abkhazia was made subordinate to Georgia.

1989

March–April

A mass meeting in the Abkhaz village of Lykhny demands the restoration of the status Abkhazia enjoyed before 1931. A series of counter-demonstrations in Tbilisi assume a pro-independence character and on 9 April Soviet troops brutally disperse demonstrators, killing twenty-one. The Georgian independence movement takes on a more radical and nationalistic tone as a result.

July–August

Several die in armed clashes between Georgians and Abkhaz in Sukhumi and Ochamchira over the planned establishment of a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi. Increasingly extreme Georgian nationalist rhetoric and the introduction of a language law which includes the provision that Georgian is to be the sole language spoken in the Supreme Soviet of Georgia lead non-Georgian ethnic groups to fear for their cultural survival. On the initiative of the Abkhaz, representatives of various North Caucasian peoples establish an Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.

September

A republic-wide strike in Abkhazia against Georgian violation of Abkhaz rights demands an investigation into the July events.

November

The South Ossetian Supreme Soviet approves a decision to increase South Ossetia's status from autonomous region to autonomous republic within Georgia. The Georgian parliament revokes the decision and armed confrontation in Tskhinvali begins, with the involvement of Soviet troops.

1990

March

Georgia declares sovereignty, nullifying treaties concluded by the Soviet government since 1921 and thereby moving closer to independence.

May

A meeting of representatives of mountain peoples of the Caucasus in Sukhumi demands the exit of Abkhazia from Georgia.

August

The Georgian Supreme Soviet bans regionally based parties from participating in elections to the Georgian parliament, preventing Aydgylara and Adamon Nykhas (the South Ossetian Popular Front) from fielding candidates. South Ossetia declares itself to be the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic and appeals to Moscow to recognize it as an independent subject of the Soviet Federation. The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declares the sovereignty of Abkhazia and a willingness to negotiate with the Georgian government on federative relations. The declaration, made in the absence of Georgian deputies who were now boycotting the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, is immediately annulled by the Georgian government.

October

Gamsakhurdia's Round Table-Free Georgia coalition wins a majority in the Georgian parliamentary elections. A Georgian National Guard is formed.

December

Vladislav Ardzinba is elected Chairman of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. Parliamentary elections in the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic prompt the Georgian government to annul the autonomy of South Ossetia and impose a blockade which lasts eighteen months. A state of emergency is declared in South Ossetia and armed clashes resume early in the new year, leading to considerable population displacement.

1991

March

Georgia boycotts the Soviet referendum on Gorbachev's proposed union of sovereign republics, but fifty-two per cent of the electorate in Abkhazia vote overwhelmingly to join the union. Gamsakhurdia threatens to abolish Abkhaz autonomy and calls Ardzinba a traitor. A Georgian referendum on independence later in the month attracts a mass turn out and ninety-eight per cent vote in favour.

April-May

Georgia declares independence. Gamsakhurdia is elected president of Georgia with eighty-seven per cent of the vote.

August

Gamsakhurdia's failure to condemn an attempted coup in Moscow increases opposition against him.

October-December

Two-stage elections to the Abkhaz parliament are held on a quota basis in accordance with an electoral law adopted in August. Twenty-eight seats are allocated to the Abkhaz (who comprise 18% of the population), 26 to the Georgians (46%) and 11 to remaining ethnic groups (36%). Within months the parliament is paralysed by the formation of two blocks and the Georgian deputies walk out. The USSR ceases to exist and Gamsakhurdia refuses to ally Georgia to the newly formed CIS. Attitudes to Gamsakhurdia polarize Georgia and an armed attack is launched against him in Tbilisi.

The post-Soviet period

1992

January–February

Gamsakhurdia is deposed in a coup d'état and flees Georgia. A Military Council under the direction of Tengiz Kitovani, Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Sigua takes power and reinstates the Georgian Constitution of 1921. Fighting continues against supporters of Gamsakhurdia in western Georgia. Georgian military action against South Ossetia intensifies after an overwhelming majority vote in a referendum there in favour of South Ossetia's joining the Russian Federation.

March–April

Shevardnadze returns to Georgia to head the Georgian State Council. International recognition of Georgia follows.

May–June

Georgia joins the IMF and the Black Sea Economic Co-operation organization. Yeltsin, Shevardnadze and Ossetian representatives agree to a ceasefire and regulation of the conflict in South Ossetia providing for the deployment of joint Russian, Georgian and Ossetian peacekeeping forces. Supporters of Gamsakhurdia rally in Tbilisi and armed clashes occur. Following an assault by Abkhaz on the ethnic Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, the Georgian government demands the dissolution of the Abkhaz parliament and new elections to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet sends a draft treaty on federative or confederative relations to the Georgian State Council, receiving no reply.

July

Georgia becomes a member of the UN and the World Bank. The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet (in the continuing absence of its Georgian deputies) reinstates the Abkhaz constitution of 1925, arguing that there is no provision for Abkhazia in the Georgian Constitution of 1921. The decision is declared null and void by the Georgian parliament. Zviadist forces continue to challenge Georgian government forces in western Georgia and a number of Georgian officials are taken hostage and reputedly held in the Gali region of Abkhazia.

August

The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet appeals to the Georgian State Council for negotiations on future relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. On 14 August the Georgian National Guard commanded by Tengiz Kitovani enters Abkhazia, reportedly to release the hostages and protect the railway from terrorist disruption. Georgian forces storm the parliament building and occupy Sukhumi. The Abkhaz leadership evacuates to Gudauta, general mobilization begins in Abkhazia and Georgian forces create a second front in northern Abkhazia.

September

A Russian-mediated ceasefire agreement does not hold. Hostilities continue and both sides accuse the other of violating the ceasefire. The UN dispatches its first fact-finding mission to Abkhazia.

October–December

Georgian forces in northern Abkhazia are pushed back across the border with Russia by Abkhaz forces assisted by volunteers from the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. Both sides make accusations of genocide. Shevardnadze is elected Head of State and Chairman of parliament with seventy-four per cent of the vote.

1993

January–March

Abkhaz forces make two unsuccessful attempts to recapture Sukhumi. Georgia and Russia quarrel over alleged Russian assistance to the Abkhaz and the retention of Russian military bases in Georgia.

May–June

A ceasefire agreed in Moscow does not hold and the military situation deteriorates. Georgia and Abkhazia appeal to the UN, CSCE and NATO to intervene. The UN appoints a Special Envoy to negotiate a comprehensive political settlement and develop proposals for a peacekeeping operation. Following a lull, in which large-scale evacuations are made from the conflict area, fighting resumes.

July

After a third unsuccessful Abkhaz attempt to recapture Sukhumi, Russia brokers a trilateral agreement in Sochi, providing for a ceasefire and the immediate demilitarization of the conflict zone.

August

A United Nations Military Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) is established to monitor the ceasefire. Zviadist forces take three key towns in Mingrelia. Continuing hostilities in western Georgia hamper the Georgian withdrawal of heavy weaponry from Abkhazia.

September

Talks between Russia and Georgia link the stationing of Russian troops in Georgia with resolution of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Abkhaz forces launch a surprise attack on Sukhumi and other Georgian positions on 16 September, claiming the Georgians had failed to withdraw heavy weaponry. Georgians accuse the Abkhaz of violating the ceasefire and the UN and Russian Foreign Ministry condemn the Abkhaz action. On 27 September Sukhumi falls, the Georgian forces are ejected from Abkhazia and the majority of the pre-war Georgian population is displaced in chaotic circumstances.

October–December

The strategic port of Poti is captured by Zviadists, supply routes to Tbilisi are severed and Zviadists move eastwards. Georgia joins the CIS in return for Russian support to reopen supply routes. Russian troops defeat Zviadist forces quickly. In Moscow the stand-off between the president and the parliament, which has hindered effective decision-making for several months, is ended when Yeltsin orders troops to storm the White House. Georgia and Abkhazia sign a Memorandum of Understanding in Geneva but further consultations on the future status of Abkhazia end with no sign of agreement. Gamsakhurdia reportedly commits suicide.

1994

January–February

A second round of Geneva talks conclude with the establishment of a quadripartite commission on refugees, though parties remain far apart on key issues. A new outbreak of hostilities in the Gali region impedes repatriation and a third round of Geneva talks fail. Georgia and Russia sign a Bilateral Treaty on Friendship and Co-operation which includes the eventual re-establishment of Russian military bases in Georgia, though vociferous opposition in the Georgian parliament means the treaty is not ratified.

March

IDPs and groups opposing Georgian co-operation with Russia demonstrate in Tbilisi. While Shevardnadze visits the USA the Georgian parliament disbands the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia and annuls its decisions, leading Abkhazia to suspend negotiations.

April–May

Georgian, Abkhaz, Russian and UN representatives sign a quadripartite framework agreement on IDP repatriation and measures for a political settlement of the conflict in Moscow. The Georgian and Abkhaz sides sign a formal ceasefire and agree to the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force.

June–July

The CSCE initiates dialogue between Georgia and South Ossetia. The CISPKF, made up of Russian troops, is deployed along the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict line. Its impartiality is questioned by both sides. The lack of progress over repatriation leads to demonstrations on the Georgia–Abkhazia border, while the unofficial return of IDPs continues.

September–October

A round of negotiations in Geneva under UN auspices produces no results. After only a few official returns of IDPs to the Gali region, large numbers of IDPs, with Russian involvement, spontaneously attempt to return to Abkhazia, threatening the ceasefire. Shevardnadze and Ardzinba meet in Sukhumi in the presence of Russian Minister of Defence Grachev to discuss tensions. A quota system for the return of IDPs is agreed in emergency talks.

November–December

Official IDP returns to the Gali region continue to be very slow, while unofficial returns are more rapid. Further talks in Geneva result in little progress. Abkhazia adopts a new constitution as a 'sovereign democratic state' subject to international law, leaving ambiguity as to whether this constitutes a declaration of independence. Ardzinba is inaugurated president by the Abkhaz parliament and the Abkhaz propose a union state with Georgia on the basis of equal partnership. In response Georgia withdraws from the next round of UN-sponsored negotiations. Kitovani and Sigua announce the creation of an Abkhaz National Liberation Organization to retake Abkhazia by force. Georgia supports Moscow's military campaign in Chechnya, and Russia imposes sanctions on Abkhazia, forbidding adult Abkhaz males from crossing the border with Russia, prohibiting car and rail traffic and cutting postal and telegraphic links.

1995

January–March

Kitovani leads a 'peaceful' march on Abkhazia, but Georgian forces interrupt his progress before he reaches the security zone. A productive dialogue in Geneva over political settlement leaves core areas of disagreement. The repatriation of IDPs is suspended after the official return of only 311. Evidence emerges of Abkhaz militia raids on Georgian villages that result in the arrest of 200 IDPs and twenty deaths. Georgian armed bands enter Abkhazia, threatening the Abkhaz militia and Georgian returnees. Russian and Georgian Defence Ministers initial a military agreement.

April–August

The Gali region remains unstable. The Georgian parliament adopts a new constitution that does not define Georgia's territorial and administrative structure in relation to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Shevardnadze proposes a federal solution to the Georgia–Abkhazia and Georgia–Ossetia conflicts. Following an attempt on his life, Shevardnadze arrests the leaders of the Mkhedrioni, including Jaba Ioseliani.

October–December

A new currency, the lari, is introduced, over time contributing to the stabilization of the Georgian economy. Shevardnadze wins presidential elections by a convincing margin. His party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia, forms the majority in the new parliament. Liviu Bota is appointed resident Deputy to the UN Special Envoy and Head of UNOMIG to give continuous political attention to the negotiations. Talks between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on a draft protocol founder over political status and the return of IDPs. Abkhazia continues to demand sovereignty and an equal relationship with Georgia. Georgia proposes autonomy within an asymmetric federation and requires the return of IDPs prior to a determination of Abkhazia's status. Abkhazia's precondition for the return of IDPs is that its political and legal status be defined.

1996

January–March

Difficulties over the prolongation of the CISPKF mandate lead to tension in the negotiation process. The UN and Russia continue to promote negotiations but the sides reject a draft protocol. Abkhazia's proposal for a 'federative union' is not accepted. Abkhaz militia clash with Georgian armed groups, notably the White Legion, Forest Brothers and Liberation Army, some of which are alleged to have links with the Abkhaz 'government-in-exile' in Tbilisi and the Georgian Ministry of State Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Abkhaz militia conduct periodic sweeps through the Gali region, contributing to the movement of IDPs back and forth across the Inguri River.

April–July

Georgian and Abkhaz civil society representatives begin to meet in a variety of non-governmental forums, but official negotiations are deadlocked. Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia and North Ossetia sign a framework agreement on South Ossetia.

October–December

The UN opens a human rights office in Sukhumi. Progress made with the first official-level bilateral talks between Abkhazia and Georgia is set back by the parliamentary elections in Abkhazia which are declared illegal by the Georgian government.

1997

January–March

Violence in the Gali region spreads to Sukhumi and Ochamchira. The mandate of the CISPKF is expanded. Attacks aimed at the CISPKF by Georgian guerrilla groups continue. The Georgian economy continues to grow and bread prices are deregulated.

April

Following an agreement between Georgia and Russia external telephone communications from Abkhazia are routed through Tbilisi rather than the Russian Federation increasing the Abkhaz feeling of isolation. Bilateral contacts continue to grow, including telephone links between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze, though without concrete results.

June–August

Violent activity in the Gali region intensifies as shootings, the laying of landmines and hostage-taking by Georgian armed groups increase, and Abkhaz militia attempt to root out the guerrillas. Bilateral meetings facilitated by Russia intensify. Bota is appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General and convenes a meeting of the parties in Geneva. The first meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba takes place in Tbilisi under Russian patronage on the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the war. Both reaffirm their commitment to negotiations but fail to agree a conclusive peace settlement. Public and parliamentary criticism on both sides is followed by the establishment of a Co-ordinating Commission.

November

Negotiations resume in Geneva under UN auspices and a Co-ordinating Council is established. Progress is made by the working group on socio-economic development and early in the new year restrictions on international telephone communications from Abkhazia are symbolically eased, but working groups on IDPs and security are less productive.

1998

January–April

The First Extraordinary Session of the Co-ordinating Council instructs its Working Group I to set up a mechanism whereby the parties, UNOMIG and the CISP KF could participate in the investigation and prevention of violations of the 1994 Moscow Agreement. The idea of a Joint Investigation Group as a confidence-building measure persists, but with little practical impact. A UN Needs Assessment Mission is sent to Abkhazia under the auspices of the Co-ordinating Council to identify short and medium term economic and humanitarian needs. Recommendations are not implemented. Another assassination attempt against Shevardnadze in Tbilisi is foiled. UN personnel are taken hostage in Zugdidi. IDPs, frustrated by the lack of progress, impose a blockade at the border between Abkhazia and Georgia on the Inguri River, which hampers the passage of humanitarian aid into Abkhazia. Mine attacks and hostage takings in the Gali region intensify. Local government elections held in Abkhazia are not recognized by Georgia or the international community. Abkhazia rejects proposals to extend the scope of the CISP KF throughout Abkhazia.

May–June

Large numbers of Abkhaz militia enter the Gali region in response to a Georgian guerrilla attack and clash with guerrillas and some Georgian Interior Ministry troops. Localized fighting over six days results in the flight of the vast majority (approximately 30,000) of the Georgian population to western Georgia. A ceasefire and the separation of forces are agreed but the situation remains unstable and the events are a major setback to negotiations. Further talks are suspended. The mandate of the CISP KF expires. Views diverge in Russia over renewal, but the peacekeepers stay on.

July

Shevardnadze is criticized for his handling of the May events. Georgia and Abkhazia level accusations against Russia over alleged involvement to destabilize relations. These accusations are linked by some to competition for oil pipeline routes from the Caspian Sea.

August–September

The Russian financial meltdown has a knock-on effect on the Georgian and the Abkhaz economies (the rouble remains the currency of use in Abkhazia). Ten members of the Abkhaz parliament walk out in protest at interference by President Ardvinba in the affairs of parliament. Clashes continue in the border region with guerrillas targeting Abkhaz militia, CISP KF and UNOMIG. There are rumours of a resumption of hostilities planned to coincide with the anniversary of the end of the 1992–93 war.

The Co-ordinating Council convenes and there is a marked increase in bilateral contacts between Abkhazia and Georgia which continue at irregular intervals into 1999, especially between Georgian State Minister Vazha Lordkipanidze and Abkhaz Prime Minister Sergei Bagapsh. Abkhaz presidential envoy Anri Djergenia visits Tbilisi on a number of occasions and there are meetings between high level state security officials.

October

A confidence building meeting under the aegis of the UN takes place in Athens during which high level talks occur but little substantive progress is made. Violent incidents in the Gali region continue throughout the autumn. A mutiny in western Georgia by over one hundred Gamsakhurdia supporters in the Georgian army is put down by government troops, but Colonel Elieva, its instigator, remains at large.

November

The Labour Party does unexpectedly well in local elections in Georgia at the expense of the Citizens' Union. High-level bilateral Georgian–Abkhaz talks in Tbilisi and Sukhumi intensify, but a proposed meeting between Ardvinba and Shevardnadze is postponed on several occasions due to disagreements over conditions for repatriation. IDPs, led by rival spokesmen Boris Kakubava and Tamaz Nadareishvili, become increasingly militant. The OSCE declares its intention to take a more active part in settling the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict in co-operation with the UN.

December

Tensions flare again in the Gali region as the situation deteriorates rapidly and Georgian troops are placed on full alert. Talks in Geneva avert conflict but the sides remain deadlocked over repatriation. The Tbilisi-based Abkhaz 'government-in-exile' creates the Party for the Liberation of Abkhazia, with Nadareishvili as its leader.

1999

January–March

Tensions between Russia and Georgia increase over the restitution to Georgian control of property used by the Russian military, the removal of Russian border guards from Georgian territory, continued Georgian attempts to internationalize peacekeeping in Abkhazia and Georgian reluctance to renegotiate the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS. The Abkhaz reiterate a proposal made in late 1998 unilaterally to begin in March the process of repatriating Georgians displaced during the 1992–93 war or the hostilities in May 1998. The Georgian leadership argues that repatriation should be jointly co-ordinated under UN auspices. Despite this some Georgians cross the border in March. Although the number of returnees is disputed the

pattern seems to repeat much of the toing and froing that IDPs have experienced over the past four years.

April–May

The presidents of CIS member states set a one-month deadline for Georgia and Abkhazia to agree on the text of two draft documents that have been under discussion for several months (the 'Agreement on Peace and Guarantees for Pre-empting Armed Clashes' and a 'Protocol on the Return of Refugees to the Gali Region and Measures to Restore the Economy'). The eighth session of the Co-ordinating Council is held in Sukhumi as a last-ditch attempt to reach an agreement but no compromises are evident. Despite the threat of withdrawal the CISPKF remains in place, though without an extension of its mandate. The Abkhaz insist that no breakthrough will come if Georgia seeks to present agreements negotiated by CIS presidents without Abkhaz participation. Georgia is accepted into the Council of Europe on the basis of a number of conditions especially, but not exclusively, relating to the repatriation to Georgia of Meskhetian Turks, who were deported under Stalin.

June–July

High-level Georgian and Abkhaz delegations meet in Istanbul for a second confidence-building meeting under UN auspices. Some minor agreements are reached. Working Group I of the Co-ordinating Council, dealing with security matters, is convened after eighteen months of deadlock caused by Abkhaz objections to the participation of people affiliated with the structures of the Abkhaz 'government-in-exile'. Representatives of five Georgian opposition parties announce in Batumi the creation of a bloc to contend the October parliamentary elections as an alliance against the Citizens' Union. Georgian leadership lobbies for international condemnation of alleged ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia as a result of the 1992–93 war, launching a campaign to bring Ardzinba before the International Court in The Hague on charges of genocide. The UN Security Council, however, refuses to label wartime attacks by Abkhaz on ethnic Georgians as ethnic cleansing, effectively ending Georgian hopes that the UN would sanction the use of force against Abkhazia. UNOMIG's mandate is extended until 31 January 2000. Low-level guerrilla activity continues and bombs are detonated in Sukhumi, although causing minimal damage. Georgian Foreign Minister Menagharishvili announces that Georgia's goal is to integrate into European economic, political and defence structures, the latter being a better guarantee of the country's national security than the CIS Collective Security Agreement.

August

Liviu Bota takes up his appointment as Romanian Ambassador to the OSCE in Vienna and becomes non-resident Special Representative to the Secretary-General and Head of Mission. It is likely that his three-month mandate in this role will be extended in view of the drawn out discussions concerning the appointment of a successor which are complicated by political bargaining among Security Council members. Surprise talks in Moscow between Georgian State Minister Lordkipanidze and Abkhaz President Ardzinba fail to solve disputes over expanding the authority of the peacekeepers and providing increased security guarantees for returning IDPs. The Georgian government requests an extension of the CISPKF mandate following a warning from Moscow that it would immediately withdraw the PKF if the mandate were not extended.

Profiles

Individuals

Vladislav Ardzinba



Source: Mia Foster/Alicia Patterson Foundation

Ardzinba was born in 1945. After graduating from the Historical Department of the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute, Ardzinba spent eighteen years in Moscow specializing in ancient Middle Eastern civilizations at the Institute of Oriental Studies, which was directed by Evgenii Primakov, subsequently Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. He returned to Abkhazia in 1987, becoming Director of the Abkhaz Institute of Language, Literature and History, when cultural and language rights were becoming a focus for dissension between Abkhaz and Georgians. In 1989 he was elected a People's Deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet. He used this platform to advocate the rights of Soviet national minorities. He also developed links with the hard-line Soyuz Group. In December 1990 he was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia. He kept his distance from Gamsakhurdia's regime, actively supporting Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Soviet Union through a new Union Treaty. He hoped this would raise the status of Abkhazia in relation to Georgia. Abkhazia's newly elected parliament voted Ardzinba its chairman in January 1992. He consolidated his position and after the outbreak of war proved to be an effective leader. Following victory and Abkhazia's de facto secession from Georgia, Ardzinba was elected President of the Republic by its parliament in November 1994. His meeting with Shevardnadze in Tbilisi in August 1997 was met with some criticism in Abkhazia by those who feared a political compromise but Ardzinba has pursued an uncompromising line on Abkhazia's sovereignty and maintained a tight grip on the levers of power in Abkhazia. As the only candidate in the October 1999 presidential elections Ardzinba's tenure in power is likely to continue.

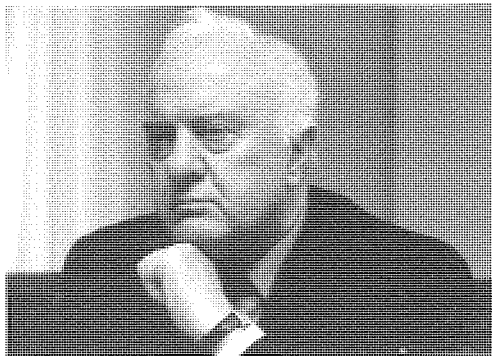
Zviad Gamsakhurdia



Source: G. Kikvadze/Georgian Fotoinformation Agency

The son of a prominent Georgian writer, Gamsakhurdia began his anti-Communist dissident activities in the 1950s. In the late 1980s he became leader of the independence movement. After becoming Chairman of the parliament he was elected president in May 1990 with eighty-six per cent of the vote. Adopting the slogan 'Georgia for Georgians' he utilized the ethnic question to increase his popularity, but in promoting majority rights antagonized relations with minorities, threatening their cultural and political security and thereby helping to bring about the war in South Ossetia. In Abkhazia Gamsakhurdia achieved an uncomfortable compromise with the Abkhaz leadership in 1991 through an election law which gave 28 out of 65 seats in the Abkhaz parliament to Abkhaz and 26 to Georgians, while the remaining thirty-seven per cent of the population received 11 seats. This 'Lebanon-style' system created an unsustainable balance which unravelled after Gamsakhurdia was overthrown in a military coup in January 1992. Gamsakhurdia's paranoid and dictatorial style was criticized by former supporters, especially after his failure to oppose the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991. Following his overthrow and exile in Chechnya he launched an unsuccessful insurgency in western Georgia in September 1993. Although he died in mysterious circumstances on 31 December 1993 his influence lingers on in the Zviadist political groupings that do not recognize the legitimacy of Shevardnadze's rule. Some of these have been accused of the assassination attempt against Shevardnadze in February 1998 and the short-lived army revolt in October 1998.

Eduard Shevardnadze



Source: Mia Foster/Alicia Patterson Foundation

Shevardnadze climbed the Communist Party hierarchy in Georgia after 1957, serving as Head of the KGB and Interior Ministry then First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party from 1972 until 1985. He was loyal to Moscow but keen to promote the Georgian language. He made his name as Soviet foreign minister during the perestroika period from 1985, but resigned in December 1990, anticipating a reaction against Gorbachev's reformist policies. In March 1992 the leaders of the coup d'état against Gamsakhurdia invited Shevardnadze to return to Georgia, hoping he would bring international recognition and domestic legitimacy. He became Chairman of parliament and Head of State of the Republic of Georgia before being elected president in November 1995. In August 1992 he ordered government troops into Abkhazia to release kidnapped officials and safeguard highways and railroads under threat from Gamsakhurdia supporters. Although he claimed not to have sanctioned Kitovani's ensuing march on Sukhumi that led to the 1992–93 war, he subsequently endorsed it. His policy of rapprochement with Russia in the immediate aftermath of the war enabled him to bring Georgia back from the verge of economic and political collapse. Criticized by IDP representatives and opposition politicians for failing to reintegrate Abkhazia, he has tried to increase international involvement and diminish Russia's influence, at times arguing for a policy of peace enforcement. Frustrated by the Abkhaz leadership's consistent rejection of Georgia's terms for a settlement he launched a campaign in 1999 to persuade the international community that the Abkhaz leadership implemented a deliberate policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing against Abkhazia's Georgian population during the 1992–93 war. The hardening of language may well be linked to the parliamentary elections of October 1999 and the presidential election in 2000 in which Shevardnadze intends to stand. Shevardnadze remains the dominant figure in Georgian politics, but people are starting to think of a Georgia without him.

Political movements and institutions

The Abkhaz parliament

Thirty-five MPs were elected to the Abkhaz parliament after competitive elections in November 1996 under Abkhazia's 1994 constitution. It replaced the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic elected in September 1991. Georgia condemned the conduct of the election because it was held without the participation of the refugee and IDP population. MPs have participated in the negotiation process and in informal meetings with Georgian parliamentarians. In 1998 disputes arose between the parliament and Ardzinba, including some in regard to the peace process, indicating a degree of open political debate in Abkhazia.

Aydgylara

The Popular Forum of Abkhazia, Aydgylara (Unity), was created in December 1988 on the wave of Gorbachev's democratization process. It became the major Abkhaz political organization, sidelining the disoriented Communist Party. Its meeting in March 1989 in the village of Lykhny, which drew over thirty thousand people, demanded a Republic of Abkhazia separate from Georgia within a renewed Soviet Federation. This sparked counter demonstrations by the Georgian population in Abkhazia and in Tbilisi. Although some of its former leaders occupy senior posts, such as Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, Aydgylara's role has since become less political.

Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus

The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC) was established in October 1992 as the successor to the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (CMPC). Aydgylara had been instrumental in founding the CMPC's predecessor the Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus in August 1989 in Sukhumi. The CMPC declared itself the successor of the North Caucasian Republic (proclaimed in 1918 but soon afterwards crushed by the Red Army) with the aim of creating a confederation of North Caucasian peoples. Before the war with Abkhazia Shevardnadze dismissed the relevance of the CMPC, but its mainly Chechen and Circassian volunteer military units, as well as considerable financial, material and moral support provided by the CMPC and then the CPC, played an important role in Georgia's defeat. The CPC's espousal of a renewed North Caucasian confederation worried the Russian leadership. However, during the 1994–96 war for Chechen independence internal divisions and Russian political manoeuvring marginalized the CPC. Abkhazia in particular was vulnerable since active support for Chechen independence would have risked Russia's taking a more pro-Georgian stance. By contrast Shevardnadze was the

only CIS leader to openly support Russian intervention, and the analogy he made between Chechnya and other 'separatists' was intended to weaken Russian support for Abkhazia.

Georgian political parties

Political parties have mushroomed in post-independence Georgia. As a result of multi-party parliamentary elections in 1990, 1992 and 1995 and local government elections in 1998 their importance in the political process has increased. Nevertheless, parties remain vulnerable to frequent organizational changes, personal rivalries and regroupings because patronage dominates political allegiances. Personalities continue to be more prominent than programmes. The 1999 parliamentary election campaign is dominated by a contest between the ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia, chaired by Shevardnadze, which has been the party of government since 1992 and an alliance of opponents to Shevardnadze that has coalesced around Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze, a potential presidential challenger in 2000. The so-called Batumi Alliance is unstable and its electoral prospects unpredictable. Economic issues are the central focus of the election campaign, but as CUG politicians have managed the negotiation process any instability relating to Abkhazia could undermine the CUG's position. While it is hard to gauge how a change in government would influence the conduct of the negotiations process, the electoral cycle is likely to diminish room for manoeuvre until after the presidential election.

The Abkhaz 'government-in-exile' and parties representing the displaced



Source: I. Davitashvili/Georgian Information Agency

Tamaz Nadareishvili

Ethnic Georgian deputies elected to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet under the unsuccessful 1991 power-sharing arrangement continue to operate from Tbilisi as a symbolic government and parliament-in-exile. They began boycotting the Abkhaz parliament in May 1992, complaining of Abkhaz discrimination, and in June commenced a campaign of civil disobedience while attempting to set up parallel power structures in Sukhumi.

In October 1992 elections to the Georgian parliament were conducted in those parts of Abkhazia controlled by Tbilisi. However, with Abkhazia outside Tbilisi's jurisdiction by the time of the 1995 Georgian parliamentary election the MPs elected from Abkhazia in 1992 automatically retained their seats in the Georgian parliament. Personnel from the 'government-in-exile' continue to be employed by Georgian state structures, as do exiled militia from Abkhazia. The continued existence of the 'government-in-exile' provides the authorities in Sukhumi with grounds to question Georgia's commitment to a negotiated settlement. It enables Shevardnadze to partially control the exiled and highly vocal politicians from Abkhazia and constitutes a threat to the de facto government in Abkhazia. There are two significant political groups of Abkhaz IDPs. In April 1999 Tamaz Nadareishvili, chairman of the 'government-in-exile' in Tbilisi and at the outbreak of the war Deputy Chairman of the parliament of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, founded the Abkhazia Liberation Party (ALP) to contest the October 1999 Georgian parliamentary elections. Formerly a Communist Party functionary in Abkhazia, he was Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia 1993–95. The ALP is the successor to My Home Abkhazia, a party he founded to contest the 1995 parliamentary election but which failed to gain parliamentary representation. Nadareishvili backs a military solution to Abkhazia's reintegration into Georgia, and although this contradicts official Georgian policy, he remains a supporter of Shevardnadze. The ALP is opposed by the Co-ordinating Council of Refugees from Abkhazia founded in 1996 by Boris Kakubava, an MP in the Abkhazeti faction. The Council is represented by the League of Popular Representatives of Georgia political party. Kakubava strongly opposes Shevardnadze who he blames for the loss of Abkhazia. As a result he associates with the Batumi Alliance, believing that the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia (though this is not supported by all in the Batumi Alliance) and the removal of Shevardnadze will make reconciliation with Abkhazia possible without resort to military force.

Military and paramilitary forces

Georgian and Abkhaz military

Defeat in Abkhazia highlighted Georgia's lack of an effective army. Georgia's subsequent rapprochement with Russia included the signing of the treaty on military bases in September 1995 which granted Russia a twenty-five-year lease on four military bases in Batumi (Ajaria), Akhalkalaki (Samtskhe-Javakheti), Vaziani, (near Tbilisi) and Gudauta (Abkhazia). In return Russia assumed responsibility for protecting Georgia's land and maritime borders and for training and equipping the Georgian army. Georgia anticipated that the agreement would commit Russia to restoring Georgia's territorial integrity. In 1994 Vardiko Nadibaidze, previously Deputy Commander of the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus, was appointed Georgian Defence Minister in an attempt to consolidate the Georgian army, diminish the role of the paramilitaries and enhance relations with Russia. Nadibaidze's replacement by US-trained David Tevzadze in 1998 reflected Georgia's increasing political orientation towards the West since 1996 and movement towards greater political accountability in the army. The October 1998 mutiny indicates, however, that reform of the army has a long way to go. Although the military is increasingly receiving Western support, it remains insufficiently resourced or trained to resolve the Abkhaz conflict by force. An Abkhaz-only National Guard, the foundation for the armed forces that fought Georgia, was formed in early 1992. During the war Abkhazia received support from North Caucasian volunteer units and, controversially, from Russian forces based in Abkhazia. Russian assistance undoubtedly contributed to Abkhazia's victory, but the fact that Russia also provided Georgia with military hardware prior to the war should not be overlooked. While lacking the numbers of the Georgian army, Abkhazia's military appears to be well entrenched and resourced and well placed to repel any military intervention.

Guerrilla groups

Georgian guerrilla activity aimed at regaining Abkhazia by force has increased since 1996. While not strong enough to take Abkhazia, the groups destabilize the situation and undermine the peace process. Called terrorists by the Abkhaz and partisans by the Georgians, these guerrillas have targeted the Abkhaz militia, CIS peacekeeping forces and occasionally UNOMIG in response to allegations of deliberate and arbitrary killings of ethnic Georgians by Abkhaz militia. Over sixty CIS soldiers and a similar number of Abkhaz militia have been killed as a result of guerrilla activities since 1994. The most prominent groups are the White Legion (led by Zurab Samushia, a follower of Gamsakhurdia) and the Forest Brothers (led by Dato

Shengelia, previously a member of the Mkhedrioni). Volunteers are mostly drawn from the IDP community, including former employees of the militia in Abkhazia. Activities have ranged from attacks by individuals to organized sabotage of power supplies and the explosion of bombs in Sukhumi. Observers suggest an increased sophistication in co-ordination and weaponry since 1997. The intensification of guerrilla activity in the first half of 1998 was a major factor in the resumption of hostilities in May 1998. Some Georgian MPs allegedly encouraged the guerrillas to intensify operations believing that official military support would follow. During the six-day hostilities troops from Georgia's Interior and Defence Ministries were drawn into the fighting, but in a defensive rather than an offensive capacity. The Georgian government has denied CISPKF and UNOMIG accusations that Georgian special services have provided support, finances or training to guerrillas. However, there has been no formal investigation into the alleged complicity of officials in the arming and training of these groups, nor steps taken to apprehend known individuals involved. The guerrillas appear to be linked to the Tbilisi-based 'parliament-in-exile', but there is no indication that a tight chain of command exists.

Paramilitary forces

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the surge of paramilitary formations in Georgia reflected the breakdown of law and order. The National Guard commanded by Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani's Mkhedrioni ('Horsemen') were instrumental in the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia. As Minister of Defence, it was Kitovani who marched the National Guard into Sukhumi in August 1992. In the absence of a regular army, paramilitary formations coalesced into a fighting force during the war, but the lack of a coherent command structure undermined Georgian military activity. The quasi-official militias often financed themselves through criminal activities. The Mkhedrioni were notorious for terrorizing the population in western Georgia. The credibility of the paramilitaries was severely weakened by defeat in Abkhazia, although it was not until Shevardnadze survived an assassination attempt in August 1995, allegedly perpetrated by Mkhedrioni, that a comprehensive crackdown and disbandment occurred, including the imprisonment of Jaba Ioseliani.



Source: Peter Nasmyth

Member of the Mkhedrioni

Intergovernmental bodies

Commonwealth of Independent States

The CIS was established in December 1991 as a regional organization for the Soviet successor states except the Baltic states. Georgia joined in the aftermath of the defeat in Abkhazia in October 1993. A CIS peacekeeping force was deployed along the ceasefire line in June 1994. Russia sought but did not receive UN status for the operation to offset costs and to gain international recognition for its sphere of interest in the former Soviet states. CISPKF troops have only come from Russia and currently number about 1,500. The PKF's role is to maintain the ceasefire and ensure the safe return of IDPs by policing the Security and Restricted Weapons Zones. The mandate has been a bone of contention between Russia and Georgia. Initially it was extended every six months at CIS summits, but on a number of occasions it has lapsed, to be extended retrospectively. Concerned that the PKF has entrenched the existing situation and become in effect an Abkhaz border guard, Georgia has tried unsuccessfully on a number of occasions to expand the mandate to include broader policing functions in the Gali and Ochamchire regions. Russia is the prime mover in the CIS, but Georgia has used the organization to impose economic restrictions on Abkhazia. Georgia questions the utility of the CIS due to its inability to resolve secessionist conflicts in several member states. Abkhazia criticizes the CIS as an organization of recognized states that denies Abkhazia representation and seeks to impose its resolutions.

The European Union

The reluctance of most EU member states to be directly involved in ethno-political conflicts has limited the development of a co-ordinated EU policy on the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict. Nevertheless, the EU is politically and economically active in the region. Its TACIS programme aims to improve transport infrastructure and diversify Europe's energy provision by developing a network linking Central Asia and the South Caucasus to Western Europe, although discussions on the rehabilitation of the railway between Sochi and Tbilisi have foundered on political obstacles. The Inguri dam reconstruction project does, however, receive EU support. A Democracy Programme supports institutional development and the promotion of civil society, including NGO programmes to facilitate dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz NGOs, journalists and academics. Regional co-operation and post-conflict reconstruction links confidence building with strengthening the rule of law and economic recovery, recognizing that a future peace settlement in Abkhazia may lead to substantial European investment in the region.

Friends of Georgia and Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia

The Friends of Georgia (FOG) a self-appointed group consisting of France, the UK, the USA, Germany and Russia was set up to aid the UN Secretary-General in the peace process. The Georgian government has tried to use FOG to internationalize the search for a solution to the conflict with Abkhazia and to pressure Russia in its role as facilitator. Western members of FOG have been critical of the Abkhaz leadership, leading to Abkhaz counter-accusations that FOG could not be regarded as impartial because it was motivated by economic and geostrategic interests. In 1997 FOG adopted the more neutral appellation Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia. The Friends were recognized as official observers of the Geneva Process in November 1997. The Friends approach to Abkhazia has evolved to include more regular contact with the Abkhaz authorities by ambassadors of the Western members and financial support for some confidence- and capacity-building measures through particular embassies. However, the underlying political position of the Friends, supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia and a federal solution for Georgia and Abkhazia, has not changed.

GUUAM

GUUAM, the loose regional alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova, was formed to broaden their international contacts and further integrate into Western security mechanisms. GUUAM's primary significance is economic, lobbying for Georgia to become the main out-route for Azeri energy and for Ukraine and Moldova to be final or transit markets. In 1998 plans were announced to create a common peacekeeping battalion 'under UN aegis' to avoid future reliance on Russian peacekeepers, especially in Georgia. Coinciding with the renegotiation of the CIS Collective Security Treaty which Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan refuse to adhere to despite Russian pressure, GUUAM's quiet institutionalization divides the CIS into two camps (the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty and the pro-Western GUUAM) with as yet unclear implications for the political influence of the CIS and its ability to play a peacekeeping role. While GUUAM is likely to be increasingly important in geopolitical terms it is not clear what role it will assume in conflict resolution.

NATO

Georgia co-operates with NATO in the framework of the Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. This provides an alternative to existing Georgian military co-operation with Moscow. Military co-operation between Georgia and NATO members (Turkey, Greece, the



Source: UNOMIG

UK, the USA and Germany) remains limited to military exercises, education programmes in military academies or support, including the gift of coastguard cutters, to the Georgian Border Guards. The type of training which would be required to enforce a settlement in Abkhazia has not been included and NATO has shown no indication of a preparedness to engage in peace enforcement as desired by Georgia. In the long term NATO countries may strive for greater military involvement in the Caucasus, depending on material and security interests there. Russian fears and Georgian hopes for such an evolution influence strategic considerations regarding Abkhazia and indicate a perpetuation of balance of power policies.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The OSCE Mission in Georgia was established in 1992 with a primary focus on South Ossetia where its comprehensive approach has encompassed political level mediation, military and human rights monitoring and promoting economic co-operation and democratization. Although mandated to help establish a negotiating framework between the parties to the conflict in Abkhazia, the Mission's primary function has been to support UN peacemaking efforts there. The Abkhaz initially responded negatively to the involvement of the OSCE which they dismissed as a partisan organization particularly following the Budapest Summit Decision in 1994 and the Lisbon Summit Declaration in 1996, when the OSCE expressed concern over 'ethnic cleansing'; without, in the Abkhaz view, voicing any concern or condemnation of the Georgian use of force and intervention in Abkhazia in August 1992. Since the Oslo Ministerial Council decision in December 1998 the OSCE has increasingly engaged in dialogue with officials and civil society representatives in Abkhazia, especially from NGOs and the media, regarding human dimension standards and is considering a presence in Gali.

The United Nations

The UN has played various roles during the conflict and peace process: a military role through its observer mission (UNOMIG); dual diplomatic roles through the Security Council and the appointment of a Special Envoy, succeeded by a Special Representative to the Secretary-General; a humanitarian role (UNHCR and UNOCHA); a development role (UNDP); a human rights role (UN Human Rights Office); and a low-key capacity and confidence-building role (UNV). As a member of the UN since July 1992 Georgia has attempted to use it as an international forum in which to advocate its case. The UN's position has been that there will be no forcible change in international borders. Any settlement must be freely negotiated and based on autonomy for Abkhazia legitimized by referendum under international observation once the multi-ethnic population has returned. Abkhazia has, as a result, been critical of the UN particularly its perceived absence of criticism of Georgia's use of force in Abkhazia in August 1992. According to Western interpretations the intervention did not contravene international law since Georgia, as a sovereign state, had the right to secure order on its territory and protect its territorial integrity. The Security Council has, however, avoided use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' because of the serious consequences it would have on the UN's ability to mediate in the conflict but affirmed in a more moderate formula 'the unacceptability of the demographic changes resulting from the conflict'.

States

Russian Federation

As the regional power Russia has played a number of roles in the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict: as a protagonist providing assistance to both sides at different times, as a facilitator in the UN-mediated negotiation process, as a mediator in bilateral and trilateral relations with the parties, as a member of the Friends of the Secretary-General, as a troop contributor to the CISPKF but also to UNOMIG, and as a state seeking to promote its national interest. The multiplicity of institutional actors pursuing policies in the region (including the president, ministries of foreign affairs and defence, border guards and the duma) and the short time-span of individuals in office, has prevented the emergence of a coherent approach and made Russian policy vulnerable to claims of partiality. Russia's capacity to act as a peacekeeper in the longer term, combined with evolving economic interests (particularly export routes for the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region) and instability in the North Caucasus are likely to be among the major determinants of future policy. However, with parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled in December 1999 and June 2000, the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict is not a priority issue in Russian politics. Russia has frequently been criticized by both sides. The role of the CISPKF, the Russian military base in Gudauta and the lax imposition of border controls are seen by Tbilisi as a part of Russia's strategic design to weaken Georgia. Abkhaz perceptions of the inability of the CISPKF to protect them from Georgian guerrillas, Russia's stance in favour of Georgian territorial integrity and the Russian-maintained sanctions on Abkhazia leave them wary of Russia. While the status quo has advantages for Russia, making both sides heavily dependent, it also hampers the development of Russia's economic relations with Georgia, Armenia and Turkey. However, Russia seems unable to deliver what both sides desire—the resolution of the conflict on their terms.

Turkey

Historically Turkey's penetration into the Caucasus has been a geopolitical obsession for Russia. Its current strengthening of relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan is a reason for caution in Moscow. Of necessity Georgia has developed good relations with Turkey, despite remnants of mistrust from a history of conflict. The countries share a border of 114 kilometres that is important for military and economic co-operation. In March 1999 they signed an agreement for Turkey to provide financial and technical aid to the Georgian army. Turkey has replaced Russia as Georgia's main trade partner and there is a coincidence of interests relating to the extraction and transportation of Caspian basin hydrocarbon resources. The presence of

both Georgian and Abkhaz diaspora groups in Turkey restrains Turkish policy regarding the conflict. While Turkey supports Georgia's territorial integrity and contributes personnel to UNOMIG, it has not prevented Turkish ships providing one of Abkhazia's main economic lifelines in the post-conflict phase. In an attempt to utilize its position Turkey hosted the Istanbul confidence building meeting in June 1999.

United States of America

Institutionally, US participation in the peace process is limited to its membership of the Friends of the Secretary-General and the UN Security Council. However, the emergence of the Caucasus as a crucial geostrategic region has increased US interest in the energy routes that will transport potentially vast supplies of oil, gas and metal ores from central Asia and Azerbaijan to the West. To ensure that the USA and its Western allies secure this East–West corridor across the Caucasus it needs politically stable and independent Caucasian states. The USA views Georgia as a vital military, strategic and commercial ally in the region. Failure in Georgia would unravel US strategy and permit greater Russian and Iranian influence. The USA therefore rejects the unilateral secession of Abkhazia and urges its integration into Georgia as an autonomous unit. In 1998 the USA announced its readiness to allocate up to \$15 million for rehabilitation of infrastructure in the Gali region if substantial progress is made in the peace process. USAID has already funded some humanitarian initiatives for Abkhazia. The USA has in recent years significantly increased its military support to the Georgian armed forces but has stated that it would not condone any moves towards peace enforcement in Abkhazia.

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Abbreviations

ALP	Abkhazia Liberation Party
AMPC	Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CISPKF	CIS Peacekeeping Force
CMG	Conflict Management Group
CMPC	Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
CPC	Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus
CSCCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CUG	Citizens' Union of Georgia
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECU	European Currency Unit
EU	European Union
FOG	Friends of Georgia
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova
IA	International Alert
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organization
JCC	Joint Control Commission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NG	National Guard
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PKF	Peacekeeping force
SRSg	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the CIS
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia
UCI	University of California, Irvine
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDHA	United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VUB	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
WFP	World Food Programme

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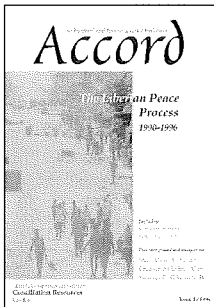
- assists local organizations in the development of indigenously rooted, innovative solutions to short- and long-term social, economic and political problems related to armed conflict or communal strife
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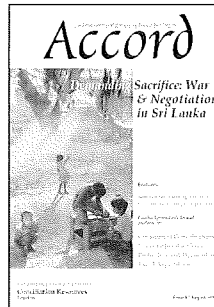
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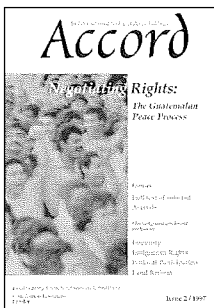
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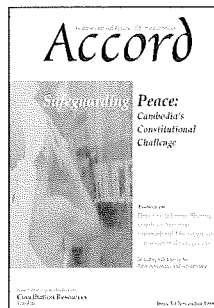
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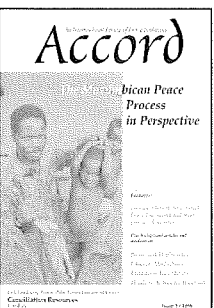
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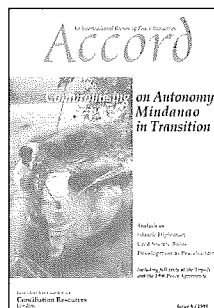
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