

Profiles

Individuals

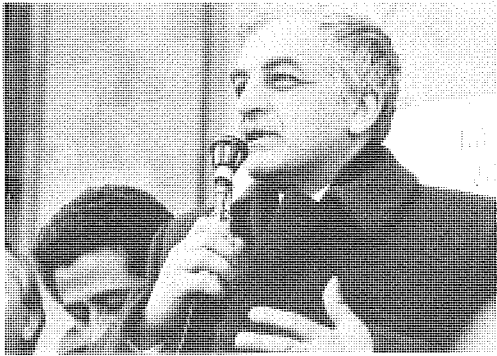
Vladislav Ardzinba



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.

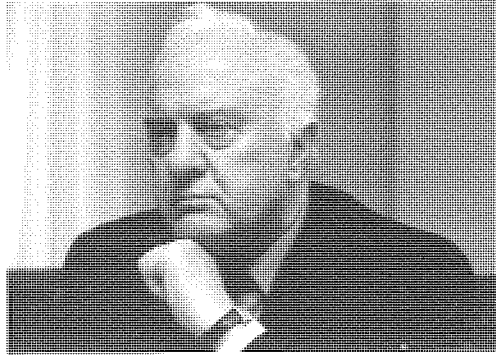
Zviad Gamsakhurdia



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: Mei 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



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 CISPKE 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 Namyn

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.