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Discordant Neighbours

A Reassessment of the Georgian-Abkhazian and
Georgian-South Ossetian Conflicts

By

George Hewitt



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Cover illustration: Whilst the map on the front-cover delineates the frontiers of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, the areas in green represent the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as recognised by Russia (26 August 2008) and five other UN member-states; red indicates the territory subject to the writ of the Georgian government and thus the reduced frontiers of today's Republic of Georgia.

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This book is dedicated to
Zaira, Aza, Alec and Zhana

Strange as it may seem, for they are amongst the wildest mountains on earth, the one thing you feel most about the lonely places of the Caucasus is a deep personal tenderness, a brotherhood; and the aching wish, vain as you know it to be, that you could guard their rare beauty. They “possess” you. Once you have felt the spell of the Caucasus you will never get over it.

(Negley Farson, *Caucasian Journey*, London:
Evans Brothers Ltd., 1952, pp. 13-14)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABL	Administrative Boundary Line
ANS	Abkhazian National Soviet
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNN	Cable News Network
CoE	Council of Europe
CPF	Collective Peacekeeping Forces
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CUG	Citizens' Union of Georgia
DPO	Development Policy Operation
EEC	European Economic Community
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FOG	Friends of Georgia
GPB	Georgian Public Broadcasting
GTEP	Georgia Train and Equip Program(me)
IA	International Alert
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IIFFMCG	Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IPRM	Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
KGB	State Security Committee (according to its Russian title)
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCG	National Council of Georgia
NFA	National Forum of Abkhazia

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RFERL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SC	Security Council
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SMK(')	Citizens' Union of Georgia (according to its Georgian title)
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
SSOP	Sustainment and Stability Operations Program(me)
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TACIS	Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TGU	Tbilisi State University (according to its Russian title)
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations' Development Program(me)
UNHCR	United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations' (International) Children's (Emergency) Fund
UNOMIG	United Nations' Observer Mission in Georgia
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation
US(A)	United States (of America)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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PREFACE

Hopes were high in many quarters that the *New World Order*, as President George Bush Snr. characterised the epoch dating from the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, would herald an era of freedom and prosperity across the former Soviet space. But in the Caucasus, one of the world's most alluring places on the fringes of Europe, there was to be no smooth transition to the state of peace that is an essential precondition for the establishment of any such nirvana. South of the great Caucasian mountain-range, war had already broken out in 1988 between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh to the Armenians); disputation between Georgians and Ossetians over what was at the time Soviet Georgia's Autonomous Region (*avtonomnaja oblast'*) of South Ossetia had descended into armed conflict in late 1990/early 1991; and tensions were rising in Soviet Georgia's Autonomous Republic (*avtonomnaja respublika*) of Abkhazia, following the fatal ethnic clashes there in July 1989. All-out war was to ensue in Abkhazia on 14 August 1992, whilst, to the north of the mountains, even greater loss of life would be witnessed in the two rounds of savage warfare between Russians and Chechens that erupted first in 1994 and again in 1999; nor should one forget either the hostilities between the neighbouring Ossetian and Ingush peoples over rights to the Prigorodnyj District or the later (and ongoing) problems that have scarred such other parts of the Russian Federation's North Caucasus as, for example, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.

Despite considerable attention from the world's media during the periods of actual fighting, once the three Transcaucasian hotspots (viz. Nagorno-Karabagh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia) had achieved *de facto* independence, interest in both them and the internationally recognised states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia that were involved in the relevant conflicts largely tended to wane, reviving only on the occasion of flare-ups in hostilities. Georgia returned to prominence in November 2003, when its leader Eduard Shevardnadze (firstly as an orthodox communist from 1972 to 1985, and then from 1992 in the guise of a born-again Christian and democrat), who had achieved worldwide fame upon his appointment in 1985 by Mikhail Gorbachev as the Soviet Union's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was ousted by his former protégé, Mikheil Saak'ashvili, who was formally elected president of Georgia in early 2004. However, it was the

short (five-day) Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 in and around South Ossetia, with lower-level military activity in Abkhazia that nevertheless had important local consequences, which really concentrated minds on Georgia and the territories in dispute with it. These conflicts form the subject-matter of the present volume.

A number of publications touching upon Abkhazia and South Ossetia have already appeared on the market. Those seeking a general introduction to the entire area of the Caucasian isthmus will find reward in the works of Charles King (2008) and Thomas de Waal (2010), which latter, dealing mainly with the Transcaucasus, has the advantage of having been composed after the events of 2008.¹ Ethno-nationalism in the Islamic states of (primarily) the North Caucasus is the focus of the contributions to the collection edited by Moshe Gammer in 2008.² Political scientists keen to detect some theory at work in the unfolding of history might discover appropriate stimulation in the analytical offerings from Jonathan Wheatley (2005) and Christoph Stefes (2006). Though written when Saak'ashvili was only about a year into his first presidential term, Wheatley's survey of Georgia from national awakening to Rose Revolution reads like a virtual manual in how not to build a functioning state. Stating that a regime is defined by (pp. 3-4):

- a) the diversity and characteristics of those actors who belong to the political élite as well as the rules, both informal and formal, that govern decision-making within the élite, b) the capacity of the political élite to penetrate society either by means of repression or by legitimization of one form or another, and c) the extent to which ordinary individuals and social forces independent of the state are able to influence state decision-making,

he then defines the key challenge as: “[u]nderstanding how and why political regimes change and the way structures and actors interact to bring about institutional change” (p. 7) and proceeds to examine the relevant years in Georgia's development against this framework. Stefes, on the other hand, compares and contrasts post-Soviet Armenia and Georgia in terms of corruption, collusion and clientelism. He proposes a typology of

¹ De Waal had already written about the North Caucasus when examining the first Russo-Chechen war (1994-96) in the 1997 book that he co-authored with Carlotta Gall. Vicken Cheterian (2009) surveys all of the wars that have broken out in the late/post-Soviet period, whilst Frederik Coene (2009) also aims to provide a general introduction to the region, perhaps appealing especially to those concerned with conflict-resolution.

² The journalist Oliver Bullough (2010) recounts his encounters with North Caucasians, both within and outside the region itself, adding his account of various historical events that have disrupted and disfigured that area's different constituent parts.

corruption that differentiates the *non-systemic* from the *systemic*, the former category being either *incidental* (based on individuals) or *sectorial* (more widely distributed through networks in certain areas of society), whilst the latter encompasses *centralised* and *non-centralised* varieties. The thesis that he then aims to substantiate throughout his book is that Armenia exemplifies a centralised systemic patterning, whilst that in Georgia is of the decentralised systemic type. However worthy and relevant such approaches might be, any reader expecting an interpretation of the conflicts that form the focus for this volume that is couched in terms of their being the likely or even inevitable outcome of this or that aspect of the socio-political particularities of Soviet and/or Georgian society will be severely disappointed, as this work is a wholly theory-free zone. It is written in the simple (some will no doubt say simplistic) twin beliefs that facts, as facts, need to be made known, especially when they have been so often deliberately distorted, misrepresented and misreported over the years, and that human actions are not necessarily predetermined by the nature of the society in which they live. Perverse intentions, illogical argumentation and immoral behaviour should always be susceptible to correction by the application of logic and common sense. And, when an ethnic group senses that its very survival is at stake, full-scale resistance is surely all that counts, regardless of the nature of the socio-political ambience.

History is a central component of the claims put forward by all sides in the various debates, and the Russian ethnologist Viktor Shnirelman in 2001 set himself the intriguing goal of contrasting the generally accepted body of basic historical facts about each of the three Transcaucasian hotspots with the range of arguments advanced over the decades by local writers and/or historians and/or archæologists about their own side's past and the relevance of these to the perceived strengthening of their nation's claim to the respective disputed territory. The reader is almost left with the impression that, whether motivated by plain naivety, centrally imposed ideology, or, most chillingly, the (frequently self-defeating) demands of local patriotism, many authors whose ideas are discussed by Shnirelman have effected a weird transformation whereby creative writers have all too often become the drivers of local historiography, whilst some of the best examples of fiction are to be found in the textbooks penned by professional historians.

One cannot deny that there is a certain amount of overlap between a number of the aforementioned titles and parts of the present work. However, as far as I am aware, not one of the above-named authors (or

most others who now present themselves as experts on Georgian affairs) can claim mastery of the Georgian language and thus (most importantly) direct acquaintance with the internal Georgian debate on relevant themes in the primary vehicle in which it is conducted. And, thus, we come to my motivation for writing this book and to the reason why its general thrust and conclusion differ from most of what has been written over almost a quarter of a century on the topics of, principally, Abkhazia and, secondarily, South Ossetia.

While spending the academic year 1975-76 in Georgia learning Georgian as a Cambridge postgraduate benefiting from the British Council's exchange-programme with the USSR, I travelled to Abkhazia on 1 April 1976 to spend a month in the capital extending my linguistic studies of Abkhaz. Before returning to England, I married a native speaker of Abkhaz. Though my early publications were more concerned with Abkhaz than Georgian, I nevertheless always considered myself at heart a georgianist and continued to extend my knowledge of, and research into, the language through both a second exchange-sojourn in Tbilisi (1979-80) and extensive reading. The materials devoured included newspapers sent from an organisation in Tbilisi set up to sustain and develop contact with Georgians born and living overseas. Thanks to the consolidation of Gorbachev's policy of *perestrojka* in the late 1980s, topics began to appear in print that had been embargoed for decades, and one eagerly awaited the arrival of each new delivery. But it was not long before the unimagined Soviet freedom seemed to mutate into licence, whereby articles of increasingly disturbing content began to be printed. It was as if the long, ill-concealed resentment (to put it no more strongly) felt by many (?most) Georgians at their two-centuries long subordination to Russia was being vented upon their own republic's ethnic minorities, who, if the chauvinistic rhetoric continued, might be expected to react accordingly towards their Georgian overlords. By including copious representative citations from such outpourings in my own translations, I hope to give readers the opportunity to reach the same conclusion that I reached even before the breakup of the USSR.³ And that

³ This was well before the names of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had become familiar in the West and at a time when mention of 'Georgia' would probably have conjured up an image only of a state in America's south in the minds of most people outside the Soviet block. Needless to say, the number of Westerners competent in Georgian during the late Soviet period was small, and I would doubt if any was following what was being written about Georgia's minorities, in particular the Abkhazians, with the interest and concern that I, for obvious reasons, had. The editor of a collection of papers that first appeared as a special issue of *Central Asian Survey* (volume 28, number 2, 2009) but which was subse-

is that, whilst it would undoubtedly be naïve to suppose that Russia will at all times have played only the part of a passive observer, the Georgians' persistent and insistent asseveration that all their country's ills (especially those relating to Abkhazia and South Ossetia) are the direct consequence of the Kremlin's manipulation is a misrepresentation of the facts of the cases, for Abkhazian and South Ossetian actions were, I maintain, essentially reactive in nature. These peoples responded in entirely predictable ways to the (at best) offensive and (at worst) threatening verbiage and actions emanating not from Moscow but from Tbilisi, for which none but the Georgians themselves can be held responsible. In addition to contemporary familiarity with those Georgian sentiments that, as it transpired, were indeed raising alarm in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, I happened to be present in Abkhazia at the time of the clashes in July 1989 and throughout the following weeks of heightened tension; I was also there during the critical events of 2008. The opinion that I expressed in print in an article published in a Georgian newspaper on 21 July 1989 in what was my first engagement with the then incipient crisis had previously become known and appreciated throughout Abkhazia, even if 'appreciation' is hardly the word to characterise the eventual reaction that it provoked amongst its Georgian readership. As a result, documents and information started to flow into my possession from the Abkhazian side. Indeed, as a regular visitor to Abkhazia over the years since 1976, I have been able to amass many materials from Abkhazian (and, to a lesser extent, South Ossetian) sources which, considering the wartime-destruction of Abkhazia's main library and archives, it would be difficult for other interested parties now even to locate, let alone consult. These too have played their part in contributing to the present work.

It is undeniable that most of what has been written in the West about these conflicts since they erupted in the dying years of Soviet power has been sympathetic to the Georgian side, though, as time goes by, more observers do seem persuaded that there can be no question of Abkhazia

quently transformed into a book, the historian Stephen Jones (2011), certainly had the linguistic competence (and possibly the opportunity) to acquaint himself with the materials that were causing me ever mounting concern. However, his edited volume, though touching upon the conflicts covered in this book, mostly focuses on issues pertaining to the events of August 2008 and post-Soviet Georgia more generally rather than on the specifics of the breakdown in Georgian-minority relations in the dying days of the Soviet Union. Like Wheatley (2005), in his latest volume, announced for 30 July 2012, Jones examines Georgia over the turbulent years 1991 to 2003 and is sure to give his own opinion, as will Rayfield (2012), of the conflicts treated in the following pages.

at least returning to the Georgian fold. What follows, whilst incorporating the Georgian argument(s), aims to provide a much-needed platform from which the Abkhazian and South Ossetian voices (often unheard or ignored) can be projected. After taking these into account, readers should be better placed to reach a more nuanced conclusion about the rights and wrongs of the two conflicts at issue than that which has become the prevailing wisdom would have them believe. If this volume can serve as such a corrective, then its purpose will have been achieved.

Doncaster-Sukhum
Summer 2012

PLAN OF THE BOOK

After an introductory survey of the Caucasus, its peoples and the countries of central concern to our specific topic, we turn to the relevant historical questions. It is simply impossible to understand much of the arguments between the Abkhazians and the South Ossetians, on the one hand, and the Georgians, on the other, unless one has a grasp of the past. And, as we shall see, the build-up to the wars (1990/1-92 in South Ossetia; 1992-3 in Abkhazia) was characterised by frequent references to history — indeed, the historical debate today is as heated as ever it was. Much of the material for pre-1993 Abkhazia is drawn/adapted from my own 1993 article. Developments under the three post-communist Georgian leaders (the late Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saak'ashvili) are described, and a discussion of Western involvement is incorporated. The conclusion draws all strands together, presenting both an assessment of the arguments and recommendations for the future.

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

All the native Caucasian languages are notorious for some degree of phonetic complexity. One common feature is the presence of ejective consonants, where the basic sound (plosive, affricate or fricative) is accompanied by closure and release of the vocal chords (producing in effect a glottal stop). Such sounds are conventionally represented in linguistics by an apostrophe,¹ and, as the Georgian sound-system can be easily and accurately captured by deploying this diacritic, it is used in appropriate contexts; the letter /q/ indicates that the plosive concerned is articulated against the soft palate, somewhat further back in the mouth than the point at which English 'k' is articulated. In rendering proper names the sequence /kh/ represents the back voiceless fricative of the English (Scottish) word

¹ An alternative practice, employed by armenologists and, sadly, in the Library of Congress scheme, leaves ejectives unmarked but then adds a reverse apostrophe to the non-ejectives (aspirates). Some publications, such as Times Books' 'Atlas of the World', thinking they are following this tradition, use an ordinary apostrophe instead of the reversed one and thereby simply manage to confuse their readers.

loch (the voiced counterpart being conveyed by /gh/), though in transcription of book/article-titles /x/ is used. The sequence /ch/ is to be pronounced as in English *church*, whilst its voiced counterpart is rendered by /dzh/, though by /j/ alone in the conventional spelling of the country *Azerbaijan*.

When it comes to representing Abkhaz, the challenges are far greater, but, as this work is not designed for linguists and any attempt to capture the complexities of the language's phonetics would probably cause some mystification and thus detract from the flow of the narrative, I have decided to take the Russian version of proper names as the basis for transcription,² though in the Bibliography any Abkhaz material is suitably rendered, with full marking of labialisation and palatalisation, for linguists to grasp the nature of the original. The neutral vowel (schwa) is indicated in the Bibliography by /ɨ/, whereas in the body of the work I use /y/ (e.g. *Apsny* in the text vs *Apsnu* in the Bibliography).

When discussing the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, sometimes the mere choice of one particular form of a toponym commits the speaker/writer to supporting this or that side. Take the capital of Abkhazia. This is most widely known as Sukhum or Sukhumi. The Soviet norm upto 1936 was Sukhum, but the year of Stalin's Soviet Constitution saw shifts in the designation of some Abkhazian toponyms, and, as part of these changes, Georgian's nominative case-ending /-i/ was added to the capital's designation. Abkhazia has understandably reverted to the pre-1936 norm, resulting in those who strive to avoid commitment having to write Sukhum(i); its omission tends to imply adherence to the Abkhazian cause, whilst its presence immediately signals sympathy for Georgia. An even stronger mark of support for the Georgian case is to employ the full Georgian toponym /soxumi/.³ One way of avoiding having to make a choice, though perhaps indicating partiality of the opposite kind, is to use the native Abkhaz term Aqw'a (strictly Aqw'a).⁴ The form 'Sukhum'

² The spelling of the surname Lakoba conforms to this practice, but, as one holder of this surname published two articles in my 1999-edited book with the spelling Lak'oba, this spelling too appears, and sometimes rendition is thus by the form Lak[']oba.

³ Georgian has no capital (upper case) letters in its alphabet.

⁴ This native Abkhazian term is first attested with certainty in the description of the Caucasus published originally in German in the 1790s by Jakob Reineggs; in volume I of the English translation of 1807 we read of the fortress of *Saghumi* "which, if it was better kept up, might be considered as the key of western Caucasus, particularly as it is protected by Agua or Aku, a strong post, situated on a rock, composed of brown Trapp in the form of stairs" (Reineggs 2005.1.327). But there is speculation that a coin of Alexander of Macedon, thought to have been minted in Colchis (K'ap'anadze 1950.28) and carrying on the reverse

is used throughout this book, unless in quotations where an alternative is required.

the Greek inscription BASILEOS AKOU (illustration 10 on Plate 1 of K'ap'anadze 1950), might conceal an ancient reference to this toponym, specifically to the king thereof (Shamba 2005:77), although it has to be conceded that it might be the name of the ruler himself and thus not a place-name at all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

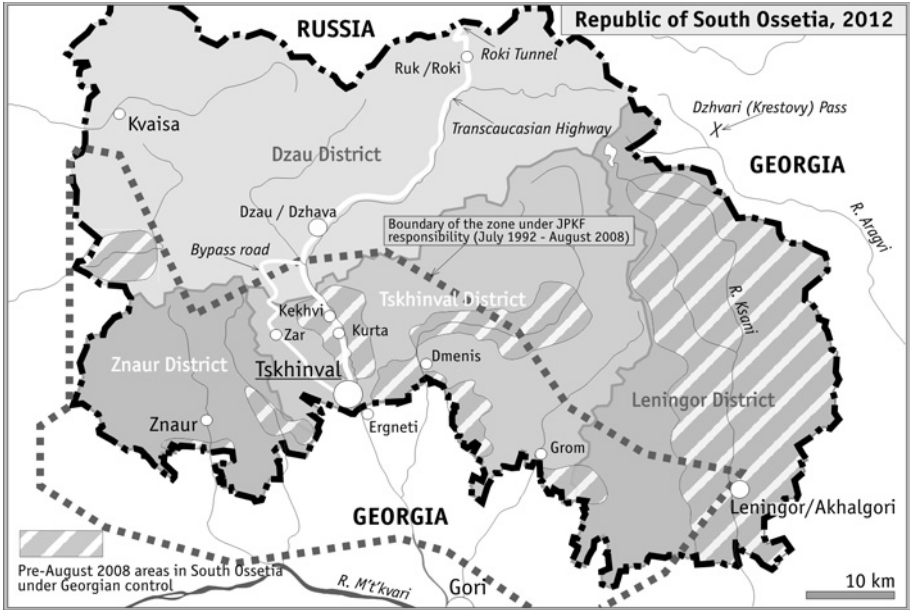
I wish to express my deep gratitude to Artur Tsutsiev, of the Vladikavkaz Institute of Management, for kindly accepting my request to draw maps for the present volume. His cartographic expertise can be seen in colour in his 'Atlas of the Ethno-political History of the Caucasus (1704-2004)' (2006, in Russian) and again on the maps inserted into the helpful (indeed essential) collection of documents by Volkhonskij et al. (2008). He also provided relevant data on South Ossetia whenever asked. Valuable comments on my first draft were received from two researchers who have written successful MA theses on Abkhazian themes, namely Michael Costello and, having generously read through the entire manuscript, Robert Crabtree in particular; Donald Rayfield and Paul Goble also kindly agreed to read the manuscript and offered suggestions. Various friends in Abkhazia could also be relied upon to respond to specific questions during the writing of the book, notably, in alphabetical order: Vjacheslav Chirikba, Arda Inal-Ipa, Irakli Khintba, Liana Kvarchelia, Asida Lomia, and Ljudmila Sagaria. I thank all who have contributed in any way, including various anonymous assessors as well as Brill's two editors-in-chief for the series in which the volume appears, Dr. Dittmar Schorkowitz and Dr. Sergey Bogatyrev, but take full responsibility for any outstanding inaccuracies or shortcomings.



Map 1. Georgia 1991.



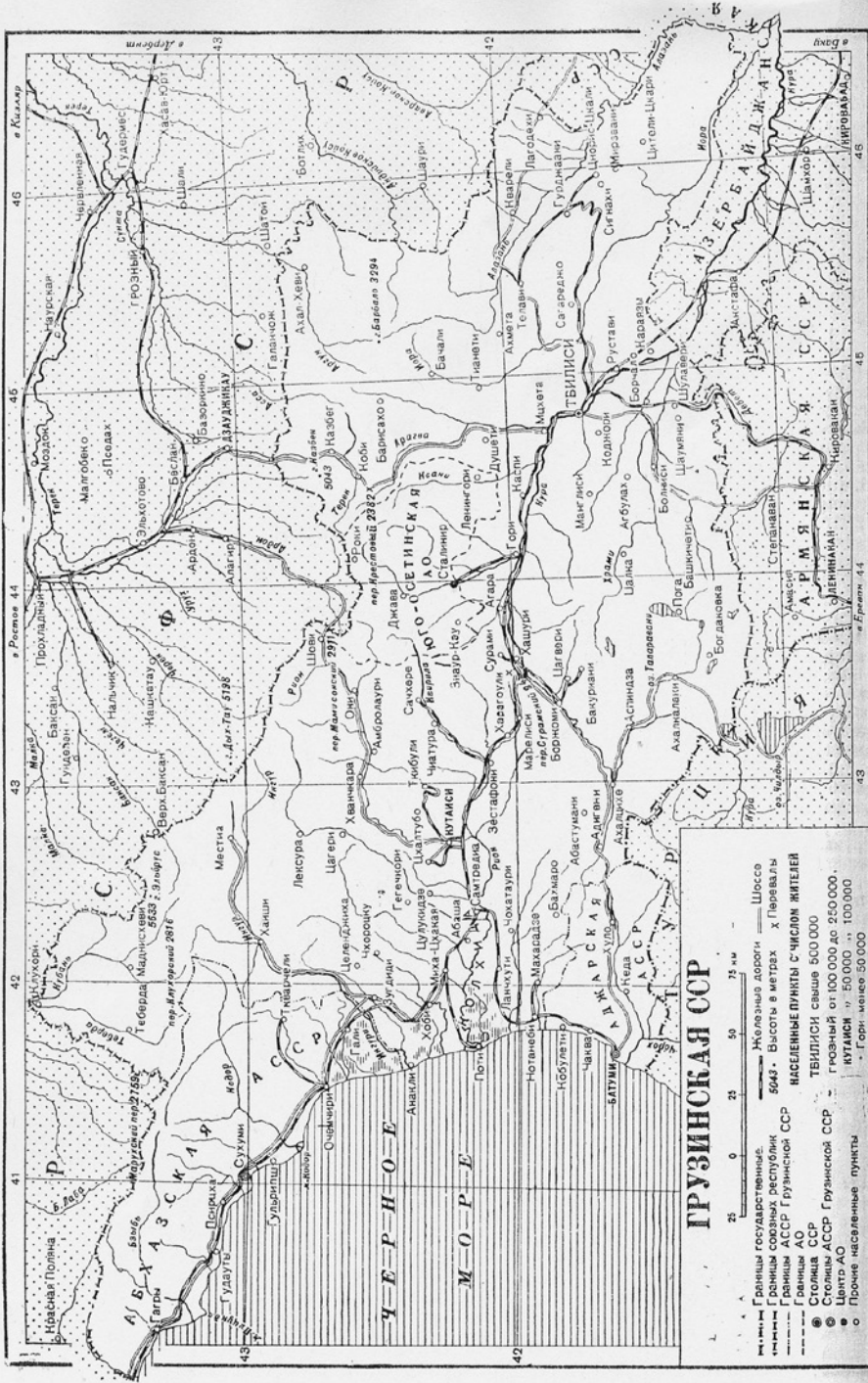
Map 2. Abkhazia.



Map 3. Ossetia.



Map 4. Georgia 2012.



Map 5. Georgia 1946.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The peoples of the Caucasus owe to it not only their salient characteristics, but their very existence. It may be said without exaggeration that the mountains made the men; and the men in return fought with passionate courage and energy in defence of their beloved mountains, in whose fastnesses indeed, they were well-nigh unconquerable.

(John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, Curzon Press, 1999—1st edition 1908, xxi-xxii)

Peoples and their Languages

The Caucasus, where the conflicts we shall be examining have unfolded, is a region at the interface of Europe and Asia which is poorly known both in terms of the countries concerned and the peoples who live there. And so, a brief survey of the peoples, their languages and lands is an essential precursor to the discussion that follows.

Non-Caucasian Peoples and Languages of the Caucasus

The narrow isthmus separating the Black from the Caspian Sea is famed not only for housing the mighty Caucasian mountain-range, which boasts Europe's highest peak (Elbrus), but also for being one of the most complex ethno-linguistic regions on earth. Some of the peoples resident here have a native language which belongs to one of the world's major families. From the Indo-European family there are speakers of: Armenian; Ossetic, Kurdish, Tat, Talysh (all four of Iranian stock); Greek; Romany; Russian and Ukrainian (both Slavonic).

The Turkic family is represented by speakers of: Turkish, Azeri, Kumyk, Nogai, Balkar, Karachay, Turkmen and Karapapak. Semitic is represented by a small group of Assyrian speakers in Georgia.

The Ossetians and to a lesser extent the Armenians will figure in the main body of the book, but most of the ethnic groups in the Caucasus speak languages which are deemed to be indigenous to the area for the simple

reason that no-one knows whence or when their ancestors came to settle in the Caucasian mountains, foothills and valleys;¹ despite various hypotheses, it has also proven impossible to demonstrate conclusively that the indigenous languages are genetically related to any other language or language-family spoken today or in the past.

Caucasian Peoples and Languages

The Caucasian languages, as the indigenous tongues are known, divide into three or, as some would argue, two language-families. Those championing the latter view operate with a simple division between North and South Caucasian (the latter alternatively known as the Kartvelian family); the more cautious add an extra division between North West Caucasian and North East Caucasian (otherwise known as Nakh-Daghestanian). Whatever one's view about the genetic relationships obtaining amongst the northern languages, all agree that the South Caucasian family is totally unrelated to the other(s).

The protagonists to the main conflict to be investigated in this study, the Georgians and the Abkhazians, speak indigenous languages belonging to two of these unrelated families, as we shall now explain.

North West Caucasian

Abkhaz, along with its most divergent dialect, Abaza, is a member of the North West Caucasian family, which also includes: the various Circassian dialects and Ubykh.

Prior to the great migrations that occurred in the wake of, firstly, Russia's final subjugation of the North Caucasus in 1864 and, again, after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8, Ubykh was spoken between the rivers Bu (or

¹ From the evidence of hydronyms containing the element *-ps-*, which is the Proto-North-West Caucasian root for 'water; river', it would seem that the ancestors of the North West Caucasian speaking peoples moved into their Caucasian homelands from the south. Consider: the ancient R. Akampsis, which is today's Ch'orokh(i) in north-eastern Turkey, or Supsa, on the Mingrelian coast in western Georgia. This is by no means a controversial conclusion, as one may judge from the following statement by the patriarch of Georgian historians and one of the founding fathers in 1918 of Tbilisi University, Ivane Dzhavakhishvili: "Thus in the prehistorical epoch Circassian tribes must have lived in western Transcaucasia, on the territory of Georgia of the historical epoch" (1950.247).

Vardan) and Hamish in the environs of modern-day Sochi,² whilst the Circassian dialects ranged from the Black Sea coast (to the north of Ubykh) along the Kuban basin and the Caucasus' northern foothills eastwards towards that part of the central North Caucasus occupied by the Ossetians. But all the Ubykhs and most of the Circassian communities migrated to Ottoman lands, so that today the majority of the world's Circassians and all ethnic Ubykhs, whose language became extinct in 1992 with the death of Tevfik Eşenç, are found in Turkey; Circassian communities were also established in territories that, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, were to become Israel, Jordan, Syria and Iraq (not to mention those who have moved to Europe, principally Germany, and America). The first wave of (T'ap'anta-speaking) Abazinians moved out of Abkhazia over the Klukhor Pass into the Teberda Valley, which is located in Karachay-Cherkessia (Russian Federation), in the 14th century (Georgian Encyclopædia vol. 1, p. 11); they were followed some 3–4 centuries later by Ashkharywa-speakers. The rump-populations of Circassian speakers left in the Caucasus are found around Tuapse on the Black Sea coast in Russia's Krasnodar Region, in the Adyghe Republic (capital Maykop), in Karachay-Cherkessia (capital Cherkessk), where they are known as Cherkess, and in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic, the only area of their historical homeland where Circassians (here Kabardian-speaking) form an absolute majority in their administrative unit. Islam largely supplanted the Christianity that was earlier found across the North West Caucasus, but, as with the Abkhazians (see below), it never set down the kind of deep roots it managed to establish further to the east in the North Caucasian regions of Ingushetia, Chechnia and Dagestan.

After the 19th-century migrations, which also saw most Abkhazians abandoning their homeland, only two dialects were left in Abkhazia, northern Bzyp and southern Abzhywa.

In 1989, at the time of the last Soviet census, the figures for North West Caucasians were:

Abazinians: 33,801 (of whom 27,475 were in Karachay-Cherkessia)

Abkhazians: 102,938 (of whom 93,267 were in Abkhazia)

West Circassians/Adyghe: 124,949 (of whom 95,439 were in Adyghea)

² Writing as late as 20 May 1830 the Russian field-commander in the Caucasus, I. Paskevich, wrote: "The Ubykhs are known to us only by stories. They have never had intercourse with the Russians, and it is unknown if any Russian has ever been in their land" (Dzidzarija 2008.171).

Cherkess: 50,356 (of whom 40,230 were in Karachay-Cherkessia)
 Kabardians: 394,651 (or whom 363,351 were in Kabardino-Balkaria)

The Near Eastern population-total for ethnic North West Caucasians is vastly in excess of these figures, but only anecdotal evidence supports the conventionally quoted figure of some four million, between 300,000 and half a million of whom are ethnic Abkhazians.

South Caucasian/Kartvelian

This family consists of the four languages: Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz and Svan, all spoken within Georgia itself or territories contiguous to it. Only two of these languages have any degree of mutual intelligibility, and these are Mingrelian and Laz, which within Georgian linguistic circles are regarded as dialects of the so-called Zan language. Once forming a Laz-Mingrelian dialect-continuum around the (south-) eastern Black Sea coast, the two speech-communities became separated as Georgian speakers moved westwards when an Arab caliphate was formed in 655 AD in central Georgia, based in the capital (T'pilisi, which gave us Tiflis, or, since 1936, Tbilisi); this caliphate was to last until 1122. Mingrelian developed to the north in the lowlands of today's western Georgia, whilst the vast majority of what became the Laz community live in a coastal strip running from the Georgian-Turkish border along to Rize in Turkey; Georgian speakers (of the Imerkhevan dialect) also live in historical Georgian-speaking territories that today similarly lie in eastern Turkey, south of Lazistan. The Svans occupy the upper valleys of the rivers Ingur and Rion (Phasis to the ancients) in north-western Georgia, where their territory abuts that of the Abkhazians, just as Mingrelia lies across the border with Abkhazia along the lower reaches of the Ingur. Apart from being the first language of the majority of the inhabitants of Georgia, Georgian is also spoken in the Zakatala region of Azerbaijan (in the form of the Ingilo dialect) as well as around Fereidan in Iran, whither a community was transplanted in the 16th century by Shah Abbas and where speakers preserve a unique dialect.

The 1989 Soviet census counted 3,787,393 'Georgians' resident in Soviet Georgia,³ but interested readers will seek in vain for the component Mingrelian, Svan or Laz totals, for since circa 1930 all these peoples have been grouped together as 'Georgians', which is why I always place the

³ The 2002 census, the accuracy of the figures in which has been challenged, stated that of a total population of 3,898,275 83.8% (3,266,754) were 'Georgians'; Abkhazia and South Ossetia, naturally, did not participate in this census.

ethnonym in this context in quotation-marks; also incorporated in this ethnic category are the few thousand speakers of the Nakh language Bats (see below for the family), who live in the eastern Georgian village of Zemo Alvani and whose language, heavily influenced by Georgian, must sadly be deemed moribund.

It is interesting to speculate on how the ethnic classification in question might have arisen. The Georgian language normally has two forms for those adjectives which designate ethnicity, one for humans and another for non-humans. Thus, a Georgian person is designated /kartveli/, whilst a Georgian thing is /kartuli/. Whilst the language possesses a cover-term (superordinate) for general reference to Georgian-Mingrelian-Laz-Svan non-human entities (e.g. languages), namely /kartveluri/, it strangely lacks the equivalent human form, which would provide the appropriate designation for grouping together all four of these peoples for census- (or other) purposes, since to style them 'Georgians' introduces a regrettable confusion into ethnic categorisation, and the ethnic picture in the Caucasus is already sufficiently complex without additional and unnecessary obfuscation. Since English lacks such an opposition in adjectival forms and, in linguistic literature, happily employs, as we have seen, the term 'Kartvelian' to refer to the South Caucasian language-family, I shall use it also to refer globally to speakers of the four Kartvelian languages.

There is a fanciful and widespread popular belief in Georgia that Mingrelian, Laz and Svan are dialects of Georgian. Local linguists who would find it uncomfortable to speak in these terms have nevertheless created the concept of 'sociolinguistic dialects' in an attempt to justify the absence of any official literary status enjoyed by (or bestowed upon) Georgian's sister-languages, and one regularly encounters in English-language works composed by commentators following the official view in Georgia the term 'Georgian sub-ethnic groups' in reference to the Mingrelians, Svans and Laz. As both these phrases are artificial (and essentially meaningless) constructs, they will not appear further in this work. Anecdotally, there may be over a million Mingrelians, but perhaps no more than half this number speak the language, the rest having been georgianised;⁴ Svans are conventionally numbered at around 50,000; in Turkey the number of Laz ranges from 50,000 upwards (see Feurstein 1992).

⁴ It is a fascinating (but as yet definitively unanswered) question how many Mingrelians are truly happy with the post-1930 developments regarding the status of their language and culture, to say nothing of any political aspirations they might have for themselves and their native region.

Nakh-Daghestanian

Though speakers of these languages figure only occasionally in this book, a few words can be added about this language-family in order to complete our survey of the autochthonous ethno-linguistic picture.

The Nakh (or Veinakh) languages are three in number: Chechen, Ingush and Bats. Ingushetia lies to the east of North Ossetia, and in turn its own eastern neighbour is Chechenia. The two were combined for most of the Soviet period in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, though this was wiped off the map when both peoples (along with the neighbouring Karachays and Balkars, the Mongol Kalmyks to the north of Daghestan, and from Georgia the Laz, Greeks, Islamicised Hemshin Armenians and the Meskh(et)ians, or so-called 'Meskhetian Turks') were deported by the Soviet dictator Stalin during (or, in some cases, after) World War II; parts of their territories were assigned to neighbouring states, including Stalin's homeland of Georgia (see Map 5, depicting the extent of Soviet Georgia's frontiers in 1947, as indicated in the volume devoted to the Soviet republics of the 'Great Soviet Encyclopaedia', with two Georgian encroachments north of the mountains). After Krushchev rehabilitated the deported nations in 1957, most Chechen and Ingush returned to the Caucasus, but a sizeable proportion remained in Central Asia; also, not all the pre-deportation territories were returned, and one particular problem resulting from this was the retention by North Ossetia of the Ingush Prigorodnyj Raion, which led to war between these two neighbours in 1992. The Bats left the mountains to settle in Zemo Alvani in the early 19th century.⁵ In 1989 the numbers of these peoples were: 956,879 Chechens vs 237,438 Ingush, the number of Bats being unspecified, for, as explained above, they appeared as part of the 'Georgian' total, though conventionally they are numbered around 6,000. After centuries of Christian influence from Georgia, Chechenia gradually yielded to Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school, slowly introduced from Daghestan from the 16th century; it was only in the latter half of the 19th century that the Ingush were converted by Sufi Qadiri missionaries.

The majority of the indigenous Caucasian languages are spoken to the east of Chechenia, in the mountainous region known as Daghestan, styled by the 10th-century Arab geographer al-Mas'udi as 'the mountain of tongues'. The following sub-groups of languages exist: Avaric, Andic,

⁵ There is also a long-standing community of Chechens in eastern Georgia, concentrated in the P'ank'isi Gorge; their presence there dates from the 19th century.

Tsezic, Lak-Dargic, and Lezgi, some (e.g. Hunzib) being spoken by such small numbers as to raise doubts about their prospects for long-term survival. The languages with the largest numbers of speakers are Avar, Dargwa/Dargi(n), Lezgi(an), Lak and Tabassaran. Each of these (along with: Chechen, Ingush, Kabardian, Adyghe, Abaza and Abkhaz) was awarded the status of a literary language by the early Soviets in the 1920s. All speakers of Andic and Tsezic languages are classified as 'Avars', as they have this (plus Russian) as their literary language. The Lezgi(an) speech-community became divided between Russia and Azerbaijan upon the dissolution of the USSR (1991). Some Lezgi languages are spoken exclusively within Azerbaijan, whilst Lezgi Udi, the descendant of the third ancient Christian community in Transcaucasia, namely the Caucasian Albanians,⁶ is spoken in one village in Georgia and two villages in Azerbaijan, though one of these latter has been reported to be now deserted. Udis in Georgia are Georgian Orthodox, whilst those in Azerbaijan are Armenian Orthodox, but Daghestanis in general are Sunni Muslims of the Shafe'i school, Islam having arrived early with the Arabs in the 8–9th centuries.

States

Georgia (in Georgian /sakartvelo/)

The volume published in 1981 as supplement to the 11-volume Soviet Georgian Encyclopædia gathered together data pertaining to the republic itself. Having noted that the territory covers 69,500 square-kilometres, the Georgian text continues:

The general length of the borders is 1,968.8 kilometres, of which 1,660.4 are land-borders. Georgia is bounded by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the north, by the Azerbaijan SSR to the east, by the Armenian SSR to the south, by Turkey to the south-west. The republic's extreme western and eastern frontiers run along the longitudes 40°05' and 46°44' east, whilst the southern and northern frontiers run along latitudes 41°07' and 43°35' north. Vertically, the territory extends from the level of the Black Sea to 5,068.8 metres (summit of Mt. Shkhara).⁷

⁶ The other two being the Armenians and the Georgians.

⁷ It might be of some interest to note in passing that in Abkhaz /à.shkha/ means '(the) mountain' and /à.shkha.ra/ '(the) mountainous region', whereas 'mountain' in Georgian is /mta/ and 'mountainous region' is /mtiani adgili/; Svan's word for 'mountain' in the Upper Bal dialect is /tanäγ/.

Stripped of references to Soviet administrative units, this is the entity which was recognised by the world in 1992 as the independent state of Georgia, and which most of the world still mentally pictures, when Georgia is mentioned; Map 1 presents this entity as it was structured prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. However, two administrative units which were constituent-parts of Soviet Georgia in 1991, namely the then Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and the then South Ossetian Autonomous Region, have not regarded themselves as part of the Georgian state since the end of their respective wars with Georgia (30 September 1993 and 24 June 1992, respectively), their status as independent republics having been recognised by Russia on 26 August 2008 (followed shortly thereafter by Nicaragua and subsequently by Venezuela; after a hiatus, the Pacific island-states of Nauru, Vanuatu and Tuvalu followed suit); Map 4 reflects this reality and presents the Republic of Georgia within its reduced borders alongside the two young republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, lies in the central province of Kartli. The state is additionally divided into the following major provinces: K'akheti, Tusheti, Khevsureti, Pshav, Imereti, Rach'a, Lechkhumi, Mtianeti, Khevi, Dzhavakheti, Meskheta, Guria, Svaneti, Mingrelia (Samegrelo), and Ach'ara (commonly known as Adzharia, according to its designation in Russian). Ach'ara's autonomy arose as a result of treaty-ties with Turkey, along the border of which it lies in Georgia's extreme south-west (see Hille 2003/2010). This explains why, throughout the Soviet period, it held the status of an Autonomous Republic—there is no suggestion that Ach'arans are not Georgians, though they do differ in terms of their faith (Islam) from their fellow-countrymen. Georgians largely follow Georgian Orthodoxy. Georgia's conversion to Christianity by a Cappadocian slave-girl called Nino is conventionally dated to 336, making Georgia⁸ the second state (after Armenia in 301) officially to become Christian.

The last two Soviet censuses produced the following population-figures for Georgia:

⁸ At first it was only the central region, with its capital then at Mtskheta, under King Mirian, which was converted, Persian Zoroastrianism being a long-time powerful rival.

Main population of Georgia (1979 & 1989)

	1979	1989	1979	1989
Whole population	4,993,182	5,400,841	100%	100%
'Georgians'	3,433,011	3,787,393	68.8%	70.1%
Armenians	448,000	437,211	9.0%	8.1%
Russians	371,608	341,172	7.4%	6.3%
Azerbaijanis	255,678	307,556	5.1%	5.7%
Ossetians	160,497	164,055	3.2%	3.0%
Greeks	95,105	100,324	1.9%	1.8%
Abkhazians	85,285	95,853	1.7%	1.8%

Georgian is alone among the indigenous Caucasian languages to boast a script older than the 19th century. It is conventionally assumed that the script, which has been through three variants, was developed some time in the 4th century to enable the dissemination of Christian dogma. The late archaeologist Levan Ch'ilashvili claimed (2000) that a Georgian inscription from the Nek'resi site is of pre-Christian origin, but this interpretation remains controversial.⁹ Georgian, nevertheless, boasts a distinguished literary tradition of at least one and a half millennia.

*Abkhazia (in Abkhaz /Apsny/)*¹⁰

Geologist and environmentalist Roman Dbar describes the 8,700 square-kilometres of his native country, bounded by the Black Sea, the Georgian provinces of Mingrelia and Svaneti, and the Russian Federation, thus (1999:23):

The average length of the territory of Abkhazia from north-west to south-east is 170km, and from south to north 66km. It lies between the northern latitudes of 43°35' and 42°27' and the eastern longitudes of 40° and 42°08'.

Abkhazia represented 12.5% of Soviet Georgia's land-mass (p. 310 of the Georgian Encyclopædia's Supplement).

⁹ See also Ch'ilashvili's article /nek'resits alap'arak'da/ 'Nek'resi too has begun to speak' in the weekly paper *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 'Literary Georgia' 28 June 1991, pp. 6–7 & 16.

¹⁰ Literally 'country of the mortals' (see Chirikba 1991), and not 'country of the soul', as folk-etymology explains it. Possibly the earliest attestation of the term is found in the 7th-century anonymous Armenian text known as 'The Geography' (Ashxarhats'ojts') in the form *Psin(oun)*, which Butba (2001:78) argues to be a reference to the country of the Apsilians and Abazgians (see Chapter 2) in the 5th century.

Lying on the coast, it is not surprising that Christianity reached Abkhazia early, though full conversion is usually dated to the reign of the emperor Justinian in the 540s. Dimitrij Dbar (1997.6–9) notes:

The light was brought to Abkhazia by the evangelical preaching of the holy apostles Andrew the First-Called and Simon the Canaanite ... The presence at the First Œcumenical Council [318] of Stratophil, Bishop of Pitsunda, bears witness to the existence here [Abkhazia] already in ancient times of the Christian Church ... The aforementioned episcopal seat in Pitsunda received archiepiscopal status in 541 ... Starting from the second half of the VIth and upto the middle of the VIIIth century there existed on the territory of modern-day Abkhazia (apart from the said one in Pitsunda) a further two autocephalous seats, one archiepiscopal, the other episcopal. The archiepiscopal seat was named 34th in the list of those subordinate to the Patriarch in Constantinople and was situated in Sevastopolis (Sukhum).

The tradition of apostolic visitation to, and death in, Abkhazia is related in appendices attached to the Old Georgian chronicle of Leont'i Mroveli. Version 1 of the appendix reads (Q'aukhchishvili 1955.38; Amichba 1988.38):

In the reign of this same Anderk'i there came to Abkhazia and Egrisi¹¹ Andrew and Simon the Canaanite of the Twelve Apostles. And Saint Simon the Canaanite died there in the town of Nik'opsia in the frontier/domain of the Greeks. But Andrew converted the Mingrelians and set off on the road to K'lardzheti.

On the other hand, version 2a reads (Q'aukhchishvili 1955.43; Amichba 1986.24; Amichba 1988.39):

Simon the Canaanite's tomb is in the town of Nik'ops[ia], between Abkhazia and Dzhiketi, for Saint Simon the Canaanite died there. But Saint Andrew again confirmed [in faith] the Mingrelians and Abkhazians and went to Scythia.

Ottoman Turks eventually introduced Islam as their influence grew along the eastern Black Sea coast, but neither major religion totally expunged pagan practices, both existing as something of a veneer; as 'The Father of Abkhazian Literature' Dmitry Gulia wrote: "We Abkhazians are equally cool-hearted to both Christianity and Islam" (1973.7).¹² The majority of Abkhazians (sc. in Abkhazia, as opposed to the diasporan communities of

¹¹ An old name for territory generally equated with Mingrelia.

¹² This is the form of the quote I have always used, having taken it from the Georgian translation of the work in question, as cited in the text above. However, the wording of the original Abkhaz (Gulia 1973a.8) is somewhat more severe: "...for whom [the Abkhazians] neither Christianity nor Islam are endowed with respect". In similar vein, one might often hear the quip: "We Abkhazians are 50% Christian, 50% Muslim, and 100% pagan!"

the Near/Middle East) regard themselves as Christians; it may be hypothesised that it was those more favourably disposed to Islam who preferred departure for Ottoman lands to life under the yoke of Holy Russia in the latter 19th century.

The last two Soviet censuses gave these main population-figures for Abkhazia:

Main population of Abkhazia (1979 & 1989)				
Whole population	486,082	525,061	100%	100%
Abkhazians	83,097	93,267	17.1%	17.8%
'Georgians'	213,322	239,872	43.9%	45.7%
Armenians	73,350	76,541	15.1%	14.6%
Russians	79,730	74,913	16.4%	14.2%
Greeks	13,642	14,664	2.8%	2.8%

South Ossetia (in Ossetic /Xussar Iryston/)

The Georgian Encyclopædia's Supplement (p. 335) described South Ossetia, capital Tskhinval(i),¹³ as occupying 3,800 square-kilometres, equating to 5.4% of Georgia's 1981 land-mass. Lying immediately to the south of the main chain of the Caucasus mountains, below North Ossetia (Russia), South Ossetia consists of the districts: Tskhinval(i), Dzhava, Leningor (earlier Akh'algor(i)), Znaur(i). It borders various regions of Georgia as follows: the southern frontier runs along the northern periphery of the Shida [Inner] Kartli plain, where it abuts the regions of K'asp'i, Gori, Kareli and Sashuri; to its east lie the regions of Q'azbegi and Dusheti, whilst its western neighbours are the Sachkheri and Oni regions.

In 1989 the population of South Ossetia was 98,527, of whom 66.2% were Ossetians, giving an actual total of 65,200, vs 29% (= 28,700) Georgians.¹⁴ Cartographer Artur Tsutsiev gives a visual breakdown of the 1989 population by district on his 2007-map inserted in Volkhonskij et al. (2008), which can be reproduced as:

¹³ An older form is attested, namely Krtskhinval.

¹⁴ One may assume that no, or only negligible numbers of, Mingrelians and/or Svans were resident there.

District	Population in thousands	Ossetians (percentage)	Georgians (percentage)
Dzhava District	10.4	91.5%	5.8%
Znaur District	10.2	63.4%	35.5%
Leningor District	12.1	44.2%	53.8%
Tskhinval District	23.5	52.6%	46.5%
Tskhinval Town	42.3	74.5%	16.3%
Totals	98.5	66.2%	29%

The majority (namely, some 98,000 persons) of Georgia's total Ossetian population in 1989 lived outside the South Ossetian enclave. According to the 2002 Georgian census (of questionable accuracy, as noted above), the Ossetian population of Georgia proper (sc. outside South Ossetia) had shrunk to 32,000.

The Ossetians derive their descent from an amalgamation of nomadic Iranian-speaking peoples (such as the Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans) which resulted in the creation of the powerful state of Alania. This reached its apogee from the 10th to the 12th centuries. Centred on today's North Ossetia, it extended far beyond North Ossetia's boundaries to the north and west. Christianity arrived in the 6th century, and, apart from some Islamic influence from neighbouring Kabardia in the area where the more archaic dialect of Digor¹⁵ is spoken, Christianity has characterised the Ossetians ever since, making them historically natural allies in the North Caucasus for (Holy) Russia. Ironic though it be, given that the Western press has frequently misrepresented both the Abkhazians and Ossetians as Muslims in the course of describing their conflicts with Georgia, ecclesiastical matters quite possibly linked these two peoples for centuries starting a millennium ago. The relevant hypothesis was formulated by the late Yuri Voronov (1992:263) in answer to Georgian claims that the Abkhazian Church became subordinate to the Catholicosate in Mtskheta at that time:

At the start of the Xth century in the West Caucasus is formed the Alan Mitropolate, itself subordinate to Constantinople, and it is merger with this which is certainly more logical for the Abkhazian Church. At the end of the Xth and beginning of the XIth centuries the Alan Mitropolate pretended to dominion over the ecclesiastical centres even on the south coast of the Black Sea (Kerasunt), which would hardly have been possible under conditions whereby the intervening ecclesiastical centres in Abkhazia proper were not themselves subordinate to it. The Mitropolate of Alania retains its place in

¹⁵ The more widely spoken dialect is Iron.

the lists of the Constantinople Patriarchate until the end of the XIIth century when the archbishoprics in the environs of Trebizond (Sotiriupolis) were again formally subordinated to the Alan archbishop. The gradual expulsion of Byzantine clerics from Alania and the parallel weakening (under the influence of the Mongol invasion) of the Catholicosate in Mtskheta led to the appearance of the Abkhazian Autocephalous Catholicosate (with its centre in Pitsunda), which continued its existence from the middle of the XIIIth to the middle of the XVIIth century.

With the above-overview in mind, we are now ready to proceed to an examination of the relevant facts of history and politics.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY

Of the early history of the Abkhasian race little is known, and little was probably to be known. More than two thousand years since we find them in Greek records inhabiting the narrow strip between the mountains and the sea along the central eastern coast of the Euxine, precisely where later records and the maps of our own day place them. But whence these seeming 'autochthones' arrived, what the cradle of their infant race, to which of the 'earth-families', in German phrase, this little tribe, the highest number of which can never have much exceeded a hundred thousand, belonged, are questions on which the past and the present are alike silent.

(William Gifford Palgrave, one-time British Vice-Consul in Sukhum, *Essays on Eastern Questions*, 1872, p. 256)

Greeks Colonise the Eastern Black Sea Coast

Our story, like many others, begins with the Greeks. Some time in the 8th century BC during the age of colonial expansion, citizens of Miletus set sail on voyages that were to take them to the eastern coast of the Black Sea, not inappropriately styled by Aeschylus for the pre-classical Hellenic world as 'the earth's remotest region'.¹ Three of the colonies established on Abkhazian territory were Gye:nos (today's Ochamchira), Dioscurias (later Sev/bastopolis = today's Aqw'a), and an idyllic spot further north known to the Greeks as 'The Great Place of Pines' (Ho Megas Pityous),² the accusative case-form of the original Greek (viz. Pityounta) providing both the toponym by which the place is best known today (Pitsunda) and the

¹ The relevant passage from *Prometheus Bound* reads: 'those who inhabit the land of Colchis, the maidens who fear no fight [Amazons], and the Scythian horde residing in the earth's remotest region bordering Lake Maeotis [Sea of Azov], and Arabia's martial flower, who are settled in the high-cragged citadel beside the Caucasus'. As reference to Arabia seems somewhat out of place here at line 420, the distinguished conqueror of Mt. Elbrus, Douglas Freshfield (1896.I.4), was tempted to see in this passage a scribal error and suggested amending /'Arabías/ to /'Abasias/, which would both give us the more logical 'Abkhazia's martial flower' and make this the first historical attestation of the toponym.

² The letter /y/ in Ancient Greek forms is to be articulated like /u/ in French 'une'.

Georgian designation (Bich'vinta) (for the etymology see Hewitt 1993a).³ The Abkhazians style the spot Amzara, which, as with the Greek, translates as 'the *a*- place *-ra* of pine *-mza*'. The Black Sea's eastern seaboard and the land behind it were named Colchis, with which the whole world is familiar thanks to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts. The demarcation between myth and history has had (and, indeed, often still has) an unfortunate tendency to become obscured in the writings of many commentators in the Caucasus (see, as pointed out in the Preface, Shnirelman 2001), and it is well to stress from the outset that, to quote the Mingrelian scholar Simon Dzhanaashia, Colchis was "more a geographical than a political term, and even then with uncertain boundaries" (1988.295), though for the Greek geographer Strabo (64/3 BC-23/4 AD) it extended roughly from Pitsunda to Trebizond (Trabzon) in Turkey (T. Q'aukhchishvili 1957.283).

To the east of Colchis lay Iberia, whose other borders Strabo describes as being the Caucasian mountains to the north, Caucasian Albania to the east, and Armenia to the south (T. Q'aukhchishvili 1957.278). This, then, must have been the country of contemporary Georgian speakers, the designation deriving from the Old Armenian phrase /i Virs/ 'to the Georgians = Georgia'. The genitive plural of this Armenian ethnonym, seen in the phrase /i Vrats/ 'among the Georgians', actually seems, though at first glance it might look thoroughly implausible, to have been the source of the English term 'Georgia(n)'. The reasoning is as follows: the Persians could not articulate the consonant-complex *-vr-* and transformed it to produce *gordzh-* (Turkish *gürc*, Arabic *gurz*), which Italians⁴ later transposed into 'Georgia' and so introduced it to their fellow Europeans (cf. Russian /Gruzija/ 'Georgia' and /Gruzin/ 'Georgian');⁵ the word has nothing to do with Georgia's patron-saint being St. George or the Greek for 'farmer' /geo:rgos/, once postulated to have been used to describe this pastoral

³ The article challenges the view that Georgian is the source of the Greek term and its derivatives, as expressed by Temur Todua in the Georgian newspaper *lit'erat'uruli sakartvelo* 'Literary Georgia' of 10 November 1989, itself in line with such Georgian precedents as: Q'aukhchishvili (1952.321), Ingoroq'va (1954.148), Apakidze (1975.15), and (latterly) Gvantseledze (1995).

⁴ The Genoese had trading-posts along the Black Sea coast from the 13th to the 15th century.

⁵ I owe this etymology to a personal communication from the late Prof. Sir Harold Bailey. That the classical world also named the westernmost territory of mainland Europe Iberia is purely coincidental, the toponym in this instance deriving from the R. Ebro. Russian has the word /gruz/ 'burden', and, given the various tensions resulting from Georgians' anti-Russian sentiments over the years, the Russians have jokingly concluded that /Gruzija/ is a very apt name for the country!

people, and clearly it has nothing in common with the Georgians' self-designation /kartveli/, the etymology of which remains unclear and a matter of dispute.⁶

The Greeks were remarkably uninterested in the languages of non-Greeks, and so there has been much speculation as to the ethnicity of the inhabitants of Colchis listed by ancient writers. Whilst one would never wish to condone the dangerous conclusions drawn by some that historical primacy of residence on a territory determines exclusive right of ownership *in perpetuum*, it is instructive to review what the sources say and how best they can be interpreted, especially as so many of the arguments between the conflicting parties have centred around these themes.

The earliest references (middle of the 1st millennium BC) mention the He:niok^hoi, the Greek word for 'Charioteers', and to their north the Achaeans, located by Melikishvili (1970.400) around Sochi.⁷ Further north appear the Kerketai, linked by some to the Circassians. Strabo situates the Dzygoi, similarly identified with the Circassians,⁸ between the Achaeans and the 'Charioteers'. Less speculation is required regarding Strabo's much-quoted observation:

Dioscurias is the beginning of the isthmus between the Caspian Sea and the Euxine, and also the common emporium of the tribes who are situated above it and in its vicinity; at any rate, seventy tribes come together in it. [...] Among the tribes which come together at Dioscurias are the Phthei-rophagi, who have received their name from their squalor and their filthiness. Near them are the Soanes, who are no less filthy, but superior to them in power. [...] [T]hey [...] hold possession of the heights of the Caucasus above Dioscurias.⁹

Clearly, the Svans are here seen occupying the very mountain-fastnesses they hold today; there is no evidence that they ever resided on the coast, and so the idea that the term Tskhu/om.i (Sukhum(i)) of the mediæval Georgian chronicles derives from the Svan noun /tskhum/ 'holm-oak' is, to say the least, far-fetched.¹⁰ But what of the delightfully named

⁶ See Schanidse [Shanidze] (1978).

⁷ The Ubykhs, who lived in this area until the mass-migration of 1864, had the self-designation /a.t^wax/.

⁸ Cf. the Abkhazian ethnonym /a.zax^w(a)/ = Georgian /dzhik.i/.

⁹ Volume 5 pp. 208–215 of the Loeb edition of Strabo's *Geography*, translated by H.L. Jones, 1961. For a Græco-Georgian edition see T. Q'aukhchishvili (1957.122–126).

¹⁰ Cf. Tsulaja (1995.21). The Georgian toponym could more plausibly, I would posit, have come from the town's district of Th^wybyn, the non-Kartvelian sequence /th^wy/ being rendered as /tskhu/ or /tskho/ (see K^warch'ia 2002.102; Shakirbaj 1974).

Phtheirofag(o)i (Armenian /((v)odzhlakerk^h/) ‘lice-eaters’? Their location places them exactly where some centuries later the tribe of Missimians appears, namely around Ts’abal (Georgian Ts’ebelda) in the K’odor Valley. Turchaninov (1946) argued that the Greeks probably calqued this term on Abkhaz /a.ts’a.fa.j^w/ ‘the.louse.eat.person’.¹¹

The Roman Period

In the 1st century AD Pliny Secundus (23-79 AD) introduced his readers to the Apsilians (in Latin /gens Absilae/), whilst a century later Arrian (c.95-c.175)¹² in his ‘Voyage’ speaks of the /Abasgoi/ ‘Abazgians’ living to the north of the Apsilians (in Greek /Apsilai/). Recall that Abaza speakers moved across the Caucasus out of Abkhazia to the North Caucasus in the 14th century. Whilst today the Abazinians call themselves /Abaza/,¹³ Genko (1955:7) noted that this resulted from Russian/Circassian influence, for the term was originally Circassian, referring to non-Circassian North-West Caucasians. But the combination of geography with the forms of the ethnonyms logically suggests the classical authors here had in mind today’s Abazinians and Abkhazians. Arrian then places to the north of the Abazgoi the /Sanigai/ ‘in whose territory lies Sebastopolis’ (K’ech’aghmadze 1961:43); the Sanigai have been identified with the northern Abkhazian Sadz tribe, all of whose speakers migrated to Turkey in the late 19th century. The combined evidence of Pliny the Elder and Arrian is, thus, of central importance for the history of the Abkhaz-Abaza branch of the North West Caucasian speaking peoples.

From the other peoples mentioned by Arrian along the coast from Trebizond (namely Trapezuntines, Colchians, Drils, Sannoi/Tdzannoi, Makro:nes, Dzydreitai, and Laz), we can identify the Laz as one of the Kartvelian peoples, whose name for themselves /ch’an.i/, along with their designation in Svan /my.zan/, could account for the Sannoi (elsewhere Tdzan(n)oi), whilst Makro:nes, stated by Strabo to be an earlier name for

¹¹ Cf. the Abkhazian colloquialism /a.ts’a.jy.l.x.ny.jy.j.fo.jt’/ ‘he picks a louse off himself and eats it’, said of a mean person. Turchaninov speculated that the Abkhazians might have thus etymologised the native Circassian word *ts’yfy* ‘human being’ and used the term in a derogatory sense to refer to the Circassians. But there is no hard evidence to support the conjecture of foreign influence here and therefore no reason to suppose any non-Abkhazian derivation.

¹² Arrian’s dates are uncertain, but his ‘Voyage around the Black Sea’ was written (in Greek) for the Emperor Hadrian, who died in 138.

¹³ For relevant remarks see Lomtadze (1954:IX) and Tabulova (1976:4).

the Sannoi (T. Q'aukhchishvili 1957.203), could well represent the Mingrelians' self-designation /ma.rg.al.i/ (in Georgian /me.gr.el.i/). Procopius of Cæsarea (c.490-c.560) then adds the Brouk^hoi, who are plausibly identified with the Ubykhs (Dumézil 1965.15).¹⁴ In the 6th century, Agathias (536–582) makes an important contribution when he places the frontier between the Apsilians and the Missimians at Tibelos (Ts'abal), observing (Q'aukhchishvili 1936.86):

Soterike went down into the country of the so-called Missimians, who are subjects, like the Apsilians, of the king of the Colchians, but they [Missimians and Colchians] speak in a different language and also pursue different laws

Pace some commentators, the original Greek unambiguously states that it is the Missimians and Colchians (and NOT the Missimians and Apsilians) who are being contrasted in terms of culture and language.¹⁵ Taking this observation together with the later statement that the Apsilians were 'a related and neighbouring people' to the Missimians¹⁶ (Q'aukhchishvili 1936.162), we can conclude that there is no reason to doubt that the evidence of the classical authors points to essentially today's territory of Abkhazia being occupied by a culturally and linguistically related Abazgian-Apsilian-Missimian (sc. Abkhazian) speech-community (or dialect-continuum).

The Abkhazian Kingdom and Dynastic Union with Georgian-speaking Lands

Arrian describes the Abazgians and Apsilians as subjects of the Laz, whose kingdom Lazica, better known in Georgian sources as Egrisi, had developed in southern Colchis. According to the Abkhazian historian Anchabadze (1959.6–7), at the start of the 6th century, Apsilia, with its southern border along the R. Aaldzga (in Georgian Ghalidzga) by Ochamchira, together with Abazgia, Missimiania and the southern part of the territory of the Sanigai were still dependants of Lazica, which itself was vassal to Byzantium and had to take cognisance of the other state compet-

¹⁴ All references from classical authors to local tribes can be found in Gulia (1986.215–55).

¹⁵ For the argument, see Hewitt (1993b 259–260).

¹⁶ The rulers in this area came from the family Marshan, from which in all likelihood the term Missimians derives.

ing for power in the region, Persia.¹⁷ A significant event occurred in the late 8th century when, with Byzantium's power on the wane, Abkhazia's Prince Leon II saw his opportunity and

when the Greeks grew weak, the prince of the Abkhazians, by name Leon, son of the brother of Prince Leon, who acquired Abkhazia by inheritance, revolted from them. This second Leon was son of the daughter of the King of the Khazars and with their might revolted from the Greeks, seized¹⁸ Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi [Mountains] and took the title 'King of the Abkhazians'

(Quoted from p. 251 of the Georgian Chronicles in Q'aukhchishvili's 1955 edition). The resulting 'Kingdom of Abkhazia', comprising the whole of today's western Georgia and, with its capital moved from Anakopia (New Athos) in Abkhazia proper to Kutaisi in the Georgian province of Imereti, lasted for roughly 200 years until the accession of Bagrat' II to the Abkhazian throne in 978, which he inherited via his mother, Gurandukht'; with the death of his father, Gurgun, in 1008 he acquired most of the Georgian-speaking provinces (adding K'akheti in 1010) and thus became the first king to unite Abkhazia proper with all Kartvelian-speaking lands;¹⁹ in the list of Georgian kings he is numbered Bagrat' III. In recognition of this unifying role the Georgian Chronicles refer to him as 'King of the

¹⁷ For details see the histories of Procopius and Agathias. In an essay originally published in 1912 the Old Georgian expert K'orneli K'ek'elidze took the text of the life of the 7th-century activist Maximus the Confessor as basis for a discussion of the toponyms attested therein. The extant Georgian translations date to the 11th century (for the Old Georgian text see K'ek'elidze 1918.60–103). After comparing available sources, K'ek'elidze concludes (Kekelidze 1961.27):

Thus, the Apsilians occupied the sea-coast between the Laz and the Abazgians. Judging by the description of Pliny (died 79 AD), they were separated from the Laz by the River Astelefus, or the Ingur of our time, and from the Abazgians by the Koraks, or today's K'odor(i).

¹⁸ The Georgian verb in the relevant text is /da.i.p'q'r.a/. Not wishing to see in this chronicle any evidence for an Abkhazian ruler having the military might to take control of the whole of western Georgia, some Georgians (Q'aukhchishvili 1956.120–121; Gamakharia et al. 2007.94) argue that this verb-form was not used in the sense of the modern verb /daip'q'ro/ but rather had the pacific meaning 'came into possession of, which Q'aukhchishvili asserts was the only meaning the verb had in Old Georgian texts of the 5th–11th centuries. The Old Georgian text of Deuteronomy 2.34 does not, however, support such a limited semantics. Also, the pre-eminent Georgian historian Ivane Dzhavakhishvili happily assigned the verb its modern sense, when he wrote: "The first king already did not content himself with Abkhazia and extended the eastern frontier of his realm as far as the Likhi Mountain" (1983.95), which is manifestly incompatible with the notion of passive inheritance.

¹⁹ Recall that the Arabs still controlled an emirate centred on Tbilisi, which lasted until overthrown by King David the Builder (Aghmashenebeli) (1089–1125) in 1122.

Abkhazians and Georgians' /apxaz.ta da kartv.el.ta mepe/. For the 200 years of the Abkhazian Kingdom's existence the term 'Abkhazia' (in Georgian /apxaz.et.i/) or its translation-equivalents in other languages referred ambiguously either to Abkhazia proper or to the whole of western Georgia.²⁰ For the next quarter of a millennium during the period when Abkhazia was united with Kartvelian-speaking territories (viz. upto c.1245) the terms for 'Abkhazia' became synonymous (especially in Arabic sources)²¹ with the Georgians' native term for their country /sa.kartv.el.o/, which term, incidentally, makes its historical debut only from the inception of this union.

Breakup of the Mediæval Georgian Kingdom

The appearance on the horizon of the Mongols during the reign of Giorgi IV (1213–22) heralded disaster. Giorgi's sister Rusudan (1222–45) sought help from Pope Gregory IX, whose response was merely to despatch some friars to confront the ravaging hordes. Upon Rusudan's demise, Abkhazia under the Chachba (or, as they are known in Georgian, Sha/ervashidze) family and Mingrelia (designated Odishi) under the Dadiani dynasty were among the western provinces to remove themselves from central control. Cleric Johannes de Galonifontibus, who passed through the western Caucasus in 1404, confirmed the contemporary division of states in the clearest possible of terms, as follows (Tardy 1978):

Beyond these [Circassians] is Abkhazia, a small hilly country ... They have their own language ... To the east of them, in the direction of Georgia, lies the country called Mingrelia ... They have their own language ... Georgia is to the east of this country. Georgia is not an integral whole ... They have their own language.

Finally, during the reign of Giorgi VIII (1446–1466) following the ravages of Timur Leng (Tamerlane), what remained of the former powerful and united Georgian entity disintegrated into the three kingdoms of Kartli (centrally), K'akheti (to the east) and Imereti (to the west); Abkhazia, Mingrelia, Svaneti, Guria and Samtskhe continued as independent principalities.

²⁰ The same applies to the associated ethnonym; cf. Old Russian *Obez* (Papaskir 2005).

²¹ See Dzhavakhishvili (1983:50).

Post-Mongol Abkhazia

In the 14th century, Mingrelian Prince Giorgi Dadiani acquired the southern half of Abkhazia, restricting the Abkhazian rulers to the north of their domains. As noted earlier, this was when the Abazinians moved to the North Caucasus. At the close of the 14th century, all of Abkhazia became vassal to the princedom of Sabediano (effectively Mingrelia), but, from the early 16th century, Abkhazia again becomes mentioned as an independent entity. Italian missionary, Archangelo Lamberti, who resided in Mingrelia from 1633 to 1653, placed the Abkhazian-Mingrelian border along the R. K'odor²² (Asatiani 1938.5). But the Chachbas took advantage of a weakening Mingrelia in the 1680s and extended their southern border to the R. Ingur (Egry in Abkhaz), strengthening their hold on the territory by increasing the Abkhazian population there (Anchabadze 1959.297). In 1705 three Chachba brothers divided Abkhazia into three personal fiefdoms, one ruling Gagra to the K'odor, the second controlling the so-called Abzhywa ('middle') region from the K'odor to the Aaldzga, and Murzaq'an taking the area down to the Ingur; this district, somewhat larger than today's Gal District, became known as Samurzaq'an(o)²³ (Georgian Encyclopædia vol. 9, p. 37).

Medieval Ossetians

Prior to the arrival of the Mongols, the Ossetians had been a powerful force in the North Caucasus. And in order to secure Georgia's northern border, a string of dynastic marriages was contracted with Ossetian royalty, starting with Giorgi I's (1014–1027) marriage to the daughter of the Ossetian king (Anchabadze et al. 1969.89). The sovereign during Georgia's exalted Golden Age, Queen Tamar (1184–1213), was in fact three-quarters Ossetian by blood, and one of her consorts was the Ossetian Davit Soslan. Mongol activ-

²² The famous Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, whose mother was Abkhazian, visited the Caucasus around the same time and placed the boundary between the Mingrelians and Abkhazians (whom he styled Abaza) along the R. Rion (Phasis). Though Puturidze does not challenge the identification of Çelebi's 'Pasha' (Phasis) with the Rion in his Georgian books (1971; 1973), in the Russian edition of 1983 the three editors (Zheltjakova, Zulaljana, Puturidze) surmise (p. 301) that this is probably in error for the K'odor, a slip resulting from Çelebi's having written his book some years after making his journey to the region.

²³ Thanks to the addition of the Georgian derivational circumfix /sa- -o/; in Abkhaz the official term became 'Samyrzaq'an', clearly an adapted borrowing from Georgian.

ity in the North Caucasus from the mid-13th century caused displacement, and the Georgian chronicler, Vakhusht'i Bat'onishvili/Bagrat'ioni, himself a member of the royal household, relates the following events from the time of East Georgian King Vakht'ang II (1289–93) (Q'aukhchishvili 1973.239):

The Ossetians began to lay waste and plunder Kartli, and they besieged and captured the town of Gori ... The Tatars acted as intermediaries and established a peace; from that moment enmity was created between the Ossetians and Georgians upto to the time of King Giorgi the Brilliant, who resolved it.

Anchabadze and his Georgian co-authors (1969.92) describe the severe consequences for Ossetian power of Mongol activity as follows:

As a result of the Mongols' invasions, the Ossetians lost the lowlands in the North Caucasus and were dispersed in various directions. Many perished in unequal battles. That part of the Ossetians which came into the mountains of the Caucasus were forced to penetrate the valleys of Kartli to find a means of sustenance. The mass-settlement of the Ossetians in Kartli starts from the 60s of the XIIIth century. This process became intense towards the end of the XIIIth century. Giorgi the Brilliant (1314–1346) set a limit to the broad settlement of Ossetians in Shida Kartli. He compelled the Ossetians to turn from Kartli's valley-regions to the mountain-regions. *In Shida Kartli's northern regions was created a compact Ossetian population, which became the foundation of South Ossetia (a population of smaller groups of Ossetians had come about even before this on the southern side of the chain).* [Stress added]

The Ossetians as a North Caucasian power were finally crushed by the campaigns of Timur Leng at the end of the 14th and start of the 15th century.²⁴ And so, an Ossetian settlement south of the mountains is attested from the 13th century at the very latest.²⁵

Turkish and Persian Encroachment

David the Builder had defeated the Seljuk Turks at Didgori in 1121, their arrival a century earlier having threatened such centres of Georgian monastic culture as Shat'berd, Oshk' and T'bet in today's eastern Turkey. But

²⁴ See Togoshvili (1977.21).

²⁵ The late Ilya Gershevitch, lecturer in Iranian languages at Cambridge University, visited South Ossetia towards the end of his life and told me that, given the nature and extent of the differences between the dialect spoken there and those in the North Caucasus, he felt that the split must have occurred centuries earlier than this. In fact, for a Scythian-Cimmerian presence in Transcaucasia in the 7th century BC see Melikishvili (1959.231).

from the 16th century it was their Ottoman successors who were to cause more long-lasting problems in western Transcaucasia, spreading Islam to communities along the coast,²⁶ whilst Persia provided an Islamic squeeze on Georgian-speaking areas further east. King Solomon I of Imereti (1751–84) had already appealed to Russia for help against the Turks, but it was his counterpart Erekle II (king in K'akheti 1744–62 and of both K'akheti and Kartli 1762–98) who was constrained by Persian activity to sue for an alliance with Muscovy, and the resulting Treaty of Georgievsk (1783) gave Catherine the Great's Russia its first toehold in Transcaucasia;²⁷ ties had already been established with the northern Ossetians at the time of the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Küchuk Kainardji of 1774.²⁸ However, when Agha Mohammad Khan devastated Tiflis in 1795, Russia failed to fulfil its undertakings.²⁹ The situation so deteriorated³⁰ that eastern Georgia was compelled to seek Russian protection in 1800, which led to annexation the following year. Mingrelia came under Russian protection in 1803, followed by Imereti in 1804 and Abkhazia in 1810;³¹ both Mingrelia and Abkhazia conducted their own affairs until 1857 and 1864, respectively, though the province of Samurzaq'ano was taken under Russian control in 1845 because of quarrelling between Abkhazia and Mingrelia over rights to the area (Sakhok'ia 1985:390). At the start of the 19th century Abkhazia was still essentially a mono-ethnic land, but from the 1860s/1870s the demography

²⁶ Not only were the North West Caucasians affected but also the Laz and such Georgian-speaking regions as Ach'ara and Meskheti.

²⁷ An English translation of the text of the Treaty can be found in Kandelaki (1953:173–179); for a French version see Moriaud & Okoumeli (1919).

²⁸ See the Georgian Encyclopædia 1987, vol. 11, p. 162.

²⁹ The Russian justification for non-intervention is that the treaty had already been broken by Erekle's overtures to Turkey. See Andrej Epifantsev at: www.apn.ru/publications/article21323.htm. For a contrary view, in defence of Georgian feelings of betrayal, see Lang (1957:227).

³⁰ For details see Lang (1957), specifically chapters 11–13. A flavour of the problems can be seen from Lang's summary (1957:230–31):

The internal and external state of K'art'lo-Kakhet'i was going from bad to worse. The Lezghian raids did not abate. The khan of Shusha renounced his traditional allegiance to the Georgian crown in order to make his peace with the new shah. A Persian envoy arrived at Tiflis to browbeat the king into submission to the shah ... Relations between Giorgi and his stepmother and half-brothers grew so bad that he became fearful for his life.

³¹ The frontispiece of the history by Lakoba et al. (1991) contains the text of the 17 February 1810 Charter, wherein Tsar Alexander I granted Georgij Sharvashidze, as the 'hereditary Prince of the Abkhazian domains', Russia's protection for Abkhazia.

began undergoing the changes that by 1989 were to reduce the Abkhazian proportion to a mere 17.8%.

Russia's Encroachment and Tsarist Rule

Russia's imperial eye turned to the broader North Caucasus once links were forged with the Ossetians (the only almost entirely Christian people in the North Caucasus) and central/eastern Georgia, but it was with the appointment of General Aleksej Ermolov in 1816 to bring the (largely Muslim) highlanders to heel that the Great Caucasian War began; this was to last until 1864.³² The more northerly and remote mountain-dwelling Abkhazians fought in the general North West Caucasian resistance and suffered the consequence of defeat following the final surrender at Krasnaja Poljana (the centre for the 2014 Winter Olympics, inland from Sochi) in the tragedy that is known as the *maxadzhestvo* 'Exile'. Expulsions to the Ottoman Empire occurred in 1864, in 1867 after the 1866 uprising at the northern centre Lykhny against Russia's proposed land-reform,³³ and again in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8, even though Abkhazians neither took up arms against Russia, nor, being denied the right to bear arms, fought against the Turks. Dzidzarija (1982.373–74) mentions for the 1860–1870s alone a figure of 80,000 deportees from Abkhazia, though the total rises to 135,000 for those of Abkhaz-Abazinian ethnicity (and to 180,000, if one includes all the Ubykhs). But if one totals all those Abkhazians and Abazinians who migrated in various years between 1816 and 1910, then the figure reaches 339,345 (384,284, with the Ubykhs). Achugba (2008.22–3) describes the order of deportations thus:

In spring 1864 the Ubykhs, who were related to the Abkhazians and lived in immediate proximity with them, left the motherland. Against the coastal and mountain Sadz-Abkhazian communities, who did not intend to aban-

³² Uprisings against Tsarist rule broke out periodically in the 19th century in different regions of Georgia (see Lang 1962.52ff.; and, for the revolt in Guria in 1841, Khach'ap'uridze 1931). For a description of the fighting in Daghestan/Chechenia see Gammer (1994 & 2006); for developments in the north-western sector see Bell (1840), who confirmed (vol. 1, p. 53) that Abkhaz was spoken down to the Mingrelian border (R. Ingur) in the late 1830s, and Henze (1992).

³³ The head of the administration, two officials, four officers and 54 Cossacks were killed (Lakoba et al. 1991.181). The majority of Abkhazian peasants, being naturally free from feudal dependency, could not understand the nature of an offer of 'freedom to purchase' what was already theirs (Achugba 2008.22; 2010.101). For a collection of documents relating to the critical years 1863–1874 see Dzidzarija (2012).

don the country, were despatched four powerful military units. After fierce battles, the Sadz were deported in their entirety to the Ottoman Empire. In the summer of the very same year the Pskhu-Abkhazians shared the same bitter fate ... The Ts'abal and Dal Abkhazians suffered especially—the almost 15,000 population of the K'odor Valley was deported to the Ottoman Empire in 1867. The next and last mass-stage of deportation of the Abkhazians to the Ottoman Empire was directly connected with the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) ... To the regions of Abkhazia earlier stripped bare were added the town of Sukhum and its environs, and all the coastal and fore-mountainous villages from the R. Aapsta to the R. Toumysh ... Wiped out in their entirety were the ethnographic groups and territorial Abkhazian societies of Sadz, Gum, Pskhu, Ts'abal, Dal. The other regions of the country suffered badly too. The Bzyp, Abzhywa and Samurzaq'an Abkhazians remained in small numbers in the guise of rump-groups.

Because of their status as a 'guilty' nation in the wake of the Lykhny Uprising, the Abkhazians were forbidden to reside in their capital and its surrounding villages. This stigma and restriction were only lifted in 1907 in recognition of the Abkhazians' non-involvement in the revolutionary movements of 1905–7 (Achugba 2008.27).

From 1864³⁴ to the 1866 rebellion in Lykhny, Abkhazia was styled the Sukhum Military Department, consisting of the Bzyp, Sukhum, Abzhywa Districts (Russian *okrugi*) plus the prefectorates (Russian *pristavstva*) of Ts'abal (Ts'ebelda) and Samurzaq'an(o), all under the control of the Governor-General of Kutaisi (capital of Imereti in Western Georgia). In 1866 these prefectorates were abolished, and four new districts were created within the Sukhum Military Department. Another reform was introduced in 1868 when this Department was split into the regions of Pitsunda (from Gagra to the K'odor) and Ochamchira (from the K'odor to the Ingur). In 1883 the Military Department was downgraded and renamed a Military District, which from 1903 to 1906 was made directly subservient to the Russian authorities responsible for the Caucasus based in Tbilisi. From 1904 to 1917 Gagra and its environs were re-assigned to the Sochi District of the Black Sea Province.

In the short comparative vocabulary appended to his second volume to illustrate the three North West Caucasian languages (Adyghe = Circassian; Abaza = Ubykh; Azra, from *Azgha*, the Ubykh word for 'Abkhaz(ian)') spoken between the R. Kuban and the Ingur during his sojourn of 1837–9, Bell included the translation-equivalents of the word 'slave'. The Abkhaz

³⁴ In November the last Chachba prince, Mikhail, was arrested and exiled to Stavropol, dying in April 1866 in Rostov (Lakoba et al. 1991.180).

term was *a.gyr.wa*, which is none other than the Abkhaz ethnonym meaning ‘Mingrelian’;³⁵ precisely the same equivalence was noted by Baron Tornau in 1835 (Dzidzarija 2008.206; see also Lakoba et al. 1991.165). This is rather telling testimony as to the social standing of the few Mingrelians within Abkhazia prior to the outward-migrations. As late as 1868 they numbered a mere 429 in Abkhazia (Achugba 2008.25), but, according to the Family Lists,³⁶ by 1886 Mingrelians had increased to 3,474, whilst the breakdown of the rest of the permanent population was: Abkhazians 58,963, Greeks 2,149, Russians 1,090, Armenians 1,090, Estonians 637, Georgians³⁷ 515, Others 743.

Georgia’s Attention Turns towards Abkhazia

In 1877 the Georgian educationalist and writer, Iak’ob Gogebashvili, devoted a series of articles in *Tiflisskij Vestnik* ‘Tiflis Herald’ (republished in volume I of his collected works in 1952, pp. 90–120) to the theme *vin unda dasaxldes apxazetshi?* ‘Who should be settled in Abkhazia?’. Apparently moved by the fact that “Abkhazia will never again be able to see its own children” (p. 90), Gogebashvili asked who should be sent in as ‘colonisers’ (*k’olonizat’orebi*).³⁸ Because of the extent of malarial marshes (since drained) “to which the Abkhazians had become acclimatised over many centuries in their own region” (p. 92), Gogebashvili argued that the obvious colonisers should consist of Mingrelians, since the climate in their territory most resembled that prevailing in adjacent Abkhazia. They were, furthermore, the most adept of the Kartvelians at adapting to new conditions; there was a shortage of land in Mingrelia; and already in Sukhum and Ochamchira they had gained control of commerce (p. 98). Confirming this when writing in 1903 and referring to Abkhazia’s central region, leading Mingrelian intellectual Tedo Sakhok’ia wrote of an increase in local commercial activity “especially after the Mingrelians began to flood into the district ... following the [Russo-Turkish] war” (1985.401).

³⁵ Based, of course, on the Kartvelian root *-rg/gr-* seen in the Mingrelian and Georgian equivalents, already presented, namely *ma.rg.ali* and *me.gr.eli*, respectively.

³⁶ *Svod statisticheskix dannyx o naselenii Zakavkazskogo kraja, izvlechenyix iz posemejnyx spiskov 1886* ‘Collection of statistical data on the population of the Transcaucasian District, drawn from family-lists 1886’, Tiflis 1893.

³⁷ Note that Georgians were (properly) distinguished from Mingrelians at this period.

³⁸ A rather significant description, in view of the current attitude of the international community as to when peoples should be accorded the right to claim independence.

Comments (sympathetic and otherwise) on Abkhazia's depopulated situation were printed in Georgian newspapers. Temur Achugba, an Abkhazian born and raised in Batumi (and thus fluent in Georgian), has examined Georgian periodicals published in the last quarter of the 19th century for relevant material. The evidence is telling. He translated the most significant passages into Russian and published them in 1995.³⁹ On the extent of the reduction of the Abkhazian population following the *Maxadzhirstvo*, the Abkhazia-born Mingrelian linguist/publicist P'et're Ch'araia remarked: "The Abkhazian nation has been so reduced in number that today it does not amount to even a quarter of what it once was" (Achugba 1995.11 & 62; citation from the paper *Iveria* 165, 1888). In his Pitsunda paper, Achugba argued that the chauvinistic concept of the whole Caucasus (including, of course, Abkhazia) being 'Georgian' territory, which was to prove so catastrophic for relations between Georgians and neighbouring ethnic minorities in the 20th century, was first voiced by the writer Giorgi Ts'ereteli in his 1873 comment (Achugba 1995.27–8; citation from the newspaper *Droeba* 'Time/EPOCH' 399, 1873):

Circumstances compelled them [Abkhazians/Circassians] to abandon their country. Land is very abundant and even better than in some of our areas ... So, what are our people thinking about? Why hitherto has there been no decision to relocate to this country? ... After all, is not the Caucasus our region? The whole Caucasus is our land, our country ... Suppose we settle in the country of the Circassians or in Daghestan—everywhere is our motherland.

Ts'ereteli returned to the theme in 1879 with this summons to his fellow-Georgians: "Let us spread there while we still have time, before foreign tribes enjoy the feast and settle in the empty places of our Caucasus!" (Achugba 1995.40; citation from *Droeba* 27, 4 February 1879). By 1897 the Russian Butyrkin could note: "Mingrelians and Imeretians have occupied the best spots in the Sukhum District; they have constructed inns, places for concealing depravity and robbery" (Achugba 1995.73; citation from the newspaper *Iveria* 172, 1897).

In the course of his own aforementioned discussion, Gogebashvili appends a revealing comment in the context of the imperial aim to russify Abkhazia. Of the residents of Samurzaq'ano he says (pp. 109–110):

³⁹ Materials from the book were included in his presentation at a conference in Pitsunda in 2004. All papers from the conference are available on the Web, but for Achugba's presentation in particular see: www.circassianworld.com/Achugba.html or www.abkhaz-world.com/articles/conflict/25-the-ethno-demographic-aspect.html.

From a political viewpoint the Mingrelians are just as Russian as the Muscovites,⁴⁰ and in this way they can exercise influence over those tribes with whom they happen to have a relationship. A striking proof of this is given by the fact [...] that, thanks to Mingrelian influence, the Samurzaq'anoans—a *branch of the Abkhazian race*—who have permanent intercourse with the Mingrelians, have become entirely faithful subjects of Russia. [Stress added]

This observation is significant in view of the fact that in his well-known school text-book *bunebis k'ari* 'Nature's Door' Gogebashvili subsequently wrote that "the Mingrelians and the Samurzaq'anoans are one people".⁴¹ The ethnic and linguistic affiliation of the Samurzaq'anoans is a highly vexatious issue.

Beginnings of Mingrelianisation

Given the history of Abkhaz-Mingrelian relations sketched above, it is hardly surprising that the more south-easterly parts of Abkhazia should have been susceptible to Mingrelian influence (cultural and/or linguistic). Speaking of Samurzaq'ano in his 1835 lecture, Tornau observed (Dzidzarija 2008.206):

It is difficult to determine the precise origin of the people who inhabit it. Talking partly in the Abkhaz, partly in the Mingrelian language, their facial features do not differ sharply from either of the two neighbouring peoples.

An official report of the Sukhum Class-Land Commission gave this description of the population and language-use of Samurzaq'ano in 1869 (1870.5):

Samurzaq'an[o] was populated by colonisation that proceeded gradually, directed on the one side from Abkhazia, on the other from Mingrelia. As a result of this, the Abkhazian element predominates in western Samurzaq'an[o], the Mingrelian in eastern, but even in the eastern part the privileged families are all settlers from Abkhazia. The Abkhazian language predominates in western Samurzaq'an[o], in the eastern it is a special dialect of the Mingrelian language.

⁴⁰ What Gogebashvili meant by this was that the Mingrelians could do a better job of incorporating Abkhazia within the tsarist *imperium* than the Russians themselves, being better suited to the local climatic conditions—BGH.

⁴¹ It is not known when or why Gogebashvili changed their ethnic classification, which has become the canonical view on the Georgian side. The 1868 edition of this work does not contain the relevant section, but it *is* included in the 7th edition of 1892, which is the earliest version at my disposal. I thank the late Michael Daly of the Bodleian Library in Oxford for making it accessible to me.

In 1899 a debate took place over the ethnic status of the Samurzaq'anoans in the pages of the *Chernomorskij Vestnik* 'Black Sea Herald' (Batumi) between K'onst'ant'ine Mach'avariani⁴² and, it is believed, the aforementioned Mingrelian intellectual Tedo Sakhok'ia, who employed the pseudonym 'Samurzaq'an', the latter arguing for their Mingrelian ethnicity, the former that they were Abkhazians. On 8 May the following conversation between Mach'avariani and the Samurzaq'anoan peasant Uru Gua was reported:

[UG] Why are you putting these questions to me? [K'M] Some people maintain that the Samurzaq'anoans are Mingrelians, that they spoke and speak Mingrelian, and that the whole of Samurzaq'ano formed part of the principality of Mingrelia. [UG] What is that you say? I shall tell you this. I well recall my father and grandfather. They never spoke Mingrelian. Everyone conversed in Abkhaz. Take the communities of Bedia, Chkhortoli, Okumi, Gali, Tsarche—everywhere you will hear Abkhaz amongst adults. If in Saborio, Ot'obaia, Dikhazurgi they speak Mingrelian, this is thanks to the residents of these villages having close contacts with the Mingrelians. Do not our names, surnames, manners, customs and even our superstitions prove we are Abkhazians and not Mingrelians? In the [18]50s you would almost never hear Mingrelian anywhere in Samurzaq'ano.⁴³ Upto then, a Mingrelian was a curiosity. May I ask you who *you* are? [K'M] A Georgian. [UG] Where did you learn Mingrelian and Abkhaz? [K'M] I was born in Mingrelia but grew up in Samurzaq'ano and Abkhazia'.

Achugba has addressed the problem of ethnic self-awareness in south-eastern Abkhazia (2006; 2008), noting such stages in their assimilation to Mingrelians as: linguistic encroachment; demarcation of the category 'Samurzaq'anoan' from that of 'Abkhazian'; advantage of self-classification as 'Samurzaq'anoan' in order to avoid the danger of deportation to Ottoman lands, a threat which hung over all Abkhazians after 1866; full assimilation and eventual recategorisation as 'Mingrelians'. The total of Abkhazians quoted above from the 1886 Family Lists treats the Samurzaq'anoans as Abkhazians, though some sources were already aligning them with the Mingrelians.

⁴² Mach'avariani was born in 1859 in the Samurzaq'anoan village of Okum(i). Though in the quotation immediately following he styles himself a Georgian, the form of his surname (in *-iani*) would suggest a Svan origin.

⁴³ Georg Rosen in his 1844 *Über das Mingrelische, Suanische und Abchasische* placed the *linguistic* frontier between Abkhaz and Mingrelian at the Erti-ts'q'ali (i.e. somewhat to the north of the R. Ingur).

The most detailed study to date for the demography of Abkhazia is Müller (1999).⁴⁴ On the specifics of the 1886 data he writes:

[T]he Samurzaq'anoans are the bone of contention between Abkhaz and Georgians. According to the Family Lists, they were actually the most numerous group of all. Some (pro-)Abkhaz scholars have stated the percentage of Abkhaz in Abkhazia for 1886 to have been 85.7%; that clearly is an addition of Abkhaz plus Samurzaq'anoans (30,640 + 28,323 = 58,963 or 85.7% of 68,773). On the other hand, some (pro-)Georgian scholars have claimed that actually they, the 'Georgians', were in a majority of 50.6%, clearly arriving at this by adding all Kartvelians (Mingrelians [and some Laz for Sukhum town] + Georgians [including Imeretians and Gurians] to the Samurzaq'anoans (30,640 + 3,558 + 515 + 84 + 9 = 34,806 or 50.6% of 68,773). Presentation of figures should always be supported by explanation of how they are calculated. While the (pro-)Abkhaz may be criticized for the form they choose, they are quite justified in the essence: the very source itself compiles additional summary tables, and in these, Samurzaq'anoans are not listed, but the number of Abkhaz in *Kutaisskaja Gubernija* is given as 60,432. Now, in Batumi (city and *okrug*), 1,469 Abkhaz were listed; thus 58,963 remain—clearly, these are the Abkhaz plus the Samurzaq'anoans in our *okrug*!

As late as 1913 the number of Abkhazians in Samurzaq'ano was put at 33,639 (against 3,915 Mingrelians, Imeretians and Gurians, plus 26 Turks) (Machavariani 2009.147). But wholesale reclassification would not be long in coming. Though the Great Soviet Encyclopædia of 1926 (possibly based on figures garnered in 1922/3) cites the number of Abkhazians in the Abkhazian SSR as 83,794 (= 48.1%) vs Kartvelians at 32,039 (18.4%), the census conducted that year gave the Abkhazian total as 55,918 vs 67,494 Kartvelians; clearly, the Samurzaq'anoans must have been categorised as Abkhazians for the Encyclopædia but reclassified as Kartvelians in the census, which is how they were registered subsequently.⁴⁵

Of the final years of the 19th and start of the 20th century Abkhazian historian Stanislav Lak[']oba has written (1999a.85):

At this period the Georgian clergy unleashed a storm of activity, foisting on the autochthonous Abkhazian population a Georgian liturgy and the Georgian language, with which they were totally unfamiliar, whilst many Abkhazian surnames were registered by Mingrelian clerics in a Kartvelian form. In the final decade of the 19th century and at the start of the 20th, because of the endless flow of those resettled from Western Georgia, relations between Abkhazians and Kartvelians were becoming ever more complicated,

⁴⁴ The article is also available at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/abkhazia/history/263-muller-demographia.html>.

⁴⁵ See Müller (1999).

reaching their lowest point during the revolutionary developments of 1905. The Abkhazian peasantry interpreted the events of the Russian revolution of 1905 in Abkhazia as a 'Georgian' revolution and viewed with distrust those who had so recently occupied the lands of their fellows and exiles and now appeared before them in the role of revolutionary agitators.

This was a period of intellectual awakening in Abkhazia, when a written form for the language was developing and the first steps were taken to establish a literature and schooling in Abkhaz. But the revolutionary year of 1917, coinciding with the still ongoing 1st World War, caused turmoil throughout the Russian Empire and heralded especially significant events in both Abkhazia (see Lakoba 1990.62–100; Lak[']oba 1999b; Lakoba 2001.3–89; Khodzhaa 2007) and South Ossetia.

*Post-Revolutionary Abkhazia and Independent (Menshevik) Georgia*⁴⁶

A British visitor to Transcaucasia during these years, Carl Bechhofer (pseudonym of Carl Eric Roberts), set the context for what was to follow (1912.11):

⁴⁶ Events in Abkhazia during this period, which was so turbulent for the entire Caucasus (and, indeed, beyond), are complex. But it is essential to try to understand them, as they have had a central bearing on Abkhazian-Georgian relations ever since. For a fuller treatment in English of the relevant history than can be given here, see both Lak'oba (1999b) and, in even greater detail (including for South Ossetia), Welt (2011—I am grateful to Robert English for making this work available to me). Welt dismisses the idea that Menshevik Georgia's difficulties in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted from the nationalism of the time but arose out of a complex interplay of issues, of which nationalism was but one component. He argues that, on the Georgian side, the folk-memory of that period explains why these two peoples were viewed as potential 'fifth columnists', primed to frustrate Georgia's move to independence from the USSR in the late 1980s, just as the territories had been seen as vanguards for the sovietisation of Georgia in 1921. But he rightly observes that, for the relevant minorities, an understanding of this period:

helps one appreciate the rather astonishing depth of Abkhaz and South Ossetian ethnoterritorial aspirations. These small ethnic groups – numbering in just the tens of thousands – have a record of ethnoterritorial mobilization that predates the Soviet experience and is rooted in indigenous movements. Such mobilization should not be understood as simply a figleaf for Soviet Russian expansion. Local Bolsheviks often acted on their own, and even expressly against orders 'from above'. More importantly, they were not the only ones who sought separate, or at least distinct, national units for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such aspirations were shared by virtually all Abkhaz and South Ossetian political representatives. This fact suggests we should be cautious against dismissing Abkhaz and South Ossetian aspirations for self-government today as a Russian-engineered contrivance.

In view of some of the later phases of the Georgian Government's policy, a pamphlet issued in English by anonymous Georgian Nationalists at Zurich as far back as 1916 ('Georgia and the War') is of some interest. Together with the usual propagandist claims—a map of Georgia, includes territory as far remote as Lazistan and Trebizond!—the statement is made that, 'The war which has broken out between Turkey and Russia affords the Georgian people the best means of acquiring again the political freedom which they lost a hundred years ago. With this in mind, Georgia has grasped the hand of Turkey and her great Allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary, in order to join with them in carrying on the war against Russia.' The moral of the pamphlet is that, 'If we, with her [Germany's] help, succeed in obtaining our liberty, she will have no better friends than us—real friends, *without any hypocrisy, from which we Georgians are free*. We wish to learn how to think and to labour in the German manner, and hope that in a short time our masters will be able to be proud of their pupils.' (My [= Bechhofer's] italics).

With governance of the Empire in confusion, Abkhazians demonstrated their desire to associate with fellow North Caucasians by joining the Union of United Mountain-Peoples of the Caucasus, which had been founded in May 1917 and which became the Mountain Republic in November; on 20 October the 'Union Treaty of the South-Eastern Union of the Cossack Military, the Mountaineers of the Caucasus and the Free People of the Steppe' was formulated, the fifth entry in the list of whose constituent-members was 'The Mountain People of the Sukhum District (Abkhazia)'.⁴⁷ A constitution was then drawn up for an Abkhazian People's Council (*Abxazskij Narodnyj Sovet* = ANS),⁴⁸ which body, after the draft was ratified at the Assembly of the Abkhazian People on 8 November 1917, became the effective organ of power in Abkhazia.⁴⁹ The fourth in the list of aims affirms the aforementioned goal: "Support and strengthening the link of the Abkhazian people with the Union of Mountaineers of the Caucasus".⁵⁰ This was followed on the same day by a declaration of the Assembly, which concluded with the aspirational statement:

The Abkhazian people...expresses the wish that the remaining nations and social groups and organisations of the Sukhum District and Transcaucasia should believe that the Abkhazians, who suffered under the old regime not

⁴⁷ For the whole text see Osmanov (1994:73–76).

⁴⁸ The equivalent *Natsional'nyj Sovet Gruzii* (National Council of Georgia = NCG) was constituted later.

⁴⁹ See Lakoba (1996:63). Three different ANSs operated between 1917 and 1921 in the sequence: 8 November 1917 to April 1918; May/June to 10 October 1918; 18 March 1919 to March 1921 (Lakoba et al. 1991:285).

⁵⁰ For the whole text see Osmanov (1994:79–80).

only a social but also a national burden, are doubly revolutionary and thirst for a joint, fraternal life with all their neighbours.⁵¹

A representative from Tbilisi, A. Chkhenk'eli, unsuccessfully argued against the association of Abkhazia with the North Caucasus, though the Gal District (more or less historical Samurzaq'ano) began to exhibit pro-Georgian leanings. In its own Declaration, made before there was any Bolshevik agitation in the area, the ANS spoke of: "One of the main future problems for the Abkhazian National Council will be to work for the self-determination of the Abkhazian people" (Lak[']oba 1999b.88).

Shortly before the Democratic Federative Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was formed (9 April 1918), the National Councils of Abkhazia and Georgia met in Tbilisi on 9 February 1918, reaching an agreement on mutual relations *between* their respective states, including:

- (i) To re-establish a single, undivided Abkhazia within the frontiers from the R. Ingur to the R. Mzymta, into the composition of which enter Abkhazia proper and Samurzaq'ano, or that which is today's [sc. 1918] Sukhum District;
- (ii) The form of the future political construction of a united Abkhazia must be worked out in accordance with the principle of national self-determination in the Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia, convened on democratic principles;
- (iii) In case Abkhazia and Georgia should wish to enter into political treaty relations with other national states, they are mutually obliged to hold preliminary discussions with each other in this regard.

Abkhazian Bolsheviks managed to seize power in Abkhazia (apart from the K'odor = Ochamchira administrative area) on 8 April, thereby effectively nullifying the rule of the first ANS, but this venture was quashed by Georgian military forces under V. Dzhugheli on 17 May. Meanwhile, back in Tbilisi, at the behest of Germany and Turkey, Georgia declared the independence of the Georgian Democratic Republic on 26 May, which meant not only the demise of the Transcaucasian Federation but also the breaking of legal ties with Abkhazia, which was not part of Georgian territory, as attested by the absence of any mention of Abkhazia in Georgia's Act of Independence, for Abkhazia was still, it is worth stressing, constitutionally part of the Union of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (Zakharov & Areshev 2008.47).

Independent Georgia was led initially by Social-Democrat Noë Ramishvili and, from 24 July, by Menshevik Noë Zhordania, even though he per-

⁵¹ For the whole text see Osmanov (1994.89–83).

sonally had never yearned for more than autonomous status for Georgia within the Russian Empire. It has to be said that the actions of Dzhugheli's forces were largely welcomed by the Abkhazians, whose position was isolated, given that the Russian civil war was being fought between the general of the Russian Volunteer Army, Anton Denikin, and the Bolsheviks across the North Caucasus, though the opportunity was taken to establish a second ANS, which this time had a more pro-Georgian orientation.

Members of the pro-Georgian faction of this body signed a 'Treaty' in Tbilisi on 8 June, although other members of the ANS back in Sukhum were discussing on 10 June a different draft for signing the following day. Regardless of this confusion, the first clause still underlined: (a) the temporary nature of the agreement; (b) the fact that the final decision-making power lay with the ANS; and also (c) the separate status of the two states, reading:

The concluded treaty will be reviewed by the National Congress of Abkhazia, which will finally determine the political construction of Abkhazia and also the mutual relations between Georgian and Abkhazia.

But it is clause 4 from the 8 June draft (clause 6 according to the 11 June version) which is deemed a turning point in relations, namely:

For the swift establishment of revolutionary order and the organisation of stable rule, the Georgian Democratic Republic sends to the Abkhazian People's Council for its aid and deployment a detachment of the Red Guard, until the need for it has passed.

On this basis General Mazniev (Mazniashvili) arrived with troops, declaring himself on 23 June 'governor' in what has since been seen effectively as a military occupation (leading to annexation) of Abkhazia by Georgia. Mazniashvili went on and eventually occupied the whole coast up to Tuapse, a move which was later 'justified' at the Paris Peace Conference (1 May 1919) by Georgian representative I. Odishelidze, who argued that the Black Sea coast had been 'Georgian lands' in the 11th-13th centuries, and that Sochi was a 'pure Georgian town' (Lakoba et al. 1991:303).⁵²

The second ANS was disbanded on 10 October 1918, the leaders of the non-Georgian faction being arrested and sent to gaol in Tbilisi. They were

⁵² A revealing comment in a secret document sent from Constantinople to the British War Office in 1919 stated: "We found on occupying Trans-Caucasus that the Georgians were in possession of the Sochi District to which I consider they have no legal or historical right but to turn them out will cause complications in Georgia properly so called" (Burdett 1996:630).

released at the insistence of British General Thomson and Colonel Stocks⁵³ in December (Lakoba 2001.62–5). At the elections for the third ANS in February 1919, 27 of the 40 deputies openly supported the Georgian position, which is hardly surprising, given that the elections took place under conditions of occupation with these restrictions: “Subjects of Georgia not residing in Abkhazia and those who received the right of residence in Abkhazia even after 19 July 1914 can be elected ANS deputies” (Lakoba et al. 1991.309). It was similar pressure from both Gen. Denikin, responding to Abkhazian complaints of mistreatment, and British generals Forrest, Walker and Milne in early February 1919 that led the Georgian government to introduce on 20 March 1919 an ‘Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia’, though, despite three proposals, no constitutional arrangement for Abkhazia was ever formally agreed (Lakoba et al. 1991.315); the third ANS had essentially no function other than to lend an air of legitimacy to the supposed ‘autonomous’ status of Abkhazia, which effectively remained in the grip of the Georgian Mensheviks. The head of the British military mission, General Briggs, had pulled no punches when addressing E. Gegech’k’ori of the Georgian government thus (Lakoba et al. 1991.316):

The Abkhazians are discontent with the Georgian government and actually declare that, if they are given arms, they themselves will purge the district of Georgian forces. The Georgians behave there worse than the Bolsheviks.

Khodzhaa (1999.21; 2007.7), quoting Sagarija (1981.32) has described the behaviour of Mazniev’s troops in Abkhazia as follows: “Not a single tsarist general raged as mercilessly when subjugating the Caucasian peoples as Mazniev in Abkhazia”. But the Abkhazians were not the only targets. On 26 February 1919, Denikin appealed to General Briggs (Alekseev 1927.96):

Official representatives of the Armenian National Union of the Sochi District have appealed to me with a request that I defend the Armenians of the Sukhum District, especially the settlements around Gudauta, from the use of force by the Georgian forces. With the cleansing of the Sochi District by Georgian troops the Georgian military authorities laid a tax upon the Armenian settlements of the Gudauta Area of the Sukhum District ... The relevant villagers, having no produce, could not fulfil the demands laid upon them by the Georgians. Then, on 10 February, the Georgian forces surrounded the villages and began to shoot at the peaceful population with artillery and machine-gun fire ... I beseech Your Excellency to bring to the attention

⁵³ After the armistice of 11 November, the Germans had left the Caucasus, and a British expeditionary force had arrived.

of the supreme British command in Transcaucasia my protest at the use of force against the defenceless Armenian population and my request for energetic pressure on the Georgian government for the cessation of these acts of brutality.

Many Armenians and Greeks left Abkhazia at this time. A late member of the small Greek community surviving in Abkhazia has written (Ioanidi 1990.28):

A protocol of the audit commission of the People's Council [Soviet] of Abkhazia speaks of the emigration of Greeks in 1919–1920 and of the installation in their place of Georgians, Svans and Mingrelians, organised by a Ministry of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which caused discontent among representatives of the Abkhazian population on the Council.

One of the reasons for the exodus during the Menshevik period, as mentioned by Ioanidi in another book (2006.10), was “pressure upon the Greeks with the aim of getting them to leave”.

The already quoted Carl Bechhofer summarised his general impressions of Menshevik Georgia, an absolutely crucial period for any understanding of Abkhazian-Georgian relations today, thus (1921.14):

‘The Free and Independent Social-Democratic State of Georgia’ will always remain in my memory as a classic example of an imperialist ‘small nation’. Both in territory-snatching outside and bureaucratic tyranny inside, its chauvinism was beyond all bounds.⁵⁴

Of the Georgian character in general he observed (1921.41–2):

Individually, the Georgians are charming people ... They are natural poets. But the qualities that make the Georgian a delightful companion do not necessarily fit him for statesmanship and citizenship. Be this as it may, I am sorry to say that the record of the Georgian Government, in its two years’ existence in the Transcaucasus, has been marred by nearly every fault that a State can commit. Chauvinism has run riot. And it has gone hand in hand with a vindictive persecution of the Russians in Georgia, by way of empha-

⁵⁴ The Armenians had a territorial dispute with Georgia during this period. As a result, Dzhavakheti became a Georgian province almost wholly populated by Armenians. Bechhofer offers the following observations on this matter: ‘In supporting the Georgian claims to Armenian territory in the autumn of 1918, General Kress, the head of the German troops in the Transcaucasus, said: “Germany, as an ally, has engaged itself to support the Georgian claims.” ... The Georgians ... claimed some territory which, by all ethnological rules, belonged to Armenia. The two peoples came to blows in December 1918, and, to the astonishment of those who supposed the Armenians to be a race of degraded moneymakers, these routed the Georgians, and would, perhaps, have captured Tiflis, the Georgian capital, had not the Allies intervened’ (1921.14).

sisg the highly disputable asseveration of Georgian ultra-patriots that Georgia was persecuted by the Russians in pre-Revolutionary days.⁵⁵

According to Bechhofer (1921.48–9), even the noted proponent of the Georgian language and of Georgian studies in the UK, (later Sir) Oliver Wardrop, then British diplomatic representative in Transcaucasia, came to feel disappointment at Georgian behaviour:

I went to the British Commission, and saw Mr Oliver Wardrop, our High Commissioner, whom I had met once or twice in London. He was very amiable, and told me how, in his opinion, matters stood in the Transcaucasus. I was not much surprised to find that he took an extremely pro-Georgian view of affairs. He and his late sister [Marjory] have done more to make Georgia and Georgian literature known in England than any one else. Both in Batum and Armenia I found people who were scandalised that a gentleman of such pronounced views should be appointed to a position which called for considerable intellectual disinterestedness, since Georgians were only one of the rival elements in the Transcaucasus. I felt safe in answering that Mr Wardrop would certainly never consciously allow himself to be biased by Georgian propaganda; *it was not for some months, however, that he appeared to discover how grossly the Georgian Government was disappointing his hopes for it.* [Stress added]⁵⁶

Grievances over other issues were compounded by the arbitrary decision, already mentioned, to categorise the Samurzaq'anoans as Mingrelians ('Georgians'), with obvious consequences for later censuses, as we shall see (Achugba 2008.29).

South Ossetians under the Mensheviks

The Ossetians reenter the story during this period. The aforementioned David Lang, first Professor of Georgian Studies in the UK, described events in South Ossetia during Menshevik times as follows (1962.228–9):

⁵⁵ A later specialist on Georgia, David Marshall Lang, added his own assessment (1962.20):

It would of course be wrong to idealize the Georgian character. Every medal has its reverse. In many Georgians, quick wit is matched by a quick temper, and a proneness to harbour rancour. The bravery associated with heroes like Prince Bagration, an outstanding general of the Napoleonic wars, is matched by the cruelty and vindictiveness found in such individuals as Stalin and Beria.

⁵⁶ For a recent collection of documents relating specifically to Abkhazia during the Menshevik years see Gozhba (2009).

A peasant uprising had already occurred in South Ossetia in 1918 and been suppressed with great severity by the Menshevik People's Guard commanded by Jaliko Jugheli ... A Russian-sponsored Ossete force crossed the border from Vladikavkaz in June 1920 and attacked the Georgian Army and People's Guard. The Georgians reacted with vigour and defeated the insurgents and their supporters in a series of hard-fought battles. Five thousand people perished in the fighting and 20,000 Ossetes fled into Soviet Russia. The Georgian People's Guard displayed a frenzy of chauvinistic zeal during the mopping-up operations, many villages being burnt to the ground and large areas of fertile land ravaged and depopulated.

We have here an uncanny foreshadowing in reverse of what was to follow the August war of 2008 in South Ossetia.

Georgia's 1921 Menshevik Constitution and Loss of Independence

On 21 February 1921, Menshevik Georgia introduced its Constitution. Articles 107 and 108 read as follows in the publication by Kandelaki (1953:204):

107. Abkhasie (district of Soukhoun), Georgia Musulmane (district of Batum), and Zakhathala (district of Zakhatala), which are integral parts of the Georgian Republic, enjoy autonomy in the administration of their affairs.

108. The statute concerning the autonomy of the districts mentioned in the previous article will be the object of special legislation.

But no legislative arrangements were ever passed to define the nature of the autonomous districts, as the Red Army entered Georgia and on 25 February declared the establishment of Bolshevik power.

Abkhazia's Status 1921–1931

The encroachment of Bolshevism was this time welcomed in Abkhazia as a way to rid the republic of the unwanted and resented Georgian occupation; Gagra was already under Bolshevik control on 22 February, and Sukhum followed on 4 March. Abkhazia's Revolutionary Committee (headed by Ephrem Eshba, Nestor Lakoba, and Nikolaj Akirtava) addressed a telegram to Lenin and Stalin in Moscow on 26 March stating their intention to declare Abkhazia a Soviet Socialist Republic.⁵⁷ The telegram was

⁵⁷ For the text see: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/abkhazia/history/738-telegram-from-the-revolutionary-committee-of-abkhazia-of-march-26-1921.html>.

received on 28 March, and the declaration was duly made and announced by radio on 31 March: “By will of the workers, a new Soviet Socialist Republic—Abkhazia, has been born” (Akhajaja et al. 1961.26). The Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic was actually recognised by Georgia’s Revolutionary Committee on 21 May. But the first step in the demotion of Abkhazia’s status occurred on 16 December when a Special Union Treaty was signed (and ratified in February 1922) between the Abkhazian SSR and the Georgia SSR;⁵⁸ a military, political and financial-economic union was formed, but the conduct of foreign affairs was left entirely to Georgia. Already on 17 February 1922 the ‘Resolution of the First Assembly of the Soviets of Abkhazia on the Federation of Transcaucasian Soviet Republics and the Federation of the Abkhazian SSR with the Georgian SSR’ (Tulumdzhjan et al. 1976.27–29) was adopted, wherein was noted the ‘necessity of creating a Transcaucasian Soviet Federation’, and on 13 December 1922 the two republics formally entered that Federation.

After a national emblem and flag had been designed for Abkhazia in 1924–25,⁵⁹ the 3rd All-Abkhazian Assembly of Soviets met between 26 March and 1 April 1925 and adopted on their gathering’s final day the Abkhazian SSR’s Constitution; it is important to note that at this time autonomous structures within the young USSR had no right to constitutions of their own (Bgazhba & Lakoba 2007.320). Article 4 of the Constitution begins:

The Abkhazian SSR, united on the basis of a special union-treaty with the Georgian SSR, enters through it [sc. Georgia] the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic and, as a constituent-part of the latter, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Article 5 then asserts *inter alia* the following:

The Abkhazian SSR is a sovereign state which exercises state-power on its territory independently and irrespective of any other power [...] The Ab-

⁵⁸ It begins (Akhajaja et al. 1961.154):

The government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, on the one hand, and the government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, on the other, on the basis of the deep commonality of national bonds which unite the working masses of Georgia and Abkhazia, and taking into account that only a full unification of all the forces of both fraternal republics can guarantee both their interests and the interests of the glorious proletarian revolution, have decided to conclude the present treaty.

⁵⁹ See Marykhuba (1994.503–4) and Achugba (2007.94–5).

khazian SSR reserves the right of free exit from both the constituency of the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic and the USSR.⁶⁰

On 27 October 1926, changes were introduced into Abkhazia's 1925 Constitution. The document was entitled 'From the basic law (Constitution) of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, ratified by the 3rd session of the 3rd sitting of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia'. Article 2 reads:

The Republic of Abkhazia is a socialist state of workers and toiling peasantry which, by force of a special treaty, enters the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and through it the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic.

Despite having been said to 'enter' the Republic of Georgia, Abkhazia retained its republican title, as is clear from the heading of chapter II of this document, namely: 'On the mutual treaty-relations of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia' (Tulumdzhjan et al. 1976.138–39). However, the final reduction in Abkhazia's status occurred on 19 February 1931, when Abkhazia became a mere autonomous republic within Soviet Georgia.

Creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (1922)

A 'Project for the Constitution of the South Ossetian SSR', dated 6 September 1921, suggests that there must have been plans at that stage to assign full republican status to South Ossetia also. The first, second and final (fifteenth) articles read:

1. The S. Ossetian SSR is formed with its capital in Tskhinval. Note: the detailed establishment of the frontiers will be entrusted to a special mixed commission.
2. The S. Ossetian SSR exists in federative union with the Georgian SSR.
15. The Russian language will serve as the language of communication between the South Ossetian SSR and the Georgian SSR.⁶¹

But this plan was never realised, and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was created on 20 April 1922; interestingly, the North Ossetian

⁶⁰ Republished in Abkhazia in 1992 from volume VI of the 1964 Moscow publication *Assemblies of the Councils [Soviets] of the USSR, Union and Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics* [in Russian], pp. 686–700; see also Marykhuba (1994.489–502).

⁶¹ For the text, see *Adæmon Nykhas 1*, 1990, the journal of the People's Front of Ossetia 'National Assembly'.

Autonomous Region (within the Russian Federation) came into existence only on 7 July 1924, being raised in status to an Autonomous Republic on 5 December 1936. In the mid-1920s, there was an attempt to unite the two Ossetian formations, but this was unsuccessful, though Georgia's proposal to take control of both was also rejected.

Death of Nestor Lakoba and Implementation of Stalin's Nationality Policy

The Abkhazian leader, Nestor Lakoba, evidently enjoyed a rather close relationship with Stalin, who several times invited him to take up a post in Moscow. Though he could not prevent the downgrading of Abkhazia's status, he kept collectivisation at bay during his lifetime. But his rejection of Stalin's offer to replace Genrikh Yagoda as head of the Security Service (NKVD) in 1936 seems to have given his Transcaucasian rival, the Abkhazia-born Mingrelian Lavrent'i Beria, his opportunity, by taking advantage of Stalin's undoubted annoyance at this rebuff. It has been suggested (Argun 2007.20) that Beria's resentment of Lakoba arose out of the latter's support in the late 1920s for the proposal that Mingrelian should have full literary status⁶² and will have been buttressed by Lakoba's growing closeness to Stalin. Beria headed the Georgian Communist Party from 1931 and the Transcaucasian Federation from 1932 until its demise with the promulgation of Stalin's 1936 Soviet Constitution. He invited Lakoba to Tbilisi on 26 December 1936 after the latter's return from Moscow, where he had supposedly discussed with Stalin the transfer of Abkhazia from the Georgian SSR to the Russian Federation (Lakoba 1990.123). After a meal at the Beria residence, Lakoba fell violently ill and died, his corpse being returned to Abkhazia with all internal organs (which could have identified the cause of death) removed. Instead of reassignment to the Russian Federation, Abkhazia was subjected to sixteen years of intense kartvelianisation, starting in 1937⁶³ and continuing under Svan K'andid Chark'viani, Beria's successor as Georgian Party Boss, once Beria took over in 1938 as Stalin's

⁶² Literary status was supported by the leading Mingrelian of the late 1920s, Isak' Zhvania, and a number of publications (including newspapers and journals) did indeed appear until 1938, after which the only Mingrelian works to be published were in specialist books for folklorists and linguists. In the 1926 census, 'Mingrelian' was an accepted ethnic category, but since c.1930 Mingrelians have been classified officially (but arbitrarily) as 'Georgians' (Hewitt 1995).

⁶³ For the savagery meted out to members of Lakoba's family after his death, see Abbasogly (2009).

security-chief in succession to Nikolaj Ezhov, the executor of Stalin's Great Terror (1936–38). In 1952 Georgian Ak'ak'i Mgeladze, who had headed the administration in Abkhazia from 1943 to 1951, was briefly promoted from his post in Kutaisi to replace Chark'viani in Tbilisi in the wake of the so-called 'Mingrelian Affair'.⁶⁴

Given the young state's conviction that the best way to eradicate tsarism's legacy of illiteracy was to utilise local languages, the early Soviets were fully justified in including both Abkhaz and Ossetic among the languages to be awarded official literary status (the so-called 'Young Written Languages'). After their scripts were shifted to a roman-base in the campaign known as *latinizatsija* 'romanisation' in the late 1920s, something strange happened in the late 1930s. As the scripts for all the Young Written Languages were being replaced by Cyrillic-based orthographies between 1936 and 1938 (reflecting the abandonment of the Soviet appeal to internationalism in favour of the cultivation of *homo sovieticus*), Abkhaz and Ossetic (in *South Ossetia* only) saw their writing-systems shifted to a Georgian base.⁶⁵ Local Abkhaz-language schools were closed in 1945–6 to

⁶⁴ Stalin finally decided to undermine his long-time spy-master by moving against his place-men in Georgia, many of whom were Mingrelians. Chark'viani initially survived the purge by turning against his predecessor and patron but was eventually replaced by Mgeladze on 2 April 1952. Beria held on and after Stalin's death managed to secure the replacement of Mgeladze as Georgian Party Boss on 14 April 1953 by the Mingrelian Aleksandre Mirtskhulava. He in turn was replaced on 20 September 1953 after Beria's arrest by the Georgian Vasil Mzhavanadze, who was succeeded on 29 September 1972 by Eduard Shevardnadze. One of Shevardnadze's acts was to rehabilitate Mgeladze. For more information see Knight (1993) and Avt'orkhanovi (1990).

⁶⁵ The main Georgian specialist on Abkhaz but at the same time one of the most uncompromising anti-Abkhazian campaigners, Teimuraz Gvantseladze, has posted an article (*/apxazuri samts'ignobro enis kartul grapik'aze gadaq'vanis ist'oriidan/* 'From the history of the transfer of the Abkhaz literary language to Georgian graphics') on the site http://www.amsi.ge/istoria/div/gvanc_rus.html in which he discusses a meeting that took place in Sukhum on 4–5 December 1937. His information was gleaned from the minutes of the meeting that were uncovered in the personal archive of one of those in attendance, the Abkhazia-born Mingrelian historian Simon Dzhanashia. The majority of those present were Abkhazian scholars, journalists, writers, pedagogues and politicians, supplemented by interested parties from Tbilisi and Moscow. Gvantseladze argues that, since everything will have been decided in advance in the Kremlin and since the Abkhazian speakers voiced approval of the shift in orthography, noting (quite correctly, in fact) that the Georgian alphabet is the most appropriate basis for writing any of the indigenous Caucasian languages, Georgians cannot be held responsible for imposing the change. It is undoubtedly true that Moscow was behind the move, but one should not forget who was shaping policy in the Kremlin at the time. And, given that Stalin's Great Terror was in full swing by the end of 1937, is it really surprising that no Abkhazian voice was raised in dissent?

be summarily replaced by Georgian-language schools,⁶⁶ and then broadcasting and publishing effectively ceased in the late 1940s. When Stalin deported the Chechens and Ingush and abolished the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic in 1944, Ossetians were transplanted from mountain regions, including Georgia's Q'azbeg District, to fill vacated areas, and the south-eastern portion of North Ossetia was actually annexed to the Q'azbeg District; Map 5 shews this and the more westerly extension of Georgia's borders as far as Mt. Elbrus and even Klukhor even further to the north. From 1949 only Georgian was permitted in South Ossetian schools, even in the Dzhava District where there was no Georgian population, and from 1951 Georgian became the exclusive language of business (Zakharov & Areshev 2008 82–3).

Abkhazia was subjected to massive forced immigration of Kartvelians (mainly Mingrelians, as Gogebashvili had advocated half a century earlier, but including Georgians from such areas as Rach'a). The details were charted on the basis of archival material, garnered while it was still possible to do so,⁶⁷ and published without cuts or adaptation of the style of the original by Sagarija et al. (1992); the compilers stated their hope that the data would cast light on what had hitherto been one of the little-studied 'black spots' in Abkhazia's history. The change in the relevant demographics can be seen at a glance in the following part-figures for the censuses from 1897 to 1970:

Demographic changes in Abkhazia (1897–1970)

	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970
Abkhazians	58,697	55,918 ⁶⁸	56,147	61,197	77,276
Kartvelians	25,875	67,494	91,067	158,221	199,595
Russians	5,135	20,456	60,201	86,715	92,889

⁶⁶ Here is Mgeladze's 'justification' for this move (Marykhuba 1994.66; Salakaja 2009.32):

There is no such language as Abkhaz. The Abkhazians speak a corrupt form of Georgian, to correct which energetic measures are now being taken.

⁶⁷ The Abkhazian Research Institute, along with its rich library and archive, and the Abkhazian State Archives were deliberately torched on 22 October 1992 by the Georgian troops, who by then were firmly in control of Sukhum. Fire-fighters were kept away at gunpoint.

⁶⁸ Recall the discussion earlier in this chapter of the treatment of the Samurzaq'anoans in the 1926 census.

The editors of the 1952 edition of Gogebashvili's collected works appended the following revealing footnote to his aforementioned work of 1877 (vol. 1, p. 93):

Gogebashvili's ideas on the settlement of Abkhazia's empty territory by Georgians achieved their actual realisation under the conditions of Soviet power.

Summarising various works (including his own) on the changes to Abkhazia's demography following the mass-migrations to Ottoman lands in the 1860s-1870s, Achugba (2011) stresses various salient points:

- Late 19th-century Georgian intelligentsia acknowledged that up until 1864 Abkhazia was densely populated by the people who call themselves 'Apswa' but who are known to the Georgians as 'apxazi';
- The waves of inward-migration that began in the late 19th century and continued under the Mensheviks turned into a tide under Stalin and Beria from 1937;
- The general Soviet decree on the state's resettlement-policy was dated 27 May 1939, over two years *after* the start of the process in Abkhazia;
- Initially Kartvelians were settled in locations surrounding Abkhazian villages, but from 1941 resettlement also took place within Abkhazian villages in order to increase the rate of assimilation (especially when coupled with the later measure to ban the teaching of Abkhaz);
- Following the deaths of Stalin and Beria in 1953, the resettlement-programme into Abkhazia was officially halted on 1 June 1954, but, in practice, the process did not stop until 1956;
- As a result of the ethnic recategorisation of the Samuzaq'anoans and inward-migration, over the course of the 73 years between 1886 and 1959 the number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia actually fell by over 2,000, whilst that of the Kartvelians rose by over 154,000 (including those gifted the homes of the Greeks, Laz and Turks who were repressed and/or deported from Abkhazia in 1949).

Deportations: Actual or Threatened

The Abkhazians were not the only ethnic group living in Abkhazia to be affected by Stalin's nationality-policy. Abkhazia had a Greek newspaper until its closure on 1 October 1938 (Ioanidi 1990.46). In the second half of 1938 Greek schools, their Pedagogical Technical College and Theatre were also closed (Ioanidi 1990.49). At the time of the 1939 census, 34,621 Greeks

were living in Abkhazia, but they were deported in 1949, after the manner of a number of Soviet peoples despatched to the east over the previous decade, as they were deemed to be living in the wrong places. Ioanidi (Ioanidi 1990.51) estimates that, at the time of the deportation in 1949, Abkhazia's Greeks would have numbered around 41,000. When the first post-World War II Soviet census was conducted in 1959, Abkhazia's Greek population was a mere 9,101 (Ioanidi 1990.53). By 2006, Ioanidi estimated the number of Greeks in Abkhazia to be no higher than 1,500 (2006.73). In his introduction to Ioanidi's 1990 publication, Stanislav Lakoba gives this general account of the fate that befell Abkhazia's Greek community in 1949:

In 1949 some 30,000 Greeks were deported from Abkhazia to Kazakhstan. In their place there began a resettlement of persons originating from Western Georgia. Stalin's national policy in tiny Abkhazia took on an openly colonising character, and this forced expulsion of the Greeks is an especially tragic example of this kartvelianisation.

Abkhazia's few Laz residents were deported at the same time. Indeed, the Abkhazians too expected to share the same fate, but, according to Abkhazian pedagogue and politician, A. Chochua, speaking to students towards the end of his life and answering the question "Who was it who saved our nation at the last moment, Stalin or Beria?", the reason why such a plan was never activated was because it was felt that enough had been done to mingrelianise/georgianise the Abkhazians by the importation of so many Kartvelians and the virtual banning of their language (personal communication by the late Boris Gurgulia).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Gvantseladze closes his aforementioned web-article with this astonishing assertion (translated from the Georgian version):

A minimal number of russianisms, sovietisms and internationalisms entered the Abkhaz language in the years 1938–1954 in comparison with, let us say, Abaza, whilst georgianisms were borrowed in very slight quantities. Putting it another way, the years 1938–1954 were a period of preserving the ecological shape of the Abkhaz language. This 16-year period saved the Abkhaz language from the destructive pressure of the Russian language and for a time halted the process of russification, which we cannot say of the period following 1954, when the scale of russification began to create a serious danger for the future of the Abkhazian people and, regrettably, is still doing so even today.

I am grateful to Nino Amiridze for drawing the existence of this article to my attention. Individual readers must decide for themselves how accurately they believe this assessment characterises the sixteen years in question, when the specific change of script is set against the context of everything else that happened in Abkhazia during those particular years.

Genesis of the 'Ingoroq'va Hypothesis'

Had the Abkhazians actually been deported, it would have been convenient to have some 'justification' to hand. In this context it is relevant to mention a publication by the specialist on Georgian literature, P'avle Ingoroq'va. The work in question first appeared in two issues of the Georgian literary journal *Mnatobi* 'Luminary' (1950, 1 & 3) but is most readily accessible as chapter 4 in the author's massive book 'Giorgi Merchule' (1954).⁷⁰ Though Ingoroq'va nowhere mentions him, it was the Georgian historian Dimit'ri Bakradze (1889.272–273), as Abkhazian historian Zurab Anchabadze (1959.221) observed, who first proposed what has become known as the 'Ingoroq'va Hypothesis', namely that the Abkhazians were relative newcomers onto 'Georgian' territory, displacing the 'original' (Kartvelian-speaking [sic!]) Abkhazians in the 17th century and thus becoming known to the outside-world as 'Abkhazians'.⁷¹ For a few years in the mid-20th century, this was the canonical view of Abkhazian history within the USSR (or within Georgia, at least), and the most prominent Abkhazian literary figure of his day, Dmitri (Dyrmit') Gulia, was forced to recant the 'errors' in his own 1925 history of Abkhazia (see Gulia 1986 for its most recent reprinting) in a booklet (1951) to bring his views into conformity with Ingoroq'va's newly postulated historical 'facts'.

In the light of the anger in Abkhazia over Ingoroq'va and the wider dissemination of his hypothesis resulting from its republication in the 1954 book, two politicians, A. Labakhua and I. Tarba, were moved to write to the Presidium of the Communist Party on 19 April 1957 (Sagarija et al. 1992.557; Hewitt 1996.267):

Ingoroq'va strives 'to lay a foundation' for his anti-scholarly thesis by means of the falsification of historical documents and pseudo-scholarly linguistic exercises on toponyms.

Though criticised from a historical perspective by then-head of the Georgian Institute of History, Nik'o Berdzenishvili (1956) and on certain linguistic points by Georgian specialist on Abkhaz, Ketevan Lomtadze (1956), the 1954 book received favourable reviews for its 'contribution' to the history of 'western Georgia' from such Georgian academics as (classicist) Simon Q'aukhchishvili (1957) and (phonetician) Giorgi Akhvlediani

⁷⁰ The manuscript was submitted to the printers in 1951 before the deaths in 1953 of both Stalin and Beria.

⁷¹ Recall that the Abkhazians' self-designation is *Apswa*, in the singular, vs *Apswaa*, in the plural.

(1957). Despite the date of the publications of the aforementioned pro-Ingoroq'van reviews, after Stalin's and Beria's deaths (in 1953), their anti-Abkhazian campaign was reversed: a new, Cyrillic-based alphabet was devised for Abkhaz; schools were reopened; publishing and broadcasting were restarted; and Abkhazians were allowed a larger share of important posts than their numbers might otherwise have dictated, a fact that was used against them in the bitter debates that began in the late 1980s, when the Abkhazians were charged with being a favoured national minority. The change in the political climate saw Ingoroq'va himself virtually consigned to a 30-year academic limbo. But the reason why it is necessary to highlight the Ingoroq'va controversy is that its ramifications continue to echo loudly today, as detailed later in this work.

Abkhazians Start to Voice their Grievances

Even during Stalin's lifetime, some Abkhazians dared to raise their concerns over Tbilisi's implementation of anti-Abkhazian policies, such as the change of toponyms and the closure of schools. Young historian and future director of the Research Institute, Giorgi Dzidzaria, together with Bagrat Shinkuba, who died in 2004 having earned the reputation of being the finest writer Abkhazia has yet produced, and the young linguist Konstantin Shakryl, wrote a letter on 25 November 1947 to the secretary of the Party's Central Committee in Moscow voicing their complaints (Sagarija et al. 1992.531–36; Marykhuba 1994.81–87; Hewitt 1996.259–66). For their pains, the authors were subjected to years of slander and persecution, Shakryl being exiled to Moscow.

Thereafter, every decade (1957, 1967, 1978) saw disturbances in Abkhazia, manifesting local dissatisfaction with rule from Tbilisi; parallel South Ossetian protests took place in 1926, 1934, 1944, 1949, 1958 and 1974. On 10 December 1977, 130 Abkhazian intellectuals wrote to the Kremlin in connection with the Union-wide debate over the proposed new Brezhnevite Soviet constitution (Marykhuba 1994.164–187); they took the opportunity to stress the lack of higher educational opportunities for Abkhazians and to reiterate Abkhazian calls for the republic to be removed from Georgian control and placed within the Russian Federation, rendering it directly answerable to Moscow. The signatories lost their jobs. The ensuing demonstrations, which saw Georgian names on signposts painted over, were so serious that they were even reported in the Western media. Georgian Party Boss from 1972, Eduard Shevardnadze, was ordered to go to Sukhum

to calm the situation. He admitted that mistakes had been made in previous years with regard to policy towards the Abkhazians, stated that the Sukhum Pedagogical Institute would be transformed into Georgia's second-only university (thereby leap-frogging Batumi, which had hitherto been designated to be accorded this distinction), promised that for the first time there would be an opportunity for limited local television-broadcasting in Abkhaz (two short programmes per week), and Abkhaz would retain its status as one of the three official languages of the autonomous republic (alongside Georgian and Russian) in its 1978 Constitution, but Abkhazia would not be transferred to Russia.

The newly created Abkhazian State University had three sectors: Georgian (roughly two-thirds of the whole), Russian and Abkhazian. As it was to serve the needs of the whole of western Georgia, many students came from outside Abkhazia, and those that did thereby gained the right to remain as residents there. And so, whilst the award of a higher educational establishment was a kind of victory, it was in a sense almost pyrrhic, as it contributed to the increase in the Kartvelian percentage of Abkhazia's population.

On 30 November 1983, Communist Party General Secretary Yuri Andropov was the addressee of another letter from Abkhazia (Marykhuba 1994.370–1) concerning the appearance in 1981 of the final volume of the Georgian Soviet Encyclopædia, the volume devoted to the Georgian SSR. The letter described continuing distortions of the history of Abkhazia and quoted from the Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, dated 25 April 1978 'On measures for the further development of the economy and culture of the Abkhazian ASSR'. It stated that in it

was noted that over recent years much was done to extirpate the consequences of the errors committed earlier in order to regularise inter-communal relations; recognition was given to the stratifications of errors made in the past in connection with the Abkhazian nation. In this regard relevant organisations were charged in the said decree with the duty of:

1. "giving a decision on all disputed questions concerning the toponymy of the Abkhazian ASSR";
2. publishing a textbook on the history of Georgia, in which the recommendation was "by working with strictly scholarly data, to reflect the history of all the Republic's autonomous formations";
3. "strengthening control over publications concerned with the history of Georgia and Abkhazia by departments of agit-prop and scholarly and educational institutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia".

Five years have already passed since the day this decree was promulgated and up to now not one of the points mentioned above has been realised.

The authors went on to note that the publication of the Encyclopædia's volume in question was a perfect illustration of the lack of any control being exercised over publications relating to the history of Abkhazia; they further remarked that it was no coincidence that variations of the notorious Ingoroq'va hypothesis had found their way into the publication in question, since Ingoroq'va himself was a member of the editorial board.

Summation of the Period 1953–1979

General information for the period 1953–1979 is most readily accessible in the study made by American sovietologist Darrell Slider (1985). He demonstrated that, despite the reversal of the discriminatory policy towards the Abkhazians, their language and culture in the post-Stalin years, all was not well in comparison with the other regions of Georgia in the spheres of access to higher education, backwardness in industrialisation, and deprivation to the tune of 40% by the Tbilisi authorities in terms of the local budget as measured on a *per capita* basis.

Such was the situation, with discontent simmering, when Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in 1985.

CHAPTER THREE

PERESTROJKA, GLASNOST' AND THE ROAD TO WAR IN GEORGIA

The more successful the majority is in the political subjugation of the minority the more persistently it occupies itself with the appropriation of the minority's past and ascription of the latter to its own ancestors.

(Shnirelman, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia*, 2001, p. 348)

On 11 March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became First Secretary of the USSR's Communist Party. Four months later, ice-cold Andrej Gromyko was replaced as the USSR's long-standing Foreign Minister by Eduard Shevardnadze. This imaginative move resulted in the external face of the USSR becoming immediately bathed in the warmth and glow of Georgian *bonhomie* and at the same time probably threw foreign ministries around the world into a flap of uncertainty as they rushed to discover all they could about the man who had been Party Boss in the little-studied and thus poorly known backwater of Georgia from 29 September 1972 to 6 July 1985. But, of course, the *Tetri Melia* 'White Fox' was well-known in Georgia and to Georgia-watchers. The reputation he earned (whether deserved or not can be debated, but the question is irrelevant to our concerns) and the friendships in high places he contracted during his years in the service of the Kremlin were to bring Georgia huge advantages in the post-Soviet era. There were some, however, for whom the consequences would ultimately prove catastrophic.

Gorbachev introduced his plans for political reforms, a process that was christened *perestrojka* 'transformation',¹ in 1986. A further step along the path of relaxing the strictures that had been in place for decades was taken in 1988 when citizens across the Union were encouraged to raise for debate any grievances that they wished the authorities to address, this leg of the reform-process being known as *glasnost* 'openness'. The flood-gates duly burst open.

¹ In Georgian this is /gardakmna/. Rayfield (1992.269) observes why this term would not necessarily have positive overtones for Georgian-speakers, given its favourite status for Beria, who used it at the time of Stalin's purges to indicate 'the very first stages of self-incrimination'.

In Georgia the invitation prompted three main reactions: Georgians themselves gave their support to those who eventually voiced the argument that ultimately the only solution for Georgia was to right the wrong committed when the Red Army brought the country within the Soviet fold in 1921 by re-establishing Georgia as a fully independent state; the initial Abkhazian demand was for restitution of the full republican status that the region had been granted when proclaimed on 31 March 1921; South Ossetians had no wish to live in a different state from the one incorporating their North Ossetian kin. The mutually contradictory positions were plain and were to lead to bloodshed, although, had common sense prevailed, this outcome need not have been inevitable.

Georgian Dissidents Take Advantage of Glasnost'

There was a long tradition of dissidence in Georgia, where the two best-known figures were the Mingrelians Merab K'ost'ava (who was born in 1939, coincidentally on the date of Menshevik Georgia's 1918 declaration of independence, 26 May) and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, also born in 1939 (31 March) and son of one of Georgia's leading novelists of the century, K'onst'ant'ine Gamsakhurdia. The two worked together on various dissident activities from the mid-1950s. In the wake of the Helsinki Declaration, which enshrined the set of principles on human rights elaborated as the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe at the major international gathering held in Helsinki during July-August 1975, they jointly founded the Georgian Helsinki Watch Group. Their subsequent activities became an embarrassment to the then 1st Secretary of the USSR's Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev. Consequently, Shevardnadze had the pair arrested in 1977, and they were duly sentenced to a lengthy term of imprisonment and internal exile. After a public recantation on Soviet TV, Gamsakhurdia was released in June 1979. K'ost'ava, on the other hand, resolutely refused to bend and served out his full sentence, during which time a son committed suicide. He was freed and returned to Georgia in 1987. Though the local dissident community had viewed Gamsakhurdia with suspicion after his action in 1979, K'ost'ava apparently never lost faith in him and, by renewing collaboration with him, managed to restore his colleague's credentials with at least some members of this community.

K'ost'ava was among the founders in late 1987 of the *Ilia Ch'avch'avadze Society*,² and at their assembly in Tbilisi on 11 December 1987 the Society's Programme and Constitution were agreed. Adopting the principles of */ena, samshoblo, sarts'munoeba/* 'Language, Homeland, Faith' as their guiding light, the members included the following articles in their Programme (Gushagi³ 15, March 1988):

1. The only homeland of the Georgians is Georgia. And so, Georgia must remain the country of the Georgians. We recognise the rights of Georgia's non-Georgian population, but artificial changes in the numbers of ethnic groups must not do harm to the Georgian people;
4. Georgian nationality, surnames and all other rights must be returned to the Meskhian, Ingilo⁴ and monophysite Georgians;
7. The Georgian language must be constitutionally confirmed as Georgia's state-language;
8. In Georgian schools great attention must be paid to the teaching of Georgian language and literature, and of the history and geography of Georgia...;
9. Knowledge of the Georgian language must be obligatory for those who work in the service of the state.

Though at this stage no specific demand for independence was articulated, territorial ownership and emphasis on Georgian language and history are themes of crucial relevance to the problems discussed later in this chapter.

Although initial reports mentioned Gamsakhurdia as a member of the Society's Board, these were false. Giorgi (Gia) Ch'ant'uria (the surname is again Mingrelian) and Irak'li Ts'ereteli, both with dissident pasts, albeit a generation below their older partners, did, however, sit alongside K'ost'ava on its Board. After the state-authorities attempted to capitalise on the growing sense of nationalism and undercut dissident-led groupings by setting up in March 1988 a rival organisation, the Rustaveli⁵ Society (under the chairmanship of Ak'ak'i Bakradze), K'ost'ava, Ch'ant'uria and Ts'ereteli

² */ilia ch'avch'avadzis sazogadoeba/*. *Ilia Ch'avch'avadze* had been a leading light in the movement of national awakening in the late 19th century; poet, novelist, publicist and political activist, he was assassinated in 1907 (some say with the involvement of the young Stalin), and the 150th anniversary of his birth was celebrated with great pomp across Georgia in 1987, during which festivities he was canonised by the Georgian Church.

³ This Georgian-language journal (the title meaning 'Sentinel') was produced by the Paris-based Georgian diaspora.

⁴ More will be said about the Meskhians (aka Meskhetian Turks) and the Ingiloan Georgians later.

⁵ Shota Rust(a)veli is the famed author of the Georgian national epic 'The Knight in the Panther-skin', written during the reign of Queen Tamar (1184–1213). Nothing more is known of him.

formed the breakaway Ilia Ch'avch'avadze Society—Fourth Group,⁶ this time with Gamsakhurdia. On 30 August 1988, a manifesto was issued (Gushagi 17, October 1988) on behalf of the National Democratic Party of Georgia,⁷ which viewed itself at the time as a radical grouping still under the umbrella of the Ilia Ch'avch'avadze Society—Fourth Group. The steering committee included both Ch'ant'uria and Ts'ereteli, though the latter is more associated with his own National Independence Party.⁸

Article 12 of the National Democratic Party's Programme includes the following:

Three autonomous units were created in Georgia, and this when the territories of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and the South Ossetia Autonomous Region are historical territories that belonged to Georgia from the beginning, whilst the 'Autonomous Republic of Ach'ara' was in fact created purely on account of religious principles, which represents something entirely unexpected in the conditions of an atheist state.

The manifesto-statement goes on to note:

Our slogan is 'Georgia for the Georgians', which in no way implies suppression of the rights of the ethnic groups living on Georgian territory or limitation of their political freedom.

This slogan is usually ascribed to Gamsakhurdia, but clearly it was originally devised by Ch'ant'uria, though it came to be the universal rallying cry of Georgian nationalism, regardless of party-affiliation. One can only wonder how many of those waving relevant banners at subsequent meetings were either aware of, or cared about, the qualification attached to the slogan in the Programme; certainly its effect on Georgia's various minorities was unambiguous and alarming.

In December 1988, K'ost'ava and Gamskhurdia founded their own new party, the Society of Holy Ilia the Just.⁹ National Fora (sometimes styled Fronts) sprang up all over the USSR, and Georgia was no exception, but it was not until June 1989 that Georgia's National Front was finally formed under the leadership of Prof. Nodar Natadze. An insight into the attitude of K'ost'ava and Gamsakhurdia towards Abkhazia was revealed in a letter they sent to the International Association of Jurists on 12 December 1987

⁶ /ilia ch'avch'avadzis sazogadoeba—meotxe dasi/.

⁷ /sakartvelos erovnul-demok'rat'iuli p'art'ia/.

⁸ /erovnuli damouk'ideblobis p'art'ia/.

⁹ /ts'minda ilia martlis sazogadoeba/. For comprehensive accounts of movements and parties that have sprung up (and continue to spring up) in Georgia since the late 1980s see Aves (1991) and Wheatley (2005).

complaining that Boris K'ak'ubava, a Mingrelian pro-Georgian activist from Abkhazia, was still languishing in Siberia after his arrest at the time of the 1978 disturbances in Abkhazia. In the letter they elected to speak of 'the "so-called" Abkhazian ASSR' (Gushagi 15, March 1988, p. 13).

Results of Glasnost' in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Given what was said in the previous chapter about Abkhazians' long-held dissatisfaction with their post-1931 status and other aspects of events in Abkhazia after that date, and given the parallels in South Ossetia, it is hardly surprising that the opportunity was grasped in both regions to restate their cases for their distancing, or outright removal, from Tbilisi's orbit. Again it was writers, artists and academics (notably from the Research Institute and the State Museum) who were at the forefront of developments in Abkhazia.

The 20th anniversary of the formation of the National Forum of Abkhazia (NFA) *Ajdgylara* (in Russian *Edinenie*) 'Unity' was celebrated in December 2008; though created earlier in 1988, its first formal assembly took place on 13 December that year,¹⁰ but formal registration only happened on 6 June 1989. Its first chairman was the novelist Aleksej Gogua (other prime movers being the poet Gennadij Alamia and the musicologist Nodar Chanba). Article 5 of its Charter-Programme includes the goal (Chumalov 1995:123; pages 122–128 for the whole text):

To facilitate the free and equal usage of native languages, the mastering of the Russian language as the means of inter-ethnic communication, [and] the development of the language and culture of all the national groups living in Abkhazia.

It is the ethnic inclusivity inherent in the Forum's aims that perhaps deserves to be emphasised here.

Ajdgylara was one of the most active of such organisations not only in the Caucasus but also across the whole USSR. It naturally provided the hub for all the ethnically orientated social movements in Abkhazia at the time, except, of course, for those promoting the Georgian cause. Amongst other activities, it organised practical measures for the repatriation of as many members of the diaspora-Abkhazians from such places as Turkey, Syria,

¹⁰ For details on the organisation's history and activities see Shul'gina (2008) and Shamba (2008).

and Georgia's south-western province of Ach'ara as could be achieved, an ongoing aspiration which remains high on the agenda for national revival.

Perhaps influenced by developments in Abkhazia as well as in response to publications (such as the article by T'ariel K'vanch'ilashvili discussed below) starting to emanate from Tbilisi, some academics in Tskhinval took the initiative in founding their own national forum, *Adæmon Nykhas* 'People's/Popular Shrine' on 21 November 1988, which held its Constitutive Assembly on 13 January 1989; the group included Alan Chochiev, who became its first chairman, Zara Abaeva, a niece of the late renowned philologist Vasilij Abaev, and Kshar Dzhigkaev (Birch 1996.168; Wesselink 1992.20).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was sometimes the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute that was to the fore, whilst at other times Georgian-Ossetian relations were in the spotlight. There was such an interplay between developments in Tbilisi, Sukhum and Tskhinval that the resulting narrative of events is complex, and our depressing Transcaucasian tale was played out against the background of developments that were to lead to the collapse of the very super-state of which all actors were a part, something which was enthusiastically welcomed by only one of the parties concerned. Since it is important that readers understand the atmosphere in which decisions were taken, I shall quote liberally in what follows from original documents and articles which helped to define the relevant contexts and which should, at the same time, aid readers to draw their own conclusions as to (a) why events moved in the direction they did at this absolutely crucial period and (b) where the responsibility for what eventually ensued actually lay.

The 'Abkhazian Letter'

On 17 June 1988, the so-called 'Abkhazian Letter', anonymously authored, was sent to the 19th All-Union Party Conference in Moscow. In the version of it privately printed for limited distribution, it consists of 87 pages, with a further twelve pages carrying the signatures of sixty intellectuals (for the text, in Russian, see Marykhuba 1994.383–439). The Letter noted that, despite the concessions of 1978, autonomy essentially remained a fiction (with all important decisions taken in Tbilisi to advantage local Kartvelians, especially in the matter of land-tenure).¹¹ Its penultimate paragraph calls

¹¹ As already noted, any Kartvelian who enrolled at the Abkhazian State University thereby obtained a permanent right of residence in Abkhazia.

for “the removal of the Abkhazian ASSR from the makeup of the Georgian SSR and the restitution of Abkhazia’s status as a Soviet Socialist Republic, as it was proclaimed in the first years of Soviet power (1921–1931)”. It will be recalled that for most of those ten years Abkhazia had treaty-ties with Georgia, and so such a relationship must be assumed to have been implicit in the request for a resetting of the constitutional arrangements.

It is unclear when news of the existence of the Letter and the request it lodged in Moscow became known in Georgia. It may not have been until spring 1989, but, in the meantime, there started to appear in the Georgian press some articles whose content proved disturbing to one or more of the republic’s minority-communities. For example, literature-expert T’ariel K’vanch’ilashvili published an article devoted to Georgia’s demographic situation¹² in which he advocated measures to slow down the birthrate of those ethnic minorities who tended to produce large families (e.g. Georgia’s Azerbaijanis) and to raise the rate of those characterised by a low rate of birth (e.g. the Georgians themselves):

One should not hide the fact that in our republic the increase of the Georgians is very low, whilst that of representatives of other peoples is taking place at a hastened rate and quickly. If this tendency continues for long, there will come a time when we shall find ourselves in a minority in our very own republic ... If in Georgia the Georgians decline, whilst others increase at such a fast rate, this will inevitably at some stage lead us to the point whereby we shall be left with a Georgia without Georgians.

Georgia’s Draft Language-Law

A major worry was the Draft of a State Programme for the Georgian Language, which was published in Tbilisi in November to stimulate public debate—Georgia was not the only union-republic where such state-programmes were being considered. Some of the crucial clauses in the Draft were the following:

3. To create in all institutions and enterprises favourable conditions for citizens of non-Georgian ethnicity living in the Republic to master the Georgian language;
10. To work out proposals on the possibility of introducing the teaching of the Georgian language by obligatory rule in the Republic’s non-Georgian (Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Abkhaz and Ossetian) schools;

¹² /mere ra ikneba?/ ‘What will there be then?’ in *Lit’erat’uruli Sakartvelo* 30 September 1988, pp. 3–4.

15. To set up a *viva voce* test for applicants to higher educational establishments in the humanities in Georgian language and literature [and] to introduce for applicants to Russian, Armenian and Azeri sectors conversational practice prior to the entry-exam in Georgian language and literature;
16. To introduce theoretical and practical courses in the Georgian language in the faculties of Russian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, Armenian and Azeri language and literature in Georgia's higher educational establishments.

This citation is taken from p. 3 of *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* of 4 November 1988, where the entire Draft can be consulted. Being the weekly organ of the Writers' Union of Georgia, this outlet for the thoughts of the intelligentsia played a major role in helping to shape (and reflect) public opinion.

This exclusive concentration on the perceived needs of Georgian, coupled with total lack of interest in the well-being of the native languages of the republic's various non-Georgians,¹³ was a source of great concern to many (if not all) of them, for, as can be seen from the census-returns, many non-Kartvelians lacked competence in Georgian. Not only that, but in (especially southern) Abkhazia, Abkhazians were already trilingual (Abkhaz, Mingrelian, Russian), and so they perceived the potential imposition of Georgian as a threat to the least widely spoken tongue in their linguistic repertoire, namely Abkhaz, their mother-tongue. Whilst the expectation that all residents of Georgia should be (come) competent in Georgian might seem reasonable, the suggestion that Georgian was to be imposed aroused suspicions that this language-policy would simply be a vehicle for enforced assimilation, and the idea that passing a test in Georgian language and literature was a necessary precondition for entry into institutions of higher learning was widely suspected of being an excuse for barring that pathway to non-Kartvelians.

Reason for Ingoroq'va's Non-election to the Georgian Academy

The Draft Law just mentioned was viewed apprehensively by Georgia's minorities in general, but Abkhazian sensitivities might already have been roused by an item in an article published in the same weekly paper the previous month. Former Director of the Institute of Georgian Literature in Tbilisi, Prof. Aleksandre Baramidze, had explained how it happened that P'avle Ingoroq'va, whose 'contribution' to Abkhazian history was discussed

¹³ Including, of course, the Kartvelian Mingrelians, Svans and Laz.

in Chapter 2, had failed to be elected to the Georgian Academy of Sciences in the late 1950s. Here is what Baramidze revealed about the unsuccessful candidacy:¹⁴

I know for sure that Nik'o Muskhelishvili¹⁵ was not opposed to P'. Ingoroq'va's election to the Academy. The President was complaining that P'. Ingoroq'va did not have a diploma to shew that he had completed his secondary education (to say nothing of an academic degree or title). He was in favour of P'. Ingoroq'va being elected an academician through the Writers' Union in the category of Writer-Academician. In 1954, P'. Ingoroq'va's large monograph *Giorgi Merchule* came out, and the following year the next elections to the Academy were to be held. The Board of the Georgian Writers' Union proposed P'. Ingoroq'va's candidacy to fill the vacant place of a full Academician, but the matter never got as far as the election. Giorgi Akhvlediani published an enthusiastic review of P'. Ingoroq'va's *Giorgi Merchule* in the paper *Zarja Vostoka*.¹⁶ Ingoroq'va's well-known conception about the Abkhazians was shared and found complete favour in the review. Giorgi Akhvlediani's article complicated and soured the issue, causing an obvious, negative reaction in a certain part of Abkhazian society. And in accordance with the directive of our republic's then-leader, Vasil Mzhavanadze, the Writers' Union withdrew P'. Ingoroq'va's candidature.

The implication that Ingoroq'va's hypothesis was scholarly in nature and that he had suffered for purely political reasons was not only to re-emerge a mere six months later but has remained a gross irritant in Georgian-Abkhazian relations to the present day.

Tit-for-tat Exchanges Begin in the Press

A week after the appearance of the Draft Language Law, the pages of *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* hosted an article by Ap'olon Silagadze, in which he argued the following:

In Georgia there should be nothing non-Georgian; even a non-Georgian in Georgia is Georgian; he should be able to speak, read and write in Georgian and should be raised on Georgian literature, should support the Georgian spirit, and, finally, should not be judged a citizen of Georgia, if he does not possess all these qualifications.¹⁷

¹⁴ /saarkivo zanduk'idan/ 'From the archival chest' in the issue of 14 October 1988 pp. 10–11.

¹⁵ President of the Georgian Academy of Sciences at the time [BGH].

¹⁶ Tbilisi's Russian-language newspaper *Dawn of the East* [BGH].

¹⁷ /merme shignit aishalnen/ 'Then internally they rose up', 11 November 1988 p. 2.

This somewhat provocative concept seemed to be a direct product of the Draft Language Law, published shortly before. A salutary and measured rejoinder, albeit addressed to the writer of one of the earlier articles quoted, namely T'ariel K'vanch'ilashvili, came in the 9 December issue of the same paper. Interestingly, it was penned from the South Ossetian capital Tskhinval by Prof. Nafi Dzhusoiti, specialist in Ossetian literature and a Corresponding Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. He wrote:

Make your own mind up: today is it possible to turn multi-ethnic Georgia into a mono-ethnic republic? It is possible, if we turf out of the republic all non-Georgians, but this would entail us consciously embroiling the peoples in enmity (instead of brotherhood) and war. It is possible for us to turn Georgia into a mono-ethnic republic, if indeed we forcibly strip these peoples of their mother-tongues, their traditions, ethnic awareness, and memory, i.e. the mono-ethnicising of Georgia is possible in the case of the assimilation of the republic's population of other ethnicities at a stroke, in a trice, but this again would mean the stoking of feelings of hatred and enmity in place of brotherhood in the peoples' souls.¹⁸

Two letters published on 17 February 1989 under the rubric 'Problems for the State-Language' hinted at language-related problems in both South Ossetia and the predominantly Azerbaijani-populated district of Marneuli in southern Georgia. Nodar K'uch'ava, Director of the Association of Restorers, wrote to the then 1st Secretary of the Marneuli District to complain about both the lack of knowledge of Georgian (as reflected in the existence of signs only in Azeri or Russian, or in Russian alone, or even in the misspelling of any Georgian words actually in use) and the mistreatment of Georgian monuments in the area.¹⁹ Jurist Nodar Nebieridze complained about letters of instruction written in Georgian to Branch 3503 of the Tskhinval Savings Bank being returned (unactioned) to the sender with a demand to communicate exclusively in Russian.²⁰

¹⁸ /ra aris ch'eshmarit'i int'ernatsionalizmi? (ghia ts'erili t'ariel k'vanch'ilashvils)/ 'What is true internationalism? (Open letter to T'ariel K'vanch'ilashvili)', 9 December 1988, pp. 2–3. It had previously appeared in the Russian-language 'Soviet Ossetia' (issues 226, 227).

¹⁹ *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 17 February, 1989, p. 3. The mistreatment by Russian soldiers stationed near the Davit Garezhka cave-monastery complex in eastern Georgia (who had been accused of using the frescoes for target-practice) and potential damage to the environment that would result from the building of the proposed trans-Caucasian railway from North Ossetia through north-central Georgia were concerns already voiced by Georgian campaigners for several months.

²⁰ Printed beneath the aforementioned letter.

The 'Lykhny Declaration' (Abkhazia) and the Reaction

The next major development took place in the village of Lykhny in northern Abkhazia. This was where the ruling Chachba princely family had had their palace (prior to its destruction by the Russians after the famous insurrection against land-reform in 1866) and where Abkhazians traditionally gathered in the adjacent meadow to decide questions of national importance. On the initiative of Ajdgylara, a meeting was held there on 18 March 1989. Over 30,000 people reportedly attended. The resulting Declaration summarised the arguments of the earlier Abkhazian Letter, mentioning in passing and *inter alia* the publications of K'vanch'ilashvili and Silagadze cited above as illustrations of growing dangers to Georgia's non-Kartvelian residents, and called upon President Gorbachev and the Soviet authorities to reinstate Abkhazia's 1921 status as a full union-republic. Boris Adleiba, Abkhazia's then 1st Secretary (who up until that moment had largely been viewed as a tool of Tbilisi), was the first to sign; his signature was followed by those of other leading members of the Abkhazian authorities. But by the time the Declaration was submitted (31 March), it carried over 30,000 signatures.²¹ Those who present this as a purely Abkhazian move, instigated by the élite (Wheatley 2005.43; 57), should recall two important facts: firstly, the involvement of the Communist leadership of the Autonomous Republic was probably due to their realisation that the aims of Ajdgylara genuinely represented popular opinion, and thus they felt it in their best interests to swim with the tide and join in Ajdgylara's initiative²²—a parallel phenomenon was observable in Tbilisi where the communist authorities eventually began to ape the opposition; and, secondly, representatives of ALL Abkhazia's ethnic groups (including Kartvelians) were amongst the signatories. When news of this venture (coupled with the existence of the earlier Abkhazian Letter) reached Tbilisi, the results were explosive.

In an unattributed commentary, *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* informed its readers on 31 March (p. 2):

At a huge meeting in Tbilisi's Victory Park on 25 March, the Declaration of the anti-Georgian meeting held in the village of Lykhny (Gudauta Region) was discussed ... Introductory remarks were made as he opened the meeting by Chairman of the all-Georgian Rustaveli Society, writer and historian,

²¹ For the text see Marykhuba (1994.452–463) or Volkhonskij et al. (2008.94–102).

²² This is supported by the view later expressed to me that, in the eyes of the Abkhazians, Adleiba was forgiven for the way he had previously behaved in Abkhazia by this simple stroke of his pen.

Ak'ak'i Bakradze. Alarm characterised the speeches about the serious situation that has been created in the Abkhazian ASSR, about the anti-Georgian movement of one part of the Abkhazian population and their extremist leaders, and about the slanderous and criminal statement directed against the Georgian people and the Georgian SSR's Party and the Soviet authorities.²³

Gamsakhurdia was among the speakers.²⁴

Abkhazia too had witnessed meetings on 25 March. In northern Abkhazia, the editor of the Gudauta regional newspaper *Bzyp*, A. Vozba, included in his report (in the issue of 4 April)²⁵ the following:

On the initiative of the Ilia Ch'avch'avadze Society, a group of extremists of Georgian ethnicity held an unsanctioned meeting on 25 March this year in our republic's capital ... This gathering announced the time for holding a similar meeting in the village of Leselidze²⁶ on 1 April ... A bus returning home after the meeting ran into a crowd of nationalists waving provocative flags; unbridled, they were proclaiming: "We shall not give this land to the Russians! Georgia only for the Georgians!" ... But fact is fact: we Abkhazians have been living on this land in friendly fashion with Georgians, Russians, Armenians, Greeks and people of other ethnicities, and no provocateurs will be able to upset our friendship. Our demand is just—restoration of the status of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic, proclaimed in 1921.

Elsewhere (in Sukhum and Gal) liquidation of Abkhazia's autonomous status and its direct subordination to Tbilisi were being demanded by Kartvelian activists.

²³ /dagmes apxaz ekst'remist'ta gamoxdomebi/ 'They condemned the speeches of the Abkhazian extremists'.

²⁴ As if devoid of meaningful material but still desperate to make some kind of derogatory statement about the Abkhazian national movement, the editor then devoted pages 4–5 of the same edition to dismissal of a speculative (and lame) theory postulated in the 1960s by Russian linguist G. Turchaninov to the effect that the language of a puzzling ancient inscription on the Maykop Stone (found in the 1960s) could be understood, if interpreted as Abkhaz. However superficially appealing this might have been to the average Abkhazian in the street, it was hardly relevant to the dispute, which was developing in dangerous directions.

²⁵ Translated into Georgian and published as /demok'rat'ia ts'esrigs moitxovs/ 'Democracy requires order' in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 5 May 1989 p. 3. The *Bzyp* newspaper, or perhaps (given its size) newsheet, under Vozba's editorship was a most valuable source of information, as, unlike the main papers published in Sukhum (especially the Georgian-language /sabh'ota apxazeti/ 'Soviet Abkhazia'), it was free from Georgian pressure and/or control; each issue was eagerly awaited and snapped up in the capital. The more substantial but less frequently published outlets of Ajdgylara itself (*Ajdgylara* in Abkhaz, edited by G. Alamia; *Edinenie* in Russian, edited by N. Dzhonua) also played a crucial role in this regard.

²⁶ Today known as Gjachrypsh in the very northwest of Abkhazia, near the border with Russia.

On 1 April, the main oppositionist, Merab K'ost'ava, was one of the speakers at a meeting in the northern Abkhazian town of Tsandrypsh (officially known at the time as Gantiadi).²⁷ Introduced by local leader of the Georgian nationalist movement who was home from Siberian exile, Boris K'ak'ubava, K'ost'ava declared:

It is you who are the core-inhabitants of this territory. If you were not to understand this and were to go against it, you will stand guilty before your brothers. As for those separatists who wrote the letter about splitting Abkhazia from Georgia, they are traitors to united Georgia (Applause). Friends, I must tell you concretely and briefly, surely you know that the territory of Abkhazia was and will remain Georgian territory ... Those who signed this letter are traitors to Georgia and will be punished (Applause). If the government doesn't take measures, they will suffer all the same, even if it takes 10 years (Applause).

The transcript of the meeting ends thus:

The Abkhazians are coming ... (Whistling).

The very next day, now back in Tbilisi, K'ost'ava, having attacked for being of Turkish descent the head of the administration in Abkhazia's Gudauta Region, Konstantin Ozgan, a veritable *bête-noire* to Georgian nationalists and a member of the Abkhazian group whose arrival in Tsandrypsh had caused the previous day's meeting to break up, stated:

We are constructing a black day for the little group of Abkhazian separatists! In truth these Abkhazians don't have enough brains; in reality let them thank us that they are living on our land. If they want anything, let them ask the Georgian government for it. They live in Georgia, and any questions should be decided via the Georgian government. We'll teach the Abkhazians sense and reason!!! Here it's the Georgian not the Russian government that rules!!! (Applause).

The 9th-April Tragedy (Tbilisi)

Tbilisi remained the focus of developments and within a week was to grab the whole world's attention. It is important to understand how events

²⁷ All Georgian or georgianised toponyms were consigned to the dustbin of history after Abkhazia's victory in the war of 1992–93. One consequence of this is that maps produced since then according to the Georgian view of the world (such as the 2008 12th edition of Times Books' *Times Atlas of the World*) present a totally false picture of realities on the ground. Anyone trying to find, for example, the resort of Pitsunda (Amzara in Abkhaz) will seek it in vain, for it appears as Bich'vinta.

unfolded, and so I quote from the description given in the main Georgian daily *K'omunist'i* 'Communist' (12 April, 1989, quoted from Gverdts'iteli 1990:44):

At 3 o'clock during the day on 4 April, a meeting of student youths was held in the grounds of the Tbilisi State Medical Institute; it was organised by the so-called 'Press Club' of this institution. About 2,000 persons gathered there. Z. Gamsakhurdia made a speech at the meeting in the name of the unofficial associations. In connection with the 'question of Abkhazia', he called on those in attendance to facilitate mass oath-takings and the organising of manifestations across the Republic. On the same day at 7 o'clock in the evening, another wild meeting took place in the business hall of Tbilisi State University which adopted a resolution calling for national disobedience towards the government of the Georgian SSR in connection with the question of the Abkhazian ASSR, the formation of a temporary government for Georgia, and the annulment of autonomous formations within Georgia. Then the majority of the meeting's participants set off towards Government House of the Georgian SSR, where a new meeting started with the participation of up to about 10,000 persons. It ended the next day at 5 o'clock in the morning, when one group of the young people declared a hunger-strike. 5 April—the meeting continued this day, *but the problem of Abkhazia moved into second place. In the speeches of the orators, central attention was given to the taking of practical measures for the Georgian SSR to leave the constituency of the USSR ...* Abusive words could be heard directed against the Republic's Communist Party and government; the general atmosphere clearly took on an anti-Soviet character. [Stress added]

The crowd continued to grow, paralysing the very heart of the Georgian capital for the next four days. Soviet troops were positioned in surrounding streets. K'ost'ava and Gamsakhurdia stood by as the Patriarch of the Georgian Church, Ilia II, called upon the demonstrators to reassemble in church, as he had information that the order for forceful dispersal was about to be given. They refused, and at 4 a.m. on 9 April the troops brutally broke up the demonstration. The action caused twenty deaths (mostly women and girls) plus numerous injuries, the effects of either the gases employed or wounds inflicted by the spades being wielded by the sappers who carried out the operation.

Unsurprisingly, the Georgian 1st Secretary, Dzhumber P'at'iashvili, who had held office since 6 July 1985, was speedily replaced (14 April), to be succeeded by Givi Gumbaridze, under whom the Communist authorities seemed reluctant to oppose the anti-Soviet opposition. K'ost'ava and Gamsakhurdia had been arrested on 9 April but were released after forty-five days in detention. With Georgia seemingly under threat, paramilitary bands began to be formed; the one that would acquire the strongest influ-

ence was called the *Mkhedrioni* 'Cavalry', established on the initiative of Dzhaba Ioseliani, a convicted bank-robber and theatre-critic, who claimed that they would localise and put down inter-ethnic conflicts allegedly inspired by the Kremlin. This band would prove itself, especially in the years following the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia, to be a collection of unsavoury ruffians, whose activities were by no means directed exclusively against non-Georgians.

That the essential demand of the demonstration was Georgia's separation from the USSR (and not agitation over the situation in Abkhazia) is confirmed by the following description supplied by National-Democratic Party leader Gia Ch'ant'uria (Chanturija, 1990.58):

The action, begun through our efforts in Tbilisi on 4 April, acquired other forms: banners about Abkhazia disappeared, and all attention was concentrated on the fundamental demand—the independence of Georgia ... I share the view of Prof. Nodar Natadze,²⁸ who wrote in the paper 'Tbilisi' on 25 April, "The main rallying-cry of the meeting which lasted several days in Tbilisi was the separation of Georgia from the USSR".

It is inconceivable, firstly, that a demonstration of such a size, duration and intensity of emotion would have convened solely in reaction to events in Abkhazia and, secondly, that such forces would have been deployed to deal with an anti-Abkhazian manifestation. However, although a telegram of condolence was received from the Abkhazian authorities (Gverdts'iteli 1990.9), Abkhazians were seen as bearing some kind of secondary responsibility for the 9 April tragedy, and a full-scale anti-Abkhazian campaign was unleashed.

South Ossetia also became caught up in the backlash. On 4 April, the newspaper *Bzyp* had printed a letter (dated 26 March) entitled 'Dear Abkhazian Friends!' from Alan Chochiev, leader of Adæmon Nykhas, in which he wrote:

The guarantee of our unshakeability is our friendship and (for the time being) only moral support for our brave Abkhazian friends and brothers! The people of Ossetia support you; our authorities too support you, except that they do not yet have sufficient boldness.²⁹

²⁸ National Front leader [BGH].

²⁹ The letter was translated into Georgian with the title /dzvirpaso apxazo megobrebo! 'Dear Abkhazian Friends!' and published in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 5 May, p. 3. Also, no note of condolence for the 9 April deaths seems to have been sent to Tbilisi from Tskhinval.

Anti-Abkhazian Agitation Intensifies

In the wake of the assembly at Lykhny, in early April, students in the Georgian sector of the Abkhazian State University began a sit-down strike. Included in their twenty-two demands were:

- the sacking of Aleko Gvaramia, Rector of the Abkhazian State University, on the grounds that he had been a signatory to the Lykhny Declaration;
- punishment for all University employees who had signed the Declaration;
- a complete change of editorial staff at the University newspaper.

On 4 April, the Presidium of the Georgian Writers' Union discussed what had taken place in Lykhny together with the Abkhazian Letter. A group of writers was tasked with producing an 'objective answer' to 'the data presented in a twisted, one-sided, pseudo-scholarly, and extremely tendentious manner' in the Letter, and the composition of the said reply fell to classicist and literary critic Roman Miminoshvili and novelist Guram Pandzhik'idze.³⁰ The final draft appeared in Georgian in *Lit'erat'uli Sakartvelo* on 1 December 1989³¹ and was published in a pocket-sized 119-page booklet in 1990.³²

³⁰ I summarised my initial assessment of this booklet in these words (Hewitt 1993:283):

In style and content it can all too sadly serve as a typical example of Kartvelian works of the genre, with its admixture of arrogance, irony, aprioristic argumentation, avoidance of the issues, and the inevitable downright abuse.

For an illuminating comparison of the language employed in the Georgian press at this time with that characterising the ritual denunciations in the Georgian press during Stalin's Purges (1936–38) see Donald Rayfield (1992).

³¹ The initial text was apparently ready in the summer, but additional material was added to take account of the incidents in Abkhazia in the middle of July. The article was called /simartle, mxolod simartle!/ 'Truth, only the truth!'

³² Entitled /simartle apxazetze/ 'Truth about Abkhazia'; a Russian translation (somewhat modified, it must be noted) came out first in the Russian-language paper *Literaturnaja Gruzija* 'Literary Georgia' and then as a parallel booklet with the title /Pravda ob abkazii/. An Abkhazian response can be read in numbers 6 and 7 of the paper *Edinenie* (December 1990), written by Vitalij Sharia and Guram Gumba.

Revival of the 'Ingoroq'va Hypothesis' (and Variants)

Historian Prof. Nodar Lomouri weighed in with an essay published on 7 April in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* (p. 4) entitled 'How should we understand the ethnonym "Abkhazian"?'.³³ In it he made the following call:

It is necessary and urgent to investigate the problems through the combined resources of representatives of different areas of scholarship. But the main thing is that a path be opened for truly scholarly and unbiased research into the history of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz language, the culture created over centuries on the territory of Abkhazia, the toponymy of Abkhazia and other spheres.

This was tantamount to an invitation to revisit the debate of the 1950s, and literary critic Rost'om Chkheidze duly obliged with relish. In *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* of 21 April (pp. 4–5),³⁴ he raised the issue of the non-reprinting of the offensive part of Ingoroq'va's 1954 book *Giorgi Merchule* in the 7-volume edition of his works planned from 1959 and took the opportunity to rehash the main controversial points of the work:

- the inhabitants of Abkhazia in ancient and mediæval times were speakers of Georgian [*recte* Kartvelian—BGH] dialects;
- the relevant etymologies discussed in the work are Georgian;
- the Abkhazian Kingdom was, thus, a Georgian polity;
- the terms 'Abkhazia(n)' derive from the Georgian tribal name /mosxi/.

Chkheidze cites the favourable reviews that the general outlines of the said theory received in the pages of the journal *Mnatobi* [Luminary] 2 (1957), as detailed in Chapter 2, airily dismissing counter-arguments as being totally non-scholarly. Naturally, he elected to ignore both the 1956 demonstration by Georgia's leading abkhazologist, Ketevan Lomtadze, that Ingoroq'va's Georgian-based etymologies are simply unsustainable as well as the burgeoning compendium of purely scholarly articles, written both at the time and since, which quite undermine every aspect of the said hypothesis. Chkheidze went on to remind his readers of the political intervention which prevented both the reprinting of *Giorgi Merchule* and the author's election to the Georgian Academy, observing:

³³ /rogor unda gvesmodes etnonimi 'apxazi'?/.

³⁴ In an article entitled /p'avle ingoroq'vas txzulebata meore t'omis gamo/ 'On the second volume of the works of P'avle Ingoroq'va'.

Concessions were made, and today we are reaping precisely the consequences of this ... This is how it was and this is how things proceeded in those dark years, as well as today. This state of affairs certainly has to change.

In a later article he went to call for Ingoroq'va's academic rehabilitation.³⁵

A literary battle then ensued, played out on the pages of various papers, journals and books. Representatives of each side (historians, linguists, literature-experts, journalists, and commentators who claimed no special expertise) addressed a multitude of issues such as:

- the position of the Abkhaz language;
- the history of Abkhazia;
- the meaning of the term 'Abkhaz(ian)' (or its translation-equivalents in different languages);
- the settlement of the territory of Abkhazia.

The Abkhazian position is straightforward, namely:

Abkhaz is a North West Caucasian language; speakers of Proto-North West Caucasian came from the south, and Abkhaz probably developed on the territory of Abkhazia, just as the sister-languages (Ubykh and Circassian) developed *in situ* once their ancestral speakers had continued moving north over the Caucasian mountain-range, and it was only after the great migrations in the closing decades of the 19th century that non-Abkhazians first appeared on Abkhazian soil (though the precise demarcation between Abkhazia and Mingrelia will have fluctuated, depending on the comparative power of these two princedoms at different times in history); Abkhazia suffered political repression to the advantage of Georgia in the years 1918–21 and again under Stalin and Beria, when falsification of Abkhazian history reached its apogee in the work of Ingoroq'va; whereas the Kremlin recognised these errors after Stalin's death, took steps to see that Tbilisi made amends, and allowed the publication of scholarly works presenting an accurate history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians, it failed to rectify Stalin's major decision of 1931 to subordinate Abkhazia to Tbilisi and refused to remove Abkhazia from Georgian jurisdiction for fear of the consequences that would stem from an enraged Tbilisi.

There are basically two Georgian positions:

1. For shorthand, this might be styled the Ingoroq'van view, whereby the Abkhazians we know today are assumed to be relative late-comers to the 'Georgian' territory of Abkhazia (exactly how late depends on

³⁵ Though Ingoroq'va (1893–1990) never achieved the status of academician, the street in Tbilisi on which stands the Linguistics Institute of the Georgian Academy of Sciences was eventually renamed Ingoroq'va Street.

which commentator one chooses to follow),³⁶ whilst the original 'Abkhazians' were a Kartvelian-speaking tribe.

2. The less extreme position is that Abkhazia always had two aboriginal peoples, Abkhazians and Kartvelians, though the latter were always in the majority.

Either way, Abkhazia is deemed an 'inalienable, primæval part of Georgia' (/sakartvelos dzirdzveli gamouq'opeli nats'ili/), the mediæval Kingdom of Abkhazia was a Georgian polity, and Russia³⁷ alone bears responsibility for Georgia's woes by creating 'illegitimate' autonomies on Georgian soil, designed ultimately to frustrate any Georgian moves to secede from the Union, and by manipulating Centre-minority relations within Georgia ever since.

This stance, which continues to this day, signally fails to explain, of course, how such a malign external force could possibly have engineered the range of publications, verbal lashings, or socio-political actions emanating from, or orchestrated by, Tbilisi which the Abkhazians and South Ossetians (not to mention certain other minorities living within Georgia's Soviet frontiers) found so offensive and alarming that they judged the safer option for them was not to join Georgia's drive for independence, whilst recognising Georgians' undeniable right to determine their own destiny. They elected to follow Georgia's precedent and seek to exercise their own right to self-determination, innocently expecting their choice to be respected by the international community in line with Article 1 (paragraph 2) of the Charter of the United Nations, which states that the second purpose and principle is:

To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.

³⁶ Some linguistic arguments advanced to provide variations on Ingoroq'va's theme have been countered in my own articles. I refer readers to Hewitt (1992a; 1993; 1993a; 1995). My paper (1993b) is of particular importance, as it counters an especially egregious example of the genre, produced in both Georgian and Russian versions by Academician Prof. Tamaz Gamq'relidze, Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, who is well-known in Western linguistic circles for his collaborative work with Vjacheslav Ivanov on Proto-Indo-European and, though somewhat less so, for his collaborative work with the late Givi Mach'avariani on proto-Kartvelian. Gamq'relidze's paper follows in the same journal my own translation of his Georgian original, which I decided to render into English so that readers unable to cope with either the Georgian or the Russian versions could experience the full flavour of the tendentious argumentation expounded therein.

³⁷ Be it Soviet or post-Soviet.

The former of the two Georgian positions just adumbrated is that two types of Abkhazians need to be differentiated, and this is the reason why adherents of this view use the native Abkhazian self-designation 'Apswa(a)' to refer to those they regard as having usurped the original Kartvelian Abkhazian ethnonym along with their lands. Thus, for a Georgian (or a supporter of the Georgian stance in the conflict) to use the term 'Apswa(a)' is a calculated insult to the Abkhazians, rather than the compliment one might otherwise suppose, given the inherent implication of the hypothesis that Abkhazians have no historical claim to the territory, being relatively recent interlopers on 'Georgian' soil.

The notion of dual aboriginal status for Abkhazia is most closely associated today with the name of the historian Prof. Mariam (Marik'a) Lortkipanidze,³⁸ though it was perhaps first introduced by Prof. Nik'o Berdzenishvili. Now, Berdzenishvili was mentioned in Chapter 2 as one of those who actually criticised Ingoroq'va in 1956. The explanation that has been advanced to account for the apparent inconsistency in his positions is that, as Director of the History Institute, Berdzenishvili had no option but to bow to pressure from the authorities and follow the then politically correct line, whereas his actual opinion (and, according to this interpretation, the ungarished truth) is rather to be found in volume VIII of his collected works (1975; 1990), to which we shall allude below. In similar fashion, it is argued that what happened in, and with respect to, Abkhazia during the Menshevik years or later when Stalin and Beria reigned supreme was not dictated by any anti-Abkhazian policy but was rather normal socio-political development, accompanied by unbiased analysis of the history of western Georgia,³⁹ whereas the State's post-Stalin stance allowed

³⁸ I should like to take this opportunity to explain that the ascription to me of the editorship of one of Lortkipanidze's works (namely, *Georgia in the nth-12th Centuries* by Mariam Lordkipanidze [sic], Tbilisi, Ganatleba, 1987) was done without my knowledge or approval. The extent of my contribution was to check and correct the English of the translation. The ascription was no doubt meant at the time to be a compliment, but it is now more of an embarrassment.

³⁹ We can illustrate this by noting the response by the aforementioned Nodar Lomouri in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 20 October to a rejoinder to his earlier article by Abkhazian ethnologist Prof. Shalva Inal-Ipa, who published an article entitled 'About my people, its language and homeland' in the Russian-language *Sovetskaja Abxazija* 'Soviet Abkhazia' on 16 September. Lomouri alluded to Ingoroq'va, saying (p. 3):

I personally do not agree with P. Ingoroq'va's views, but it is a pure, scholarly hypothesis. Abkhazian scholars from the very start did not like this hypothesis and worked so hard that they managed not only to put a stop to the book but halted the publication of several volumes of his collected works. An alarming fact, but fact it is!

Abkhazians to spread distortions of historical truths. The arguments continue to the present day.⁴⁰

The 'War of Linguists and Historians'

This summative outline of the positions of the parties to the conflict has been necessary because it was at this juncture in 1989 that the arguments took off again in the modern period and provided a kind of ideological backdrop to developments both on the street and in the political arena in what has been characterised as the 'war of the linguists and historians'. It is impossible here to mention (let alone examine in detail) each claim and counter-claim, though some examples are about to be quoted to give a flavour of the content of the Georgian media during this critical period. The style and tone of the materials produced by the advocates of the Georgian position are striking, and readers should try to imagine what the atmosphere must have been like for Georgia's various minority-communities—faced with similar and sustained outpourings across the entire Georgian media, they were left wondering to whom they would be able to turn for protection, should the need arise, and whether such protection would actually be forthcoming. The Soviet Union still existed, and so, even if anyone in the outside-world even knew, or cared, about the predicament in which they feared they might soon find themselves, what could they do about it?

Poet T'ariel Ch'ant'uria, another Mingrelian, decided to stir the pot with a lecture, published in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 5 May (p. 4).⁴¹ In it he attempted to draw a distinction between two Abkhazias:

Men of Turkish stock, men of Persian stock, in a word men of the Muslim faith have their eye on Abkhazia! ... Today on this most ancient of Georgian lands there are two Abkhazias: one of historical Christian culture, the Abkhazia which is the lawful inheritor and carrier of Georgian culture ... and the other, Muslim Abkhazia.

The main target of the article was the Abkhazian writer Fazil Iskander, who writes in Russian and is deemed to be among the finest modern writers in this language. He is taken to task for a story in which the main character drinks his enemy's (a Georgian's) blood as a mark of revenge. Poet

⁴⁰ See such large-scale works as Agwazhba & Achugba (2005; 2008) or Anchabadze & Argun (2007), on the Abkhazian side, vs Gamakharia et al. (2007) or P'ap'askiri (2009), on the Georgian side.

⁴¹ /apxazeti-namdvili, apxazeti-mogonili.../'Abkhazia real, Abkhazia imagined...'

Ch'ant'uria concludes from this that Iskander is an apologist for cannibalism and proceeds to opine: "Not unexpected from propagandists of cannibalistic passions would be an attempt to bring peoples into conflict."

Alarmed at the nature of the response across the Georgian media to the Lykhny Declaration, a Mingrelian lady, T'. Bok'uchava-Gagulia, who worked in the Abkhazian educational system, had published a letter entitled 'To preserve friendship' in the newspaper *Bzyp* (11 April). It was translated into Georgian for publication two weeks later in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* (28 April, p. 4).⁴² Part of the letter reads:

I was myself in attendance and saw that the Abkhazians behaved in a civilised and correct manner. They spoke of their desire to live better and with greater freedom, selflessly to serve *perestrojka*, and to look after their own territory themselves ... The Abkhazians never persecuted anyone but displayed hospitality towards all persons living on their land. I am a Georgian; I was born here; I have an Abkhazian husband. Within an Abkhazian family I have learned to prepare Abkhazian dishes; my Abkhazian friends prepare Georgian dishes. Their Abkhazian grandmother used to sing delicate and melodious lullabies (just like Georgian songs) to my children. My younger daughter married an Abkhazian. In our family everyone speaks in Russian. My 95 year-old mother-in-law has not once censured me for not knowing Abkhaz ... But in Tbilisi, where I spent a couple of days at a republican pedagogical conference, I was met by a wholly different picture. I was surprised and shocked that, on hearing Russian speech, they turn their backs on you.⁴³ My heart sank, and I felt ashamed on behalf of my fellow countrymen ... As for the award of union-republican status to Abkhazia, this will be a beneficial act for the representatives of all ethnic groups living in our republic.

A storm of protest broke around the head of Madam Bok'uchava-Gagulia in May, when a flood of letters from outraged readers was published. Two full pages (2–3) of *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 19 May 1989 were given over to such attacks. The letters are prefaced by the following editorial statement:

In recent times inter-ethnic relations have taken on a rather unpleasant aspect in the Republic; anti-Georgian manifestations of different forms and content have grown frequent. Primarily we refer to the assembly in the village of Lykhny and the so-called 'Abkhazian Letter', which, thanks to its provocative intent, struck a spear into the age-old fraternity and friendship between the Georgians and Abkhazians. It could be said that even the ter-

⁴² /megobrobas unda gavuprtxildet/ 'We must take care of friendship' was the Georgian title.

⁴³ I personally witnessed such practices in Tbilisi in the mid-1970s—BGH.

rible 9th-April tragedy is directly linked to it. It is a well-known truth that the Georgian people have always treated with exceptional tolerance all nationalities resident on their territory; they have shared together with them strife and joy equally; they have given them physical and moral support; they have never deemed themselves superior to others; on such good-neighbourly, internationalist principles have the Georgian people lived and come through to the present day. All the more offensive and beyond understanding are the baseless pretensions and unjust demands of the representatives of certain other peoples living on our soil. What else should we style the behaviour of A. Chochiev, one of the leaders of the South Ossetian informal associations, who published an anti-Georgian letter in Gudauta's paper *Bzyp*? ... We should add here that Literary Georgia's editorial board has in no way judged the 'ideas' formulated in A. Chochiev's letter to be the general view of the Ossetian people ... We reprinted A. Chochiev's letter and made the whole of Georgia (including the population of South Ossetia) acquainted with it so that once again we might shape society's opinion as to who is who, who stands alongside whom, and who is stirring up the water between fraternal peoples. The same can be said also of Madam T'. Bok'uchava-Gagulia's letter. Tendentiousness, superficiality, and one-sided assessment of events—such, in short, is the characterisation we might give its pathos and content. By the way, we have received numerous responses to it from Georgia's different regions. They all resemble one another like identical twins; T'. Bok'uchava-Gagulia's letter has riled all the authors equally. We have decided to publish a portion of the responses after judicious shortenings so that society's view should be complete and clear.

The letters then appear under the editorial rubric 'What should I say to such a Georgian...?'.⁴⁴ One of the arguments used to lambast Madam Bok'uchava-Gagulia was that she was ignorant of her 'native language'. In her response entitled 'Open Letter to the editorial boards of the republican papers "People's Education", "Youth of Georgia", "Literary Georgia"', published in *Bzyp* on 6 June, she makes a significant comment that has relevance to another potential problem for Georgia(ns):

I have full command of my native language. But, sadly, there is no possibility to write it, for it is Mingrelian, the writing of which has been expunged from the face of the earth since 1927.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ /me iset kartvels ra vutxra...?/.

⁴⁵ Probably a slip for 1937, the year when the most prominent Mingrelian politician prior to Lavrent'i Beria, Isak' Zhvania, was liquidated in Stalin's Terror. At least, this is the fate ascribed to him by Zviad Gamsakhurdia in his lengthy article "The problem of Mingrelia: Isak' Zhvania and Mingrelia's "autonomy" in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 3 November 1989, though the Soviet Georgian Encyclopædia gives his death-date as 1946. Zhvania had favoured full literary status for Mingrelian and autonomy for Mingrelia from the 1920s, but such aspirations were eventually quashed by Stalin and Beria.

Around the second week of May there began to circulate “in the name of Georgia’s intelligentsia in association with: The Society of Holy Ilia the Just (Ch’avch’avadze); The National Democratic Party; [and] The Georgian Helsinki Group” a 23-page ‘Open Letter to the Georgians of North West Georgia (Abkhazian ASSR)’ (*Letopis’ 4* ‘Chronicle 4’). The document is nothing less than an instruction-manual to Abkhazia’s Kartvelian residents on how to agitate against the Abkhazians. In it one reads:

It is no secret that the Apswas (or Abkhazians, as they are incorrectly known in other languages) have long formed an anti-Georgian, secret (illegal) organisation, which periodically acts openly. The aims of these separatist organisations include: ... the tearing away of the said territory from Georgia ... Georgians must achieve the removal from the Abkhazian ASSR of those regions which historically did not belong to Apsny and where the number of Apswas is fewer, specifically the Gali, Gulripshi, Gagra and Sukhumi regions, plus part of the Ochamchira Region as well as the city of Sukhumi. Letters must be delivered in different regions, residential areas and in the centre of the Republic demanding that they be directly joined to Georgia. As for the Apswa residential points in the Gudauta Region and that part of the Ochamchira Region where they have villages, they should be transformed into national ‘Areas’ (*okrugi*).⁴⁶

The years 1936–54, when Stalin, Beria, Chark’viani and Mgeladze were instigating the repressive anti-Abkhazian measures described in Chapter 2, are here recharacterised as years when “the supremacy of the separatists and the coercion exercised by the Apswas in relation to other nations dwelling in the Abkhazian ASSR were reined in”.

Moves to Open a Branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum

Almost the final recommendation of the aforementioned Open Letter was implemented virtually at once:

⁴⁶ The question of reducing Abkhazia’s frontiers was still on the agenda at the end of 1990. In an interview for the Georgian paper *Sakartvelos Resp’ublik’a* ‘Republic of Georgia’ on 18 December 1990, Gamsakhurdia stated:

I have several times said that the borders of the autonomies can be reduced, for these autonomies were illegally created. I have said this not only of the Gali Region but also with respect to other regions. There was talk of the Abkhazian autonomy being shrunk. I have not yet elaborated this concept. These rumours spread throughout Abkhazia, causing displeasure ... But no work has been done in this regard. It is a matter for the future.

Also desirable is the composing of petitions by Georgian students of the 'Abkhazian University' together with applicant-students in Sukhumi directed against the population of Apswas at this university. Out of the 40,000 residents of Sukhumi surely 400–500 can be found willing to participate in these petitions?

The striking students now demanded the opening in Sukhum of a branch of Tbilisi State University. Staff at the Georgian sector joined the student-protest and left the University; other organisations (such as the National Theatre) began to split according to ethnic divisions. Without any long delay, Georgia's Council of Ministers, responding to the strikes of the students and staff of the Georgian sector at the Abkhazian State University, raised the stakes when, on 14 May, they decreed that a branch of Tbilisi State University would be opened in Sukhum (for the text of the decree see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.22); naturally, it was proposed that this institution would be administered directly from Tbilisi and not be subject to the Abkhazian Higher Education Ministry. On 24 June, the Georgian *K'omsomoli* 'Komsomol' newspaper published details of the entrance-examination, scheduled for Monday 17 July...⁴⁷

Since the Soviet Ministry of Education in Moscow alone had the authority to sanction the creation of institutions of higher education, it dispatched a Commission to investigate the justification for the opening of such a Branch (*filial*). Not surprisingly, the Commission dismissed the idea that a Republic the size of Abkhazia needed two universities—since 1918 the whole of Georgia had been served by only one (Tbilisi). As for the claim that Kartvelians were suffering discrimination, this was belied by the figures. Applications to the Georgian sector ran at 33.5% vs 24% for the Abkhazian sector and 42.5% for the Russian, though both Kartvelians and Abkhazians would have been among those enrolling in this last. In terms of actual student-numbers, Kartvelians were in the majority at 53.1% vs 35.1% Abkhazians and 11.8% Others. Nevertheless, Tbilisi proposed to press ahead regardless, whilst the Abkhazians were determined to prevent any such threat to the viability of their own hard-won University.

⁴⁷ See Elizabeth Fuller's report for Radio Liberty 'Georgian Prosecutor Accused of Inciting Interethnic Hatred' (27 April 1990).

Georgia Experiences its First Fatal Inter-ethnic Clashes

Tensions continued to rise, and not only in Abkhazia. Georgian nationalist leaders were also agitating against what they saw as an unlawful increase in the number of Azerbaijanis living in the Dmanisi-Bolnisi-Marneuli areas of southern Georgia. Local Azerbaijanis rather recklessly raised the suggestion of the region being granted autonomy (just as Georgians were raising calls for the abolition of the autonomies already established in their republic). Wesseling (1992:46) described events as follows:

Gamsachurdia encouraged his partisans to pay intimidatory visits to Bolnisi. The tensions that resulted and the occasional armed attacks on Azeris forced all 900 Azeri families out of the small city of Bolnisi. The local authorities are accused of obstructing their return. In 1989, in the village of Agharam, unidentified armed men ... were said to have terrorized the entire Azeri population and extorted money from them. 250 families are reported to have fled the village. They were forced to sell their houses for very low prices.

As matters finally came to a head in Abkhazia, Georgian TV was reporting fatal clashes in Dmanisi-Marneuli.

With the deadline for the submission of entrance-papers to the Branch of Tbilisi University approaching, a temporary shrine to those killed in Tbilisi on 9 April that had been set up in the centre of Sukhum was smashed on 12 July by Abkhazian activists, who regrettably regarded it as an affront; the local Georgian-language paper *Sabch'ota Apxazeti* was prevented from being issued; and the school-building designated to house the Branch was surrounded in order to prevent the entry of aspiring applicants. Some time on the evening of Saturday 15 July, clashes broke out in Sukhum. Early the following morning the residents of Ochamchira were woken by an explosion and shooting. News of the fighting in Sukhum resulted in large numbers of supporters of the Georgian cause arming themselves and setting out to, as they saw it, defend their fellow Kartvelians from physical danger and Georgian interests in general; gates of a gaol in the Mingrelian capital of Zugdidi had been opened and the inmates given arms and instructions to join the throng. Seeing the number of eager fighters crossing the R. Ingur into Abkhazia, the head of the Gal District, Mingrelian Vakht'ang Q'olbaia, alerted the head of the Ochamchira District, Sergej Bagapsh (President of Abkhazia from 2005 to 2011). Some locals were hurriedly organised, and a tanker was exploded on the bridge over the R. Aaldzga (Ghalidzga in Georgian) to halt the masses, who then gathered menacingly across the

river; at some stage they were joined by K'ost'ava and Gamsakhurdia in person. The following morning (Monday 17 July) Georgian Party Boss, Givi Gumbaridze, and members of the government flew to Ochamchira, effectively the front-line in the Kartvelian-Abkhazian stand-off, for urgent talks, as helicopters began ferrying in a contingent of Soviet Interior Ministry conscripts, who were charged with patrolling in small groups the streets of Ochamchira and other towns/villages where Abkhazians and Kartvelians (Mingrelians) lived in mixed communities.

Members of both ethnic groups were heartily relieved to have them there and would take out food and drink for them as they plodded up and down the dusty streets in the August heat. Most looked to be from Central Asia and expressed incredulity that peoples who seemed to be living such prosperous lives had reached such a pitch of distrust and enmity. As a result of the clashes that weekend, some seventeen persons died (eleven Kartvelians, five Abkhazians, one Greek) and a further 424 injured, but it was the swift action taken by Moscow to calm the situation that prevented further casualties (not to say, considering what happened three years later, all-out war). It took some weeks for normal life (including transport) to get back to something approaching normality, but, if the 9 April was a watershed for Georgians, thereafter even more determined than ever to win independence, the weekend of 15–16 July was a similar watershed for Abkhazians, now absolutely convinced that there could be no possibility of their living within an independent Georgian polity.

Although the disturbances in Abkhazia in 1978 had received some minimal coverage in the Western media, it was really only from July 1989 that the region began to impinge on the West's consciousness. And the first signs of the misreporting that has blemished much journalism ever since became noticeable, with references to Abkhazians being a Muslim people, who speak a Turkic language; in similar fashion (South) Ossetians were misrepresented as Muslims.

Tensions Rise Even Further After the July Deaths

Accusations began to flow thick and fast. Shortly after the clashes in Abkhazia, the distinguished linguist, Academician Prof. Vjacheslav Ivanov,⁴⁸ who had been a member of the Moscow Commission to investi-

⁴⁸ In 1984 Ivanov, elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy in 1977, had co-authored with his Georgian colleague, Academician Prof. Tamaz Gamq'relidze, elected

gate whether there was any justification for opening in Sukhum a Branch of Tbilisi University, gave an interview to the BBC Russian-language service. His attempt to explain to his listeners the facts behind the killings in Sukhum that weekend elicited a furious response from historian Lovard T'ukhashvili in the Georgian paper *Axalgazrda K'omunist'i* 'Young Communist' on 27 July. T'ukhashvili charged:

I blame V. Ivanov for stoking inter-ethnic conflict and for mounting a defamatory campaign directed against my nation. By the way, V. Ivanov is not original. Just two days ago I was listening to the appearance on TV of the 1st Secretary of the Gudauta Regional Committee, Konstantin Ozgan. He, word for word, repeated V. Ivanov's accusation. I cannot say which is whose teacher.

The same paper followed this on 29 July with a spectacularly vicious and overtly threatening piece by writer and professor of literature, Revaz Mishveladze:

Georgia stands on the brink of a real catastrophe—of extirpation. What devil ruled our minds, when we yielded up our land, gained inch by inch over the centuries, defended and soaked with our blood, to every homeless beggar that has come down from the fringes of the Caucasus, to tribes that have neither history nor culture? ... We must make every effort to raise the percentage of Georgians⁴⁹ in the population of Georgia (currently 61%) to 95%. The remaining 5% must consist of only those who know Georgian, who have a proper respect for Georgia, who have been brought up under the influence of the *Georgian national phenomenon* [stress added—BGH]. We must persuade other nationalities, who are multiplying suspiciously in the land of David the Builder, that ideal conditions for the development of their personalities are to be found only in their homelands. Apart from a peaceful declaration to that effect, it is possible to bring the law to bear upon those guests who eventually prove obdurate and slow to leave. The law will state clearly that land will be taken at once from those who have illegally possessed it, that any buildings erected there will be demolished without compensation ... A few days ago a delegation from Georgia (which included the 1st Secretary of the Q'vareli *Raikom*) spent 8 hours in nervous conversation with the leaders of Daghestan, trying to reach agreement on the return to their fatherland of part of the [locally resident] Lezgians.⁵⁰

a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy in 1979, a massive work *Indo-Evropskij jazyk i Indo-Evropejtsy* 'The Indo-European Language and the Indo-Europeans', one of the most significant contributions to Indo-European studies in the latter half of the 20th century. It is rumoured that the two scholars have not spoken since July 1989.

⁴⁹ *Recte* Kartvelians [BGH].

⁵⁰ Actually Avars [BGH].

Finally, after reminding them of their patriotic duty, of the possibility of actual danger, we succeeded in partially accomplishing our mission.

A jointly authored article⁵¹ by Tedo Bekishvili, Zaur K'alandia, Vakht'ang Kharchilava, and Mamuk'a Ts'ik'lauri in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 4 August (p. 2) seemed at first to be offering the possibility of reconciliation, but the sentiments soon changed:

We should be reconciled with the Abkhazian people who have been deceived, but never can we be reconciled with Abkhazian extremists; never can we be reconciled with manifestations of Abkhazian extremism. We cannot be reconciled with those 'human beings' who can fire on unarmed people, who can fall upon the wounded in hospital in order to settle scores. We cannot be reconciled with writers and scholars who mouth falsehoods, those misanthropic doctors and their ilk who can refuse to treat the wounded solely on the grounds that they are Georgians. Whence come such cannibalism and vandalism? How should we believe that the Abkhazian people have sunk, degenerated and become so debased that it has given birth from its bosom to such horrifying monsters? Where have Abkhazian chivalry and manliness gone? Rogues who kill unarmed people and who are ready to raise their hands against the wounded have shamed and besmirched for centuries the dignity of Abkhazian men, and for this reason, first of all, it behoves the Abkhazians themselves to impose the severest of penalties on those who have trampled on their dignity.

Needless to say, these accusations were entirely without foundation.

K'ost'ava himself gave a characteristically unbending interview to Lovard T'ukhashvili on Georgian TV on 9 August. Gia Ch'ant'uria's National-Democratic Party had previously issued the Georgian authorities with an ultimatum that, unless the disturbances in Abkhazia and the Marneuli-Dmanisi-Bolnisi (Lower Kartli) district in southern Georgia were sorted out by 15 August, a campaign of civil disobedience would be implemented throughout the country (Declaration of 18 July). In his interview K'ost'ava generously set his own organisation's deadline as 1 September, arguing that, as Moscow was orchestrating events in Abkhazia, Tbilisi needed extra time to disentangle itself from Moscow's influence and introduce necessary changes in the two problem-regions. He concluded:

With a minimal shedding of blood, Georgia's exit from the constituency of the USSR will be achieved bravely and chivalrously. In this we have to be optimistically minded. I believe in the immortality of the soul. God above sees all our strivings. Our movement has to be optimistic, direct and chivalrous ... We need a strong national army ... The situation in Lower Kartli

⁵¹ /zhami umk'atsresi gamotsdisa/ 'Time of the sternest test'.

and Abkhazia has conditioned our ethno-crisis and has been revealed to be responsible for it. We shall escape the ethno-crisis only as, for example, in Lower Kartli by resettling there Ach'arans and Svans.⁵²

Written in September 1989 but not published until 2 January 1990 was a piece by Gia Ch'ant'uria (Chanturija) in which we read (p. 56):

In the XVIIIth century, ancestors (Circassian tribes) of today's 'Abkhazians' moved over onto the territory of Abkhazia. Despite their different faiths, the Apswa and the Georgians became friendly neighbours on this historical Georgian land and also fought together against outsiders.

He went on (pp. 56–60):

Moreover, the Apswa speak a language of Circassian origin, which serves as further testimony that this people do not belong to the autochthonous population of the Black Sea Coast ... [O]f course, they should be citizens of Georgia and enjoy full rights, able to take advantage of all the rights which the core Georgian population will possess. However, as to the question of the ownership of Abkhazia, there cannot be two opinions. This is primordial Georgian land, and this territory will stay Georgian ... The 15 July assault by Abkhazians on the Branch of TGU⁵³ and then on unarmed Georgians on Lakoba Street demonstrated that not only were the Abkhazians in the majority but that they were the ones who were armed and set on aggression ... I am convinced that we have to have dialogue with the Apswa. However, so that it be productive, it is necessary to educate these people politically, to shew them the true enemy.

In the manner of Madam Bok'uchava-Gagulia earlier in the year, a group of twenty-one local Kartvelians attempted to soothe passions by writing the following in *Bzyp* on 5 September:

Today almost every shade of Georgia's intelligentsia, scholarly and industrial—please believe that it is bitter for us to acknowledge this—stubbornly and persistently tries to demonstrate that the Abkhazians are not the real Abkhazians but 'incomers'. They are quite shameless in their expressions. This is unworthy of any person who values himself ... We take full responsibility for declaring that, living in Abkhazia, we have never felt anything from the Abkhazians other than fraternal, friendly relations. And even when the Georgian intelligentsia began its mass-attack on the Abkhazians, they have directed at us not a single offensive word ... We are ashamed on your

⁵² An apparent reference to the resettling in south-western Georgia of a number of Svan families who had been forced to abandon their homes at the top of the valley of Upper Svanetia as a result of the damage caused by the exceptionally severe winter on 1987–8.

⁵³ 'Tbilisi State University' according to its Russian designation of *Tbilisskij Gosudarstvennyj Universitet*, which in Georgian is /tbilisis saxelmts'ipo universit'et'i/.

behalf, respected Prof. Nodar Natadze,⁵⁴ for your incompetent and provocative interview on the programme *Vestnik*. What on earth can be said of such phrases as: 'Abkhazian bandits! Azerbaijani bandits!?' ... You make a claim for the exclusivity of the Georgian nation. History, alas, recalls the bitter outcome of similar pretensions ... The famous 'Lykhny Declaration', for which the Abkhazian nation is reproached, is no illegal act but a well substantiated document expressing the will of a nation ... [Signed by] A. Chikovani et al. (p. 2).

But popular author Ch'abua Amiredzhibi, writing on 22 September in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* (pp. 3–5),⁵⁵ demonstrated that attitudes had not altered:

The Abkhazians are one of the oldest, genetically purified tribes, who possess the highest moral code and human values. A real Abkhazian could not entrap women and children and slaughter them like animals. This is something only half-savages of the lowest biological development could do, and that too only then if their minds are darkened by money or propaganda ... Deserving of attention is the time precisely chosen to activate separatist forces in Georgia, a period when the entire population of the state is experiencing a press full of criticism of the Stalinist regime, and these insults and abuse assume an anti-Georgian character, by ricochet and sometimes, indeed, by direct aim ... Opponents of *perestrojka* for their part seek to take destabilisation to the extreme depths so that, on the excuse that we Georgians do not have the capacity to resolve our internal inter-ethnic problems ourselves, they can make our autonomies directly subject to the Centre ... It is well-known that Georgians historically formed the great majority of Abkhazia's population ... Because of the historical state of affairs specific to the Georgian people, a law should be introduced allowing the label 'Enemy of the Georgian people' or 'Enemy of Christianity' to be applied to whosoever deserves this according to a simple majority of a universal national referendum of the Georgians and for a judgment to be enacted through this same referendum against those deemed to be an enemy.

Andrej Sakharov's 'Mini-empires' and the Inevitable Backlash

In an article carrying the title 'Level of Freedom' (*Stepen' svobody*) in the Russian journal *Ogonëk* (Flame) of 31 July, the most famous Russian dissident, the late Andrej Sakharov, who had declined to participate in the official Commission established to investigate the 9th-April tragedy because of his complex relations with K'ost'ava and Gamsakhurdia, had re-

⁵⁴ Leader of the National Front of Georgia, as stated earlier—BGH.

⁵⁵ In an article entitled /chemi azri.../ 'My opinion...'

ferred to the USSR's constituent-republics as 'mini-empires', singling out Georgia for special mention in his discussion of the extent and nature of the control that republican centres were allowed to exercise within their respective fiefdoms. The late historian-archæologist Yuri Voronov, writing in 1992, gave an illustration of control from the academic sphere (p. 259):

Already in the 1930s the history of the peoples of the USSR was placed in the hands of the Academies of Sciences of the 15 Union Republics, where social scientists at once became appendages of the ideological structures whose purpose was to prove the superiority of the native peoples over the non-native, of the large nations over the small. In practical terms this led to the extinction of the more objective schools of Caucasology in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and Moscow.

But a more detailed characterisation of the excesses to which local sovereignty could lead and because of which Sakharov specifically accused Georgia of being consumed with a 'chauvinistic psychosis' can be found in the citations adduced from an article by Vasilij Abaev in the *Postscript* appended to the present chapter.

Not surprisingly, Gamsakhurdia was one of those who contributed to the predictable backlash against Sakharov's article. His *Open Letter* was published first in the Georgian paper *Kartuli Pilmi* 'Georgian Film' on 6 September (p. 2) and later in Russian translation entitled 'Level of Objectivity' in *Vechernyj Tbilisi* 'Evening Tbilisi' on 12 September (p. 3), alongside a fragment of Sakharov's original. Gamsakhurdia wrote:

But these days the Circassian tribe of Apswas, who are related to the North Caucasian Cherkess and who from the XVIIth century have been setting out to seize control of historical Abkhazia's northern, mountainous part, to effect the assimilation of the Georgian population, and to take root there (see Academician N. Berdzenishvili *Problems in the History of Georgia* vol. VIII),⁵⁶ are wrongly called 'Abkhazians'⁵⁷ ... Georgia was punished because it rejected Bolshevism; it said 'no' to, and threw out of its borders, the Bolshevik leaders, Stalin, Ordzhonik'idze and others whom it deemed to be traitors to their motherland, and for this it was 'punished' to boot. Herein are the reasons, which you should have known, behind the creation of illegal autonomies on the territory of Georgia; herein is why the Abkhazian national minority was privileged by these leaders and the 17% of the population lords it over the remaining 83%. It was for this same reason that the Gagra and Sukhumi Regions, where the Abkhazians are only a certain percentage of

⁵⁶ Sc. of his collected works [BGH].

⁵⁷ In the Georgian original there is a typo, such that in place of 'Abkhazians' we read 'Abkhazia'—BGH.

the whole population, and the Gali Region, where Abkhazians have never lived and do not live now, were included within the makeup of Abkhazia.⁵⁸

The following page (p. 3) and also a section of p. 4 of *Kartuli Pilmi* were devoted to another reply to Sakharov from Guram P'et'riashvili,⁵⁹ which includes the mocking: "Poor old Brezhnev. How could he not realise that it was not a quarrel that you wanted with him but were offering him a better path to develop the imperium?"

In yet another *Open Letter* (in the Georgian paper *Tbilisi* of 28 August, p. 3) Prof. Eldar Mamistvalishvili, who held a doctorate in historical sciences, offered the Russian physicist this history-lesson:

The Abkhazian nationalists blame the Georgians for Stalin's repressions and consider that the same policy towards them is continuing today too, arguing: "Georgians are persecuting and repressing Abkhazians". The forebears of today's Abkhazians began to settle on Georgia's northwest Black Sea coast in the XVI-XVIIth centuries, and this process went on for a long time. Today the Abkhazians represent here only 17% of the population. False is their leaders' assertion that they allegedly once formed the majority, whilst it was as a result of the Georgians' colonising politics that they ended up in the minority. Historical science knows no such thing.

Viktor Popkov's Corrective

It is obvious from this copious array of citations that the widespread assumption in Georgia was that the Abkhazians must have been responsible for the blood-letting of 15–16 July. Is this so? In September 1989, a certain Viktor Popkov paid a visit to Ochamchira specifically to find the writer of these lines. He introduced himself as an archæological photographer and

⁵⁸ Taking exception to Gamsakhurdia's charge in this article that Ossetians helped the Bolshevik seizure of Georgia in 1921, Mark Blied in his own response (1989) offered Gamsakhurdia this curt reminder (p. 153):

I personally know of no 'Bolshevik Ossetians' who might have been active in Georgia. On the other hand, I well know that Ordzhonikidze, Mamia Orakhelashvili, Sasha Gegechkori, Noë Buachidze and other Georgian Bolsheviks fought for Soviet power in Ossetia, and Stalin in 1920 proclaimed the Soviet Mountain Republic, incorporating North Ossetia. If, Zviad, you have 'your own accounts' to settle with the Bolsheviks, is it not better to start with Georgian Bolshevism, about which in his day L. P. Beria wrote so extensively and pretentiously in a special monograph?

The reference is to the Russian work 'On the History of the Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia', which appeared in 1939 under Beria's name.

⁵⁹ /usiamovno ghia ts'erili/ 'Unpleasant Open Letter'.

free-lance journalist. He had written a book on Soviet minorities which existed in only manuscript-form, and two sections were devoted to Georgian-Abkhazian relations. He had spent time earlier in the summer both in Abkhazia and Svanetia. Staying in the village of T'amsh (just north of Ochamchira), where an archæological dig was in progress, he decided on 15 July to make his way (with extreme difficulty) that night to Sukhum, where he was an eye-witness to the immediate aftermath of the initial clash. On the basis of what he saw that night and his interviews with local Abkhazians and Kartvelians both before and after the events, he concluded that the clashes were indeed premeditated, but by the Kartvelians, the choreography of events emanating from western Georgia. Popkov asked me to bring his manuscript to the West and try to have it published, as it had proven too hot for Soviet publishers to handle. At that time there was no interest in such a topic, and the best I could do was arrange for the sections on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict to be translated and disseminated amongst interested parties. A condensed version finally appeared in a book I edited some years later (see Popkov⁶⁰ 1999). Popkov's conclusions were entirely in accord with my own observations on the ground⁶¹ and set the record straight as to who did what and when that summer of discontent.

The Assembly (Later Confederation) of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus

Since its inception Ajdgylara had been active in lobbying for support in the North Caucasus, and, in a demonstration of solidarity with their Abkhazian cousins, delegates representing Adygheans, Kabardians, Cherkess (these three being sub-groups of the Circassians), Abazinians, Chechens and Ingush (plus the Abkhazians themselves, of course) met in Sukhum on 25–26 August and agreed to form the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus under the chairmanship of Kabardian professor of sociology, Yuri (Musa) Shanibov.⁶² The Charter of the Assembly was published in *Edinenie*

⁶⁰ During the first Chechen war, Popkov decided to demonstrate his solidarity with the Chechens by sharing their suffering in the cellars of Grozny during its bombardment by the Russian air-force. He was met there by Anatol Lieven, then working for *The Times* but now an academic in London, who described him in print as the 'nearest thing to a saint I have met'. Popkov was later shot and killed, while still in Chechenia.

⁶¹ My family and I spent July, August and September 1989 in Ochamchira.

⁶² Derluguian's 2005-work purports to be a book about Shanibov but reads more like a treatise on Soviet policy in the North Caucasus, with aspects of Shanibov's views and activities tacked on.

on 25 October. The Assembly's second congress was held in the Kabardian capital Nal'chik on 13–14 October 1990 with the additional membership of the Stavropol, Kuban and Don Cossacks. The third congress was again held in Sukhum on 1–2 November 1991, by which stage North and South Ossetians, along with a selection of the peoples of Daghestan, had joined. The participants ratified a document entitled 'Treaty for a Confederative Union of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus', the first Article of which proclaims the newly styled Confederation to be "the legitimate successor of the independent North Caucasian Republic ('Mountain Republic'), created on 11 May 1918". Thus, from late August 1989, the Abkhazians were buoyed in the knowledge that they would not be standing alone in the event of hostilities instigated from Tbilisi.

Essentially, nothing had been resolved as a result of the mid-July clashes, and tensions remained high. The creation in Sukhum of a Branch of Tbilisi University, which had been vigorously pursued since being first mooted in the spring of 1989, was still on the agenda of the Georgian nationalists; Ozgan in Gudauta and Bagapsh in Ochamchira were removed from office; by resolution 427, the State Programme for the Georgian Language was ratified on 15 August 1989; despite demands from Abkhazia that the official investigation into the July clashes be conducted by the General Soviet Prosecutor, A. Sukharëv, it was left in the hands of Georgia's procurator, V. Razmadze, whose statements in a subsequent interview for *Zarja Vostoka* (22 February 1990) confirmed Abkhazian suspicions that he (not to say the whole Georgian government) was acting in line with the programme of the nationalist movement.⁶³

Death of K'ost'ava. Attention Shifts to South Ossetia

On 13 October, Merab K'ost'ava, along with another leading nationalist, Zurab Ch'avch'avadze, was killed in a car-crash. Gamsakhurdia was thereby left as the single most dominant oppositionist in the struggle for independence. Perhaps because Moscow had demonstrated through its timely and welcome intervention on 17 July that it would not permit bloodshed in Abkhazia and because the Abkhazians now had visible support from the North Caucasus, attention shifted to South Ossetia.

⁶³ See Ajdgylara's 'Open Letter to Georgian Procurator V.A. Razmadze' in *Bzyp* 3 March 1990, p. 2.

To judge by the criticism that Alan Chochiev received from some Ossetians (as printed in the pages of the Georgian press), not all of his compatriots had agreed with the wisdom of sending the letter of support from Adæmon Nykhas to the Abkhazians in April, perhaps conscious and fearful of the all-too predictable reaction. However, partly no doubt as a result of the introduction in August of the Language Law, by the autumn popular opinion among the Ossetians of South Ossetia was swinging behind their National Forum, which organised strikes and demonstrations, culminating in the summoning of South Ossetia's Council of People's Deputies, which on 10 November voted to make Ossetic the state-language⁶⁴ and to upgrade South Ossetia into an Autonomous Republic within Georgia (for the texts of the two decrees see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.178–9). Worth emphasising, perhaps, is the fact that the right was reserved to decide its own status, should Georgia ever become a unitarian nationalist state (Tanaev 2008.21).

Naturally, these decrees did not go unanswered. Firstly, in the political arena, Georgia's Supreme Soviet met on 16 November under the chairmanship of Otar Cherkezia and overturned the decision according to point 10 of statute 115 of Georgia's Constitution on the grounds that the summoning of the 10 November meeting had violated Law 40 of the Autonomous Region (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.23–4). Thus began a period where one legislative act promulgated in one regional assembly led to countermanding legislation at the republican centre, occasioning a further response in the respective regional assembly, in what became known as the 'war of the laws'. The second reaction took place at street-level with a mass-march (numbering, by some accounts, up to 40,000) on Tskhinval, organised and led by Gamsakhurdia, on 23 November. En route, 7 kilometers from Tskhinval, Gamsakhurdia declared at the village of Eredvi:

Half of Georgia will be with us, and it will be clear there who gains victory over whom, [and] whose blood will flow in greater measure.⁶⁵

During the ensuing 3-month blockade of Tskhinval, six persons died.

Following the escalation of tensions in South Ossetia, Ajdgylara received from Tskhinval another letter carrying the name of A. Chochiev, much longer than the first; it was printed in the newspaper *Edinenie*

⁶⁴ The session was chaired by First Deputy Chairman M. Sanakoev and Secretary of the Executive Cte., I. Kokoev. A programme for developing Ossetic had already been approved on 4 September.

⁶⁵ See S. Markedonov's article /Zemlja i volja Zviada Gamsaxurdia/ 'Land and desire of Zviad Gamsakhurdia' at: <http://www.politcom.ru/4379.html>, cited from Tanaev (2008.22).

(January 1990, pp. 4–5) with the title 'Where your brother is...'.⁶⁶ Chochiev explained the origins of the South Ossetian national movement and queried the reasons for the hysterical reaction to the Abkhazian Letter, pointing out: "As for the idea of separating Abkhazia from Georgia, there is not a single word about this in the Letter!" He also raised another question. As noted above, his original letter had been printed in the paper *Bzyp* on 4 April 1989. Since it had been well publicised at the time, he asks in relation to the Georgian translation:

Why was it necessary to publish it two months after the paper 'Bzyp'? The answer is simple. Someone really needed to whip up the real pain of Georgian society and direct it elsewhere—against the Ossetians, so as to build on the painful note of 9 April an anti-Ossetian psychological potential and keep the heat of inter-ethnic relations incandescent.

He added:

The November-events in South Ossetia demonstrated that the assessment of the situation in Georgia offered by Sakharov and many other intellectuals ... completely reflected reality.

New Leadership for Abkhazia's National Movement

Although decisions at the political level were starting to become the focus of events, national fora still had a vital role to play. At its second congress on 3 February 1990, Ajdgylara decided that change was necessary: Gogua resigned the chairmanship in favour of the younger (archæologist and historian) Sergej Shamba,⁶⁷ who, together with (historian) Stanislav Lakoba, had penned the Lykhny Declaration; the deputy-chairman was to be the lawyer Zurab Achba. A cultural organisation *Krunk* 'Crane' was formed by Abkhazia's Armenian community,⁶⁸ its constitutive assembly being held on 27 January, at which its Charter was approved (see Chumalov 1995:308–312).⁶⁹ Other communities followed suit in 1991: the Charter of Abkhazia's Russian community's cultural organisation 'Slav Home' was registered a year later on 23 April 1991 (for the text see Chumalov 1995:313–

⁶⁶ /Gde brat tvoj.../.

⁶⁷ See *Edinenie* for April 1990 (p. 1). Pp. 4–5 contain my own *Pechal' nyj itog minuvshego goda* 'Sad review of the past year'.

⁶⁸ For Armenians the crane symbolises return to the bosom of one's family or homeland (Krikor Moskofian—personal communication).

⁶⁹ Chumalov appends a footnote to the effect that Georgia's General Prosecutor, V. Razmadze, judged Krounk's activity unconstitutional by a ruling of 29 August 1991.

316); Abkhazia's Greek community had the Charter of its cultural organisation registered on 19 February 1991 (for the text see Chumalov 1995:317–318). But the figure who was about to dominate Abkhazian politics until 2004 had already entered the political arena.

Vladislav Ardzinba was born in 1945 just to the north of Sukhum in the village of Eshera. He had studied and then worked (under Evgenij Primakov) at Moscow's Oriental Institute, where, researching the history and culture of ancient Asia Minor, he specialised in Hittite. When the venerable director of Abkhazia's Institute of Abkhazian History, Literature and Language, Academician Prof. Giorgij Dzidzhari(j)a, died in 1988, Ardzinba was invited home to assume the directorship. With the prominence in Abkhazia that such a post gave him, he was elected in 1989 to both Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet and the USSR's Supreme Soviet, also becoming a member of the Congress of People's Deputies (the former Congress of Soviets now refashioned as part of Gorbachev's reforms). Not just an ordinary member of the USSR's Supreme Soviet, he became a member of its Presidium and chaired the Sub-commission on the State-Legal Status of Autonomous Republics, Districts and Areas. In this capacity he was excellently placed to articulate (in a Russian that earned him universal praise) the grievances and aspirations of minorities across the entire Union.

Back in Tbilisi, Gia Ch'ant'uria split with Gamsakhurdia over how to respond to the problem of South Ossetia, and, with further discord emerging among the oppositionists in the spring of 1990, Gamsakhurdia formed another coalition styled 'Round Table(—Free Georgia)' (/mrgvali magida(—tavisupali sakartvelo)/) and, rather than joining former colleagues in the 30th-September elections to the National Congress, projected to be a rival parliament to the official Supreme Soviet, he decided to change course and declared that he would contest the 29th-October ballot for the latter body, thereby becoming a player for the first time in Georgia's official political structures.

Tbilisi Sets Out Towards Independence and the Reaction in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Having already in November 1989 condemned Georgia's annexation by the Red Army in 1921, Georgia's Supreme Soviet on 9 March 1990 adopted the Resolution 'On Guarantees to Defend Georgia's State Sovereignty', the text of which includes—see the paper *Zarja Vostoka* 12 March 1990 (also Volkhonskij et al. 2008:24–6):

The Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR, affirming the conclusion of the commission of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR in connection with the political and legal evaluation of the transgression of the Treaty concluded between Georgia and Soviet Russia on 7 May 1920, recognises that the introduction of Soviet Russia's army into Georgia in February 1921 and the taking of all her territory was, from a legal viewpoint, military interference (intervention) and occupation aimed at the overthrow of the existing political structure, and, from a political viewpoint, effective annexation; deeming the occupation and effective annexation of Georgia by Soviet Russia to be an international crime, it seeks to annul for Georgia the consequences of the transgression of the Treaty of 7 May 1920 and to restore the rights of Georgia recognised by Soviet Russia through this Treaty. The Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR deems illegal and void the ... Treaty between the Georgian SSR and the Federative Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia of 21 May 1921 and the union Treaty on the formation of the Transcaucasian Federative Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of 12 March 1922. [It decides] to start talks on the restoration of the/an independent Georgian state, since the Treaty on the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of 30 December 1922 is illegal so far as it concerns Georgia.

Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR G. Gumbaridze.

This was followed by a further resolution on 20 June calling upon all citizens of Georgia to work towards the revival of the state-independence of Georgia (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.24–6).

Two days after the news of Georgia's resolution on the annulment of all Soviet legislation appeared in the press, the Abkhazian National Forum (Ajdgylara) published a 23-page appeal to the Abkhazian community at home and abroad. Having noted that the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR was the last of the Brezhnevite constitutions to be promulgated that year (on 6 June) because of wrangling over Abkhazia's demand that it should be granted the constitutional right to secede from Georgia, a demand that was rejected, Ajdgylara declared:

1. The Abkhazian people, respecting the right of the Georgian people to its own political self-determination, at the same time also reserves to itself an analogical right. In the case of the Georgian SSR's leaving the makeup of the USSR, the Abkhazian ASSR reserves to itself the legal right to remain within the confines of the USSR.
2. The only legal decision that can eliminate the historical injustice of the Abkhazian question is restoration of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic in the capacity of a subject of a renewed pan-Soviet federation in ac-

cordance with the will of the Abkhazian people expressed a year ago in the Lykhny Declaration, taken on 18 March 1989.

Here again, then, is testimony that the Abkhazians were intent only upon securing the future of their own territory and had no designs on frustrating the attempt by Georgians to do the same for the territory of Georgia proper (*/sak'utriv sakartvelo/*).

In the light of moves towards secession from the Union in both the Baltic States and the Caucasus, a 'Law of the USSR on the correct way to decide questions pertaining to the withdrawal from the USSR of a union-republic' was signed by Mikhail Gorbachev on 3 April 1990; on 15 March Gorbachev had been elected the first executive president of the USSR. Clause 3 granted the right to the peoples of autonomous republics and autonomous formations to decide for themselves whether to remain in the USSR or in the departing republic and also to raise the question of their state-legal status (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.228–234). A subsequent 'Law on the demarcation of powers between a Union SSR and a subject of the Federation' was signed by Gorbachev on 26 April (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.234–238). These have been interpreted as a virtual separatists' charter, composed by a Kremlin bent on fomenting separatism amongst malleable minorities and to provide them with the means to achieve it. But the evidence already presented is that, far from needing external stimuli, such a head of steam had built up towards exercising self-determination amongst the Abkhazians and South Ossetians that the momentum would have carried them forward along that track, regardless of Soviet legislative arrangements.

Ajdgylara's growing influence in setting the agenda was reflected in Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet issuing on 25 August 1990 a 'Decree of the Abkhazian ASSR's Supreme Soviet on the legal guarantees for the defence of the statehood of Abkhazia', signed by Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet V. Kobakhia and Secretary Ju. Kvitisinija (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.105–109; Marykhuba 1994.482–86). This has been misreported as a declaration of independence, which it was not. It was in direct reaction to the sequence of the three legislative acts adopted in Tbilisi from November 1989 to June 1990, which, in annulling all Soviet legislation relevant to the Georgian SSR prior to reviving the Georgian Democratic Republic of 1918–1921, left Abkhazia with a precarious and undefined status. Reference was made to the history of Abkhazian-Georgian relations at that period (as described in Chapter 2): essentially, the Abkhazians argued that the treaty signed between Abkhazia and Georgia in February 1918 recognised

Abkhazia's independent status and that the subsequent actions of the Georgian military amounted to illegal occupation followed by annexation. And, since the Menshevik Constitution of 1921, in which Abkhazia was simply referred to as an autonomy without any specification of what that meant, had never been ratified (because of Georgia's absorption into the Soviet Union), Abkhazia was left without any formal state-legal status. As a result, its Supreme Soviet felt it was left with no choice but to invoke Article 73 of the Soviet Constitution and request that the status which Abkhazia proclaimed on 31 March 1921 be restored. The Supreme Soviet declared Abkhazia's readiness to enter negotiations with Georgia on their future state-legal relations. It noted that this would in essence mean a return to their interstate relations established in 1922 (taking into account changed circumstances), and, as one of the signatories creating the Soviet Union and as a subject of the Soviet Federation, it requested the right to participate along with other subjects of the USSR in negotiations and in the working out, and concluding, of the proposed new Union Treaty.

In a note appended to the text of the Decree Volkhonskij et al. (2008.109) observe that this session had originally been planned for 28 July but was not held because the gathering was inquorate. The rescheduled gathering was still boycotted by many of those who had refused to attend on 28 July on the grounds that this (proposed) Decree would encroach on Georgia's territorial integrity. Nevertheless, 72 out of the 138 deputies attended, and the motion was passed with a vote of 70 in favour and two abstentions. However, henceforth the Supreme Soviet was split into an Abkhazian vs a Kartvelian faction.

*Restoration of Abkhazia's Republican Status of the 1920s and Tbilisi's
Reaction*

The Supreme Soviet then proceeded formally to pass, with the same signatories, the 'Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Abkhazian SSR' (for the text see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.110–112; Marykhuba 1994.479–82), making Abkhazia once again a full union-republic. The final two sentences read:

On the territory of the Abkhazian SSR, Abkhaz is the state-language, with Abkhaz, Georgian and Russian as official languages. The Declaration is the basis for a new Constitution for the Abkhazian SSR and defines the position of the Republic *once a Union Treaty and Treaty with the Georgian SSR are concluded*. [Stress added]

The very next day Georgia's Supreme Soviet, under the chairmanship of Gumbaridze, voted to overturn Abkhazia's two proclamations of 25 August on the grounds that (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.27–28):

[T]he said decisions are an attempt, without basis in legal relations, to alter the national-state and administrative-territorial structure of the Georgian SSR, which is a gross violation of the Constitution of the Georgian SSR, the Abkhazian ASSR, and also the Constitution of the USSR.

This Resolution would appear to be totally inconsistent with the previous decision of Georgia's Supreme Soviet to annul all Soviet legislation pertaining to Georgia.

The split in Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet was underlined on 31 August, when those deputies who had boycotted the session six days earlier met in Sukhum in the building of the Georgian Institute for Sub-tropical Agriculture and passed their own Resolution, which, in line with that passed in Tbilisi on 26 August, condemned the Declarations made by their fellow-deputies. This Resolution (for the text see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.112–114) was signed by Deputy-Chairman of the Presidium of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet, Vakht'ang Q'olbaia,⁷⁰ and Deputy-Secretary, R. Salukvadze.

South Ossetia Moves to Raise its Status

South Ossetia's answer to Tbilisi's annulment of Soviet legislation was for the Council of People's Deputies to meet on 20 September 1990. At this session, chaired by Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Council, F. Zasseev,⁷¹ but attended by only 95 of the 137 deputies (almost all Georgian deputies being absent), a number of decisions were taken. Though neither Adæmon Nykhas chairman Alan Chochiev nor his fellow national movement leader, Torez Kulumbegov, were themselves deputies, they were responsible for setting the day's agenda. The first item was short and sweet (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.181):

⁷⁰ It will be recalled that Q'olbaia, a Mingrelian, when Regional Secretary in the Gal District in July 1989, had sent the warning through to Bagapsh in Ochamchira that thousands of armed Kartvelians had crossed from Mingrelia intent on joining the fighting in Sukhum that had erupted on 15 July, thereby providing valuable time for counter-measures to be taken to prevent this horde crossing the R. Aaldzga (Ghalidzga).

⁷¹ The Secretary, who also signed the documents, was I. Kokoev.

The fourteenth session (20th calling) of the South Ossetian Council of People's Deputies decides:

1. To transform the South Ossetian Autonomous District into the South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic;
2. To appeal to the USSR Supreme Soviet for the inclusion into the constituency of the USSR of the South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic as an independent subject of the Federation;
3. To appeal to the republics of the USSR requesting the concluding of a Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with the South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic.

There followed a lengthy text on the state-sovereignty of the newly declared Republic (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.181–185).

In view of Georgia's annulment of all Soviet legislation and its reinstatement of the Menshevik Constitution (1921), the third decision concerned the question of which laws were to be operative on the territory of South Ossetia. As South Ossetia was only created in 1922, the Council decided to align the region with the Soviet Constitution and its associated Law Code (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.185–186). Since Georgia on 20 June 1990 had passed a law whereby those between the ages of 18–27 who were liable for Soviet military service were to do community work within Georgia as an alternative, the South Ossetian Council of People's Deputies stated that, though there was no objection to South Ossetian youth fulfilling their military obligations to the Soviet state, they should be allowed to serve on the territory of either North or South Ossetia (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.186–187). The following day the Presidium of Georgia's Supreme Soviet, under its chairman Gumbaridze, declared these decisions to have no legal force and urged South Ossetia's Council of People's Deputies to regularise its activities in accordance with the Constitutions of the USSR and the Georgian SSR (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.28–29), again forgetting its former liquidation of Soviet legislative acts on the territory of its republic. Nevertheless, on 16 October, elections to the Supreme Soviet of the South Ossetian Republic were announced for December.

In September Dzhaba Ioseliani's paramilitary organisation (the *Mkheldioni*) were granted legal status by Tbilisi.

New Union Treaty Proposed in Moscow

In Moscow, on 22 September, the first congress of representatives of national-state and national-territorial formations and peoples not possessing their own statehood was opened. In attendance were representatives from

Abkhazia (headed by Ardzinba), as well as the Chairman of the USSR's Supreme Soviet's Legislative Committee, the Circassian Yuri Kalmykov, the Chairman of the USSR's Palace of Nationalities, Rafik Nishanov, and the Chairman of the Russian Federation's Palace of Nationalities, Ramazan Abdulatipov. On the agenda for discussion was renewal of the Union 'on the basis of equal rights and sovereignty for all peoples' (newspaper *Respublika Abxazija* 16–17 December 2008). A Resolution of the USSR's Supreme Soviet on 1 October, under the chairmanship of A. Lukjanov, took account of information provided by Nishanov on the aforementioned discussion and proposed to consult and elaborate the concept of a new Union Treaty (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.238–239).

*Gamsakhurdia Becomes Supreme Soviet Chairman. Moscow's Reaction
and 1st War in South Ossetia*

Elections to Georgia's Supreme Soviet were held on 28 October. Although they were the first multi-party elections anywhere in the USSR, regional parties (such as Ajdgylara and Adæmon Nykhas) had been prohibited from participating. Victory went to Gamsakhurdia's Round-Table bloc with a 54% majority (giving the bloc 155 of the 250 seats); the Communists came second with 64 seats (29.6%) (Wheatley 2005.52). At its first session, Gamsakhurdia was elected Chairman (24 October).⁷²

On 14 November, Georgia's Supreme Soviet declared a transitional period in which Georgia's status would move from that of Soviet to that of independent republic; the flag of Menshevik Georgia (1918–21) was also reintroduced.⁷³ The next day the Soviet law on military service was suspended on the territory of Georgia, and on 20 December Georgia's Supreme Soviet under the chairmanship of Gamsakhurdia passed a law on 'The formation of an internal army—the National Guard of the Republic of Georgia' to be attached to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and its leader (separately named as the sculptor [sic!] Tengiz K'it'ovani) would be First Deputy of Internal Affairs (for the text see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.40–41).

Under Gamsakhurdia's chairmanship, Georgia's Supreme Soviet met on 22 November to discuss South Ossetia. The session condemned the calling

⁷² The Communist Party was in retreat, and Gumbaridze was replaced as 1st Secretary by Avtandil Margiani on 7 Dec 1990. He, in turn, was replaced by Dzhemal Mikeladze, who was the last person to hold this office in Georgia (from 20 February 1991 to 26 August 1991).

⁷³ The flag was wine-red in colour with a black horizontal bar in the top left, underneath which was a similarly sized white bar (see Appendix 2 in Chapter 4).

of elections in disregard of the decision of Georgia's Supreme Soviet of 21 September and declared that it would fight to preserve any threat to Georgia's territorial integrity (for the text see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.30–31).

The factions in the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet decided to reassemble for the session which opened on 4 December 1990. Various questions were discussed, including:

- changes and additions to Abkhazia's Constitution in the light of recent legislative acts in Tbilisi;
- rules for the Supreme Soviet's election;
- creation of a commission to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts;
- abolition of the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (held by Valerian Kobakhia).

During the session, Ardzinba was chosen to chair the Supreme Soviet, after Konstantin Ozgan requested to be relieved of this post, whilst Q'olbaia, from the Kartvelian faction, became Deputy-Chairman (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.115).⁷⁴

Elections in South Ossetia duly went ahead on 9 December, though boycotted by the local Georgian population, and the following day Torez Kulumbegov was elected Chairman. The response of Georgia's Supreme Soviet followed on 11 December: on the alleged grounds that the South Ossetian Autonomous District had been set up against the will of the region's 'native' Georgian population and with the intention of damaging the interests of Georgia as a whole, and in view of the fact that, within the USSR, the Ossetians have their own historical territory located in North Ossetia, South Ossetia's autonomy was abrogated in its entirety. Additionally, the Decree No. 2 of 20 April 1922, which created the Autonomous Region, as well as the Georgian Law of 12 November 1980 'On the South Ossetian Autonomous Region' was stripped of force, though one might have thought that the abrogation of all Soviet legislation under Gumbaridze's chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet had effectively already accomplished this. Naturally, the results of the 9 December elections were also annulled—for the Russian text⁷⁵ see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.31–33), where a footnote observes that Gorbachev's law of 26 April 1990 forbade alteration to the status of union republics or autonomies without local

⁷⁴ See also Tengiz P'ach'k'oria's despatch from Sukhum for *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 7 December /apxazetis uzenaesi sabch'os sesiaze/ 'At the session of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet' (p. 1).

⁷⁵ The Georgian original can be found in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 14 December 1990, p. 1.

agreement. On the self-same day, ethnic clashes occurred in Tskhinval causing three deaths. As a result, on 12 December, Tbilisi introduced a state of emergency in Tskhinval and the Dzhava District, whilst on the night of 5–6 January 1991 a detachment of Georgia's National Guard was sent to Tskhinval.

On 7 January, Gorbachev issued a 'Decree on certain legislative acts passed in December 1990 in the Georgian SSR', whereby he sought to curtail the conflict and fix the Soviet *status quo* in Georgia, demanding the removal within three days of all armed formations from South Ossetia, other than USSR Interior Ministry forces (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.239–240). But, as Tanaev (2008.23) noted, no-one in Georgia was listening to Gorbachev any longer, and, in any case, Georgia's Supreme Soviet, under Gamsakhurdia's chairmanship, issued its own rejoinder on 29 January, declaring Gorbachev's Decree of 7 January 'a gross interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Georgia' (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.41–44). Citing *The Independent* (25 January 1991), Birch (1996.171) quotes Gamsakhurdia as accusing the 'Ossetian extremists' of being "agents of Gorbachev, who is applying pressure on us through this war". After three weeks of fighting, the Georgian militia was forced out by, according to Ossetian sources, a mixture of local militia and self-defence units, whereas Gamsakhurdia charged:

It has been confirmed through reliable documents that not only Ossetian extremists but also the Soviet army are fighting us in so-called South Ossetia. There is a military missile base there from which the extremists are systematically being supplied with rockets for fighting.

This was included in an interview given to the Georgian mass-media on 2 February 1991.⁷⁶ If the events in Tskhinval in November 1990 did not mark the start of the Georgian-Ossetian war, what took place in early January 1991 most certainly did. On 29 January, Georgian police arrested Torez Kulumbegov.

To buttress the claim that, in Georgian eyes, the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was an illegitimate construct, Georgian sources around this time began to refer to it in one of three ways:

⁷⁶ Report carried on the front page of *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 8 February 1991. As Birch noted (1996.171), citing a *Washington Post* interview in the *International Herald Tribune* of 22 March:

In an interview in March 1991 he went further, declaring that "(t)he Soviet army is fighting against us, together with the Ossetian extremists".

1. 'So-called South Ossetia', as in the previous quotation;
2. Samachablo, which means 'the domain of the Machabeli family', since this area encompassed the patrimonial estates of the princely Machabeli and Eristavi families;
3. Shida Kartli 'Inner Kartli'.

The patriarch of Ossetic philology, Vasilij Abaev (1900–2001), who was born and raised in Georgia, dismissed such attempted redesignations with the following observations:⁷⁷

- whilst /samxret oseti/ 'South Ossetia' is well-attested in Georgian sources (e.g. the 8-volume Georgian Academy Dictionary⁷⁸ or Iak'ob Gogebashvili's famous 19th-century educational text /bunebis k'ari/ 'Nature's Door'), the term /samachablo/ is not only unattested but the use of such surname-derivatives to refer to regions of Georgia is thoroughly artificial and follows no historical tradition;⁷⁹
- as for /shida kartli/, this term properly refers to the much larger area of central Georgia from the R. Aragvi and the capital Tbilisi westwards to the Surami Ridge.

Thus, the conflict developed into an 18-month war, characterised by a series of skirmishes and shellings. An immediate consequence was an outflow of Ossetians from Georgia in general. At the time Gamsakhurdia stated: "The Ossetians must leave. This is plain. There is no other way out" (Tanaev 2008.24). On 1 February 1991, Georgia disconnected the electricity-supply to South Ossetia, resulting in deaths, especially amongst the elderly and infants. Unsurprisingly, renewed outflows of populations followed, Ossetians fleeing via the Roki Tunnel to North Ossetia, as other exit-routes were blocked, whilst during the year some 7,000 Georgians moved into Georgia proper, their homes and schools being burnt down.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ From his article /Tragedija Juzhnoj Osetii: Put' k Soglasiju/ 'The tragedy of South Ossetia: path to agreement' in the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaja Gazeta* 'Independent Newspaper' of 22 January 1992.

⁷⁸ /kartuli enis ganmart'ebiti leksik'oni/ 'Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language' (Academy Publishing House, 1950–1964).

⁷⁹ From a more legalistic point of view, Zakharov and Areshev (2008.79; for a reworked and updated version see Zakharov, Areshev and Semerikova 2010) argue that, after Georgia's annexation by Russia, Tsar Alexander I, recognising the weakness of the Georgian princely families, proposed that they abandon South Ossetian lands in return for an annual payment of 5,000 roubles. Furthermore, by order of the Tsar, the Ossetians became state-peasants and thus free from interference from, or control by, the Georgian nobility.

⁸⁰ The humanitarian situation was exacerbated on 29 April by an earthquake, which affected both parties to the conflict, though the damage to property in the Dzhava Region

Gorbachev's 17th-March 1991 Referendum for Reshaping the Union

Continuing its activities both at home and abroad, Ajdgylara was one of the founding members of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO) in The Hague in February 1991. Back in Abkhazia, efforts were directed at marshalling support for a 'yes'-vote in the upcoming referendum on reconstituting the Soviet Union to be held on 17 March. On 6 March, a number of socio-political movements active within Abkhazia (including Ajdgylara, the Democratic Party, the Sukhum Society of Internationalists, the Armenian *Krunk*, and the National Union 'Abkhazia', etc..) held a meeting in Sukhum's drama-theatre to form a Union to raise awareness of the referendum, and an appeal was issued to the local population to participate in it.

On 11 March, *Der Spiegel* published an interview with Gamsakhurdia.⁸¹ In it Gamsakhurdia laid the blame for the July 1989 ethnic clashes with the Azerbaijanis and Abkhazians on manipulation by Moscow. He also claimed that in a phone-conversation with Gorbachev on 25 February, the latter had threatened that, unless Georgia sign up to the plan to reform the Union: "Then expect big trouble in South Ossetia and Abkhazia".⁸² Asked about the imprisoned Kulumbegov, Gamsakhurdia responded thus:

Under interrogation, Kulumbegov declares that he is the president of the independent Ossetian republic. In psychiatric clinics one often hears assertions that someone is Napoleon, Hitler or Stalin, and this surprises no-one. In this specific case, we know that Kulumbegov and his right hand, Chochiev, are rented agents of the KGB.

The sole responsibility for the problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia Gamsakhurdia placed on centrists in Moscow, though he claimed to have good relations with Chairman of Russia's Supreme Soviet, Boris Yeltsin, whom he met in Kazbegi (Q'azbegi) in northern Georgia on 23 March (Birch 1996.176). The 8-point agreement reached between them included proposals for the formation by 10 April of a joint-policing force to disarm ethnic militias operating on the territory of the 'former' South Ossetian Autonomous Region and for the withdrawal from it of sections of the Soviet army (Guruli 2007.87–89, quoting the newspaper *Sakartvelos Resp'ublik'a* 'Republic of Georgia' 26 March 1991).

was particularly severe. Naturally, this only increased population-movements.

⁸¹ The Georgian translation appeared in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* on 15 March (pp. 2–3).

⁸² A Kremlin spokesman later denied any such threat had been made.

Apart from inter-ethnic and Russo-Georgian relations, *Der Spiegel's* correspondent was also interested in the growing fragmentation within Georgia's own political circles. As Wheatley (2005, 54–55) records, Ioseliani's Mkhedrioni, numbering up to 1,000 in Tbilisi (and 4,000 nationwide), supported the unofficial National Congress. Their growing power caused Gamsakhurdia some alarm, resulting in his allegedly employing a Russian [sic!] detachment with 40 tanks to mount an assault outside Tbilisi on 19 February. Along with other members of the paramilitary organisation, Ioseliani himself was detained and placed in a KGB prison, where he sat until December. Regarding the oppositionists in the National Congress, Gamsakhurdia dismissed them thus:

These are neither an opposition nor a parallel parliament; they are a group of empty-handed politicians who have sunk to criminality.

Explaining how the National Congress obtained weaponry, he replied:

They've acquired them on the black market; apart from this, hardly a day goes by that they don't fall upon Soviet soldiers and snatch their arms. This gives the Kremlin the excuse to assert that an armed uprising is being prepared in Georgia. And so, for us it was of paramount importance to end these provocations. As long as we don't give the Kremlin any more excuses, their tanks won't be able to roar amongst us.⁸³

It became an ever more frequent slur in Gamsakhurdia's rhetoric to tar anyone who criticised him with the label of being an agent of the KGB.⁸⁴ But what goes around comes around, and in a 'Declaration for the Mass-

⁸³ Of course, it was not only Georgia's National Congress which obtained arms in this way. The same could be said of ALL paramilitary groups, whether in Georgia proper, South Ossetia or Abkhazia. There were reports of break-ins (possibly involving collusion) at Russian military bases, resulting in seizure of weapons. Also, the deteriorating economic position across the Union meant that it was becoming increasingly possible to acquire whatever one wanted for an appropriate payment (be it in cash or kind, e.g. vodka). As regards South Ossetia, it should not be forgotten that the majority of Ossetians live(d) in North Ossetia, where there was (and remains) huge sympathy for the fate of the South Ossetians, and that the Ossetians were Russia's oldest allies in the North Caucasus. And, with reference to Abkhazia, the determination of the Abkhazians' Circassian cousins (not to mention that of other North Caucasians) to ensure that the Abkhazians would not be left defenceless was demonstrated in the forming of the Assembly/Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, discussed earlier. In addition to these factors, Russians were well-aware of the anti-Russian sentiments that were/are so prevalent within Georgian society. Given this range of sympathies and channels of provision, the spread of arms amongst all parties is no surprise.

⁸⁴ It might be of interest to note that the list of his perceived agents included the present writer (and his wife).

Media' issued on 19 May 1991 National-Democratic Party leader Giorgi Ch'ant'uria stated:

The Kremlin, lending its real support to pseudo-national forces, seeks in this way to preserve totalitarianism, and the government of Gamsakhurdia, hiding behind the mask of the noble idea of Georgian independence, is destroying the true national movement [and] democratic forces. The dictator of Georgia calls the opposition criminal bands, finds false witnesses, forces the procurator and the militia to construct 'cases' and arrests persons unwelcome to him. The number of those gone missing without trace is increasing (as a rule, those who disappear are opponents of Gamsakhurdia).

In another document produced by Ch'ant'uria at this juncture it was claimed that Gamsakhurdia was recruited by the KGB at the time of his arrest in 1977, when they threatened that, in the event of his refusing, materials would be published proving that his father had been a personal agent of his fellow-Mingrelian Lavrent'i Beria, code-named Colchian (*Kolxidets*).

Away from intra-Kartvelian squabbles, Gamsakhurdia, on 15 March, addressed an Appeal to the Abkhazian people, in which he stressed their age-old bonds, defended his right to appoint a Prefect for the Gal District,⁸⁵ accused Ardzinba and the Abkhazian authorities of playing Moscow's game with its inevitability of bloodshed, called upon them not to participate in the 17 March Soviet referendum, and urged them rather to vote in Georgia's referendum on 31 March in favour of reestablishing Georgia's independence, for only in such a state, he asserted, would Abkhazians properly be able to exercise control over their own affairs; he signed off 'With love and respect' (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.50). The nobler sentiments of this summons should be contrasted with Gamsakhurdia's words from the podium in the centre of Tbilisi just prior to the 9th-April tragedy, when he asserted: "No such people as the Abkhazians exists",⁸⁶ which recalls Ak'ak'i Mgeladze's 'justification' for closing Abkhaz-language schools in 1945–6, namely that no such language as Abkhaz existed (see Footnote 66 of Chapter 2).

⁸⁵ The reference is to Gamsakhurdia's declaration of 11 February that he was appointing Edisher Dzhandzhulia Prefect of the Gal District, thereby effectively dismissing Rabo Shonia from the post of Chairman of the District's Executive Committee of the Council of People's Deputies. Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet responded on 13 February by declaring the move illegal (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.47 & 117 for the texts).

⁸⁶ /apxazi eri ar arsebobs/. This archive clip is included in Mamuk'a Kuparadze's 2009 film /nebis arkona/ 'Absence of Will' (Studia-Re).

Ardzinba duly replied the same day. Whilst accepting the fact of the centuries-old good-neighbourliness between the Abkhazian and Georgian peoples and hoping that in the future the two would resolve the complex problems of their national development 'hand in hand', he stressed Abkhazia's sovereign status and thus rejected Tbilisi's attempt to appoint a Prefect for the Gal District as an affront to elementary legal ethics, noting (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.118–121):

In circumstances where political decisions and actions that stir inter-ethnic discord in Abkhazia are rudely dispensed by diktat, we are taking and shall continue to take all necessary measures to defend the interests of Abkhazia's multi-ethnic population.

Provocations, led by Boris K'ak'ubava, began as soon as it became known that deputies would work towards implementing Gorbachev's plan to re-structure the Union and that Abkhazia would participate in the corresponding referendum. Asked in a revealing interview in 1998 for the Georgian newspaper *Alia* about K'ak'ubava's actions at that time, Abkhazia's 1991 Minister of Internal Affairs, Givi Lominadze, admitted that K'ak'ubava's criminal actions were numerous. Asked why he had not taken steps to stop them, he said that he had feared being branded a traitor to Georgia but added significantly: "If I had stepped in according to the law, it is true, I would have earned the respect of the Abkhazians and also prevented many misfortunes for Georgia".⁸⁷

Whilst Georgia proper predictably boycotted Gorbachev's referendum, voting went ahead in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The question asked was:

Do you consider to be necessary the preservation of the USSR as a renewed federation of sovereign republics enjoying equal rights in which the rights and freedoms of the individual of any nationality will be guaranteed in full measure?

Of 318,317 registered voters in Abkhazia, 166,544 (52.3%) participated, and of these 164,231 (98.6%) voted in favour (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.118). It follows from these figures that an absolute majority of those eligible to vote elected to stay part of a reformed Union, and, given the ethnic mix and balance of Abkhazia's population, this means that Gorbachev's proposal must have commanded support from all of the region's communities (including Kartvelian voters). In South Ossetia the parallel figures were: 72%

⁸⁷ Quoted from Sergej Shamba's article on Ajdgylara's 20th anniversary in *Respublika Abxazija* 16–17 December 2008, p. 3.

of registered voters participated with 97% voting in favour. Given these outcomes, the argument advanced from Abkhazia and South Ossetia is that, when, after the collapse of the USSR, Georgia obtained international recognition and membership of the UN, Abkhazia and South Ossetia had no legal links to it, and thus any recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity within its Soviet frontiers must be deemed to be devoid of any legal basis.

The result of Georgia's referendum of 31 March on reinstating Georgia's independence was a foregone conclusion, and the 'Act of Reviving the State-Independence of Georgia', signed by all members of the Supreme Soviet and Government of the Republic of Georgia, was duly passed on the emotive date of 9 April. The text declares: "The territory of the sovereign Republic of Georgia is one and indivisible"; there being no mention of any autonomies, it was natural for the Abkhazians and South Ossetians to suspect an intention to create a unitary state, devoid of any such entities (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.50–51). The press-release noted that the session had also passed a law on the activation of the Constitution and legislation of the Georgian Republic. Furthermore, the deputy-chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ak'ak'i Asatiani, proposed that the post of president should be introduced, and this suggestion was unanimously approved.

Gamsakhurdia then gave a press-conference. In view of worrying parallels that exist between Gamsakhurdia's and Saak'ashvili's Georgia, it is appropriate to quote something of what was said.⁸⁸

In connection with the situation that has developed in Samachablo, it was stated that in the village of Okona the Soviet army had attacked the Georgian militia and imprisoned 21 persons. In Tamarasheni they had disarmed the militia, and in Eredvi they had attacked the population. The Soviet army is acting like a real aggressor. Because of all this, the Soviet government had been handed an official note. Georgia's Supreme Soviet had received a telegram from the Soviet Union's Minister of Internal Affairs, Pugo, to the effect that the Republic does not have the right to form a National Guard and that such activity is an infringement of the President's decree. We should oppose the Centre's uncouth interference in our internal politics with powerful

⁸⁸ See *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 12 April 1991, p. 3. Compare the sentiments expressed by writer Revaz Mishveladze in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 9 August 1991, p. 2:

Georgia is tired of waiting in vain for a permanent stop to be put on the disparaging of Georgians on their own soil of Samachablo ... The hope is expunged that the extremist representatives of the guest-race would come to their senses. There never was any hope from the very start that the imperial power with gun in hand would bring an end to the marauding of bandits for the benefit of both sides.

protest-action. A strike has already begun on the railway and in the ports; an airport strike is also expected. Today we effectively find ourselves in conditions of war, and in war the people must overcome all odds. Attention will be concentrated on the fact that the provision of real economic assistance and the granting of solid credits to us is expected from the West ... Mamuk'a Tsintsadze's question concerned the announcement made by the USA's State Department that the Soviet government should resolve its problems with Georgia by only democratic means. "This fact inspires us with hope. We have sent a telegram to Mr. George Bush to the effect that a military intervention in Georgia and an armed interference in our internal affairs is being prepared. The one and only thing that will defend us is the West's reaction," he stated at the press-conference ... In the case of support from the free world, we shall have a guarantee of achieving in the nearest future complete independence and the withdrawal of occupying armies. As foundation for Georgia's new Constitution will lie the Constitution of the Georgian Democratic Republic which existed in the years 1918–1921.

At a session on 14 April, the Supreme Soviet set the 26 May as the date for presidential elections and gave its unanimous approval to Gamsakhurdia's candidacy.

In the light of Gorbachev's 7th-January instruction and in a spirit of compromise, an Assembly of South Ossetian deputies of all ranks, chaired by Znaur Gassiev, resolved, on 4 May, to rescind the decision of 20 September 1990 to declare South Ossetia a full republic and to reinstate the South Ossetian Autonomous Region along with all the administrative and legal structures existing prior to the upgrade; in view of the will of the people expressed in the 17th-March referendum, however, a request was made to the USSR's Supreme Soviet to permit South Ossetia to be an independent signatory of Gorbachev's proposed new Union Treaty (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.198–200). Georgia's dismissive response came on 7 May with a short resolution from the Supreme Soviet, signed by Asatiani, its new Chairman.

*Gamsakhurdia and Yeltsin Gain their Respective Presidencies, and
Gorbachev's Fall*

On 26 May, Gamsakhurdia was, as expected, elected President. The olive branch offered from Tskhinval on 4 May, already rejected in Georgia's legislature, was then answered on the ground with an intensification of military activity. Georgian forces took command of the heights overlooking Tskhinval and began shelling.

On 12 June, Boris Yeltsin became President of the Russian Federation. On 23 July, Gorbachev and leaders of the plenipotentiary delegations from those republics interested in reforming the Union finalised the draft-text of the 'Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States' at Novo-Ogarëvo. The text was despatched to relevant addressees along with a covering letter, dated 2 August, which set out the timetable for the signing-ceremony to be held in the Georgievsk Hall of the Great Kremlin Palace. Signing was to begin on 20 August with Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; Belorussia and Tajikistan would follow on 3 September, Turkmenistan and Kirghizia on 20 September, and finally on 10 October the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, other republics and Union-delegations—for the letter see Achugba (2007.86). But this ceremony never took place, and the hopes invested by the Abkhazians and South Ossetians in the associated reformation of the Union were not destined to be realised. Fearing the disintegration of the USSR, a group of Kremlin hardliners mounted on 19 August a coup against Gorbachev while he was holidaying at his Crimean retreat. Though the coup failed in a matter of days, it rapidly led to precisely what it had been designed to frustrate, namely the collapse of the USSR, preceded by the fall of Gorbachev and followed by the demise of Gamsakhurdia.

Gamsakhurdia's hovering over how to react to the attempted coup in Moscow on the grounds that it was of no concern to a Georgia already constructing its own independence, whilst perfectly understandable, led to a loss of respect and support, which began to haemorrhage.⁸⁹ K'it'ovani balked at the suggestion that his National Guard should be subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which Gamsakhurdia ordered at the behest of the putschists in Moscow, and marched his men out of the capital, accusing Gamsakhurdia of supporting the coup, which resulted in his dismissal as head of the National Guard. Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, an academic economist, had been sacked on 17 August because of the poor

⁸⁹ Of course, this was not the only reason why Gamsakhurdia's support ebbed away. His behaviour was deemed to be increasingly erratic, autocratic, and, it was felt, megalomaniacal. He had long had an interest in mysticism and, in 1990, had published a book entitled */sakartvelos sulieri missia/* 'Georgia's Spiritual Mission'. At the time, this had aroused little interest, but in *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* of 14 June 1991 it was eulogised in an article by Lela Khachidze. One of its chapters was a 42-page exegesis of the short 10th-century poem 'Praise and Glory of the Georgian Language', by Ioane Zosime. This was reprinted as chapter one of a collection 'Letters and Essays' (Tbilisi: Khelovneba), and a more extensive elucidation was promised. In the final paragraph Gamsakhurdia concluded that Zosime had predicted that after a period of 4,000 years, during which the language (equated with the Georgian people) would suffer decline and belittlement, it/they would rise and regain its/their universal position, offering spiritual instruction to mankind.

performance of the economy. The National-Democratic Party organised a demonstration on 2 September, leading to weeks of increasing disturbances. National-Democratic Party leader Giorgi Ch'ant'uria's flight to Moscow on 17 September was ordered to turn back, and he was gaoled. On 23 September, Gamsakhurdia declared a state of emergency. After fatal riots in Tbilisi on 5 October, a temporary calm was restored, but it lasted only until December (Wheatley 2005:55–56).

South Ossetia Rescinds Its Compromise-offer

On 1 September, South Ossetian People's Deputies met under the chairmanship of A. Parastaev and took two decisions. The first overturned the 4th-May compromise, on the grounds that the Assembly that made it was not a legally constituted body, since the highest organ of state-power was the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of South Ossetia that had been elected in the vote of 9 December 1990. Secondly, they resolved to appeal to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation to consider the adjoining of South Ossetia to Russia (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008:200–201).

New Electoral Law in Abkhazia

Attention in Abkhazia meanwhile was concentrated on the principles by which the elections to the local Supreme Soviet should be conducted. A draft-proposal had been composed by a group of qualified jurists, and one of them, V. Ketsba, was asked to comment on it in the newspaper *Abxazija* of 26 March. The Abkhazian preference was for a two-chamber Parliament, consisting of a republican chamber, elected by territorial regions, and a nationalities' chamber, in which the five ethnic societies of Abkhazia (Abkhazian, Kartvelian, Armenian, Russian, Greek) were to be represented by different numbers of deputies. However, this was not acceptable to Tbilisi, and so, by way of compromise in order to avoid possible violent reaction from what was still the metropolitan centre, Sukhum agreed to a different system, as proposed by Gamsakhurdia (a fact that will resurface in a later chapter).⁹⁰ On 27 August, the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR met under Ardzinba's chairmanship and passed a law on changes to

⁹⁰ On 8 July, Gamsakhurdia addressed an appeal to the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet's deputies (see *Lit'erat'uruli Sakartvelo* 12 July, p. 1). He laid the blame again on 'certain forces at the Centre' who were trying to undermine Georgia's struggle for independence by

the electoral law for its deputies—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.122–3). There was to be a single chamber with a quota-system: 28 deputies were to be mandated by the Abkhazians, 26 by the Kartvelians, 11 by the other nationalities. Though the elections were originally supposed to take place in December 1991, they were brought forward to be held in a series of rounds from September 1991 through January 1992. A number of parties (viz. *Ajdgylara*; the Armenian organisation *Krunk*, under Albert Topolian; the Russian movement *Slavjanskij Dom*, under Yuri Voronov; and some others) agreed to form a block called *Sojuz* ‘Union’, and this block achieved a sufficient number of seats in the very first round of voting in order to form the simple majority that was required to carry all legislative acts other than those that would alter the Constitution, for which a two-thirds majority was needed.

On 27 September, the Presidium of Abkhazia’s Supreme Soviet passed a resolution on securing the economic base of Abkhazia’s sovereignty—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008. 127–128). In line with this resolution, Abkhazia’s Council of Ministers then passed, on 22 October, a resolution ‘On measures for the transference to the jurisdiction of the Abkhazian ASSR of the enterprises and organisations subordinate to the Union and Union-Republic and located on the territory of the Abkhazian ASSR’. A working-party was set up under the chairmanship of Z. Labakhua. A proposition envisaged the transference of enterprises and organisations under the jurisdiction of the Abkhazian ASSR to the state-ownership of Abkhazia without compensation (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.128–129). Both these resolutions were overturned by a Decree of Gamsakhurdia issued on 24 October—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.61–62).

USSR Disintegrates and USA Recognises Georgia

Though Gorbachev and the leaders of eight republics signed a New Economic Agreement on 18 October, the end of the Union was approaching. Russia, the Ukraine and Belorussia agreed to form a Commonwealth

setting the Abkhazians against the Kartvelians and to ‘tear Abkhazia away from Georgia’s living body’. He warned:

All such attempts are doomed to failure, for the cement that binds Abkhazia to the whole of Georgia is so firm that no external or internal force can shake it.

He added that the most serious consequences could follow any such attempts to infringe both Georgia’s and Abkhazia’s constitutions.

of Independent States (CIS) on 8 December, and eight other republics joined on 21 December by signing the Alma-Ata Protocol, thereby effectively consigning the Soviet Union to history—the republics who declined to join were: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Georgia. Gorbachev resigned on 25 December, abolishing the office of USSR President and transferring relevant powers to the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. That same Christmas Day, in his address to the American people, President George Bush Sr. announced that the USA recognised all fifteen union-republics as independent states. But of Georgia (along with Moldavia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) he stated (see <http://www.webcitation.org/5kwPvzwbj>):

We will establish diplomatic relations with them when we are satisfied that they have made commitments to responsible security policies and democratic principles.

By the close of the year, the Soviet Union officially no longer existed. Naturally, these events with their wide-ranging ramifications (far beyond the constitutive states of the now dissolved Soviet Union themselves) held the world's attention, but on 21 December significant developments were also taking place in Tbilisi and Tskhinval.

South Ossetia Declares Independence

The Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia, stating that the region had been subjected to an undeclared war since 23 November 1989, involving political, economic, fuel and informational blockades, and to an overt war since the start of 1991, issued a 'Declaration of the Independence of the Republic of South Ossetia' on 21 December⁹¹—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.203–4). This was followed by a resolution, carrying Gassiev's signa-

⁹¹ What would prove to be Gamsakhurdia's final edict on South Ossetia had been published on 2 December. It began:

In Shida Kartli the Ossetian separatists, having usurped power, with the support of the internal forces of the USSR's Ministry of the Interior and the Soviet Army, as before are continuing anti-constitutional and anti-state activities, clearly essaying encroachment on the territorial integrity of Georgia and restriction of the sovereign rights of the Republic of Georgia.

He condemned as "inoperative and devoid of juridical power the decisions of the anti-constitutional and anti-state organ, the so-called Supreme Soviet of the South Ossetian Republic of 26 November 1991" and demanded that the relevant state-structures of the USSR remove from Georgian territory all military forces of the Soviet Interior Ministry and sec-

ture, establishing a Republican Guard and Defence Committee; also introduced was a six-month state of emergency—for the relevant texts see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.203–205).

Gamsakhurdia Overthrown and Civil War in Mingrelia

Of more immediate concern in Tbilisi was the reappearance on the streets there of K'it'ovani and his National Guardsmen in support of the recently renewed protests by the opposition. The ensuing fighting with government-troops turned the centre of Tbilisi around Government House into a battle-ground, as Gamsakhurdia was cornered in the building's bunker.⁹² Ioseliani's release was secured, and this stimulated members of the Mkhedrioni to rally and supplement opposition-forces. Interestingly, it was Ioseliani who freed Kulumbegov on 29 December, and he returned to head South Ossetia's administration (Tanaev 2008.26). The stand-off in Tbilisi continued until 6 January 1992, when Gamsakhurdia was compelled to depart, fleeing first to Armenia and then eventually settling as guest of the Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudaev in Grozny (capital of Chechenia). Here he was to remain until he returned on 24 September 1993 to Mingrelia. Though Gamsakhurdia had never been a Mingrelian nationalist (in the sense of seeking rights for either the Mingrelian language or the Mingrelians as a people), the bulk of his followers were concentrated in Mingrelia,⁹³ where feelings were so strong that his illegal ousting from the presidency quickly sparked a civil war against the forces of those responsible for it. And it was from Mingrelia that Gamsakhurdia was to play his last card in the game of Georgian politics, when, ironically, he would be rematched against his long-standing adversary, Eduard Shevardnadze.

In view of Gamsakhurdia's decree of 11 November on the nationalisation of property belonging to the USSR's military forces on Georgian territory and following events in Moscow, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet passed on 29

tions of the Soviet army located in 'Shida Kartli'. The text is given by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.62–64).

⁹² The extent to which Russian troops helped BOTH sides, either by direct participation in the fighting or by the provision of arms, has been the subject of debate (see Wheatley 2005.56 & 65).

⁹³ He was the 'local boy made good' and thus benefited from regional loyalty, much as many Georgians harbour a level of respect for Stalin, even if they deplore his excesses, for the same reason.

December two resolutions to subordinate to itself all military forces operating in Abkhazia—for the texts⁹⁴ see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.129–131).

Relations between Tbilisi's Military Council and Abkhazia/South Ossetia

The junta which overthrew Gamsakhurdia formed themselves into a so-called Military Council, which laid claim to power in Georgia from 6 January to the end of March. The members of the ruling triumvirate were: former premier Tengiz Sigua; leader of the National Guard, Tengiz K'it'ovani; and leader of the Mkhedrioni, Dzhaba Ioseliani.

No doubt viewing the situation in Tbilisi and the confrontation developing in Mingrelia with a certain amount of *Schadenfreude*, South Ossetia, where the humanitarian situation, already precarious, had become catastrophic at the end of 1991,⁹⁵ took advantage of the lull caused by Georgian preoccupations elsewhere and proceeded to organise a referendum on 19 January. The questions sought to gauge the level of approval for South Ossetia's declaration of independence and possible reunion with Russia (as the heir to the USSR). Of the 70% of the potential electorate who participated, over 98% voted in favour; for the results of the referendum, see the two protocol-documents given by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.205–6), who also present on the following page a statement issued by Ju. Dzitstsoiti, Chairman of the Central Referendum Commission. In February, Georgians resumed intensive shelling of Tskhinval, and this basically continued until the end of the war.

By the start of February 1992, the activity of the Zviadists was having an effect in Abkhazia, disrupting the operation of Sukhum airport and the single-track railway-line that connected Russia with Georgia (and onward to Armenia). On 4 February, the Abkhazian authorities, perhaps surprisingly, agreed to the introduction into the Gal District of elements of the National Guard to deal with Zviadists active there. Negotiations took place that day in Ochamchira between delegations of Abkhazia's Supreme

⁹⁴ In this collection of texts, the resolution passed on 27 November was signed by Ardzinba as 'Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia' (p. 129), and this titular practice continued until the resolution of 31 March 1992 (pp. 134–135), where the signatory is described as 'Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Abkhazia'. Previously his signature had appeared against the title 'Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR'.

⁹⁵ For example, as winter set in, the temperature in Tskhinval's hospital never rose above 14°C, and, at one stage because of the blockade, the dead had to be buried in make-shift graves in the city's back-yards.

Soviet, the Zviadist strike-committee, and the command of the Military Council's militia. Agreement was reached that meetings would cease from 5 February, and the blockade of the railway organised by the Zviadists would be lifted. The National Guard undertook to withdraw from Abkhazia after 12 February.

On 14 February, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet made this appeal to Georgia's Military Council and Temporary government:

At the beginning of February of this year, units of the National Guard of Georgia were brought onto the territory of Abkhazia with the aim of lifting the blockade of the railway and Sukhum city-airport. In consideration of firm guarantees given by the Military Council and Temporary government of the Republic of Georgia to withdraw the Guardsmen after executing these aims, the government of Abkhazia did not prevent the introduction of the military. At the present time these aims have already been achieved. At the same time, the presence of formations of the National Guard has seriously complicated the socio-political and crime-situation in Abkhazia. During their presence in Abkhazia, Georgia's National Guardsmen have committed a range of especially dangerous offences: murders, robbery, pillage, etc... Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet will take all measures to normalise the situation in the republic, and the further presence in Abkhazia of units of the National Guard of the Republic of Georgia will hinder the stabilisation of the situation. Therefore, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet, in conformity with current understandings, deems necessary the withdrawal of the formations of the National Guard of the Republic of Georgia from the territory of Abkhazia. For its part, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet guarantees the normal functioning of the railway and Sukhum city-airport.

On 17 February, the National Guard units were withdrawn—for the text and the accompanying explanatory note see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.133). Happenings on the railway-line will resurface in connection with the start of the war in Abkhazia later in the year.⁹⁶

On 21 February, K'it'ovani and Ioseliani signed a declaration on behalf of the Military Council stating—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.64–65):

1. Without changes to the frontiers and national-state structures of the Republic of Georgia existing today (with the current status of Abkhazia and Ach'ara) [the Military Council] deems unchanged the international legal acts and the supremacy of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of

⁹⁶ And, indeed, they were even to play a part in Abkhazia's presidential election-campaign in 2011.

Georgia dating from 21 February 1921 and its operability, taking account of today's realities;⁹⁷

2. Elections to the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia will be held no later than the autumn of 1992 on the basis of the principles established by the Constitution of Georgia from 21 February 1921;

3. The Military Council of the Republic of Georgia together with the Temporary government will lay down its powers before the newly elected Parliament of Georgia at its very first sitting.

Postscript

Just before the fall of Gamsakhurdia, the journal *Index on Censorship* commissioned a translation of an article in Russian by the then-nonagenarian Ossetian philologist Vasilij Abaev entitled 'The Tragedy of South Ossetia'. Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to observations by Abaev on alternative designations employed by Georgians to avoid their having to use the abominated term 'South Ossetia'. As stated there, those observations were made in his article 'The tragedy of South Ossetia: path to agreement', published in the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaja Gazeta* 'Independent Paper' on 22 January 1992, two weeks after Gamsakhurdia's overthrow. Since the said observations, along with some other comments, were also included in the longer article, it is reasonable to assume that the newspaper-piece will have represented a rejigging of its similarly named predecessor. In view of Gamsakhurdia's ousting and perhaps in the hope that Kartvelian attitudes to their minorities would then change, the journal's editor elected not to print the commissioned translation. Elements from it were presented as Appendix 7 in one of my earliest (English-language)⁹⁸ publications on the politics of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (Hewitt 1993:314–316). It is worthwhile comparing some of the content of these two 'variations on a theme'.

⁹⁷ Recall that in Article 107 of the (never ratified) 1921 Constitution the third autonomy within Georgia was not South Ossetia, formed only in 1922, but Zakatala, a region that was assigned to Azerbaijan by the early Soviets.

⁹⁸ My very first such comment on Georgia's developing interethnic strife was in Georgian (Hewitt 1989), the English translation of which can be consulted at the website: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/conflict/637-an-open-letter-to-the-georgian-people-1989.html>. Another offering that antedated the article in question (Hewitt 1992a) was more linguistically based. Also, it should be pointed out that the journal *Index on Censorship* 19.1 of January 1990 had carried on pp. 23–25 an article "Guests" on their own territory', of which I was the unnamed author; a Russian translation appeared in *Bzyp* on 24 April 1990 (pp. 3–4). For a further contribution see Hewitt (1990).

The pre-coup version began with a quote from Andrej Sakharov's article in *Ogonëk* 'Flame' of July 1989, namely: "Georgia has become consumed with a chauvinistic psychosis and behaves towards its ethnic minorities as a mini-empire." It then continued in this (edited) fashion:

What is ethnocracy? We are speaking of when some ethnos declares itself to be sole ruler and awards itself the right to crush, oppress and exterminate all the ethnic minorities on its 'own' territory. This ethnos arrogates to itself unique qualities, a profound antiquity, a brilliant history, and, of course, a racial superiority over all other peoples. The leaders of the chauvinistic groups puff themselves up to appear large and important. The mania of power is always comical and utterly provincial.

"The most interesting moment begins when they undertake to argue for the 'right' of the given ethnos over the territories of others, alleging that these belonged to it in the past, forgetting that the whole history of mankind is a continuous process of transigrations, splits and convergences of peoples, that there is no ethnos on earth whose formation would not have resulted from some special variety of migration and assimilation" (A. Osipov *Svobodnoe Slovo* [Free Speech] 25 July 1989)...

Long before the inter-ethnic relations in South Ossetia became seriously strained and the sound of gunfire thundered on the streets of Tskhinval, the Georgian mass-media, its papers, journals and responsible persons began strenuously to cultivate the concepts of 'hosts' and 'guests'. The essence of this notion is as simple as the mooing of a cow—the Georgians are 'host', all others in the republic are 'guests'...

In order to discredit the 'wild' Ossetians, the propaganda of the Georgian fascists baulks at no fabrication. On 7 March 1991, Belgian and Dutch television broadcast in the evening news-programme information to the effect that the conflict in South Ossetia was of a religious character. The Ossetians, they claimed, follow Islam (!!) and speak a Turkic tongue (!!!). This 'information' was evidently tossed over from Georgia and broadcast through the grace of the Soviet ambassador, the Georgian A. Chik'vaidze.

Real and imagined history

Wherever fascism erupts, the humanitarian disciplines always suffer, history most of all. There is one open and cynical goal for scholarship—not the search for, and resurrection of, historical *truth* but unrestrained ethnic, national and racial self-adulation.

In the paper *Zarja Vostoka* [Dawn of the East] (26 May 1989) I happened upon the article 'How old are we?' by Georgian historian Lovard T'ukhashvili. The author asserts that the Georgian state is 6,000 years old. The evidence? If you please: 'The analysis of national ethno-psychology, heightened ambition, unshakeable self-love, pride.' And that is all! National conceit becomes the determiner of the age of national statehood—the greater the conceit, the older the state. Such is the level of the new fascistic historiography of Georgia.

Let us move from concocted 'patriotic' fantasies to actual history. Before the 10th century of our era there is not a hint of any Georgian kingdom. If before that time a Georgian-speaking 'kingdom' did exist, then it had no political relevance even within the confines of Transcaucasia. Only with King David the Builder (1073–1125) does the Georgian state gain a stable political status and, thanks to the crusades, become known in the West. 'The Georgian Chronicle' begins by presenting a varied mix of fantasy with reality. Many 'kings' figure here. But there is something odd—not one of them has a Georgian name—they are all Iranian.

All this has been demonstrated by Georgian historians themselves, the venerable Ivane Dzhavakhishvili among them. From Dzhavakhishvili to T'ukhashvili—what a deplorable degradation!..

Totalitarianism—animal-like fear of pluralism, brutal political repression of any alternative thinking, savage censorship, uniformity of all the outlets of mass-information, a puppet-parliament where all decisions are taken unanimously, the concept of 'host' and 'guest' with the hint of the expulsion of all 'guests', rabid racism, half-baked messianism ... the fascist character of the ethnocratic Georgian regime is no longer a secret either at home or abroad. Writing in *Le Monde* (25 April 1991) T. Nask'idashvili prophesies: "And if Gamsakhurdia doesn't come to his senses in time, the Ossetians will be followed by the Adzharians, Abkhazians, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians ... all those who for centuries judged Georgia to be beautiful and lofty-spirited."

Abaev began his later, more conciliatory variation by adhering to Sakharov's diagnosis, but he saw it as applying in its most virulent form to only a proportion of the population. Sadly, this group, headed by Gamsakhurdia, who had labelled the Ossetians 'an uneducated, stupid race', had manoeuvred itself into a position where it exercised most influence amongst the Georgians. But Abaev hoped that the casting aside of Gamsakhurdia would prove to be the first step in Georgia's return to the values that Shota Rustaveli infused into the text of the Georgian national epic 'The Knight in the Panther-skin'. He goes on:

One of the particularities of the conflict in South Ossetia is that there can be no doubt as to who is the aggressor here and who the victim. It is obvious to the naked eye that it was not Ossetian fighters who raged in Tbilisi and committed a pogrom there—it was Georgians in Tskhinval. It was not Ossetian extremists who violated the Rustaveli monument—it was Georgians who violated the Kosta Khetagurov⁹⁹ monument. It was not Ossetian forces who killed citizens in Tbilisi through hunger and cold—it was Georgians who did this to the citizens of Tskhinval. The excesses of the Ossetian fighters were merely a reaction in answer to the excesses of the Georgians.

⁹⁹ Ossetia's national poet (1859–1906). Interestingly, the house-museum of Abaev himself suffered damaged in the August 2008 fighting in Tskhinval.

That said, without naming names, Abaev went on to criticise the provocative stance adopted by those who looked exclusively to Moscow and sought union with North Ossetia. Whilst this was understandable at the human level, he argued, it was folly to imagine that such a natural barrier between Georgia and Ossetia as that presented by the main chain of the Caucasus mountains could be erased.¹⁰⁰ He even went so far as to urge the abandonment of all talk of removing South Ossetia from Georgia, as no Georgian government would or could ever assent to such infringement of its territorial integrity, and:

The Ossetian side must recognise that South Ossetia was and will remain an organic part of Georgia. All talk of splitting South Ossetia from Georgia and of the 'sovereignty' of South Ossetia must stop once and for all.

Naturally, these are the sentiments that are quoted by Georgian commentators. But, just as he saw obligations applicable to his fellow-Ossetians, there was another component to Abaev's argument. Georgia had to shift from ethnocracy to the kind of democratic state envisaged in Articles 5 and 6 of its Declaration of Independence on 26 May 1918:

The Georgian Democratic Republic, within the confines of its frontiers, will guarantee to all its citizens equal civil and political rights, regardless of their ethnic affiliation ... 6. The Georgian Democratic Republic will offer the possibility of free development to all nationalities living on its territory.

As we seen in the discussion in Chapter 2, Menshevik Georgia failed to live up to the ideals enshrined in the Declaration. And time would tell if Gamsakhurdia's successors would prove any more magnanimous and accommodating to the Ossetians (as well as the Abkhazians and other apprehensive minorities) than the deposed president, or if it would be just more of the same, or possibly even worse...

Summation

Interestingly, the South Ossetians had pressed for much more in a far shorter time than had the Abkhazians, who were still formally to revoke their region's status as an ASSR. The Ossetian leaders might argue that, though all of Soviet Georgia's autonomies were under threat of abolition, South Ossetia became the first target of sustained pressure, even if the first ethnic clashes had occurred in Abkhazia (not forgetting incidents in

¹⁰⁰ The Roki Tunnel, connecting North and South Ossetia, was constructed in 1985.

Georgia's Azerbaijani-populated districts) in July 1989. And the reason for this might have been that, since the very beginning of these problems in the late 1980s, there has been a widely-held assumption that the case of South Ossetia could be 'solved' more easily than that of Abkhazia, which is on a larger scale, longer lasting, and more intractable; after all, South Ossetia had been created by the Soviets in 1922 as a mere Autonomous Region, whilst Abkhazia had begun its Soviet existence as a full union-republic, was first forced into treaty-alliance with Georgia, and finally demoted to an ASSR within Georgia. However, although Abaev did not mention the word 'federalism', one wonders if he might have had some such possibility at the back of his mind when composing the more emollient expression of his considered opinions. And one wonders what the reaction in South Ossetia would have been, had such an offer come from Tbilisi either in the dying days of the Soviet regime or in the wake of Gamsakhurdia's overthrow. As we shall see in the next chapter, the offer of a confederal arrangement for Abkhazia would almost certainly have avoided war there. Whether a tighter federative relationship would have been acceptable to the Abkhazians in the conditions existing in the summer of 1992 is less clear and poses a tantalising question that can probably never be definitively answered.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONS WITH POST-COMMUNIST GEORGIA UNDER EDUARD SHEVARDNADZE

Pstazaras jyq'ow apsadgjyl awp'

'Life is the homeland' (Abkhazian aphorism)

The first months of 1992 saw Georgia in the hands of an unelected Military Council, buttressed by K'it'ovani's National Guard and Ioseliani's Mkhedrioni, and facing not only war on two fronts (South Ossetia and Mingrelia, where Zviadist supporters of the ousted president resisted the Council's unconstitutional takeover of power) but also growing tensions in Abkhazia. Whereas other former union-republics of the USSR were being recognised by, and establishing diplomatic relations with, the outside-world, Georgia's chances of gaining similar benefits, quite understandably, looked decidedly unpromising, given the chaotic condition in which the state found itself. The desperate situation called for a desperate measure.

In March, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had resigned as Soviet Foreign Minister in the wake of the failed coup against Gorbachev the previous year, was invited to return to his original power-base to chair the Military Council (shortly to be restyled State Council). The invitation was accepted, and he flew in on 7 March, bringing with him a wealth of goodwill from the Western politicians and diplomats whom he had come to know in his capacity as the external face of the Soviet Union and who felt they owed him a debt of gratitude for his perceived role in permitting the peaceful collapse of the Berlin Wall and subsequent disintegration of the USSR. The consequences were to be profound, in both a positive and negative sense, depending on the perspective of the ethnic group concerned. It should not, however, be assumed that his fellow-countrymen necessarily shared with his (relatively) new Western friends the same rose-tinted view of Shevardnadze the man, politician and head of state; after all, their memories went back to murkier years, when, as Party Boss in Georgia (1972–85), he was very well-known to his local fellow-citizens but essentially unknown outside his native republic.¹ And, thus, his return to lead his native

¹ On 18 November 1983, a group of young persons from privileged families decided to undermine Shevardnadze's plans to impress Leonid Brezhnev with glorious celebrations

republic, albeit in a revised format, was by no means universally welcomed

jointly to mark the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk and the 60th anniversary of both the consolidation of the USSR and Soviet rule in Georgia by playing a mindless prank—they hijacked a plane, intending to divert it to Turkey. The hijackers were tricked into thinking the plane had landed on Turkish soil, whereas it was actually at Batumi airport in south-western Georgia (near the Turkish border). Russian Spetsnaz forces were flown from Moscow, and the hijacking was speedily ended; two died and five were wounded in the process. In the spring of 1992 an article, in the form of a letter to the new Georgian leader ('After 8 years of silence' by Prof. Vazha Iverieli, Chairman of Georgia's Medical Society of Endocrinologists and President of Georgia's Diabetic Association, whose sons were two of the hijackers) was published by the Georgian diaspora in France in *Gushagi* 'Sentinel', (issue 27, pp. 19–29). Iverieli's ten pages are a blistering attack on Shevardnadze's personality, as revealed by his actions during his communist days in Georgia. No relatives of the defendants were allowed to attend the hijackers' 'open' trial, access to which was carefully controlled, and, Iverieli asserts, it was only in 1989 that the relatives learnt that all of the accused had been executed in 1984. After cataloguing examples of Shevardnadze's misrule in Georgia, including the rather widespread view that he raised corruption to 'a mechanism for governing the state', Iverieli drew the following conclusion:

And so, we have a twofold picture of you: in Georgia as the apostle of the unclean vs abroad as an 'angel' sent to us as an apostle of peace. The question arises as to which of these two is the real you and which the mask. It is our firm conviction that there has been no *perestrojka* within your internal nature—internally you are the same Shevardnadze you were in Georgia—simply the role has changed. The main aim of your life has been to achieve peaks in your career; all your skill and energy are directed towards attaining these. Any other moral categories have for you no value whatsoever. For you human beings have just the same sort of significance as do figures on a chess-board for the chess-player. It would be laughable to talk in terms of the categories of feeling about how sorry a chess-player might be when called upon to sacrifice this or that piece. Equally baseless would it be for me to censure you for your stony-heartedness when in consideration of your career you were despatching human beings to the slaughter-house. This is why we have expressed no censure of you in this manner, so as not to make ourselves a laughing-stock. For you patriotism and philanthropy are weasel words, as indeed is every category of feeling; in like vein, ideology has no meaning, whether it be Marxism-Leninism, fascism, or democracy. It is just your very nature which leads you always to strive to be among the ranks of the prominent, regardless of whatever might be the foundation upon which your career is at any moment being built—that of Marxism-Leninism, that of fascism, that of democracy. No matter what face you shew to the world, internally you will remain the self-same Shevardnadze forever.

In the same issue of the journal is another 'Open Letter to Comrade Shevardnadze' (pp. 61–4) by Elizabed Chikhladze, daughter of Father Teodore (aka Teimuraz Chikhladze), who, though not on the plane and though arrested only three months after the event, was executed on the charge of being the hijackers' ringleader. His daughter saw this as a trumped up allegation, being in reality a cynical move to rid Georgia's communist authorities of a troublesome prelate who wanted an end to it. She was outraged to read in an interview with Shevardnadze in the Georgian paper *Republic of Georgia* his assertion: "I knew nothing, had nothing to do with it, and recall nothing." She ended her letter with her own accusation: "I charge you with manufacturing the death-sentence against my father! I charge you with executing a servant of God!..."

at home. Within the year this one-time standard-bearer of Georgian bolshevism, notorious for the speech in which he had once stated during the Brezhnev era that Georgia basked in the radiance of two suns, one rising in the east, the other in the north (viz. the Kremlin), had been baptised into the Georgian Orthodox Church with the baptismal name Giorgi.

The hoped-for benefits duly began to accrue to Georgia within days of Shevardnadze's return. There were rumours that the UK might follow America in simply recognising Georgia without taking the more significant step of establishing diplomatic relations. However, with a General Election in the UK set for 2 April, which the ruling Conservative government of Premier John Major was, according to all indicators, widely expected to lose, an announcement suddenly issued from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), headed by Douglas Hurd as Foreign Secretary, at the end of March that the UK would both recognise and establish diplomatic relations with Georgia.² The consequences were profound and, one might argue, are still being played out. The UK was about to assume the rolling six-month chairmanship of the European Economic Community (EEC)³ in the second half of the year, and the UK's lead in this matter was promptly followed by the other member-states. Despite the timing of this decision, the first British ambassador to Georgia (Stephen Nash) was not actually appointed until 1995. President George Bush also established diplomatic relations with Georgia upon Shevardnadze's return to his homeland, making Georgia the last of the Soviet union-republics to be granted this favour,⁴ and the first American ambassador (Kent Brown) took up office on 9 September 1992.⁵

Upsurge Followed by Ceasefire in South Ossetia

Meanwhile, in South Ossetia there was an upsurge in hostilities following Shevardnadze's return. On 20 May, a column of refugees heading towards

² Was the decision taken precipitately (as I have long argued) by Major and Hurd, desirous of taking the glory of doing Shevardnadze this favour before losing office? Against all the odds, the Conservatives were then returned to power. And so, if this assumption is correct, the rush to recognise was unnecessary.

³ This became the European Union (EU) on 1 November 1993 following the Treaty of Maastricht.

⁴ See Norman Kempster's note in *The Los Angeles Times* for 25 March 1992 headed 'Shevardnadze's Georgia Wins U.S. Recognition' at: http://articles.latimes.com/1992-03-25/news/mn-4221_1_human-rights.

⁵ The Embassy had been established on 23 April. Brown served until 19 August 1995.

North Ossetia for protection from the shelling came under fire near the village of Zar. The result was 36 dead, aged between 11 and 76, of whom 19 were women; over 30 were seriously wounded. This was one of the worst incidents in the conflict, casualties in which between 1989 and 1992 amounted to: 1,000 killed, 3,500 injured, and 117 Ossetian villages burnt and plundered (Zakharov & Areshev 2008.89). In addition to widespread destruction of property and businesses, tens of thousands of refugees from Georgia (from both inside and outside South Ossetia) fled to, and were registered in, North Ossetia. On 29 May, South Ossetia's Supreme Soviet, acting in accordance with the 19th-January plebiscite, passed the formal Act proclaiming the country's independence—for the short text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.210–11) and Tanaev (2008.270).

With the relatively low-level conflict threatening to intensify, the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, intervened, arranging talks first in the northern Georgian village of Q'azbegi (10 June) and then in Daghomys (near Sochi, the popular Russian resort located on ancient Ubykh territory, just north of Abkhazia on the Black Sea coast), where the so-called Daghomys Accord was signed on 24 June by Yeltsin, Shevardnadze, Kulumbegov (for South Ossetia), and A. Galazov (for North Ossetia). By the terms of the agreement, hostilities were to cease by 28 June; within three days thereafter, military formations were to be withdrawn to create a corridor or demilitarised zone, to be delimited by a joint-group of observers (Georgian, Russian and both South and North Ossetian); so as to avoid being drawn into the conflict, Russia was to withdraw its 37th Regiment of Engineers and Sappers and its 292nd Military Helicopter Regiment, along with all support-staff; a joint Control Commission was to be established, with headquarters in Tskhinval, to oversee the agreement with the support of the group of military observers in accordance with understandings reached at the earlier meeting in Q'azbegi; there were to be no resumption of hostilities, no sanctions, and free right of return for refugees—for the text see Tanaev (2008.271–73) and Volkhonskij et al. (2008.252–53). Shelling of Tskhinval actually ceased on 13 July, and on the following day three battalions (Georgian, Ossetian, Russian) of peace-keepers were introduced (Tanaev 2008.28). On Map 3 one can see not only the line demarcating the demilitarised zone but that, whilst the bulk of the territory of South Ossetia was in Ossetian hands, there were areas where the villages were populated by Georgians, and these local residents recognised Tbilisi's sovereignty.

Attention Shifts to Mingrelia and Abkhazia

Following the ceasefire in South Ossetia, Mingrelia was left as the sole seat of open military conflict in Georgia, though tensions continued to rise in neighbouring Abkhazia. On 9 March, Zviadists stepped up their campaign, taking control of the whole of Mingrelia by 30 March. On 31 March, a decree strengthening Abkhazia's military preparedness, deemed necessary in the light of developments across the R. Ingur, was signed by Ardzinba as 'Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Abkhazia' [sic] (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.134–5). Volkhonskij and his fellow-editors set the context by including the following observations in their note appended to this text (p. 135):

On 1 April, forces of the State Council mounted an assault and within two days had captured Zugdidi. On the evening of 3 April, Abkhazian internal forces took up position by the Ingur Bridge to prevent Georgian forces entering the territory of the republic. On 5 April, there was crossfire between Georgian and Abkhazian units, as a result of which 4 persons were killed. Negotiations took place in Sukhum on 7 April between Ardzinba and a Georgian delegation, in which it was agreed that Georgia would not introduce military forces into Abkhazia, whilst the Abkhazian government undertook to guarantee the uninterrupted working of the main transport-routes and to prevent meetings of Zviadists.

Because no new Government had been formed in Abkhazia since 25 January, when the previous one had resigned as the Supreme Soviet began its 12th sitting, the relevant duties had been fulfilled in the interim by the Supreme Soviet itself. But on 5 May, the first step was taken to set up a new administration. After rejecting the candidature of Givi Lominadze, then Abkhazia's Minister of Internal Affairs, as Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Abkhazia, Ivan Zarandia was elected to the post. At its next meeting on 8 May, R. Dgebuadze read out a declaration on behalf of the 20 Kartvelian deputies complaining that the opinion of the said faction was being ignored and all decisions were being taken by simple majority-vote. After delivering this complaint, the Kartvelian deputies walked out. The remaining 31 deputies then proceeded to make other ministerial appointments, including that of Aleksandr Ankvab as Minister of Internal Affairs. Lominadze refused to vacate his desk, saying that only Georgia's Minister of Internal Affairs, Roman Gventsadze, had the power to dismiss him. In fact, Lominadze had held the job for three years, refusing to be dislodged even after Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet had deemed his performance unsatisfactory on 30 January 1992. Before long,

he was forcibly and unceremoniously ejected from his office, ending up in hospital as a result.

At the end of May, the Kartvelian oppositionists made clear their demands for the dissolution of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet, the abolition of the quota-system by which it was elected, and the resignation of Ardzinba. Deputy-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Tamaz Nadareishvili, wrote to Ardzinba on 27 May blaming him and his entourage for the crisis developing in Abkhazia and urging that the two of them resign together (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.137–8). A group of deputies responded the following day in Ardzinba's defence, reminding Nadareishvili of his own recent advocacy of the view that the only way to resolve the problem of Abkhaz-Georgian relations was to bring the troops of Georgia's State Council into Abkhazia (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.139–40), a move that would have entailed war, as indeed it was to do just a few weeks later.

Ardzinba explained his thinking when we met in Abkhazia in early July 1992 (see Hewitt 1993). It was his intention to strengthen Abkhazia to a sufficient level and reintroduce the 1925 Constitution, or at least a modern-day equivalent to it, as a temporary measure until a new Constitution could be drafted and ratified. In fact, Moscow-based Abkhazian lawyer Taras Shamba had been asked to draw up just such a draft-treaty along the lines of the Union-Treaty that had defined Abkhazia's relations with Georgia for most of the 1920s (up to 1931) but reflecting the circumstances prevailing in 1992. The first draft of this document was published on p. 2 of the newspaper *Abxazija* (No. 23) for the week 29 June - 4 July 1992 and is included as Document 83 by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.141–3); see also Amkvab and Ilarionova (1992.23–26).⁶ The significance of this document is the unambiguous demonstration it provides that, though the Abkhazians desired to control their own affairs in their historical homeland, they were not intent upon total separation from Georgia, recognising the ties that had necessarily linked these two neighbours for millennia and hopeful that, given the international community's recognition of Georgia, this same international community might be favourably disposed to the Abkhazians' readiness to contract confederal relations⁷ with Tbilisi. They were, of course, woefully mistaken in their hope and expectation.

⁶ This document seemed to be of such importance that I translated it into English and incorporated this as Appendix 5 of my afore-mentioned article (Hewitt 1993:309–312) and as Appendix 2 in my later edited book (Hewitt 1999:264–6); it can be more immediately consulted in Appendix 1 to this chapter.

⁷ In order to avoid any possible confusion based on different interpretations of the terms 'federation' and 'confederation', it should be stressed again that by 'confederation'

The preliminary version of Taras Shamba's draft evidently underwent some redrafting (Anchabadze 1999.139), one modified version of the text being presented by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.148–150) as their Document 88. Clause 3 of the earlier version starts with the statement: "The Republic of Abkhazia of its own free will unites with the Republic of Georgia". These words are missing from the later version, where we read: "The Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Abkhazia, each on its own territory, enjoys full legislative, executive and judicial powers ...". This second version seems never to have been published at the time. Volkhonskij and his fellow-compilers source the original to Abkhazia's Presidential Archive, where a hand-written alteration appears in the 1st clause. Crossed out in the list of goals are the words 'to strengthen the mutual respect and friendship of the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples', which words were replaced in Ardzinba's hand by 'to overcome the distrust one towards the other that is now heightened'.⁸ It would seem reasonable to conclude that Clause 3 of the earlier version of the text will have been modified as too closely reflecting the state of affairs obtaining after the change introduced in 1926 to Abkhazia's 1925 Constitution, according to which Abkhazia 'entered' Georgia (and through it the Transcaucasian Federation and, indeed, the Soviet Union), whereas the revised wording, patently less objectionable to Abkhazian sensibilities, conforms more to the original spirit of the 1925 Constitution, whereby "the Abkhazian SSR, united on the basis of a special treaty with the Georgian SSR, through it enters the Transcaucasian Federation". Be this as it may, one can hardly deny that the Abkhazian leadership was seriously seeking a meaningful constitutional *modus vivendi* with Georgia within a single, confederal polity in the conditions of post-Soviet independence existing in the summer of 1992, the first step towards which was the offer to negotiate on the basis of Shamba's document. And yet this fact is totally disregarded by all who charge that the Abkhazians were (indeed are) separatist marionettes whose strings are pulled by Kremlin hands in order to frustrate Tbilisi's attempts to create a viable unified state.

The session of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet that was held on 23 July can be seen as something of a watershed. Of the full complement of 65 deputies, 36 were in attendance, the Kartvelian faction exercising its boycott.

the Abkhazians meant a union which can be dissolved by either party at any time, whereas by 'federation' they understood a union with tighter bonds, which is thus less easily dissolvable.

⁸ This 'correction' does not appear in the photocopy in my own archive.

Although when abrogating all Soviet legislation and reinstating the 1921 Menshevik Constitution on 21 February 1992 Georgia's Military Council had specified there were to be no changes to the status of Abkhazia (and Ach'ara), the Abkhazian lawyer Zurab Achba argued that, since Abkhazia's relations with Georgia rested on Georgia's and Abkhazia's 1978 (Brezhnevite) Constitutions, the rescinding of Georgia's 1978 Constitution (and, in Georgian eyes, Abkhazia's 1978 Constitution too) left Abkhazia in a political vacuum. He, therefore, proposed reinstating Abkhazia's own 1925 Constitution, whilst preserving the currently operative legislative, executive and judicial powers; a new Constitution was to be drafted for presentation to the Supreme Soviet in September of that year. It was decided that Abkhazia be officially styled 'The Republic of Abkhazia', and a new flag and state-emblem were to be adopted—see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.143–4), and Achugba (2007.91), quoting the Russian-language newspaper *Respublika Abxazija* (28 July 1992).⁹ On the same day, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet resolved that a simple majority of the total of deputies was all that was required for the passing of legislation. These developments have often been interpreted (and continue to be so) as a declaration of independence, which is quite erroneous; after all, the various autonomies in the Russian Federation were similarly awarding themselves republican status around this period without any charges being levied against them of separatist tendencies.

Meeting in the rest-house 'Sukhumi' on 29 July under Nadareishvili's chairmanship, the 31 deputies who opposed the majority-grouping around Ardzinba and who had formed themselves into the faction 'Democratic Abkhazia' in January 1992 resolved that all the decisions of 23 July were devoid of force insofar as they had been taken in violation of the 1978 Constitution(s), of which they declared themselves to be the legitimate upholders—see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.145–7) for the texts of the respective resolutions.

Georgia's International Profile Rises Under Shevardnadze

Despite the lack of a democratically mandated government in Georgia, despite the continuing fighting in Mingrelia, and despite the worrying

⁹ The flag and emblem, designed by the late artist Valerij Gamgia, together with verbal descriptions, which first appeared in *Respublika Abxazija* on 29 July 1992, can be found in Appendix 2 to this chapter.

course that events in Abkhazia were taking, Georgia was accepted into the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in May, and membership of the World Bank was also granted. But the greatest prize bestowed upon Shevardnadze's Georgia was membership of the United Nations on 31 July. All these accrued benefits, including well-nigh universal recognition, essentially meant that what passed for a government in Tbilisi could now have the confidence to act in any way it saw fit to deal with threats to Georgia's territorial integrity in the almost certain knowledge that fellow member-states of the UN might be relied upon to declare such actions to be, if not exactly exemplary, at least a purely internal affair of a recognised state and, to that extent, legitimate. Such an action was not long in coming...

Around the time that Georgia was being welcomed into the UN, Deputy-Premier Aleksandre K'avsadze was taken hostage by Zviadists in Mingrelia, who were also causing havoc and disruption by stopping and robbing trains as they passed through Mingrelia along the sole railway-line linking Georgia (and Armenia) to Russia. On 11 August, Shevardnadze's National Security Adviser and Interior Minister, Roman Gventsadze, and some accompanying officials, who had travelled to Zugdidi to negotiate K'avsadze's release, were themselves taken hostage.

War in Abkhazia

In Sukhum on 13 August, Zurab Achba led an Abkhazian delegation in talks with Georgian parliamentarians on future relations between Tbilisi and Sukhum. The following day, Shamba's draft-treaty (in its various redraftings) was to be debated by the Supreme Soviet. But this discussion never took place, for early that next morning K'it'ovani's National Guard crossed the Ingur and headed for Sukhum; a sea-borne assault to the north saw Georgian troops landing near Gagra. Anchabadze (1999:140) suggests that Georgia's State Council had determined to quash Abkhazia's autonomy once and for all through military means.

Though the Abkhazians had been taken by surprise, resistance was mounted, leading to a temporary drawing back of forces, the Abkhazians along the R. Gumista on Sukhum's northern boundary and the Georgians to the south of the city. However, on 15 August, more troops landed by sea near to the Russian border (R. Psou) at the village of Gjachrypsh (aka Leselidze, for Georgians) to seal that crossing-point and prevent access to anyone wishing to come to the Abkhazians' aid. In a matter of days, the northern stretch from Gagra to the Psou was under Georgian control. The

Georgians had broken the truce in Sukhum, forcing Abkhazian fighters across the Gumista. Despite his initial reluctance to abandon the capital, Ardzinba was persuaded to move, together with the rest of his administration, to Gudauta, centre of the one region where Abkhazians formed an absolute majority. It became home to Abkhazia's legitimate leadership for the whole of the war. Reports (essentially the only source of reliable information) on the ensuing events were despatched from there to a hastily set up press-centre in Moscow and from there to the outside-world, though most Western agencies took their 'information' from Georgian sources in Tbilisi, which readily accounts for the attendant inaccuracies that characterised most such accounts of events. Most Abkhazian residents of Sukhum either fled immediately or were later permitted to cross the R. Gumista into what was to remain Abkhazian-controlled territory, whilst those in the villages south of Sukhum tended to make their way to the mining town of T'q'varchal (inland from Ochamchira), which was besieged and bombarded for the duration of the war.

As soon as it had become clear what was happening (or, as the Abkhazians would describe it, that an invasion of their country was being mounted), Ardzinba had desperately tried to make contact by phone with Yeltsin, who was holidaying just over the border in Sochi, in the hope that he might exert pressure on Shevardnadze, his erstwhile Politburo-colleague, who had backed Yeltsin's challenge to the coup-leaders in Moscow almost exactly 12 months earlier, to withdraw his forces and thus avoid rapid escalation to outright war. That it proved impossible to speak to Yeltsin fuelled speculation that Yeltsin had probably received advance-warning and had given Shevardnadze tacit approval in the expectation that Tbilisi might quickly establish control and thereby reduce the threat of further potential instability on Russia's southern border, a permanent *desideratum* for the Kremlin.¹⁰

The initial excuse for the National Guard's move into Abkhazia was the need to free the captive ministers, who, it was alleged, had been spirited into the Gal District. However, the official reason soon shifted.¹¹ In his interview with Peter Pringle in the British daily newspaper *The Independent*

¹⁰ Other factors that point to planning for this action on the part of Tbilisi are: (a) the arming by the Georgian authorities of Kartvelian civilians in Gagra and the Ochamchira District in April, and (b) the departure of Kartvelian political leaders from Gagra on 11 August (Overeem et al. 1995:150).

¹¹ Could this possibly have been because the hostages, who were eventually released, had never been moved out of Mingrelia onto Abkhazian territory in the first place?

(24 September 1992), Shevardnadze simply stressed the need to protect the rail-link to Russia (quoted in Hewitt 1993:321):

They were blowing up bridges, they were stopping trains, the total damage was 11–12 billion roubles ... the police refused to obey orders because there were too many criminals all armed to the teeth.

Shevardnadze has often claimed that he had secured by phone Ardzinba's agreement in advance for the introduction of forces to ensure the unhindered passage of trains through Abkhazia (see Shevardnadze 1992:9). Ardzinba always resolutely denied this charge, and, in view of the measures taken and the agreements reached earlier in the year, as outlined above, one has to ask if it is remotely conceivable that he would have so fundamentally changed his mind in a trice during a phonecall in August. As already noted, the situation on the rail-line was indeed serious. Indeed, it caused the Presidium of the State Council to issue a decree on 10 August 'On the introduction of a State of Emergency on railway-transport'. Though reference is made to incidents in Gal on 8 August, the majority of happenings specified therein occurred, as was typically reported in the press at the time, in Mingrelia.¹²

Further relevant testimony on this highly important theme is contained in the documentary film mentioned in Chapter 3, namely 'Absence of Will' (Georgian /nebis ar-kona/).¹³ Director Mamuk'a Kuparadze arranged for two young Georgians, who were too young to remember the war in Abkhazia themselves, to interview various players on the Georgian side and asked them to draw their conclusions about (past and future) relations between Georgia and Abkhazia (plus South Ossetia). One of the persons interviewed was Shevardnadze. He repeated that troops had to be sent to protect the railway, making it sound like a mere policing operation; interestingly, he specified that the stretch of line where attacks had been dis-

¹² At the time of composition, relevant information could be found at the annex for 10 August on the website: www.sme.gov/en/abkhazia/conflict_chronology, but access to this page was subsequently blocked. At the end of June 1992, many caucasologists had attended the colloquium of the European Caucasological Society in Maykop (Adyghea). Afterwards, the Abkhazian delegation and some others travelled unimpeded by rail along Abkhazia's coast. A German colleague (Wolfgang Feurstein) alighted from the train in Sukhum and then spent a night in Ochamchira before catching another train for onward-passage to Tbilisi. While in Sukhum, Ardzinba had urged him to fly to Tbilisi on the grounds that, once the train crossed into Mingrelia, he could not guarantee his safety. In the event, nothing untoward happened, but the warning clearly illustrated where the problems really lay that fateful summer.

¹³ Produced in 2008 and released in 2009 with the financial backing of Conciliation Resources (UK) and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Germany).

rupting the free flow of transport, prompting, he asserted, both the Russian and Ukrainian authorities to entreat him to take appropriate measures, lay between Sochi and Sukhum, where in fact only one or two such incidents affecting freight-trains had earlier taken place.¹⁴

Shevardnadze added that K'it'ovani's mistake was that he should never have entered Sukhum, apparently forgetting that it is physically impossible to reach areas to the north of Sukhum from the direction of Georgia without passing through it! In answer to one interviewer's objection that tanks were hardly necessary if simply securing the rail-link was the sole purpose, Shevardnadze said that, as far as he could recall, K'it'ovani had no tanks. But also shewn being interviewed in Kuparadze's film immediately after this assertion fell from Shevardnadze's lips was the Mingrelian writer Guram Odisharia, who lived on the southern outskirts of Sukhum until the end of the war in Abkhazia. Odisharia speaks of his shock upon seeing helicopter-gunships dropping bombs near the Tourist Centre (*Turbaza*), which is situated just off the main highway as one enters Sukhum from the south(-east). This testimony is consonant with reports of Sukhum's beaches being strafed, sending swimmers running for their lives¹⁵—needless to say, a massive effort had to be launched quickly to transport the huge numbers of tourists, who were spending their annual holidays at the various coastal resorts, out of danger into Russia (or, indeed, Georgia). Tellingly, Odisharia also remarked in passing that he personally counted 55 tanks on the advance that very day....

Another interviewee in the documentary was the man who was soon to be appointed by Shevardnadze to head the Georgian military operation in Abkhazia, Gia Q'arq'arashvili. He claimed that the troops went in in a disorganised fashion *without any specific goal*, turning local non-Kartvelian populations¹⁶ against them for their undisciplined behaviour.¹⁷ At the

¹⁴ In a televised interview after the Georgian incursion into Abkhazia, Ardzinba rejected this motive by pointing out that there had been no interruption to rail-transport on Abkhazian soil for at least two months.

¹⁵ Abkhazian Lola Godsoe, wife of US citizen Ian Godsoe, was in the water at the time and confirms this rather crucial detail (personal communication).

¹⁶ The sizeable Armenian population is specifically mentioned.

¹⁷ Charles Fairbanks (Professor of International Relations at John Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute) made an early recommendation for professional training of Georgian forces during the question-and-answer session at a briefing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Monday, 25 October, 1993, Washington DC):

If one gave arms to the most westernized and youngest elements of the population and created an army that had some discipline, that really obeys the government, that had a chain of command, to begin with, it wouldn't commit atrocities this eas-

time, K'it'ovani himself airily dismissed criticism of the actions of his National Guard by joking that they needed some three days 'to satiate themselves'.¹⁸ Clearly, there is a glaring inconsistency and mutual incompatibility here. In the final chapter of this book a different explanation will be offered as to why the reckless gamble of introducing troops into Abkhazia was taken on 14 August.

While in Maykop at the end of June 1992, I was privileged to meet the president of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, Yuri (Musa) Shanibov, and took the opportunity to ask him if the Confederation would respond, should war break out in Abkhazia. He assured me that there would be a strong and swift response. And this was exactly what happened a mere six weeks after our conversation.

Volunteers were organised from the Confederation's member-states (notably from the various Circassian communities, as well as from Chechnia¹⁹ and Ossetia; there were also Cossacks), and the then-leader of Chechnia, Dzhokhar Dudaev, made weaponry available, albeit covertly. As a result of alarm at what pro-Abkhazian agitation might presage across the North Caucasus, Shanibov was arrested in Nal'chik, though he later managed to escape and made his way into Abkhazia, where, during the course of the conflict, his son was killed in mysterious circumstances. Since the border with Russia had been closed by Georgian action in the

ily ... And if one has professionalization of armies in these areas, one will greatly reduce the level of human rights violations.

The response from journalist Thomas Goltz was curt and to the point: "I think both the Germans and the Japanese were well ordered and had very good armies and I think they committed a lot of atrocities" (*Current Situation in Georgia and Implications for US Policy*, October 1993, 13–15). Cf. Anchabadze (1999, 280).

¹⁸ The English translation of some twenty-seven reminiscences of their war-time experiences by various Abkhazian and Armenian citizens of Abkhazia was prepared for publication in the summer of 2012. One recollection was by the Armenian Misak Kjulian, resident of the village of Gumista on the northern-western outskirts of Sukhum. After his house was occupied by members of the Georgian National Guard, he was told the following by a drunken Guardsman as to how this fighter came to be in Abkhazia:

I was in prison serving a 12-year sentence. The investigator called those of us serving 10 years and above (well, it was for the most serious crimes, of course, that such terms are imposed) one by one into his office and said: "Go to Abkhazia, for 2–3 months, to fight. What you plunder will be your reward, and after 2–3 months you will receive a full amnesty, or sit out the entire term from start to finish." [My translation]

¹⁹ The 'Chechen Battalion' was commanded by the late Shamil Basaev, who later achieved notoriety in the Russo-Chechen wars. Another Chechen volunteer was the late Ruslan Gelaev, who will make a further appearance in our story in due course.

north of Abkhazia, it was necessary (at least at this early stage of hostilities) for fighters coming in from not only the North Caucasus but also Abkhazia's (and indeed Circassia's) large diaspora-communities in the Near/Middle East to make their way across the mountains and then be bussed down from above Lake Rits'a (along the road built by German World War II prisoners-of-war) to Gudauta for deployment alongside Abkhazian fighters. Monies were collected from wealthy Abkhazians, predominantly in Russia and Turkey, for the purchase of weapons, which were mostly acquired from Russia(ns).²⁰ But, whilst the Abkhazians were largely compelled to buy their equipment, Georgia had acquired a truly significant amount of military hardware *gratis* from the division of Soviet holdings amongst the former union-republics in accordance with the Tashkent Agreement;²¹ additionally, there were incidents of raids on Russian stores, sometimes with the suggestion of complicity on the part of the guards,²² and one should not forget the equipment supplied by the Ukraine (as witnessed by tanks being unloaded from a Ukrainian vessel in the photo-collection incidentally included by Chervonnaya in her heavily pro-Georgian 1994 vanity-publication).²³

²⁰ Nothing sinister need necessarily be read into this, although, of course, it has been. After the collapse of the USSR, the economy (like discipline) went into free fall; in these circumstances, any type of weaponry, ordnance or even service (such as piloting of planes) was available for the appropriate payment. Long-standing and unconcealed Georgian antipathy towards Russia(ns) was no doubt also a factor in motivating some contributions from individual Russians on the Abkhazian side.

²¹ One commentator, Tom Cooper, has listed the following items (in addition to aircraft) gained by Georgia in the 1991–2 division of the Soviet arsenal: at least 350 tanks and APCs; over 3,000 vehicles; 400 artillery pieces and 50 mortars; over 47,000 small arms; 15 sets of ground-technology and equipment from the air-defence system. The naval base in Batumi was nationalised. The total cost, if levied, would have been over \$600 million. See 'Georgia and Abkhazia, 1992–1993: the War of Datchas' at www.acig.org/artman/publish/article_282.shtml. Furthermore (Overeem 1995.136):

According to several sources, both in Georgia and Abkhazia, the Georgian aim to try to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute by military means would have been entirely unrealistic, were it not for the military and political support of the Russian Federation and the Ukraine. The Georgian army obtained 7 bomber planes from the Russian Federation, most probably with pilots, as it did not have any experienced pilots itself. In November 1992 Georgia requested Russia to send ten military advisors. Moreover, Georgia expected to obtain aircraft carriers from both the Russian Federation and the Ukraine, again according to Yuri Voronov.

²² Russia retained four military bases: Bombora (near Gudauta in Abkhazia), Batumi (in Ach'ara), Akhalkalaki (in the Armenian-dominated Dzhavakheti province), and Vaziani (near Tbilisi).

²³ For my review of this publication see Hewitt (1994). The fact of Ukrainian support to Georgia is usually conveniently ignored by those who readily accuse Russia of aiding the

The situation was deteriorating to such an extent that Yeltsin felt obliged to summon the opposing leaders to Moscow for talks, with the participation of North Caucasian leaders. A ceasefire-agreement was signed on 3 September. That this was by no means favourable to the Abkhazians is clear from Ardzinba's body-language as captured in the well-known picture taken as Yeltsin insisted that he and Shevardnadze jointly shake hands with him when announcing the agreement to the press; Ardzinba's face is glum, whilst Shevardnadze is beaming broadly (see Alamia 2009.115).

Article 1 began with a statement of the need to guarantee Georgia's territorial integrity.²⁵ The ceasefire was to take effect from noon on 5 September, with the following stipulations:

- a tripartite (Georgian, Abkhazian, Russian) Commission was to be set up to oversee observance;
- illegally armed groups were to be disarmed and removed from Abkhazia, whilst the North Caucasian authorities were to ensure that no such elements crossed from their territories into Abkhazia;
- Georgian forces were to remain in Abkhazia in only the numbers necessary to secure such objects as the railway;
- displaced persons were to be allowed to return to their places of domicile and prisoners freed;
- normal life was to be restored;
- and, by 15 September, the legitimate authorities [viz. Ardzinba's administration] were to resume power.

The Agreement closed with an appeal to the UN and Conference on (later, from 1 January 1995, Organisation for) Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later OSCE) for support and that they send an observer-mission to establish the facts—for the text see Amkvab & Ilarionova (1992.244–6). Clearly, Ardzinba must have been subjected to considerable pressure to sign such an unpalatable document. As he remarked in his statement the next day (Amkvab & Ilarionova 2009.255–6), the need for the State Council to secure the railway was but a pretext for what he judged to be the main goal of ending the Abkhazian problem by liquidating the legitimate local

disastrous consequences, in his own assault on Chechenia in December 1994 (see Gall and de Waal 1997).

²⁵ The UN Security Council's pronouncement on 8 October (S/24637) set a pattern of reference to Georgia's territorial integrity to which it subsequently adhered when it called "on all the parties to cease the fighting forthwith and to observe the terms of the agreement concluded on 3 September 1992 in Moscow which affirms that the territorial integrity of Georgia shall be ensured".

authorities.²⁶ Since there would have been no armed conflict without the introduction of Georgian armed units onto the territory of Abkhazia, the first step in resolving the crisis should have been the removal of those forces from Abkhazia followed by constructive negotiations on the future mutual relations between the two republics,²⁷ but, as he regretfully observed, no such provisions were incorporated in the Agreement. In the event, none of the provisions was put into effect, and hostilities quickly resumed.

The Battle for Gagra

One essential aim for the Abkhazians was to regain control over Gagra and the territory lying between it and the border with Russia over the R. Psou. Success there would leave them free from the fear of Georgian incursion across the whole of the north of their territory, afford them secure supply-routes for men and provisions, and allow them to concentrate on recapturing their capital and then gaining victory on the eastern front, where the Georgian forces controlled the highway and its towns, whilst some (at least) of the inland-villages of the Ochamchira District remained in Abkhazian hands (see Byt^wba 1996.430–1 for a map of dispositions along the eastern front in July 1993); the largely Mingrelian population of the Gal District was mostly (but not exclusively) neutral during the war, as they felt little or no affinity with the anti-Gamsakhurdia State Council, just as the Zviadists in Mingrelia proper maintained their hostile stance to the regime in Tbilisi.

When I asked Dodge Billingsley, a co-founder of the *War Studies' Journal* at King's College (London University), to contribute an article on military aspects of the Georgian-Abkhazian war for the collection of essays I was invited to put together for Curzon Press (Hewitt 1999), he chose to concentrate on the battle to liberate Gagra. His reason for so doing was simply (1999.147):

[E]vents at Gagra perfectly illustrated in microcosm the strengths and weaknesses of both protagonists throughout the 14 months of military engage-

²⁶ He might have added that the State Council itself had no legitimate authority at all in Georgia, as it existed as the result of a coup and elections were only due to take place in Georgia in October.

²⁷ It should be stressed that, even after what the Abkhazians saw as the invasion by Georgia, the Abkhazian leadership was still prepared for talks to define future mutual relations.

ment. Kartvelian forces were never able to become a cohesive fighting machine, as seen so glaringly at Gagra. A lack of unit and individual discipline not only cost them on the battlefield, but it also made the Kartvelian troops exceedingly unpopular amongst the local inhabitants. On the other hand, Abkhazian units surrounding Gagra were filled with outside volunteers but still managed to be much more cohesive. Though outnumbered, they were able to find common cause and made better use of their limited resources.

On 6 October, the Abkhazians were able to plant their flag on the border with Russia. Among the Georgian dead in the battle for supremacy in northern Abkhazia was one Gocha Q'arq'arashvili, commander of the White Eagle detachment and brother of the then-leader of Georgian forces in Abkhazia, Gia, who had achieved permanent notoriety amongst the Abkhazians with a short TV-appearance in August. It was reported as follows in the Georgian newspaper *7 dghe* '7 Days' (No. 31, 4–10 September 1992, p. 3):

On 25 August, Gia Q'arq'arashvili, general of the National Guard stationed in western Georgia, appeared on Abkhazian television. He issued an ultimatum to the Abkhazian side: if within 24 hours they should not lay down their arms and hand themselves over to members of the State Council, "The Abkhazians would have no-one left to carry on their race; 100,000 Georgians would be sacrificed for the 97,000²⁸ Abkhazians, but Georgia's borders would remain in tact".

Following the fall of Gagra, Q'arq'arashvili resigned as military commander in Abkhazia on the excuse of having suffered a nervous breakdown, only to emerge a few weeks later as Shevardnadze's new Minister of Defence (replacing K'it'ovani). Giorgi Khaindrava, another Shevardnadze appointee as Minister for Abkhazia, was to rearticulate Q'arq'arashvili's genocidal threat in the April 1993 issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique* when he observed that all that the Georgians needed to do to wipe out the Abkhazians was to liquidate their genetic pool of 15,000 young men, adding chillingly: "We are perfectly capable of this." But the war entailed more than mere verbal threats such as these...

On 11 October, elections were held in Georgia, though polling had to be postponed in nine electoral districts in Abkhazia, Mingrelia and South Ossetia because of the various conflicts. Shevardnadze duly received his expected mandate, as a result of which he was finally able to call himself the elected Head of State. Wheatley's comment (2005:75) reflects the re-

²⁸ 27,000 was printed in error. The threat was also reported in *The Guardian* (28 September 1993).

ceived wisdom on the ballot: “[M]ost international observers judged the poll to be free and fair.” However, one of the US observers, Gregory Minjack, who was assigned to Gori and its environs (including parts of South Ossetia), offers an intriguing insight (personal communication, published first in Hewitt 2009.189–90):²⁹

Of course, that election was white-washed even with ample evidence of electoral curiosities which would never be tolerated in other emerging democracies.

This undue tolerance was undoubtedly motivated by the same Shevardnadze-factor that had brought Georgia its international gains in the spring and summer, as detailed above, gains which must surely be judged to have been both precipitate and unwarranted.

Never-to-be-forgotten Incidents in Sukhum and above Lat’a

Two weeks after Shevardnadze’s receipt of his electoral mandate, there occurred one of two events which will live long as days of infamy in the collective memory of the Abkhazians. The Dmitry Gulia Research Institute for Abkhazian Language, Literature and History, which stood in a prominent position on Sukhum’s sea-front, housed a priceless library and archive. On the evening of 22 October, in a deliberate act of cultural vandalism, it was torched. When attempts were made to douse the flames, gunmen held the fire-fighters at bay. The destruction of this building (along with that of the State Archive) is seen as nothing other than a calculated attempt to erase the documentary evidence of the Abkhazians’ very presence in Abkhazia. There are suspicions that the library’s holdings were cherry-picked in advance³⁰ and that some at least of the irreplaceable 18th- and 19th-century publications housed there might well survive secreted in some vault in Tbilisi. Whilst the damage inflicted on the cultural life of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the destruction of the Sarajevo Library during the Balkan maelstrom made headlines around the world, which in turn led to a massive effort to replace the losses, help to Abkhazia in this regard

²⁹ See also the report from the British Helsinki Human Rights’ Group.

³⁰ One proof that not all the valuable holdings were reduced to ash is that the wonderful illustrations and maps drawn by Swiss polymath Ferdinand Dubois de Montpéroux to accompany his 6-volume *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Géorgie, en Arménie et en Crimée* (1839–43) were recovered from beneath a dog-kennel [sic!] over ten years after the war when a miscreant offered to reveal their whereabouts in a plea-bargain.

has been minimal, coming mainly from Russian institutions and private scholars, whilst Abkhazia's National Library, itself chronically in need of substantial restocking, has managed to set up partnerships in both Russia and Turkey, from where it receives (largely new) publications.³¹

The other, even more atrocious incident, which only served to reinforce Abkhazians' hatred towards Georgia, was the human catastrophe that occurred on 14 December 1992. Given the numbers who had flocked for refuge into T'q'varchal from Ochamchira itself and villages in the Ochamchira District at the start of hostilities, the humanitarian situation there threatened to become critical as a result of the siege that allowed precarious access only via the mountains to its rear. Therefore, humanitarian relief flights by helicopter were organised by Russian forces to alleviate the overcrowding and evacuate the vulnerable to the safety of the Gudauta and Gagra Districts, where evacuees from the occupied areas were accommodated in rooms normally filled by tourists, notably, for example, the hotel-blocks fronting the beach at the famed resort of Pitsunda. On the fateful day, an MI-8 helicopter took off with Valerij Maskin at the controls. On board were 87 persons, the overwhelming majority being women (some pregnant) and children.³² As it was over the village of Lat'a, in the largely Svan-populated K'odor Valley, it was brought down in flames by a rocket. The horror and loathing occasioned by this act, especially after the charred remains were retrieved and shewn on television as they were delivered to mourners in Gudauta town, may easily be imagined. Asked to comment on the tragedy, Shevardnadze justified the helicopter's downing by asserting that it might have been conveying weapons.

In view of the allegations of extensive Russian involvement in the conflict on the Abkhazian side, which have been levelled so often and with such conviction that they have attained the status of virtual fact, it is germane to quote the conclusion reached by Billingsley (Billingsley 1999:155), whom I specifically asked to address this crucial question in his article. His sober assessment is contained in the following statement:

There were ... verified cases of Russian assistance. Russian pilots were actually shot down by Kartvelian units, but the incidents were isolated and more likely reflected freelancing by rogue elements of the Russian military ... Russia did meddle in the conflict, but the factor that made the difference

³¹ For information on the losses themselves and the need for replenishment see: www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/151-a-history-eraseded.html; www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/408-issues-points-memo-boris-cholaria.html.

³² For a list of the names see Pachulija (2010:555–9).

were the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that made their way to the region to engage Kartvelian forces throughout the war. This is not to say that the volunteers might not incidentally have served the strategy of some circles in the Russian military-political arena.³³

This same author's more general summation is equally instructive (1999:155–6):

Abkhazians never held an overall numerical advantage. Locally-based UN military observers substantiate these Abkhazian claims, suggesting that Kartvelian troops did indeed outnumber Abkhazian personnel but were so ill-disciplined that the Abkhazian victory at Gagra should have come as no surprise ... In many ways the battle for Gagra was the battle for Abkhazia itself. Once in control of the border and port-facilities in the northern corner of Abkhazia, the Abkhazian leadership was assured that supplies and manpower would get through. On the other hand, after the loss of Gagra, Georgia could only hope for a breakout on the Sukhum front. Reeling from the loss of Gagra, Kartvelian forces proved incapable of further large-scale offensive operations. There were only four more meaningful offensives undertaken that are worthy of note (January 1993, March 1993, July 1993 and the final offensive of September 1993), and all were conducted by the Abkhazian side.

Writing in *Jane's Intelligence Review* (February 1996) on the theme of 'Georgian-Abkhazian security issues', Billingsley had earlier offered this judicious conclusion:

... [E]mpirical evidence suggests that Georgia is largely responsible for its own disintegration ... It is difficult to prove Georgian accusations of universal Russian support for Abkhazia. On many occasions, Russian actions benefited Georgia more than Abkhazia ... Georgian accusations of Russian intervention must be weighed against the need for assistance and a scapegoat in the face of an ill-planned military adventure with an ill-prepared military.³⁴

³³ Pachulija (2010:507–54) lists by name, country/place of residence, and place of death all those who lost their lives fighting as part of the Abkhazian military forces. Included in the list are: 99 individuals assigned to the Russian Federation; 7 from Adyghea; 4 from Ingushetia; 44 from Kabardino-Balkaria; 11 from Karachay-Cherkessia; 6 from North Ossetia; 7 from South Ossetia; 54 from Chechenia; 5 from Tatarstan; 1 from Bashkiriya; 1 from Udmurtia; 1 from Azerbaijan; 1 from Belarus; 1 from Kazakhstan; 1 from Lithuania; 2 from Transdnistria; 8 from the Ukraine; 1 from Estonia; 3 from Ach'ara (Adzharia); 6 from Turkey; 3 from Syria; and 1 from Poland. This is in comparison with 1,345 from the various regions of Abkhazia.

³⁴ In the context of a discussion on external aid, note the interesting fact that Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997 under President Bill Clinton was one Gen. John Shalikashvili, who had been born to Georgian parents in Poland. And it was while his brother Col. Otar Shalikashvili was chief advisor of the US Defense Secretary for US-Geor-

There were high hopes amongst the Abkhazians that the March offensive would provide the decisive break-through and lead to the retaking of Sukhum. But those hopes were dashed. In addition to losses in the actual battle, some 200 fighters on the Abkhazian side disappeared. Their fate was revealed on 6 October when a mass-grave near the hospital was excavated. It contained 128 bodies, all of which had bullet-wounds and marks indicating that the victims' hands had been bound behind their backs; the executions were estimated to have taken place on 15–16 March, followed by burial on 21 or 22 March (Overeem et al. 1995:137 & 139). Despite this serious setback, the Abkhazians were determined to redouble their efforts, and, fearing the outcome, Tamaz Nadareishvili called in April for the general mobilisation of Abkhazia's Kartvelian population.

Second Ceasefire

At the end of May, Ardzinba together with Torez Kulumbegov of South Ossetia appealed to Moscow to postpone signing a comprehensive treaty with Georgia until the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts were solved. They added that Georgia's failure to protect the rights of their peoples meant that the two regions could not form part of any Georgian state (*Covcas Bulletin* III.13. p. 2 of 3 June, quoting *Agence France Presse* of 29 May). A ceasefire came into effect in Abkhazia on 20 May, but fighting resumed in June.

On 2 July, the Abkhazians launched a further attempt to retake their capital. By the end of the month, they effectively had Sukhum under siege. The situation in South Ossetia was also deteriorating. Vice-President of the South Ossetian Parliament, Alan Chochiev, spoke of the region 'slowly but surely' sliding into a new and larger-scale conflict, adding: "[P]ossibilities of a political dialogue between Georgia and South Ossetia have been practically exhausted ... South Ossetia will not accept under any conditions to remain within Georgia"; instead, union with North Ossetia would be sought (*Covcas Bulletin* III.16 p. 3 of 28 July).

gian military cooperation that Georgia was to receive its first military training from America in 2002 (see Chapter 6).

Third Ceasefire

On 27 July, yet another ceasefire-agreement was signed in Sochi by Abkhazian, Georgian and Russian representatives—the Russian text can be consulted in Volkhonskij et al. (2008.274–6).³⁵ In clause 6 we read:

Within 10 to 15 days from the beginning of the cease-fire, military formations of the Republic of Georgia are to be withdrawn from the territory of Abkhazia. Within the same period military formations, groups, and individuals in the conflict-zone are to be disbanded and withdrawn from Abkhazia.

By Resolution 854 of 6 August in the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General's recommendation for an advance-team of up to ten UN military observers for deployment to Abkhazia was approved. The withdrawal of Georgian forces should have been completed by 16 August. On 14 August, Reuters reported a member of the UN observer-mission, Major Carl Jensen, as stating: "It has begun, but the numbers are very, very small—one tank, two tanks" (*Covcas Bulletin* III.18 p. 4 for 25 August). UN Security Council Resolution 858 followed on 24 August, establishing its first observer-mission in any former republic of the USSR with the creation of UNOMIG (UN Observer Mission in Georgia) under the command of Danish General John Hvidegaard and with a mandate to be renewed every few months.³⁶

On p. 6 of the afore-mentioned issue of *Covcas Bulletin*, *The San Francisco Chronicle* was quoted as describing Georgia on 18 August in cataclysmic terms:

According to a CSCE confidential report leaked to the press, Georgia has descended into the pit of chaos comparable in some ways to that in Somalia. The report said that Georgia is "perhaps the most unstable, violence-ridden and violence-prone former Soviet Republic", which is quite an indictment, given the war in N[agorno]K[arabagh] and Tajikistan. Although the main conflict in Georgia is the Abkhazian conflict, there are, however, separate wars in other parts of the country as well as general lawlessness. The report also says that Georgia has no real government left, at least not one that can uphold its decisions. About the only thing Georgia has left is the international stature of Eduard Shevardnadze.

To underline the extent of the problem, deposed president Zviad Gamsakhurdia was calling upon his supporters to overthrow the regime of

³⁵ An English translation is available in Overeem et al. 1995.151–3 and in *Covcas Bulletin* III.19 pp. 5–6 of 1 September.

³⁶ For an official summary of the Mission's activities from 1993 to 2009 see: www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unomig/background.html.

Shevardnadze. On 29 August, Shevardnadze had to inform Parliament that Zviadist forces under Loti Kobalia had taken the strategic Mingrelian towns of Senak'i (formerly Tskhak'aia), Abasha and Khobi, whilst two days later they had blocked the port of Poti.

In a press-bulletin released by Igor Akhba, the Plenipotentiary (and, after the events of August 2008, Ambassador) of Abkhazia to the Russian Federation, he wrote on 29 August (*Covcas Bulletin* III.19 for 1 September p. 4):

Despite violations of the July 27 agreement by Georgian forces, the cease-fire was in general observed in Abkhazia. Georgian forces had violated the timing of withdrawal of troops from Abkhazia as well as the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from Sukhumi. These violations were brought to the attention of a joint committee set up under the agreement. At its August 22 meeting, the joint committee confirmed that the Abkhazian side had fulfilled its obligation under the agreement and took note of explanations by the Georgian side that they would withdraw their troops and weaponry from Sukhumi on August 25 by train or on September 1 by sea. However, by August 25, the Georgian troops had not been withdrawn from Sukhumi. Also, the Georgian side unilaterally has returned to Sukhumi refugees who had fled the city as well as transferred people who had never lived in Sukhumi before. The resettlement of refugees was to take place after Abkhaz authorities were reinstalled in the city, which cannot take place until Georgian troops withdraw. The Georgian side has also prevented the distribution of humanitarian goods to Abkhaz held territories.

The next issue of *Covcas Bulletin* (III.20 p. 7 for 29 September) resumed the chronicle of events at this crucial moment, firstly quoting *Agence France Presse*:

According to Georgian sources, Abkhazian forces violated the cease-fire agreement of July 27, crossed the Gumista river and entered Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia under Georgian control ... Fighting was reported in the center of Sukhumi. Russia issued a stern warning to the Abkhazian authorities to stop the attack and added that *the violations of the cease-fire agreement by Georgia* do not justify the Abkhazian offensive. [Stress added]

The Bulletin then translates the press-release of 18 September from Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet:

In violation of the July 27 agreement, Georgian forces not only failed to withdraw their forces from Abkhazia but also retained all heavy weaponry in the region, including T-72 tanks, Grad missile systems, and heavy artillery. In addition, Georgian authorities decided to move additional armed forces contingents into Abkhazia. In addition, Georgian forces have prevented the delivery of humanitarian supplies into Abkhazian held territories, including

medical supplies. As a result, hostilities were resumed. In an attempt to stop the fighting, Abkhazian authorities proposed through Russian mediation to allow without further delay the return of the Abkhaz government to Sukhumi as stipulated in the July 27 agreement. However, President Shevardnadze appealed instead to the Georgian people to mobilize and fight in Abkhazia.

The Abkhazians refused to allow the Georgians to benefit from their non-compliance with the 27 July ceasefire and on 16 September resumed fighting, including a breakout from T'q'varchal, which had been besieged for 400 days; the previous day Zviadists had taken action to gain control of the crucial railway-junction in Samtredia in south-western Georgia. In a final attempt to bring a halt to the fighting, Russian Minister of Defence Pavel Grachëv proposed to position Russian forces between the Abkhazian and the Georgian forces, which would effectively have partitioned Abkhazia, leaving territory to the north of Sukhum in Abkhazian hands, whilst Sukhum and the south-eastern parts would have been left under Tbilisi's control. Whilst the Abkhazians did not find such a prospect in any way appealing, Ardzinba felt they had no option but to accept the offer,³⁷ whereas Shevardnadze flatly rejected it. Exasperated by this Georgian response, the Russians declined to place any further restraints on the Abkhazians, who by 19 September had advanced into Sukhum from three directions. Predictably, the UN Security Council denounced the 'very serious violation' of the ceasefire by the Abkhazians, remaining silent about the non-withdrawal of Georgian weaponry that had motivated the Abkhazian action. The situation was so desperate that Shevardnadze flew into Sukhum on 19 September, vowing to die there rather than leave in humiliating defeat.

On 24 September, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet put out a press-statement. It included the following (*Caucas Bulletin* III.20 p. 8 for 29 September):

Georgian forces are using the Sukhum airport to bring in reinforcements and supplies. As such, all aircraft using the airport will be subject to the provisions of Article 22 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Thus, between 21 and 23 September, Abkhazian forces shot down five aircraft flying in or out of Sukhum which did not comply with the provisions of Article 22. By contrast, other aircraft which complied with the provisions of Article 22 flew in and out of Sukhum airport unhindered; Abkhazian forces have shot down three SU-25 Georgian air-force jets bombing Abkhazian positions.

³⁷ As he later told me personally.

With Shevardnadze placing himself in a position of great personal danger, the international community, which had demonstrated little concern for the dire and direct consequences of Georgia's actions in Abkhazia since the outbreak of war there, suddenly woke up to the potentially sensational reality. Reporters despatched to the area tended to concentrate on the straitened circumstances in which the Georgian fighters found themselves and on the very personal threat to Shevardnadze. For example, while sitting in Tbilisi, miles from the conflict-zone, one of the BBC's Moscow correspondents, Robert Parsons (fluent in both Russian and Georgian), filed a report for BBC World Service about a column battling its way to relieve the Georgian troops under siege at Sukhum's airport. In truth, no such relief-column existed.

On 27 September, Sukhum fell to the Abkhazians, and thoughts turned to the fate of Shevardnadze in his bunker.³⁸ Aware of the inevitable outcome of the fighting, Yeltsin put in a call to Ardzinba to urge that Shevardnadze be granted safe conduct out of Abkhazia, a request to which Ardzinba assented. I was immediately informed of this decision by fax from Abkhazia's Press Centre in Gudauta and passed it on without delay by fax to the BBC World Service. This message was ignored,³⁹ and over two hours later the World Service's *Newshour* programme elected instead to broadcast a much more sensational but totally unfounded report from Alexis Rowell, a stringer again ensconced in Tbilisi, that Shevardnadze was facing imminent assassination.⁴⁰

³⁸ In the summer of 2009, I heard a story, which, though possibly apocryphal, is perhaps illustrative of the attitude of the Georgian leadership in 1993 and suggestive of close parallels with August 2008. As the climax of hostilities approached, Gen. Hvidegaard was puzzled at the sight of Shevardnadze and others in his retinue training their binoculars over the Black Sea. Enquiring why they were looking in that direction rather than towards the approach of the Abkhazians over land, he was told that they were scanning for the NATO vessels they were confident would, albeit at this 11th hour, be coming to rescue them!

³⁹ This had become par for the course. When the clashes took place in Abkhazia in the summer of 1989, I had been on the ground and was dismayed when I returned to England to find the media all talking of 'Turkic-speaking, Muslim Abkhazians'. When I made efforts to correct these ill-informed epithets, the response of *The Guardian* was typical; in terms, this was: "Thank you, but we leave it to our Moscow correspondent to decide how the story should be presented."

⁴⁰ When I enquired why nothing had been done with the up-to-date and accurate information that I had supplied about Shevardnadze being allowed free exit, I was told that all incoming information had to be evaluated by editors, who evidently supposed correspondents sitting in Tbilisi to be better informed than one able to provide information sourced directly to the Abkhazian leadership.

Exactly as Ardzinba had promised, Shevardnadze was conducted out of Abkhazia unharmed, though his personal jet was sitting as late as 2007 on the tarmac at Sukhum airport. Other Kartvelian leaders, such as the Mingrelians Zhiuli Shart'ava, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and of the Security Committee in the Kartvelian administration in Abkhazia at the time, and Mamia Alasania, father of Irak'li, who was to come to prominence over a decade later first in the administration of Mikheil Saak'ashvili and then as the leader of a political party opposing him, were not so fortunate.⁴¹ Given the international community's reaction to Abkhazia's quashing of Shevardnadze's 14-month military (mis)adventure, many Abkhazians speculate what might have happened, had Ardzinba either elected not to take Yeltsin's phone-call or found an excuse to delay passing on the order to the field-commanders in Sukhum that particular autumn morning...⁴²

Abkhazians Victorious in the War

Unsurprisingly, the UN-sponsored negotiations that were due to be held in Geneva on 30 September had to be postponed; the announcement was made by Swiss Ambassador Eduard Brunner, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Special Envoy to Georgia.⁴³ Coincidentally, it was 30 September when hostilities officially ceased, with the planting of the Abkhazian flag on the R. Ingur, Abkhazia's centuries-old border with Georgia. In fact, though it is not common knowledge, Abkhazian forces pushed into Mingrelia. By this time Gamsakhurdia was back from his Grozny exile in the Mingrelian capital, Zugdidi. When the Abkhazians reached Zugdidi, they told the Zviadist forces under Kobalia that they had no irredentist claims on Georgia (specifically, on Mingrelia) and that what happened thereafter was entirely in the hands of the Mingrelians. They then turned back to Abkhazia to begin the daunting task of striving to rebuild shattered lives, restore the republic's ruined infrastructure and

⁴¹ Their murders in unclear circumstances during the dying days of the war are among the atrocities that have to be counted against the Abkhazians and their allies.

⁴² For an account of life in occupied Sukhum see the posthumously published diary of Tarnava (2008) and for a parallel description of life in the occupied Ochamchira Region see Kubrava (2010).

⁴³ Brunner became one of the few Western diplomats to be respected in Sukhum for not succumbing to the blandishments of Georgian hospitality and for maintaining a rare objectivity with respect to the conflict. The second British ambassador to Georgia, Richard Jenkins, was another. This was in contrast to Boutros-Ghali himself, whose objectivity was compromised in November 1994 when he accepted an honorary doctorate from Tbilisi University (cf. Hewitt 1998:203).

economy, and, in general, lift their devastated land out of the truly catastrophic situation into which Shevardnadze's war had plunged it. If anyone thought that the military victory would herald an end to their problems with Georgia or a change in the international community's unbending support for Georgian territorial integrity, they were (once more) to be sorely disappointed.

Subsequent events led some to ponder what might have happened, had Abkhazian forces stayed in Mingrelia and had the Abkhazian government immediately declared independence, using their control of Mingrelian territory as a bargaining chip to secure Georgian recognition. As it was, Abkhazia had to endure years of punishment for having exhibited the temerity not only to withstand but actually repel the Georgian incursion, unceremoniously ejecting both the fighters and, most humiliatingly, the man who had sent them into action. But were non-participants in the fighting also expelled from the territory?

'Ethnic Cleansing' or 'Ethnic Flight'?

If there are reasons for wondering what the real motive underlying the actions that led to the war might have been, one also has to query what has become the received wisdom of "[t]he forced flight of some 250,000 Georgians and Mingrelians from Abkhazia" (Hansen 1999:58), resulting in the Abkhazians standing accused of having committed ethnic cleansing. If one recalls the figure for Kartvelian residents in Abkhazia from the 1989 census (namely 239,872), it would follow that, if 250,000 is a remotely accurate figure, it would have been virtually impossible to locate a single Kartvelian in Abkhazia as of 1 October 1993. This was patently absurd; for one thing, the Abkhazians deemed it a pointless exercise and too dangerous to push up into the higher reaches of the largely Svan populated K'odor Valley, leaving this part of their territory under nominal Georgian control (until 12 August 2008). But even more nonsensical were the wildly exaggerated figures bandied about by some spokesmen in Tbilisi of up to 500,000⁴⁴ [sic] refugees from Abkhazia (known to the international agencies as 'internally displaced persons', or IDPs, semantically to underline the view that their displacement is not from one country to another but

⁴⁴ During his visit to London in February 1995, Shevardnadze quoted the figure of 300,000. And even as late as 15 February 2010 President Saak'ashvili was referring to half a million; see www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21985. In a contribution to *The Guardian's* on-line website on 5 March 2010, the Georgian Ambassador to the UK, Giorgi Badridze, spoke of 350,000.

merely from one part of Georgia to another), a figure that would have left Abkhazia almost entirely devoid of inhabitants of any ethnicity. Even the UN Security Council in one of its documents (S/1994/80 of 25 January 1994) quoted 300,000. Such inflated totals cannot be solely ascribed to Georgians' natural inclination to hyperbole: the higher the figures, the greater would be the international sympathy and consequential aid (humanitarian and financial). A more realistic calculation would be that the maximum figure of Kartvelians who took flight was significantly below 200,000. But, the number of people on the move is one thing, whereas what motivated that movement is entirely another.

We have already observed the way in which the behaviour of the National Guardsmen in the early days of hostilities made enemies of all the non-Kartvelian peoples; the Armenians even formed a special battalion, called Bagramian, to protect the Armenian population. Many Abkhazians fled (or were forced to leave?) areas under Georgian occupation (including Sukhum, Ochamchira, etc...). Israel arranged to evacuate Jews from Abkhazia, and in August 1993 the Greek government organised a vessel to evacuate Greek residents in an operation code-named 'Golden Fleece'.⁴⁵ War is war, and in the cold light of day, one can hardly avoid concluding that during the 14 months of hostilities both sides committed acts deserving condemnation. But was a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing put into effect by the Abkhazians and their allies in the final days of the war? The cautionary final sentence in this *Covcas Bulletin* summary of

⁴⁵ Clogg (1994) wrote the following about the fate of Abkhazia's Greeks:

Much of our knowledge of the plight of the Abkhazian Greeks is due to Vlas Agtzidis ... He accompanied operation 'Golden Fleece', the dispatch in August 1993 by the Greek government of a ship to evacuate just over a thousand ethnic Greeks from Sukhum to Greece. [...] Agtzidis carried out interviews among a sizeable proportion of these refugees. His initial findings were published in *Eleftherotypia* (August 29, 1993) and he has now produced a much more detailed report on the consequences of the war for the Greeks of Abkhazia. This report makes grim reading. Take, for instance, the case of Xanthi Kyriazova from Sukhum. She was overpowered one night by a group of seven armed Georgian paramilitaries, who proceeded to extract five gold teeth with pliers. They tortured and murdered her seventy year old aunt, whose children had earlier fled to Greece. Afterwards she was killed and buried in the yard of her house. This was seized by a Georgian family who dug up her aunt's corpse. A.P. had the lobe of her ear shot off when she tried to resist a group of Georgians bent on rape. (A photograph of her damaged ear was published in *Eleftherotypia*).

This is cited from Footnote 10 of Anchabadze [1999.280]. The 'more detailed report' referred to here is Agtzidis (1994).

a report from *The International Herald Tribune* of 22 October is worthy of special attention (*Covcas Bulletin* III.22 p. 6 for 27 October 1993):

According to refugees who escaped from Sukhumi, victorious Abkhazian forces committed massive violations of human rights, including summary executions, sexual violence against women, and other violations against Georgian civilians, forcing them to flee the region. *However, the reporter noted, it is hard to separate reports by witnesses from hearsay and rumors.* [Stress added]

In view of the serious charges laid against the Abkhazians, it is reasonable to ask what conclusions have been drawn by special investigative teams.

Georgia, before attaining membership of the UN, was a founder-member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO), based in The Hague, becoming a 'supporting member' thereafter; Abkhazia independently became a member on 1 January 1992. The first UNPO mission, under its then-General Secretary Dr. Michael van Walt van Praag, took place early in the war between 31 October and 8 November 1992; cities visited were: Moscow, Sochi, Gagra, Gudauta, Sukhum, Tbilisi, and Grozny. This Mission's report was published in *Central Asian Survey* 12.3 (1993:325–45). On pp. 338–9 we read:

With respect to human rights violations by Abkhazian and allied forces, the delegation was able to determine that some human rights violations had occurred against Georgian civilians. However, those acts did not appear to be systematic, and they never reached anything like the scale or gross nature of those committed by the Georgian military ... The Mission was particularly interested in investigating allegations of atrocities by Abkhazian troops in Gagra at the time of the recapture of that city from Georgian forces. The delegation was able to find absolutely no evidence to support two major allegations: one was the story that hundreds of Georgians had been driven into a stadium and killed; the other was that Abkhazian soldiers had gone to the hospital and killed doctors and patients there. What did seem to have taken place was the burning of many houses of Georgians who had fled the area before the Abkhazian advance.

UNPO's second mission took place after the war from 29 November to 10 December 1993, their visit this time taking in various towns along the war's eastern front (including Ochamchira and T'q'varchal). The report was printed in *Central Asian Survey* 14.1 (1995:127–54). On the Georgian side the Mission found (p. 137):

The evidence obtained by the mission leaves a picture of gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law by Georgian troops and authorities

on a scale not acknowledged so far by the UN or other international organizations.

On the Abkhazian side the Mission noted (p. 138):

In areas controlled by Abkhazian authorities during the war, there is evidence of anti-Georgian violence, including extra-judicial killings, burning and looting of houses and of property ... In the final stages of the war, when Abkhazian forces, supported by military units from the Northern Caucasus, took back Sukhum and the remaining Abkhazian territory to the Ingur river, there is evidence of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by members of the Abkhazian forces, Northern Caucasus troops and by armed civilians. When Abkhazian troops entered Sukhum many civilians were killed. Similar incidents also occurred in other parts of Abkhazia. *The majority of Georgians, however, fled before Abkhazian and Northern Caucasus troops arrived.* [Stress added].

Also quoted in the document (p. 128) is an important sentence from the report of a slightly earlier mission to the region (22–30 October) from the UN (UN Security Council Documents S/26795), published on 17 November. Though there was evidence of serious human rights' violations on the part of both sides, there was *no* convincing proof of ethnic cleansing (p. 12):

On the basis of the information collected the mission was not in the position to ascertain whether it had been an actively pursued policy of the authorities on either side, at any time, to clear the areas under their control of either the Abkhazian or the Georgian population.

In other words, Abkhazians abandoning areas under Georgian occupation probably did so in the main because they judged it to be a sensible precaution, just as those Kartvelians who fled in the wake of the fall of Sukhum on 27 September 1993 equally did so in the main through fear of what *might* happen, not because they were actually forced out under pain of execution, which is how the term 'ethnic cleansing' is surely to be understood in plain English. Indeed, only too aware of the feelings of hatred and bitterness roused among the Abkhazian population by the war and the traditions of vendetta in which all Caucasian peoples are steeped, the Abkhazian authorities distributed a leaflet during the last week of fighting to urge the citizenry to observe humanitarian norms and correct behaviour with regard to both surrendering soldiers and innocent civilians linked to the losing side. The leaflet, reproduced below, reminded them that their actions would characterise Abkhazia in the eyes of the world and determine the world's response. Regrettably, the world noticed only the presence of the refugees on the Georgian side of the R. Ingur and preferred not to enquire too closely into why they came to be there.



Fig. 2. Leaflet distributed at the end of the Georgian-Abkhazian war by the Abkhazian authorities reminding the victorious side of their obligations not to mistreat Kartvelian civilians or surrendering soldiers

Confirmation that Kartvelians were on the move before the arrival of any Abkhazian or allied forces comes from an unexpected source. The Mingrelian writer Guram Odisharia, whose contribution to the documentary film 'Absence of Will' was cited above, was one of those who fled from his family-home in Mach'ara, on the south-eastern outskirts of Sukhum. He published a little booklet ('The Pass of the Persecuted', Tbilisi, 2001 [in English]) in order to record the horrors he witnessed in the headlong flight of retreating soldiers and fearful locals who joined them as they took the precarious road winding up the K'odor Valley in search of what they hoped would be safety in the mountain-fastnesses of Svanetia just at the moment when autumn was turning to winter; their passage

along the coastal highway leading directly to Mingrelia was apparently cut off at the bridge over the River K'odor (between the villages of Varcha and Adzjwybzha). He left his home on 27 September as the Georgian forces were finally capitulating in the centre of Sukhum. With not a single Abkhazian fighter in the vicinity, Odisharia's journey began amidst the following chaotic scene (p. 9):

Soldiers in black uniforms start shooting from sub-machine guns, emptying their magazines, bullets whistle over our heads. I brake the car abruptly. "Go back, damn you," the black uniforms shout... "Go back, or we'll kill all of you! Who gave you the order to leave the town!"...⁴⁶

Georgia on the Brink

The world's attention quickly shifted from Abkhazia—not that Abkhazia as such had ever been a major focus of that attention in the first place. On the very day the war ended, *Agence France Presse* presented a bleak picture of the state of Georgia (*Covcas Bulletin* III.21 p. 2 for 13 October 1993):

Georgia's economy is on the brink of collapse, with 50% of the work force unemployed, 80% of industry idle, and harvest decreasing by 25% per annum. The annual inflation rate in the country has reached 2,000% and average salaries are around \$2 per month. In addition, 120,000 refugees have fled the combat zone in Abkhazia, of which 70,000 have settled in Tbilisi during the past year. The Government is unable to pay wages to State owned industry workers as a result of budget deficit. [Stress added]

Mention might also have been made of the persistent fuel-crisis to which Tbilisi in particular was susceptible as a result of Georgia's inability to pay for what it consumed (e.g. to Turkmenistan for gas).

⁴⁶ Odisharia's account reveals another aspect of the travails of the fleeing Kartvelians which, since all the opprobrium for their misery has been heaped on the Abkhazians, has been swept under the carpet and totally ignored. This is the way some (many?) of them were treated by (at least some of) the Svans, who, instead of welcoming fellow 'Georgians', took the opportunity to rob them (and worse). Odisharia writes (pp. 61–2):

But it turned out that at that very time, below us, round a bend in the road, real robbers lay in ambush near real rocks and stones, and robbed the persecuted. They took away weapons from the soldiers, and jackets, money, gold things and the last remaining property from the others... Shining bullets, flying out from the turning of the road, made several semicircles in the air; now and then we could hear the distant rattle of machine-guns. We saw the dead body of a young man killed for a gun, and the dead body of a frozen fighter, with a metal helmet on, on the road, though he might have been killed too, and maybe also for a gun... There is no one here to do anything against this, no one to defend the people.

If that was not enough, in Mingrelia Zviadist forces took immediate advantage of the rout of Shevardnadze's troops from Abkhazia and pressed on after them, bringing one town after another into the Zviadist fold. Shevardnadze, who had earlier laid the blame for his defeat in Abkhazia on 'Russian imperialism' (*Le Monde* 30 September), announced in Moscow on 8 October that Georgia would finally join the other former Soviet republics (apart from the three Baltic states) in becoming a member of the CIS. Three days later Giorgi (Gia) Ch'ant'uria, Chairman of the National Democratic Party, resigned from the State of Emergency Committee, threatening "to take over the functions of the state, which in fact no longer existed", if the proposal for Georgia to join the CIS was approved (*Covcas Bulletin* III.21 p. 4 for 13 October 1993).

Zviadists continued to exercise a stranglehold over the railway connecting the port of Poti to Tbilisi (and Armenia) and began moving out of Mingrelia to threaten Georgia's second city of Kutaisi. Assured that Georgia would join the CIS, Russian 'aid' was forthcoming, and the Zviadist rebellion miraculously crumbled.⁴⁷ Without this intervention, Georgia could well have disintegrated, and for some time thereafter it threatened to implode into a failed state. Despite there being no formal parliamentary approval, Shevardnadze signed the decree taking Georgia into the CIS on 23 October. Gamsakhurdia remained in Mingrelia, ever hopeful of rekindling an uprising against his long-time nemesis, but in early January 1994 his death was announced to have occurred on 31 December. Officially, he committed suicide, but there are still suspicions that it was a contract-killing. His body was taken in February to Grozny for burial but was eventually returned to Georgia by President Mikheil Saak'ashvili and reburied in pomp on the Holy Mountain (Mta-ts'minda) overlooking Tbilisi on 1

⁴⁷ On 28 October *The Guardian* newspaper reported (*Covcas Bulletin* III.23 p. 3 of 10 November 1993):

Georgian gangsters, posing as government soldiers, are just as likely to ride to war against rebels in the west of the republic in a Mercedes as in a tank. The criminal elements of Georgia's largest paramilitary group, the Mkhedrioni or Horsemen, have been looting the homes of civilians who have fled the advancing government forces. "The Mkhedrioni are simply here to steal," said Archil Asenishvili, a 40-year-old 'businessman' turned government soldier. "We [the real soldiers] go forward, the 'Zviadists' run away, and the Mkhedrioni steal whatever they can and go home," he said. The Georgian armed forces are a rag-bag of private militias of questionable military ability. A senior Red Cross official commented: "I was in Lebanon during the civil war, in Somalia at its worst, but I've never seen anything so disorganized as the Georgian army." Fortunately for Mr. Shevardnadze, the Gamsakhurdia supporters are no better disciplined.

April 2007. Mingrelia continued to be a source of unrest for some time to come, but the main danger for Tbilisi from this quarter was over.

Russia wished to keep the military bases it had created in Soviet Georgia, and discussion on the future of these bases will no doubt have played a part in negotiations for Georgia's entry into the CIS. By contracting this alliance, Shevardnadze hoped for Russian assistance not only in quelling the Zviadist revolt but also in pressuring Abkhazia and South Ossetia to abandon what was already their *de facto* independent status and, as we have seen, Gamsakhurdia's challenge duly melted away. Towards the end of 1993, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali established the group known as the Friends of Georgia, or, to avoid the unfortunate acronym (FOG), Friends of the Secretary General for Georgia; the 'Friends' were: the USA, UK, Russia, France and Germany. No-one (including Boris Yeltsin) wanted to see Georgia disintegrate. In February 1994, Georgia and Russia signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. And then Shevardnadze eventually (on 15 September 1995) signed a document granting Russia a 25-year lease to retain its military bases, though this contract was never ratified by the Georgian parliament and was to prove a bone of contention for years to come.

The following cartoon reflects Abkhazians' suspicions of Russia's links with Georgia in those years. We see Yeltsin dressed up as a Russian granny trying to comfort baby Shevardnadze, upset that his toy-tanks are broken, by telling him in the caption: 'Don't cry! The regiment in Akhaltshikhe is now with you.'



Fig. 3. Abkhazian cartoon depicting Boris Yeltsin as a matron handling child Shevardnadze's toy-tanks and urging him not to cry as he now had a division based in Akhaltsikhe (southwest Georgia)

Reality Dawns on the Abkhazians

Back in Abkhazia, the euphoria that is natural in the wake of military victory soon dissipated when the nature of the task ahead dawned on the population. An essential statistic to register is that the Abkhazians had sacrificed 4% of their numbers in the defence of their homeland; thousands more lost their lives on the Kartvelian side. A glimpse of the material problems facing post-war Abkhazia is given in this summary of the appeal from Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet of 19 October (*Caucas Bulletin* III.22 p. 5 of 27 October 1993):

The Abkhazian parliament issued an urgent appeal to Russia to lift the economic sanctions imposed on the region. The appeal said the economic sanctions are further aggravating the situation of the civilian population. As a result of the war, Abkhazia suffers from electricity power-cuts, lack of fresh water, medical supplies and fuel. Authorities in Abkhazia have taken resolute measures against criminal elements still marauding and robbing civilians, the statement said ... The appeal concluded by reiterating that authorities are determined to protect the rights of all residents irrespective of their ethnic origin and to create conditions for the return of refugees.

Apart from the village of Lower Eshera, just across the R. Gumista, which had been a prime target for Georgian shelling, as it was the native village of Vladislav Ardzinba, there were few indications between the Gumista and Pitsunda that an intensely fought war had been conducted in the republic at all; and, in fact, the damage to Gagra and the territory up to the border with Russia was slight, just as the Gal District had survived almost untouched. But whole swathes of the capital and nearby-settlements were in ruins, as was the area which had formed the focus of the fighting along the eastern front (notably Ochamchira town and villages along the highway to its north(-west), together with the inland-town of T'q'varchal). As those who had fled their homes at the start of hostilities returned, they typically found that, if their homes had not been reduced to rubble, possibly having been occupied by fighters during the confrontation, they were no more than bare shells, all contents and movable property having been carried off as booty to Georgia. The lawful occupants had no option but to commandeer furniture and other household-essentials from those homes vacated by fleeing Mingrelians and which had not been destroyed during the war. The coastal 'highway' south(-east) of Sukhum was such only in name, for many of the bridges had been blown up, and tank caterpillar-tracks had left the surface pitted with pot-holes. But, then, there were few cars in private hands; buses, which, even if they ran, tended to be in a de-

crepit state, were also in short supply. It was a long time before Sukhum's trolley-bus service was restored, partly with some new units eventually donated by Russia.⁴⁸

Over 200,000 mines were estimated to have been laid in the Ochamchira District, making any movement off the Sukhum-Ochamchira-T'q'varchal highway into the fields (and in other inland-spots) a highly dangerous venture; it was only in 2007 that Britain's demining NGO *The Halo Trust* removed the last little skull-and-crossbone warning signs from the highway-verges, though deminers were still then engaged at some inland-sites. Sukhum airport, the largest in the entire Caucasus, had been renovated in the final years of Soviet rule, but it lay entirely idle (apart from UN helicopter-flights into/out of Senak'i or the occasional local flight to the remote community in Pskhu) from the end of the war until some renewed activity connected with the hostilities in the summer of 2008. Similarly, the railway-line was out of action for years, though after about a decade an occasional local service was introduced between Sukhum and Sochi, whilst in more recent times there has been a Sukhum-Moscow connection.

As for tele- and postal communications, there has been no proper or complete postal service in Abkhazia since the war to the present day (viz. 2012), though this has not prevented Abkhazia printing a bewildering array of attractive stamps.⁴⁹ For years it was only with difficulty that one could make a phone-call from one locality within Abkhazia to another, let alone make an international call. Thus, the country had to be lifted from its knees, but at least the boast was that no debt had been incurred, for all dues had been paid during the war; interestingly, Tbilisi has paid not one penny by way of reparation for the damage caused by its instigation and conduct of the war. On 27 May 2010, the official Abkhazian news-agency Apsny Press quoted (the then-)Vice-President Aleksandr Ankvab as estimating the damage done to Abkhazia's agriculture, industrial base and its resorts in the 1992–3 war to be no less than US \$13–14 billion [sic] (cited from Costello 2010.21). Nevertheless and perhaps surprisingly, shared Abkhazian-Georgian control of the Ingur hydro-electric station, supplying power to parts of Abkhazia and western Georgia, remained undisturbed throughout the war and beyond—the dam itself is located on the Georgian side of the border, whilst the control-mechanisms lie on the Abkhazian

⁴⁸ More new stock was introduced in 2011.

⁴⁹ The much-publicised stamps of Groucho Marx, John Lennon and later Bill Clinton with Monica Lewinsky were all foreign spoofs, however.

side (with a post-2008 Russian contingent situated close by to ensure no interference from Georgia).

The main fighting may have been over, but there was still a danger of renewed clashes, as no ceasefire-agreement had been signed, and there was no oversight of the border with Mingrelia. Years of negotiations began informally in late October in Geneva, with Ambassador Brunner occupying the mediator's chair. At the same time, the Parliament of the Confederation of the Peoples⁵⁰ of the Caucasus met in Pitsunda and resolved to keep military contingents⁵¹ in Abkhazia until a peace-agreement was signed; they also repeated the call on Russia to lift the economic sanctions imposed in the final days of the war.

It soon became clear where the sympathies of the European Parliament lay; in Document PV 37 II (PE 176.537) it strongly condemned 'the attacks on the territorial integrity and the still vulnerable democracy' of Georgia, characterising the Abkhazian forces as a 'terrorist-separatist movement' (*Covcas Bulletin* III.23 p. 2 for 10 November 1993).⁵² At the same time, Russian Foreign Minister Andrej Kozyrev, no friend of the Abkhazians,⁵³ delivered a lecture at Chatham House in London, repeating a Russian proposal for its troops to serve under a UN mandate as peace-keepers in areas of ethnic conflicts in the former USSR. Quoting from *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper, *Covcas Bulletin* (ibid. p. 3) reported:

Kozyrev also praised the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs Douglas Hurd for his decision to support the Russian proposal. Hurd had agreed that only the Russian army was in a position to intervene in the conflicts in the former Soviet Union and urged the UN to formalize an arrangement.

And, thus, it became clear from the start that Russia's special role in the conflicts involving Georgia was championed by one of the principal play-

⁵⁰ Now minus the epithet 'Mountain-'.

⁵¹ At the start of January, Shanibov stressed that it was illegal for the Confederation to form armed units of its own and that its volunteers in Abkhazia were under the command of the Abkhazian Defence Ministry (Radio Liberty Daily Report, cited by *Covcas Bulletin* IV.1 p. 6 for 12 January 1994).

⁵² Needless to say, it was not long before the familiar pre-war slurs against the Abkhazians were making a reappearance. Novelist Ch'abua Amiredzhibi, who had lost a son in the war, came up with the following in *Rossijskie Vesti* 'Russian News' of 22 Oct 1992: "The Abkhazians are a Georgian tribe. But those who came here from the North Caucasus are supreme riff-raff, Adyghes, killers and half-savage tribes...".

⁵³ At one stage during the war, when Kozyrev told Ardzinba that the Abkhazians should not labour under any illusions that they would regain control of Sukhum, Ardzinba was so incensed that he upturned the table at which they were seated (personal communication from one present at the meeting).

ers in Europe's recognition of the Georgian state, and, as in March 1992, Britain's partners were again content to follow her lead.

The urgent need for a ceasefire was underscored by Shevardnadze's declaration on 4 November that, after restoration of order in Mingrelia, a similar action would be undertaken in Abkhazia. Four days later, the UN Security Council approved the deployment of Russian troops in Georgia to ensure the running of the railway from Poti. By 11 November, Gamsakhurdia's forces had been driven out of Zugdidi, and, speaking by radio from Senak'i, Shevardnadze spoke of a Georgian return to Abkhazia as a prime goal; his troops were close to the Abkhazian border. Meanwhile, there were reports of Kartvelian armed units operating in the Gal and Gulripsh Districts. On 18 November, the Russian news-agency Itar-Tass quoted Ardzinba as stating that Abkhazia would not declare independence, because: "We saw what happened to Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia" (*Covcas Bulletin* III.24 p. 10 for 1 December 1993); Russia was also pressing Sukhum to enter negotiations with Georgia. In Tbilisi, Shevardnadze brought together a number of small political parties under his umbrella-party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG).⁵⁴ Elected to its chairmanship, Shevardnadze announced its aims to be the reestablishment of Georgian control over Abkhazia and radical economic reforms. Shortly afterwards, he proposed that a new constitution be drafted.⁵⁵

Start of Formal Peace-talks

The first round of formal Abkhaz-Georgian negotiations under the aegis of the UN (Eduard Brunner chairing) took place in Geneva from 30 November to 1 December. Russia, in the person of Boris Pastukhov, was Facilitator, and Vincenzo Manno represented the CSCE. The resulting Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Dzhaba Ioseliani for Georgia and by (then-Premier) Sok'rat' Dzhindzholia (Jinjolia) for Abkhazia. The Parties committed themselves not to use force or the threat thereof for the period of the negotiations. An international peace-keeping force was requested. There was a commitment to "undertake to create conditions for the voluntary, safe and speedy return of refugees to the places of their permanent residence in all regions of Abkhazia". A group of experts was to be set up

⁵⁴ In Georgian /sakartvelos mokalaketa k'avshiri/ (SMK(')).

⁵⁵ For a convenient account of Shevardnadze's manipulation of politics in Tbilisi over the next decade see Wheatley (2005, 82–185) or Jones (2012).

to prepare recommendations on the political status of Abkhazia for presentation at the next round of negotiations, scheduled to begin on 11 January 1994.⁵⁶

While Abkhazians and Georgians were negotiating in Geneva, there was a reminder that all was not well in another part of Georgia, that part where ethnic clashes flared in July 1989 at the same time that Abkhaz-Georgian relations began their slide to the eventual nadir of war. On 30 November, *Turan* reported continuing provocations against Georgia's Azerbaijani minority. As many as seventy hostages had been taken for ransom. Demonstrations had begun on 8 November demanding that the Georgian authorities guarantee the constitutional rights of Georgia's Azerbaijani community (*Covcas Bulletin* III.25 p. 8 for 15 December 1993).

The second round of negotiations was held in Geneva on 11–13 January 1994.⁵⁷ The Sides called for a widening of UNOMIG's mandate and for a peace-keeping force (either the UN's own or one sanctioned by the UN) to be despatched to the conflict-zone, where a demilitarised zone would be established for them to patrol along the R. Ingur and other possible flash-points; the peace-keeping force should certainly include a Russian military contingent. Clause 4 begins:

The Sides will continue preliminary work for a quadripartite agreement on the voluntary return and repatriation to Abkhazia of refugees and displaced persons. The Sides have agreed to create a special commission on refugees to include representatives of the Sides, the UN, and Russia and which will begin work on 25 January 1994. The Sides have reached agreement on the putting into effect from 10 February 1994 of a gradual process of returning the refugees and displaced persons to Abkhazia, the first stage of which will be to the Gal District.

The following day, during a visit to Turkey, Shevardnadze welcomed the offer received from NATO of a Partnership for Peace.

The third round of negotiations was an altogether grander affair than the first two, for the first session was held in Geneva (22–25 February), the second in New York (7–9 March), and the third in Moscow (29–31 March). Two documents resulted, both signed in Moscow on 4 April, with K'avsadze substituting for Ioseliani as signatory for Georgia on both, whilst J. Amunategul, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, took the place of

⁵⁶ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.319–20); an English version is available in *Covcas Bulletin* III.25 p. 15 for 15 December 1993.

⁵⁷ The text of the Communiqué, carrying the same signatures as the earlier Memorandum, can be found in Volkhonskij et al. (2008.323–4).

the CSCE representative. These documents were: the 'Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz Conflict', and the 'Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons'.⁵⁸ Reaffirming the earlier Memorandum and Communiqué, the parties again appealed for an expanded UNOMIG mandate. Abkhazia was to have its own Constitution and state-symbols, whilst joint-action was agreed in various fields (e.g. energy and protection of human and minority rights), but ultimate distribution of powers depended on a comprehensive settlement being reached. Chirikba (2010.19)⁵⁹ draws attention to the existence in Article 8 of the phrase 'reestablishment of state-legal relations', observing that, if such relations needed to be reestablished, they cannot logically have existed at the time the document was drafted and signed.

The urgent need for formalising some sort of mutual understanding was underlined on 10 March when the Georgian parliament passed a resolution 'On the Legislative Practice of Apartheid and Racism in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic', which declared the annulment of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet—for the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008. 77–81). Though effectively a meaningless gesture, it had led to a temporary stalling of the peace-talks.

The progress seemingly codified in the documents signed on 4 April led to:

- (a) the Proposal for the Establishment of a Coordinating Commission 'to discuss practical matters of mutual interest', signed in Moscow on 11 May by Ioseliani and Dzhindzholia in the presence of Brunner, Pas-tukhov and Manno (returning on behalf of the CSCE)⁶⁰ and

⁵⁸ The Russian texts are given as Documents 232 and 233 by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.329–335), whilst the English versions can be consulted in Cohen (1999.66–9 and Hewitt (1999.266–71); they are reprinted below as Appendices 3 and 4 to this chapter.

⁵⁹ This paper was originally delivered at a conference in Istanbul in May 2009; it may also be found at: www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/285-int-legal-status-abkhazia-vchirikba.html.

Dr. Vjacheslav Chirikba, having served as foreign affairs' adviser and head of the Abkhazian delegation at the Geneva talks during President Sergej Bagapsh's second term, was appointed Foreign Minister in the autumn of 2011 after the election to Abkhazia's presidency of Aleksandr Ankvab on 26 August. He retained under the new president the leadership of the Abkhazian delegation to Geneva.

⁶⁰ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.338–9) and for the English version Cohen (1999.70).

- (b) the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, which was signed in Moscow on 14 May by Dzhindzholia and Ioseliani (without any UN or CSCE participation).⁶¹

In New York, Ardzinba had been pressured to allow peace-keepers access to the whole of Abkhazia but rejected this as being tantamount to occupation. And so, the CIS (in effect, Russian) peace-keeping contingent was eventually deployed (16 June) in just the Security Zone, a strip of territory in which armed forces and heavy military equipment were prohibited. Beyond this inner zone were broader Restricted-weapons Zones, in which heavy military equipment was banned. Local civilian authorities were to function in these zones, and the police/militia were permitted to carry only personal arms therein. Heavy military equipment withdrawn from the zones was to be stored in agreed locations under the supervision of UNOMIG. Importantly, special mention was made of the K'odor Valley:

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 K'odor 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 K'odor Valley. Apart from guaranteeing the ceasefire, the presence of the CIS force should promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, especially to the Gal District.

Though the relevant forces, under Maj-Gen. V. Jakushev, were deployed in June, the CIS did not actually mandate the operation until 21 October (Lynch 1998:30).⁶² But, consequent upon the deployment, the UN Security Council by Resolution 937 (21 July 1994) extended the mandate of an expanded UNOMIG to monitor the observance of the 14th-May Ceasefire.⁶³ The Resolution specifically stated in Sections (e-f) that UNOMIG was (Cohen 1999:71): "(e) To monitor the withdrawal of troops of the Republic

⁶¹ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008:339–41) and for the English version Cohen (1999:69–70).

⁶² For the decision and mandate see Documents 243 and 244 in Volkhonskij et al. (2008:355–58). As a negotiating ploy, Georgia would often threaten over the years that it would insist on the peace-keepers' withdrawal in the run-up to the UN mandate's renewal, but it never carried out its bluff.

⁶³ The UNOMIG head-quarters in Abkhazia were originally located in Pitsunda, a drive of some two and half hours from the border with Mingrelia, where any incident would be likely to occur. Eventually, they moved to Aitar, on the south-eastern outskirts of Sukhum.

of Georgia from the Kodori valley to places beyond the boundaries of Abkhazia, Republic of Georgia;⁶⁴ (f) To patrol the Kodori valley”.

Prior to the start of the second round of discussions, Ambassador Brunner had given an interview to Itar-Tass, stating (Cited by *Caucas Bulletin* IV.1 p. 10 for 12 January 1994):

While Georgia insists on preserving its territorial integrity, Georgia is prepared to offer Abkhazia autonomy. Abkhazia demands either total independence or a federal agreement with Georgia.

Whilst the Abkhazians were considering federal relations with Georgia prior to the war, confederal ties were the most they were prepared to entertain after the war. With this emendation to Brunner’s statement, he was accurately characterising the sides’ mutually incompatible positions. These, despite all the pressure applied through the Friends of Georgia⁶⁵ (including Yel’tin’s Russia), never changed, and it is this which explains why no real progress was made (or was ever likely to be made) throughout all the years of meetings, confidence-building measures, or negotiations in which representatives of the parties to the conflict engaged up to Abkhazia’s formal Declaration of Independence on 12 October 1999. Since this latter date, not even a confederal option has even been on the table, leaving the parties divided by an unbridgeable gap which was only widened when Russia finally set in train what was always going to prove, given the stance of most of the international community, the slow process of securing international recognition for Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) on 26 August 2008.

Periodisation of the Negotiations

Natella Akaba (2009) divides the negotiating process into three periods:

- 1993–94, with the documents signed in Moscow in 1994 representing the absolute high-point;
- 1995–99, when the struggle was to devise a mechanism for bringing Abkhazia and Georgia together in a common state;

⁶⁴ In order to demonstrate the sanctity of Georgian territorial integrity, whenever UN documents referred to Abkhazia, the phrase ‘(Republic of) Georgia’ always accompanied it—BGH.

⁶⁵ As I wrote in 1998 of negotiations in the mid-1990s: “[A]t an earlier round the French Ambassador had reportedly informed the Abkhazian delegation of a Georgian plan to divide Abkhazia on racial lines and that FOG endorsed this idea” (p. 203).

- 1999–2006, from Abkhazia’s declaration of independence through to Saak’ashvili’s *démarche* into the Upper K’odor Valley.

During Akaba’s middle stage, Ardzinba had to steer a demanding course that avoided renewed warfare, did not make unacceptable concessions to Tbilisi, and did not entirely offend an essentially pro-Georgian [sic] Kremlin.⁶⁶ At this time, Russia, backing Georgia’s territorial integrity, was pressuring both sides—Georgia to federalise and Abkhazia to accept entry into a common state with Georgia. In mid-1995 following Russo-Georgian talks in Moscow (without the participation of Abkhazia), Tbilisi said it would offer Abkhazia autonomous republican status within a federal Georgia (along with special status for Soviet Georgia’s other two autonomies of South Ossetia and Ach’ara). To this Dzhindzholia, then Speaker of the Abkhazian Parliament, replied on 15 May (Cited from Potier 2001.117):

[O]ne [Russia, in this case] should remember about the limit below [?beyond—BGH] which the Republic of Abkhazia cannot go ... Russia should help the search for a compromise between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, instead of boosting the creation of a federal Georgian state.⁶⁷

Whatever the choice of words, all that Shevardnadze was ever really prepared to offer was essentially a return to the *status quo ante bellum*, namely ‘highest level of or ‘maximal’ autonomy within a unitary Georgian state;⁶⁸ the very mention of precisely those regions to which the Soviets had award-

⁶⁶ Many feel that, without Ardzinba at the helm, Abkhazia’s fate would have been radically different (for the worse).

⁶⁷ A joint-meeting of the Abkhazian parliament and cabinet of ministers issued a statement in June 1995 which included this affirmation of their stance:

The participants of the meeting approve the course of the leadership of the Republic of Abkhazia towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict and consider inconceivable the establishment of a federative relation between Abkhazia and Georgia.

⁶⁸ One Western constitutional expert, the Belgian Bruno Coppieters, became interested in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and devoted a number of publications to it (especially) during the Shevardnadze era, often concentrating on the question of how different forms of federalism might be applied in this particular case. The relevant publications are: Coppieters (1998; 2000; 2001; 2001a; 2002; 2004), Coppieters, Darchiashvili and Akaba (2000), and Coppieters & Sakwa (2003); a later volume (Coppieters & Legvold 2005) was devoted to the post-Shevardnadze era. Coppieters eventually became a member of the Tagliavini Commission, which investigated the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008 on behalf of the European Union. See also Chirikba (2000). Potier (2001) addresses all three Transcaucasian hotspots (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabagh) in his legal appraisal of constitutional arrangements, this book being an updated version of his doctoral thesis. For another legal perspective see Hille (2010, this also being a somewhat expanded and adapted version of her doctoral thesis of 2003; and 2010a).

ed autonomous status as those to figure as 'constituent elements' in this new 'asymmetrically' federal Georgia looked suspicious—what of Mingrelia, Svanetia, and the Armenian- and Azerbaijani-populated regions, to name but four further potential constituencies of a federalised Georgia?

To illustrate the point, Potier (2001:127) cites a number of statements from Ardzinba made between June 1995 and June 1997:

President Ardzinba: 'The Abkhaz leadership has not discussed and will not discuss the idea of Abkhazia getting the status of an autonomy within Georgia. We are discussing the possible reinstatement of legal relations between Georgia and Abkhazia and the possibility of restoring the territorial integrity of the borders of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.' However, 'these must be equal relations. Renunciation of this principle will mean a return to Stalinism, suppression of the rights of a less numerous people.' Over the four years of talks with Tbilisi, the Georgian president 'has never proposed anything new except the attempts to give Abkhazia the status of a broad autonomy', he said.

But, after losing their union-republican status in 1931, the Abkhazians had 'enjoyed' autonomy within Georgia for six decades and, thus, knew only too well what it had meant: it had been a fiction that had seen them reduced to a 17.8% minority in their homeland, whilst Kartvelians had almost attained an absolute majority there by the time of the last Soviet census (1989), and it had led to ethnic clashes and, ultimately, war. They were never going to put themselves in that position of subservience to Tbilisi again, albeit under a mask of federalism. Though Saak'ashvili would also eventually start talking again in terms of some kind of federal arrangement, the concept was outdated by over a decade, and the topic was simply no longer of any interest in Sukhum, despite all the time and effort devoted by commentators to devising variations on the theme of (con)federalism.

While negotiators wrestled fruitlessly over the years in an attempt to fit the square peg of Abkhazian aspirations for confederation (the ultimate prize of outright independence then looking unattainable) into the round hole of Georgian insistence on a unitary state (even if moderately federalised), the problem of the refugees remained unresolved. The Abkhazians felt that a comprehensive political solution should be agreed before any large-scale return of Kartvelians (especially to areas other than the Gal District) could be contemplated, whereas Tbilisi (and the Friends) demanded immediate resettlement of the displaced, ignoring the fact that so much housing-stock had been lost in those areas from which most of the Kartvelians had fled (viz. Sukhum and the Gulripsh and Ochamchira

Regions) that Abkhazia's infrastructure was in no fit state to accommodate the numbers concerned. In the autumn of 1994 a large-scale return of refugees was attempted (with Russian assistance), but it was blocked. With the ceasefire endangered, Russian Defence Minister Grachëv arranged a meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba in Sukhum, which led to agreement on a quota-system to manage returns.

Abkhazia's 1994 Constitution

On 26 November 1994, a new Constitution for Abkhazia was ratified by the Parliament (formerly Supreme Soviet), this date being thereafter celebrated as Constitution Day. An Anglo-Russian text was published that year in Sukhum under the title 'The Republic of Abkhazia [Apsny]. The Constitution'; the main articles read as follows:

We, the people of Abkhazia, in exercising our right to self-determination, seeking to contribute to general prosperity and internal peace, and asserting human rights and freedoms, civil peace and concord, solemnly proclaim and establish the Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia.

Chapter 1. The basics of constitutional order.

Article 1. The Republic of Abkhazia (Apsny) shall be a sovereign democratic state based on law, which has historically become firmly established by the right of the nation to self-determination. The Republic of Abkhazia and Apsny shall be equivalent names.

Article 2. The sovereignty of the people shall be the basis for the State authority in the Republic of Abkhazia. The sovereignty bearer and sole source of authority in the Republic of Abkhazia shall be its people, i.e., the citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia. The people shall exercise their authority directly or through their representatives.

Article 3. The Republic of Abkhazia as a subject of international law shall enter treaty relationships with other states. The procedure for concluding, publishing, ratifying and denouncing international treaties shall be specified by law.

Article 4. The Republic of Abkhazia consists of the historical provinces of Sadz, Bzyp, Guma, Dal-Ts'abal, Abjua, Samurzaq'an which are the present-day Gagra, Gudauta, Sukhum, Gulripsh, Ochamchira, T'q'varchal and Gal districts within which the cities of Gagra, Gudauta, New Athos, Sukhum, Ochamchira, T'q'varchal and Gal are located. The territory of the Republic of Abkhazia is indivisible, inviolable and inalienable...

Chapter 3. The legislative power.

Article 36. All the legislative authority established by this Constitution shall be exercised by the People's Assembly or the Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia.

Article 37. The Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia shall consist of 35 members. The election to the Parliament shall be carried out on the basis of a universal, equal and direct suffrage, by means of secret ballot. The Parliament's term of office shall be five years...

Chapter 4. The executive power.

Article 48. The Executive Power in the Republic of Abkhazia shall be granted to the President of the Republic of Abkhazia. The President of the Republic of Abkhazia shall be the head of the State.

Article 49. The elections of the President of the Republic of Abkhazia shall be based on universal, equal and direct suffrage. The President shall be elected by secret vote for five years. Any person of Abkhaz nationality who is a citizen of the Republic of Abkhazia and who is not younger than 35 years and not older than 65 years, having the right to vote, is eligible to be elected President of the Republic of Abkhazia. One and the same person may not be President of the Republic of Abkhazia for a longer period than two successive terms of office.

Map 2, which presents today's Republic of Abkhazia, includes the post-Soviet T'q'varchal District, which was created after the war, incorporating areas from the districts of Ochamchira and Gal (including Bedia with its famous church, founded by King Bagrat' II(I) and place of his burial). As it was impossible to organise an election, given the circumstances prevailing in the republic at the end of 1994, Ardzinba was simply appointed President by the Parliament.

The Abkhazian leadership had already in the late-Soviet period started to make efforts to establish links with the diaspora-community based in Turkey in the hope of attracting investment from (primarily) Turkish-Abkhazian businessmen. This Turkey-based resource has remained a rich potential source of help to Abkhazia in various spheres. We have already noted that volunteers from the diaspora eagerly joined the ranks of fighters during the war; a number chose to settle in Abkhazia, and, when one talks of returning 'exiles' to Abkhazia, it is the descendants of those who departed in the 19th-century *maxadzhirstvo* that the Abkhazians wish to welcome back to their ancestral land, arguing that they are the ones who hold primacy of right of return. Investment from Turkey has been significant, and Turkey can play a crucial role politically, given that it is:

- (a) a direct neighbour of, and huge trading partner with, Georgia;
- (b) a member of NATO; and
- (c) keen to have good relations with Russia, just as Russia needs good relations with Turkey (with its control over the passage of vessels through the Bosphorus).

A valued connection with Turkey opened up for ordinary citizens in 1994, when a little passenger-boat named 'Rits'a', owned by Abkhazian businessman Artur Sabua, began to sail between Sukhum and Trebizond (Trabzon). Turkey allowed Abkhazian citizens to enter the country solely on the basis of their old Soviet documents. In order not to cause embarrassment, the boat flew the Russian flag when in Turkish coastal waters, but for most of its voyage the Abkhazian flag was hoisted and flew proudly atop the mast. The service was forced to end in November 1995.

However, as that marine avenue was opening up, another avenue was restricted. Because of worrying developments that were soon to lead to the first Chechen war (end of 1994), Russia introduced on 19 December a resolution 'On Measures for a Temporary Restriction on the Crossing of the Border of the Russian Federation with the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Georgia',⁶⁹ prohibiting *inter alia* car-traffic and flow of goods. As the note appended by Volkhonskij and his co-compilers to the text of the resolution observes (p. 296):

This and a range of subsequent resolutions of the Russian Government formalised the embargo-regime on mutual trading and economic activity between Russia and Abkhazia that was operative from September 1993 through September 1999.

A slight relaxation in the restrictions on crossing the Psou was introduced on 7 July 1995, when pensioners, children upto 16 years of age, and women of any age could cross simply by shewing documents identifying them and their place of domicile; lorries carrying humanitarian aid, food and building-materials were also permitted in order to relieve the straitened circumstances in which the population found itself.⁷⁰ Once the war in Chechnia was underway, Shevardnadze interestingly followed the precedent of the 19th-century Russo-Georgian alliance against the North Caucasians by allowing Russia to use air-strips in Georgia to launch bombing raids on the Chechens.

In February 1995, the Georgian Parliament decided to reinstate the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet that it had abolished the previous year but in a reduced form, comprising only the Kartvelian members who had been elected in 1991; in June, those who had been elected in Georgian-occupied Abkhazian constituencies in 1992 were also admitted, and this body was regarded in Georgia as Abkhazia's 'Government-in-exile' under the chair-

⁶⁹ For the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.295–6).

⁷⁰ For the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.298–9).

manship of Tamaz Nadareishvili.⁷¹ The members were also given dispensation to sit in the Georgian Parliament.

That same month, Shevardnadze visited London. In an open address at Chatham House, he labelled Ardzinba and Chechen President, Dzhokhar Dudaev, together as 'fascists'. His prescription, delivered on the day, for dealing with the dangers of the new universal threat of (as he christened it) 'aggressive separatism' was laid out for all to see in the article he published on 26 May 1995 in the British weekly magazine *The New Statesman*:

We will finally find the resolve to do what we have until now failed to do—to call separatism separatism, genocide genocide. We must stop this epidemic of disintegration whose consequences could eclipse all our current national horrors. We must resolve to take all prompt and necessary measures, regardless of cost and the criticisms levelled by those out of short-term gain.⁷²

On 24 August 1995, Georgia promulgated its own new Constitution. The preamble states that it is founded on the Georgian people's multi-centennial state-traditions and the basic principles of Georgia's 1921 Constitution; it begins thus (in my translation from Shengelia 1999.1):

Chapter 1

General precepts

Article 1

1. Georgia is an independent, unitary and indivisible state, which is confirmed by the referendum conducted on 31 March 1991 over the entire territory of

⁷¹ Between 1993 and 1995 he also held the post of Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia.

⁷² Former UK Foreign Secretary in Margaret Thatcher's government, Lord Geoffrey Howe, who had become acquainted with Shevardnadze during the latter's days as Soviet Foreign Minister, chaired the lecture. Since he had praised Shevardnadze's speech as one of the best he had heard delivered at Chatham House, I wrote to ask if he agreed with his guest's recommendation for combating separatism. His letter, dated 3 April 1995, sought to deny his friend's prescription: "My own judgment is that Shevardnadze and I would be equally reluctant to accept the view (which you attribute to him) that 'separatism should be put down wherever it occurs, no matter what the cost'...". Another resolute defender of Shevardnadze from his Moscow days under Gorbachev was former US Secretary of State James Baker. A documentary film by freelance film-maker Chris Wenner that was highly critical of Shevardnadze and which (possibly for this reason) never received a broadcast in the UK includes footage of Baker addressing a crowd in Tbilisi in 1992. He was there to give personal support to his close friend, and so strong was the bond between the two that Baker was manifestly unconcerned at the shots that could plainly be heard emanating from a counter, pro-Gamsakhurdia demonstration but a short distance away as Shevardnadze's men opened fire to disperse unarmed demonstrators. Sounding rather hollow and uncomfortable against all this were the words of US Ambassador to Georgia in 1996, William H. Courtney: "International backing for Georgia has grown because of its strong democratic and economic reforms, and its policy of seeking peaceful resolution of separatist disputes" (from the NATO/ICCN Brown University Workshop on Regional Security, 4 October 1996, Tbilisi).

the country, including the Abkhazian ASSR and the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region, and the act restoring Georgia's state-independence of 9 April 1991.

2. The form of Georgia's state-political arrangement is that of a democratic republic.

3. The name of the state of Georgia is Sakartvelo [Georgia]

Just as in the 1921 Menshevik Constitution, the nature of the state-legal relations with Abkhazia remained unspecified.

Shevardnadze Elected President

Having survived an assassination-attempt on 29 August, in which Igor Giorgadze, Minister of State Security, was allegedly implicated, Shevardnadze was elected president on 5 November, the main opposition-figure, Gia Ch'ant'uria of the National Democratic Party, having been shot dead on 3 December 1994. As Shevardnadze's party, the CUG, won the parliamentary elections, also held on 5 November, the president was dealt a strong hand for running the country for the next quinquennium. Endeavouring to capture the spirit of the age, Wheatley entitled his chapter devoted to this period 'Profile of a corrupt regime: the Georgian state 1996–2001' (2008.103–142).

Terrorism in Abkhazia

Though the introduction of the CIS peace-keeping contingent had produced a level of stability, both sides came to feel a certain dissatisfaction with it, despite the fact that one of the objects for UNOMIG to observe will certainly have been the activities of the CIS forces—on 1 October 1995, the Romanian diplomat Liviu Bota was appointed UN Secretary General's Deputy Special Representative and Head of UNOMIG. A porous, unofficial border affords an ideal conduit for smuggling, and unsavoury Abkhazian and Kartvelian gangs had no scruples in finding common cause and collaborating over the movement of contraband. But, with more specific reference to the conflict itself, the Georgians felt that not enough was being done to facilitate the return of refugees or to protect fellow 'Georgians' (viz. the Mingrelians) in the Gal District from harassment, whilst the Abkhazians thought that more could be done to stop the infiltration of saboteurs, who were starting to come over the Ingur and slip back again after carrying out their acts of sabotage and terrorism. Over the next few years many indi-

viduals were to lose their lives in these shootings and explosions. As most incidents occurred in the Gal District, it was not only ethnic Abkhazians who were the targets; numerous Mingrelians and several of the CIS peacekeepers perished. Apart from killing Abkhazians, a secondary objective seems to have been to create fear, havoc, and general instability to give the impression that the Abkhazians had no effective control over their territory; punishment of Gal Mingrelians, Armenians and Russians for treacherously being prepared to live and work among the 'enemy' might have been viewed (by those so minded) as an incidental bonus.⁷³

There were two main groups operating in the area: the Forest Brothers, led by Mingrelian Davit (Dato) Shengelia, and the White Legion, led by Mingrelian Zurab Samushia.⁷⁴ Suspicions that these were (or, at least, became) more than mere *ad hoc* groupings were eventually demonstrated to be far from baseless. An Amnesty International report of August 1998 included the following:

The Abkhazian side has claimed frequently and bitterly that guerrilla forces operating in Abkhazia have the support of the Georgian government, which does not act with sufficient rigour to clamp down on the activity of those who launch their attacks from Georgian controlled territory. Russian officials from the CIS peacekeeping forces, also targets of guerrilla activity, have made similar claims. For example, after five soldiers from the CIS peacekeeping force were killed by a mine on 12 July this year, the Russian

⁷³ Some idea of what life was like at the time may be gleaned from just three (from a plethora of) official reports of such incidents from later years, namely:

1. 15-IX-98: at 8.30 a.m. in the Gal District's village of Nabak'evi a patrol-group of the Republic of Abkhazia's Interior Ministry was fired upon. B. K'ak'alia, A. Pilia, V. Lazaria, E. Khukhua, G. Eponishvikov, A. Semenov, P. Mazurik were killed; B. Gunia, P. K'vek'vesk'iri, A. Chok'ua, T. Pachulia, and U. Pliev were wounded.
2. 10-X-98: at 9.20 a.m. in the Gal District's village of Nabak'evi a Georgian terrorist-group opened fire on a patrol-group of the Republic of Abkhazia's Interior Ministry killing A. Cholokian, G. Avdzhan, and L. Karagozian.
3. 4-I-99: on the approach-road to the Gal District's village of Chuburkhindzhi an anti-tank mine laid by a Georgian terrorist-group exploded beneath Gudul Ionovich Gamsakhurdia (b. 1920) as he was following his horses. He perished on the spot.

⁷⁴ An Interfax report on the conflict from 24th February 1997 stated (Anchabadze 1999:281):

In an interview in the Georgian paper *axali taoba* [New Generation] the leader of the 'White Legion', Zurab Samushia, declared that "the partisan-formation known as the White Legion" is conducting an armed struggle against "a puppet, separatist regime" ... Samushia maintained that the 'White Legion' ... will continue to carry on the armed struggle against the current authorities in Abkhazia until there is complete restoration of Georgia's jurisdiction in this republic.

Foreign Ministry issued a statement two days later condemning the killings as an act of terrorism by Georgian guerrillas and said that “any attempts to present the White Legion or the Forest Brothers as organisations that have nothing to do with the Georgian special services are an attempt to ignore reality”.

The Georgian Interior and Security Ministries issued a statement on 16 July rejecting the accusations, and the Georgian government has persistently denied having any links with or giving support, financial or otherwise, to the armed groups. To Amnesty International’s knowledge, however, no criminal proceedings have been initiated against any suspects although some have a high profile locally, or in the press. In the western town of Zugdidi, for example, close to the Inguri river border, men said to be local commanders of the White Legion reportedly move openly around the town and surrounding areas, with the tacit approval of the local authorities. Members of armed groups are said to have given press interviews during the May fighting in Gal, and the leader of the White Legion, Zurab Samushia, is regularly quoted by domestic and international media. He was, for example, interviewed and photographed by the British daily *The Guardian* in June while he was recuperating in Tbilisi from a leg wound sustained in the fighting. In that interview Zurab Samushia claimed that the White Legion had ‘executed’ 47 members of the CIS peacekeeping forces.⁷⁵

There have also been claims that the Georgian Security Ministry has been involved in training members of armed groups, including in sophisticated sabotage techniques. In November 1996, for example, UNOMIG observers

⁷⁵ In an article in the Russian-language *Nezavisimaja Gazeta* ‘Independent Newspaper’ of 23 January 1999, Georgian journalist Nodar Broladze wrote:

Zurab Samushia, leader of the militarised band known as the White Legion, contacted on 20 January the news-agency Sakinform [Georgian Information Service], according to information provided by this agency, and denied the assertion of the British paper *The Guardian* [13 June 1998] that Samushia had told its correspondent that during the recent years of the war his bands had executed in the Gal District 45 [actually the figure quoted was 47—translator] Russian military personnel serving in the peace-keeping forces. Samushia styled these testimonies provocative and defamatory, declaring categorically that he had given *The Guardian* no interview either by phone or face-to-face and that, insofar as he had had no contact with representatives of this publication, he had no notion of whence such a ‘statistic’ might have been taken. The commander of the White Legion considers that behind assertions of this genre there stand such forces as strive to aggravate Russo-Georgian relations, to complicate the process of settling the conflict in Abkhazia, and to discredit the Georgian side ... Tamaz Nadareishvili himself in a commentary for the press did not exclude the possibility that the article in *The Guardian* was the work of those forces who ideologically support and even finance the British scholar George Hewitt.

For the record, the first I knew about *The Guardian*’s interview with James Meek, who confirmed to me that the interview did indeed take place, was when I read Broladze’s article. [My footnote—BGH]

discovered a paramilitary group of some 50 men, 'many of whom were internally displaced persons with connections to known insurgent groups', in a camp in the restricted weapons zone on the Georgian side of the Inguri river. UNOMIG was initially refused access to investigate but was eventually allowed to visit the unit after making protests. The Georgian security service informed UNOMIG that the unit "had been formed to control amnestied criminal elements who had committed crimes in Abkhazia" and who were at that time living in the Zugdidi area. They had been given the choice of either joining the unit or being expelled.

Some individual Georgians in authority have also been linked with the guerrilla forces. The White Legion, for example, is said to have links with Tamaz Nadareishvili, the chairman of the Abkhazian parliament in exile.

Indeed, Georgian officialdom's association with these terrorist-groups was so well-known in the region that Georgian journalist, Ak'ak'i Mikadze, writing in the Russian-language *Vremja* 'Time' (3 June 1998), boldly asserted:

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of State Security actively support the partisan groupings operating in the Gal District. For example, fighters from the division called *Forest Brothers* officially receive wages of 200 lari (about \$150), whilst their commander, criminal authority Davit Shengelia, receives 300 lari (about \$220).

The Squeeze on Abkhazia Tightens

From the mid-1990s the Abkhazians began to perceive their horizons shrinking. On 11 September 1995, their Vice-Premier Yuri Voronov was assassinated in his central Sukhum flat.⁷⁶ Voronov, an Abkhazia-born Russian, was a distinguished archaeologist and historian who consistently argued against Georgian attempts to rewrite Abkhazia's history. Who ultimately commissioned the murder is still a matter of speculation.

On 19 January 1996, the CIS presidents decided to impose virtually a total blockade on Abkhazia, banning trade and all links involving finance, communications and transport; Belarus and Turkmenistan declined to sign.⁷⁷ Terrorist activity, mostly in Gal, was on the rise. Georgia's complaint to the International Maritime Organisation resulted in cessation of the

⁷⁶ See my obituary in *The Independent* 15 Sept 1995.

⁷⁷ For the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008, 377–79). For other CIS resolutions on Abkhazia see Documents 259 from May 1996, 261 from October 1996, 266 and 267 from March 1997, 273 from April 1998, 285 from April 1999, 289 from January 2000, 302 from October 2002, 305 from March 2003 and 309 from September 2004, all in Volkhonskij et al. (2008).

short-lived passenger-sailings to Turkey by the boat *Ritsa*, though freightships were still allowed to travel to Sukhum—Georgia demanded the right to check their cargoes, but the Abkhazians refused to assent to this. In April 1997, phonecalls to and from Abkhazia were routed through Georgia rather than Russia. In the run-up to the switchover, Abkhazian Foreign Minister, K'onst'ant'in Ozgan, complained to Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Boris Pastukhov, on 25 February 1997, that (Anchabadze 1999.281):

... as practice demonstrates, the Georgian side uses negotiations to create merely a semblance of using civilised methods to decide the conflict. The basis for this assertion are the practical actions of Georgia—it simply ignores understandings already reached. Regrettable too is the fact that several actions which go against existing agreements receive the support of the facilitator in the negotiations, i.e. the Russian Federation. In particular, on 15 February 1997 an agreement was signed in Tbilisi between the ministries of communication of Georgia and the Russian Federation according to which it is proposed to switch off the remaining channels of communication linking Abkhazia with the outside-world.

Tbilisi-Baku Rapprochement and Growth of US Interest

Around this time, Shevardnadze was cultivating links with his old Politburo-colleague Haidar Aliev in neighbouring Azerbaijan. Caspian oil-reserves had been reassessed upwards, and a suitable route to export the precious commodity in such a way as to avoid Iran and Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossijsk (via a pipeline rerouted to the north of the Grozny installations in the still dangerous Chechenia) was under discussion. Given the ongoing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabagh, Georgia was the only other possibility. This increased US interest in the country, as the decision was finally taken to construct the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, eventually to deliver the oil to tankers in southern Turkey. Growing US interest was matched by an increased flow of dollars, and Shevardnadze's orientation began to shift westwards; in 1999 he refused Russia's request to be allowed to pursue Chechen fighters across the border into north-eastern Georgia's P'ank'isi Gorge, home to Georgia's long-standing Chechen community, arguing that Georgia would police the area itself.

Further increasing Abkhazia's isolation was the fact that, as it became impossible to renew the old-style Soviet passports, Abkhazians found themselves unable to travel. The international community expected (and, indeed, still expects) them to apply for Georgian passports (or, as of 2012,

so-called 'neutral travel-documents' or 'identity-cards' issued by the Georgian authorities). Though a few had no compunctions about acquiring such passports, regarding them simply as a means to the end of licensing international travel, most Abkhazians found the prospect an utter anathema and a step they could not psychologically bring themselves to take, considering the suffering they had endured during the war and the tribulations to which they were still being subjected.

On 1 July 1997, Liviu Bota replaced Eduard Brunner as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Special Representative, while retaining his role as head of UNOMIG. The fifth anniversary of the start of the war saw Ardzinba in Tbilisi for a meeting with Shevardnadze; it was chaired by Russia's Foreign Minister Evgenij Primakov.⁷⁸ A statement was duly released the same day committing both sides to working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict—see Cohen (1999:71) for the English text. Representatives of the two sides continued to meet periodically under the auspices of the UN, with the participation of OSCE and now also the Group of Friends of the Secretary General. The concluding statement, signed only by Bota, of the gathering in Geneva on 17–19 November condemned the killings and mine-laying in Gal and included the following:

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.⁷⁹

In the wake of the Tbilisi-summit, there was a determined effort to produce a Protocol for regulating the conflict, and the sides agreed to designate the 18 June as the date for signing the approved document. However, at the

⁷⁸ Primakov had been head of Moscow's Oriental Institute when Ardzinba worked there as a Hittologist. He also had links with Georgia, having been raised (though not born) there. An Arabist, he perhaps became best known in the West as Gorbachev's special envoy to Iraq in the run-up to the first Gulf War.

⁷⁹ For the full English text see Cohen (1999:72–3).

last minute the Georgian side refused, introducing changes to the text. On 19 June, Abkhazia's Foreign Minister Sergej Shamba (brother of the Moscow-based lawyer Taras) wrote to his counterpart in Tbilisi, setting out what alterations would be acceptable to the Abkhazians. But expectations were dashed by yet another refusal on the part of the Georgian side (Akaba 2009.17).

Also available for consultation (see Cohen 1999.73–6) are the English texts of the records of the first session of the aforementioned Coordinating Council (Sukhum, 18 December 1997) and the second session of Working Group I of the Coordinating Council on lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security-problems (Tbilisi, 22 January 1998), which announced the plan to send a UN mission of experts to conduct an assessment of needs across Abkhazia. This mission eventually produced a 107-page document (*United Nations Development Programme. United Nations Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, Georgia*, dated March 1998, Working Group III, Revision I, Distribution: Restricted).⁸⁰ Its recommendations, however, were never acted upon, as their implementation was predicated on the ever thorny issues of concluding a political settlement and returning the refugees. And, for all the noble words and lofty sentiments found in the communiqués issuing from these meetings, there was little concrete change on the ground, though international phonecalls from Abkhazia did become easier in November 1997.

⁸⁰ On 20 November, Lord Eric Avebury wrote to Joyce Quinn MP, relevant junior minister in the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) at the time, asking a number of questions. The first was why the document had been given only restricted distribution and had not been made available to him when he requested a copy from the FCO. Having pointed out that, as some of the recommendations, which would have cost \$187.3 million to implement, served the interests of both sides and might help facilitate the return of more refugees, he expressed his wish to know the UK Government's response to the document. He concluded his letter thus:

The situation in Abkhazia is pretty desperate. Apart from the absence of economic activity, mentioned in the report, there is a great deal of criminality and lawlessness, and this is linked to high levels of unemployment. Drug trafficking is also a major problem. Surely it is intolerable that we should acquiesce in the reduction of the people to such an abyss of misery, and it is unrealistic to expect that the two sides will reach an agreement without more outside intervention. Ending the blockade and supporting the UNDP recommendations generally would be positive initiatives we could recommend to all those concerned.

Further Georgian Assault Repulsed (May 1998)

Perhaps not altogether unexpectedly, outright hostilities were renewed, albeit briefly, in May 1998. As noted by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.407), the fighting, which began in the security-zone in the Gal District on the night of 19–20 May, had been preceded by demonstrations in March–April on the bridge over the R. Ingur, organised by representatives of the Kartvelian refugees from Abkhazia. They demanded the immediate repatriation of these refugees and the removal of CIS peace-keepers. In mid-May, the head-quarters of the so-called Abkhazian Government-in-exile was moved from Tbilisi to Zugdidi. In response to the danger, a general mobilisation was immediately proclaimed in Abkhazia, and, after a fire-fight lasting a matter of days, the assault was repelled, with much damage to property in the border-villages concerned (such as Tagiloni) and another mass-flight of some 40,000 Mingrelians from the Gal District.

Bota and commander of the CIS forces, S. Korobko, were present on 25 May in Gudauta at a hurriedly convened meeting between the Ministers of Foreign and Internal Affairs of Georgia (Irak'li Menagharishvili and K'akha Targamadze) and Abkhazia (Sergej Shamba and Aslambej Kchach). Fighting was to cease at 6 a.m., and fighters were to withdraw from the Gal District between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. the following day. Abkhazia was to stop harassment of the peaceful citizens of the Gal District, whilst Georgia was obliged to take effective measures to stop the crossing into Abkhazia of 'terrorist and diversionary groups, armed formations and individuals'.⁸¹ Both sides expressed disappointment with the performance of the CIS peace-keepers: the Abkhazians because the initial attacks on the villages beside the Ingur were not prevented, the Georgians because the Abkhazians were able to enter the zone to counter and expel the attackers. The Gal District remained a source of tension for at least the remainder of 1998.

Georgia Strengthens Ties to Europe

Outside the immediate area of confrontation, on 22 April 1996, the EU and Georgia had concluded an 87-page (sc. according to the English text) 'Partnership and Cooperation Agreement', in which the second objective of Article 1 is stated to be "to support Georgia's efforts to consolidate its

⁸¹ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.407).

democracy and to develop its economy and to complete the transition into a market economy". Links with Europe deepened in February 1998 when Shevardnadze signed off on a new code for criminal procedure; it came into effect on 15 May 1999. Council of Europe experts had ensured that the code conformed to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to which all member-states of the Council must conform. Georgia was then admitted to the Council of Europe on 27 April 1999.⁸² However, in October 2000, Human Rights Watch published a 63-page document (vol. 12, No. 11 (D)) entitled *Georgia. Backtracking on Reform: Amendments Undermine Access to Justice*. The Summary includes this observation (p. 3):

[O]n May 13 and 28, 1999, shortly after Georgia became a full member of the Council, Georgia's parliament adopted 289 amendments to the new code. Several weeks later, on July 22 and July 23, the parliament adopted sixty-three additional amendments. Together, these amendments altered or replaced nearly half the articles in the new code ... [T]orture, ill-treatment, and violations of defendants' procedural rights are common and widespread during pre-trial period in Georgia. Yet the 1999 amendments repealed the reformed complaints procedures and reestablished severe obstacles for criminal suspects or defendants who seek to end or obtain redress for such abuse. By reimposing restriction on access to the courts to hear complaints regarding procedural violations prior to trial, the parliament made it extremely difficult for detainees to prove abuse and for abusive officials to be held accountable.

The Background-section then begins with the remark:

Georgia has an abysmal record of torture and other ill-treatment in pre-trial detention and of unfair trials (p. 6).

Western rose-tinted assessment of Georgia's democracy continued in 1999 when the American National Democratic Institute awarded its W. Averell Harriman prize to Shevardnadze in the presence of Hillary Clinton (with even a surprise appearance from President Bill Clinton).⁸³

⁸² One crucial condition was that the issue of the so-called 'Meskhetian Turks' should be resolved within twelve years. We shall return to this provision in a later chapter.

⁸³ The Institute today prefers not to advertise this embarrassing fact on its website (Gregory Minjack—personal communication). Abkhazians (and South Ossetians) would no doubt claim that, since Georgia suddenly emerged on their horizons with the collapse of the USSR, that country's Western partners have consistently shewn themselves far too ill-informed and gullible when it comes to evaluating socio-political developments within its society, consequentially failing utterly to appreciate the strength and depth of their determination not to be reassociated with the Georgian state, the realities of which they know much better than Georgia's Western supporters.

Shevardnadze's Star no Longer in the Ascendant

Disenchantment with Shevardnadze's rule was beginning to set in, though the presence of a group of reform-minded, younger politicians clustered around Chairman of Parliament Zurab Zhvania in the Citizens' Union Party gave some cause for hope of improvement (though eventually in 2003 it was to be these very 'reformers' who would bring Shevardnadze down). Perhaps indicative of attitudes in Mingrelia were two actions undertaken by Mingrelians in 1998. The first was an attempt on Shevardnadze's life on 9 February. After it failed, the leader of the group, Gocha Esebua, took four UN observers hostage in Zugdidi. He was eventually killed in a shoot-out. Then, on 18 October, Col. Ak'ak'i Eliava, a former Zviadist, led a short-lived revolt from his base near Kutaisi; he was eventually shot in 2000. In the Georgian parliamentary elections, held on 31 October 1999, Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union polled the most votes (41.75%) and gained 132 seats; alongside these and representatives of some smaller parties sat the twelve MPs elected in 1992 in Abkhazia (Abkhazia's 'Government-in-exile'). Wheatley's assessment of democratic activity in Georgia at the time is damning (2005:158):

The main rationale, or 'hidden agenda', for entering Parliament was access to the lucrative resources that could be gained by protecting or lobbying certain business and sectoral interests from within the legislature. In this context the publicly-espoused political platform of parties should be understood as no more than window dressing, devised to convince the population that the party really cared for them or to show western governments that Georgia really was a democracy.

Abkhazia Finally Declares Independence

In Abkhazia, Ardzinba too was attracting some criticism both for the way that certain members of his extended family had managed to amass control of many lucrative enterprises and for his reluctance to sanction the creation of an opposition-movement. His defence was that the situation remained too critical to permit a division of opinion within such a tiny electorate as that existing within Abkhazia, even though this somewhat undermined the assertion in Article 1 of the 1994 Constitution that Abkhazia was a 'democratic state'; in the late summer of 1998 there was an argument over Ardzinba's attempt to meddle in the affairs of parliament.

Nevertheless, on 3 October 1999, presidential elections were held⁸⁴ along with a referendum to ascertain public opinion on the acceptability of the 1994 Constitution. Unsurprisingly, Ardzinba, who was still widely revered as the country's war-leader, was elected president—he was, after all, the only candidate. On 12 October, frustrated that the negotiations were going nowhere,⁸⁵ Ardzinba and Sok'rat' Dzhindzholia, then Speaker of the National Assembly, signed the 'Act of State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia'.⁸⁶ This heralded Akaba's third stage in the negotiating process, the one which she characterised as being totally devoid of compromise. For the Abkhazians only "fully-fledged statehood, buttressed by international guarantees, could serve as the condition for physical survival and preservation of ethno-cultural identity" (2009.20).

Over the years, international efforts at mediation continued. As part of the Geneva Process, on 16–18 October 1998, Athens hosted the most representative meeting between the two sides since the end of the war in 1993; the delegations were headed by Vazha Lortkipanidze for Georgia and by Sergej Bagapsh for Abkhazia; its purpose was to build confidence between the parties. Apart from the usual clauses (such as recognising the right of refugees to a speedy return), it was acknowledged that demining had to be effectively implemented, and there was a call for expert assistance in the provision of psychological social rehabilitation of post-trauma syndrome.⁸⁷

At the end of 1998 a Party for the Liberation of Abkhazia was formed in Tbilisi with Tamaz Nadareisvhili as its head. Despite Georgian objections, Ardzinba went ahead with the mass-repatriation of Mingrelians to the Gal District; many of these individuals, though 'resident' in Abkhazia, frequently crossed the border into Mingrelia in order to receive humanitarian aid available there to the refugees.

⁸⁴ Condemned in advance as 'unacceptable and unlawful' by UN Security Council Resolution 1255 of 30 July 1999. All subsequent elections have attracted similar international repudiation.

⁸⁵ An excellent example (albeit from February 2001) of the sort of persistent obstructionism encountered from Georgia over the years occurred when Georgia's UN Ambassador, P'et're Chkheidze, declined to sign two draft-documents on the grounds that they were unacceptable to the Georgian side. As respected Radio Liberty commentator on Caucasian affairs, Liz Fuller, noted in her commentary (Report 4.5 2 February 2001): "Chkheidze's criticism is surprising as the versions of both drafts currently under discussion were proposed by the Georgian side!"

⁸⁶ For the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.175–6).

⁸⁷ For the whole text see Cohen (1999.78–79). The full text of the communiqué, signed also by L. Bota, is available in Cohen (1999.77). The Russian text is in Volkhonskij et al. (2008.418–19).

Attempts at Confidence-building Continue

The next confidence-building session took place in Istanbul on 7–9 June 1999, headed by the same negotiators as at Athens. Turkey's Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem, spoke at both the opening and closing ceremonies. It was agreed to revive the activities of the working groups within the framework of the Coordinating Council; Working Group I (for security matters) had not met for some 18 months because the Abkhazians refused to sit around the table with elements associated with the so-called 'Abkhazian Government-in-Exile'. There were to be meetings for Georgian and Abkhazian journalists in Tbilisi and Pitsunda for the exchange of information, and the sides were 'to request the BBC to sponsor training courses for Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in London' (clause 7e).⁸⁸ In August, Liviu Bota moved to other duties in Vienna, and, in November, his replacement was named as Dieter Boden. In September 1999, Russia relaxed restrictions on the Psou-border, reopening the frontier for crossing by Abkhazian and Russian citizens and transport, though westerners (apart from UN staff) wishing to enter Abkhazia were required to do so via Georgia (unless possessing a special dispensation issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry).

A joint-commission under UN aegis undertook an investigation into conditions for the returning refugees in the Gal District from 20 to 24 November 2000. They looked into such questions as: the opening of a UN Human Rights' office in the town of Gal; how to integrate the local population into human rights' structures; and the guaranteeing of non-discrimination as regards the language of tuition in local schools (viz. provision for teaching in Georgian). As an indication that the K'odor Valley might become the next flash-point, on 10 December, two UNOMIG staff were abducted from the lower part of the valley, which was under notional Abkhazian control, and taken into its upper reaches, which part was in Georgian hands, where they were held for three days until released thanks to the efforts of Boden and the Georgian authorities.⁸⁹

The third round of international meetings for confidence-building was held on 15–16 March 2001 in Yalta with the participation of representatives of both the Friends of the Secretary General for Georgia and OSCE. The short communiqué issued after the meeting and signed by Giorgi

⁸⁸ The Russian text is available at Volkhonskij et al. (2008.429–31).

⁸⁹ See the notes appended to the Russian text of UN Security Council Resolution 1339 of 31 January 2001 by Volkhonskij et al. (2008.444).

Arsenishvili (for Georgia), Vjacheslav Tsugba (for Abkhazia), N. Sidorychev (for the CIS peace-keepers), and D. Boden (for the UN) affirmed the parties' commitments to observe the ceasefire and to work towards an overall settlement. Also published were a 5-point programme for carrying forward the agreements already reached in the Geneva Process at Athens and Istanbul as well as a supplement listing the concrete activities and meetings to be organised.⁹⁰

Clashes took place between Abkhazian security forces and some 700 armed irregulars near the upper part of the K'odor Valley on 18–19 August 2001. On 22 August, Abkhazian premier Anri Dzhergenia, a lawyer by training and a cousin of Ardzinba's wife, announced that the irregulars were massing in advance of launching an attack. After a partial mobilisation of the army and reservists was announced, talks on 24 August seemed to stabilise the situation. But it deteriorated again in September, and, despite the meeting between Shevardnadze and Dzhergenia, a group of Chechen fighters under Ruslan Gelaev,⁹¹ who had been transported in Kamaz trucks⁹² across Georgia from the P'ank'isi Gorge, entered the K'odor Valley on 3–4 October; clearly, their passage would have been impossible without the backing of the authorities in Tbilisi. There was also fighting near Tagiloni in the Lower Gal District. Some 40 deaths occurred in the clashes in the Upper K'odor Valley, including nine in the most notorious incident. On 8 October, a UN helicopter was given permission by the Abkhazians to take off, as the Chechens were said to have been pushed northwards. However, when it was 20 km. east of Sukhum, it was brought down by a rocket fired from the Georgian-controlled part of the Valley; all on board perished, being: four unarmed military observers, two local staff employed by UNOMIG, and the three crew. During the disturbances, Georgia contravened the Moscow Accords of 1994 by introducing its military into the Valley. This resulted in the immediate suspension by the Abkhazians of any negotiations with Georgia until they were removed. This did not happen until Boden secured Georgia's agreement in talks on 15–17 January 2002.⁹³

⁹⁰ For these three Russian texts see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.445–49).

⁹¹ One of the Chechen guerrilla-leaders who had fought on the Abkhazian side in the war with Georgia but who in this instance was manifestly acting in a mercenary capacity on behalf of the Georgian government. He was eventually killed by the Russians in the North Caucasus.

⁹² Large, Russian heavy-duty vehicles.

⁹³ See UN Security Council Resolution 1393 of 31 January 2002, the Russian version of which, along with explanatory notes, can be found in Volkhonskij et al. (2008.452–56).

UN Security Council Resolution 1255 of 30 July 1999 (see Volkhonskij et al. 2008.431–33 for its Russian version) had requested that the Secretary General's Special Representative work on a document setting out the recommended division of responsibilities between Georgia and Abkhazia, on the rather questionable assumption that Abkhazia might be persuaded to enter a common state with Georgia. The result, produced in consultation with the 'Friends' (including Russia), was the 'Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum(i)', commonly known as 'The Boden Document'. Though not made public immediately, this set of principles was endorsed by the aforementioned UN Security Council Resolution 1393 of 31 January 2002 (point 3). Despite a gestation-period of 18 months, the document is very short (see Appendix 5), leaving the details to be worked out later. But since in the first two clauses Georgia, as a sovereign 'state', is contrasted with Abkhazia, as a sovereign 'formation within the state of Georgia', it should hardly have come as a surprise that the product of this mighty labour was still-born.⁹⁴ In the first consultations with Boden after the appearance of his eponymous document, Premier Dzhergenia simply rejected any reference within it to Abkhazia as being 'within the composition of the state of Georgia'. Meetings held by Russian Foreign Minister Igor' Ivanov, whose mother was Georgian, with Dzhergenia and Abkhazia's Foreign Minister, Sergej Shamba, on 25–31 May 2002 failed to shift the adamant stance of the Abkhazian leadership, something that caused the expression of deep regret in UN Security Council Resolution 1427 of 29 July 2002 (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.460). On 25 May 2002, the Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini replaced Boden as the Secretary General's Special Representative.

The situation in the Upper K'odor Valley remained tense. On 2 April 2002, an agreement was reached whereby patrols by UNOMIG and the CIS peace-keepers would be conducted jointly, their dates and routes being agreed in advance with the Georgian forces and representatives of the local population (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.460; UN Security Council Resolution 1427 of 29 July 2002). The armed Georgian presence in the Valley was one reason why the Abkhazians refused to participate in talks with the UN and the 'Friends' proposed by Russia on 14 November 2002 (Volkhonskij et al. 2008.465). In both Resolutions 1427 and 1462 (of 30 January 2003), the Security Council called on both sides (but Georgia 'in particular') to con-

⁹⁴ For specific criticism see Coppieters (2004.203ff.).

tinue observing in full the protocol of 2 April 2002 (with reference to the K'odor Valley).

Shortly after Vladimir Putin's accession to the Russian presidency in 2000, he gave permission for Russian passports to be issued to Abkhazians (and South Ossetians) who had no desire to acquire their passport through Georgian channels. At first, the procedure was bureaucratically taxing and expensive, but over the years their acquisition became easier and cheaper, enabling (it is estimated) 80% of the population to have obtained them by 2006.⁹⁵

The presidents of Russia and Georgia met in Sochi on 6–7 March 2003 and discussed establishing working groups to address the problems of: returning the refugees to the Gal District; modernising the Ingur hydro-electric power-station; and reviving the rail-link between Sochi and Tbilisi (which would have restored rail-traffic from Russia into Armenia). The Abkhazians were naturally in favour of reviving the rail-link, but again hopes for progress were dashed, when Tbilisi declined to proceed without a prior settlement of the refugee-issue.

Fall of Shevardnadze

From 23 November 2003, the government of Georgia was in new hands, after Shevardnadze was forced to resign. Mikheil Saak'ashvili and his supporters stormed the Georgian Parliament, as it was being addressed by Shevardnadze, and demanded that the President leave office in the wake of the dubious parliamentary elections of 2 November.

Developments in South Ossetia under Shevardnadze

Most attention during the decade from 1993 to 2003 was concentrated on Abkhazia, but in the meantime what had been happening in South Ossetia?

⁹⁵ A survey conducted in Abkhazia in late March-early April 2010 revealed that around 70% of the Abkhazians in the sample-group questioned held Russian passports, whilst 95% of them had Abkhazian passports. For comparison, amongst the Armenians questioned, some 72% had Russian passports, whilst around 86% had Abkhazian passports; amongst the Kartvelians questioned, around 10% had Russian passports and around 52% had Abkhazian passports; and, finally, amongst the Russians questioned, about 79% had Russian passports against about 78% holding Abkhazian passports. See O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal (2010); also available at: www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event&event_id=603134.

We saw that South Ossetia had been more radical in acting to seek to remove itself from subordination to Tbilisi. Nevertheless, because Abkhazia is a more significant territory (in terms of size, location, population-figures, and economic potential) and because the fighting was more intensive with more serious consequences (in terms of loss of life, damage to property and infrastructure, as well as size of population-displacement), it is natural that the conflict in Abkhazia should have overshadowed that in South Ossetia for most of the period since the signing of the Daghomys Agreement. But this certainly did not mean that South Ossetia no longer presented a problem, as the summary below, which is based on Tanaev (2008.28–30), demonstrates.

On 2 February 1993, moves were made towards the socio-economic and cultural integration of North and South Ossetia. On 6 March, North Ossetia's Supreme Soviet recognised the Republic of South Ossetia. Torez Kulumbegov resigned in October to be replaced as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and Head of State by Prof. Ljudvig Chibirov, Rector of the State Pedagogical Institute. On 14 September, Russia and Georgia signed an agreement on the economic revival of regions in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict-zone.⁹⁶ Tied up with Georgia's entry into the CIS, following defeat in the Abkhazian war and the threat to the Georgian state emanating from the push by Gamsakhurdia and his followers out of Mingrelia against Kutaisi, Georgia's second city, was the formal approval for Russian involvement in peace-keeping operations in South Ossetia,⁹⁷ where, on 2 November 1993, the Supreme Soviet ratified the Constitution of the Republic of South Ossetia, declaring that day to be Constitution Day. In the elections to the Supreme Soviet on 27 May 1994, the Communist Party was victorious, but, despite having no party-affiliation, Chibirov was elected as Chairman.

The first Georgian-Ossetian meeting with the participation of Russia, North Ossetia and OSCE took place in Tskhinval on 30 October 1995. Though OSCE had a role in attempts to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute, the UN took the lead in that conflict, whereas for South Ossetia preeminence was granted to OSCE. In order to reduce tensions, it was decided that the decision of Georgia's Supreme Soviet to annul South

⁹⁶ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.279–80).

⁹⁷ The document setting down the 'Basic Principles for the Operation of the Military Contingents and Groups of Observers, Intended for the Normalisation of the Situation in the Zone of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict' was published as a supplement to a decision of the mixed Control Commission taken in Moscow on 6 December 1994; for the Russian text of the principles see Tanaev (2008.274–282) or Volkhonskij et al. (2008.290–94).

Ossetia's autonomy should be abrogated, whilst South Ossetia's decision to withdraw from the make-up of Georgia should also be rescinded. This laid the foundations for the start of negotiations between the parties to the conflict. The text of a memorandum on non-use of force, prevention of ethnic discrimination and return of refugees, signed in Tskhinval on 17 April 1996, became the 'Memorandum on Measures to Ensure Security and Strengthen Mutual Trust between the Sides in the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict', which was signed in Moscow on 16 May 1996 by I. Menagharishvili (for Georgia), V. Gabaraev (for South Ossetia), A. Galazov (for North Ossetia), E. Primakov (for Russia), and D. Boden, then representative for OSCE, which had been monitoring the ceasefire-arrangements since November 1992.⁹⁸

South Ossetia and Abkhazia were now in roughly the same situation vis-à-vis Georgia: the 'sovereign' Republic of Abkhazia had yet actually to declare itself independent from Georgia, and negotiations were proceeding in line with the 1994 accords, whilst Russia's role in peace-keeping duties was confirmed by a separate 1994 agreement; the 'sovereign' Republic of South Ossetia had withdrawn its resolution to take itself out of Georgia, the role of the quadripartite peace-keeping forces was set down in the statement of 6 December 1994, and now an agreement was in place, in accordance with which negotiations were to proceed. Shevardnadze and Chibirov had their first official meeting in Vladikavkaz on 27 August 1996.

On 10 November 1996, Chibirov was elected the first President of South Ossetia. A further Russo-Georgian agreement was signed on 22 December 2000 to restore South Ossetia's economy and return the refugees. In the presidential elections of 2001, former wrestler and businessman Eduard Kokoiti⁹⁹ emerged as victor on 6 December after two rounds of voting.

⁹⁸ For the Russian text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.299–301) or Tanaev (2008.282–84), whilst an English translation is given below as Appendix 6.

⁹⁹ Kokoiti's brother, Robert Kokoev, became South Ossetia's first ambassador to Abkhazia. When asked the reason for the different form of the surname, he gave this explanation. Both he and Eduard were registered at birth according to the Russian form of the surname in '-ev'. At one point Eduard found himself living in Tbilisi, where he was advised that it would considerably help his career, if he altered his surname to the Georgian form K'ok'oshvili. So affronted was he at this (as he perceived it) insult, that he promptly changed it to the true Ossetic form Kokoiti! His brother and sister retain their surnames as registered on their birth-certificates, yielding Kokoev and Kokoeva respectively. This pressure to georgianise one's surname for advancement in Georgian society is not unique. The late historian, academician and one-time Director of the History Institute at the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Giorgi Melikishvili, was originally Giorgi Ksenofontov until Nik'o Berdzenishvili gave him advice parallel to that rejected by Kokoiti (Temur Achugba—personal communication).

Though Tbilisi continued to regard South Ossetia as an integral part of the Georgian state, no large-scale attempt at forced reintegration took place until 2004 under Saak'ashvili's presidency. Despite improvements in relations, which saw mutual recognition of car registration-plates, the operation of joint-markets, and transport-links between Tskhinval and Tbilisi, there was always the danger of a flare-up. On 1 March 2002, the Parliament of the South Ossetian Republic addressed an appeal to the State Duma of the Russian Federation—for the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.222–23). Noting that over half South Ossetia's population were citizens of the Russian Federation, that Russian served alongside Ossetic as an official language of the republic, and that South Ossetia considered itself to be part of the Russian cultural and national space, the South Ossetian Parliament urged the Russian State Duma to recognise the independence of South Ossetia, to reunify it (sc. following its split with North Ossetia at the time of the disintegration of the USSR in 1991) with Russia, and to introduce Russian troops to defend tens of thousands of Russian citizens.

Shevardnadze had not caused the war and resulting hatreds in South Ossetia in the way that responsibility for events in Abkhazia *could* plausibly be laid at his door. Perhaps this explains why South Ossetia was relatively calm during his second period as head of the government of Georgia (1992–2003). This (comparatively) favourable atmosphere was not destined to last, however.

APPENDIX 1

T.M. SHAMBA, DOCTOR OF LAW*

*Treaty**on the Principles for Mutual Relations between the Republic of Abkhazia
and the Republic of Georgia
(Proposal for the Project)*

In accordance with the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Georgia and the State Sovereignty of Abkhazia, until the adoption of new Constitutions, the official delegations of both republics, hereafter referred to as *The Sides*, have as a result of talks agreed to the following:

1. The Sides declare their wish to:
strengthen the mutual respect and friendship of the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples;
develop the socio-economic and cultural ties;
expand cooperation into all spheres of life on equal and mutually beneficial conditions;
strictly observe human rights and liberties, including the rights of national minorities;
prohibit hostility and international discord, use of force or threat to use force;
refrain from interference in the internal affairs of each other;
respect territorial integrity;
cater for the satisfaction of national, cultural, spiritual, linguistic and other requirements of all the peoples living on the territory of Georgia and Abkhazia.
2. The Sides recognise Georgia and Abkhazia as sovereign states and full and equal participants of international and foreign economic relations, as well as agreements with other republics and regions of the Russian Federation and the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.
The Sides will independently conclude treaties and agreements with other countries which should not cause damage or be directed against the other Side.
3. The Republic of Abkhazia of its own free will unites with the Republic of Georgia and possesses all legislative, executive and judicial power on its own territory apart from those plenary powers which are assigned by the Constitutions of Georgia and Abkhazia to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Georgia.

* The original Russian text may be consulted on page 2 of the newspaper *Abxazija* (No. 23) for the week 29 June - 4 July 1992.

In the Constitutions are listed those plenary powers which are effected jointly by the organs of state-power of Georgia and Abkhazia.

4. The territory and status of the two sovereign states cannot be changed without their consent, expressed by their supreme organs of government or by a plebiscite (referendum).
5. The land, its mineral wealth, waters, flora and fauna are the property of the peoples living on the territory of Abkhazia.

Questions concerning the possession, use and exploitation of the natural resources are regulated by the laws of Georgia and Abkhazia and also are settled on the basis of bilateral agreements.

6. The governmental bodies of the Republic of Abkhazia will take part in the realisation of the plenary powers of the Republic of Georgia and have their own representation in its organs of power.
7. On questions of joint-authority the organs of governmental power will issue the Fundamentals (general principles) of the legislative system in accordance with which the organs of power of Abkhazia will independently effect legal regulation.

Projects for the Fundamentals of the legislative system will be sent to Abkhazia, and her suggestions will be taken into account when they are revised.

8. The Constitution and laws of Abkhazia will enjoy supremacy on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia.

The laws of Georgia in matters which are under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Georgia are mandatory on the territory of Abkhazia, provided they do not contradict the Constitution and laws of Abkhazia.

The Fundamentals for the legislative system of Georgia, issued on questions of joint-management, will come into power on the territory of Abkhazia after their approval by the supreme organs of state-power of the Republic of Abkhazia.

9. The Republic of Georgia recognises the citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia.

The Sides guarantee to their citizens equal rights, liberties and responsibilities, declared by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reflected in international-judicial acts and in the Constitutions of Georgia and Abkhazia.

Discrimination on the basis of national identity, religion or any other difference is prohibited.

Each Side shall protect the rights of its citizens irrespective of the place of their residence or sojourn, providing them with comprehensive help and support. In this the Sides shall cooperate with each other.

Matters concerning the acquisition or loss of citizenship of one of the Sides by persons living on the territory of the other Side are regulated by the laws of citizenship of Georgia and Abkhazia.

10. The Sides confirm the agreement reached previously concerning the creation on the territory of Abkhazia of the unified multi-national Abkhazian Guard, subordinated to the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and, at times of general threat to or attack upon them, to the Ministry of Defence of Georgia.

The Sides commit themselves not to create any military formations on nationality lines and directed against the other Side.

11. In case of disputes the Sides commit themselves conscientiously and in the spirit of cooperation to make every effort to settle them in the shortest possible time on the bases of legislation actually in force or, in the absence of such legislation, on the basis of the principles and norms of international law.

The procedure for the settlement of disputes shall be determined by the Sides arising out of the prevailing circumstances.

12. The Abkhazian Side declares its readiness to participate in the drawing up of a new Constitution for the Republic of Georgia and the constitutional laws resulting therefrom.

The Georgian Side regards this declaration with understanding and considers the participation of the representatives of the Republic of Abkhazia as well as the representatives of the other nations and peoples residing on the territory of Georgia essential in the drawing up of the new Constitution and constitutional laws of the Republic of Georgia.

13. The Sides have agreed to have permanent plenipotentiary representations—the Republic of Georgia in the city of Sukhum, the Republic of Abkhazia in the city of Tbilisi.

14. The Sides do not exclude the possibility of additional inter-parliamentary, inter-governmental or other treaties and agreements concerning specific questions of cooperation and mutual relations between the Sides.

15. The present Treaty comes into effect from the moment of signing and remains in force up to the formation of new supreme organs of state-power and governance in the Republic of Georgia, after which the process of negotiation shall be continued.

APPENDIX 2

*On the Historical Symbolism of the State Flag of the Republic of Abkhazia
(designed by Valerij Gamgia in 1992)¹⁰⁰*

The open white palm on the red background is a symbol of Abkhazian statehood, which was formed at the time of the Abkhazian Kingdom (VIII-Xth centuries). Such a representation is attested on the coloured Genoese 'portalans' (sea-charts) of the XIII-XIVth centuries. A dark-red flag with white palm flew in the Middle Ages above the town of Sebastopolis (otherwise San-Sebastian and the classical Dioscurias).

The seven 5-pointed stars above the palm are the seven main regions of historical Abkhazia: Sadzen (Dzhigetia), Bzyp, G^wmaa, Abzhywa, Samyrzaq'an, Dal-Ts'abal, Psh^wy-Ajbga. These incorporated the ethnic territory of the Abkhazians from the River Khosta (frontier with the Ubykhs) down to the River Ingur (frontier with Mingrelia) and from the Black Sea to the Caucasus Mountains. Apart from this, the number '7' for Abkhazians (as for many other peoples) is viewed as sacred and is widely attested in their religion, mythology and traditional culture. Also endowed with esteem is the constellation known commonly by the title 'The Seven Brothers'.

The 5-pointed star is widespread among the Abkhazians as an ancient astrological symbol. It is found, moreover, on the antique amphors of the Apsilians, the ancestors of the Abkhazians, mentioned by Græco-Roman authors in the I-IInd centuries AD.

At the same time the proportions of the flag, the number of stars and the sequence of green-white stripes reflect the fundamental look of the historical flag of the independent North Caucasus Republic (known in the literature as the Mountain Republic), which was proclaimed on 11 May 1918 and which existed for one year. At that period seven states were included in the composition of the Mountain Republic: Daghestan, Chechen-Ingushetia, Ossetia, Abkhazia, Kabardia, Adyghea, Karachay-Balkaria.

¹⁰⁰ The various flags and state-emblems of Abkhazia over the centuries can be found on pp. 104-5 of Argun (2012). The oldest flag dates from 1320, whilst the oldest emblem is dated to 1350-60. This volume also reproduces, with commentaries, 39 (excerpts of) maps, including relevant sections of the 15th/16th-century *Tabula Peutingeriana*, copied from a 4th/5th-century map of Roman trade-routes, as well as maps based on descriptions of the Black Sea coast by such early travellers as Strabo, Arrian and Pseudo-Skylax.

The green-white sequence of seven stripes (four green, three white) is an indication of the religious tolerance of the Caucasian peoples in the minds of whom Islam (the green) peacefully coexists with Christianity (the white). Abkhazia, as an ancient Christian land from the IVth century, together with two others (Ossetia and Kabarda), was represented on the flag of the Mountain Republic by a white stripe.

The modern flag of the Republic of Abkhazia, approved by its Parliament in Sukhum on 23 July 1992, symbolises the fundamental stages in the development of the statehood of the Abkhazian nation, one of the oldest autochthonous ethnic groups of the Caucasus, whose language, culture and traditions are especially close to, and cognate with, those of the North Caucasian peoples, in particular the Abazinians, the Adyghes, the Kabardians, the Ubykhs, the Cherkess, etc...

Description of the National Coat-of-Arms of the Republic of Abkhazia



The coat-of-arms takes the form of a shield, divided vertically into equal sectors of white and green. The outline and central design of the composition are golden.

At the base of the arms is set an 8-pointed star.

In the upper portion of both the white and green sectors are set symmetrically two 8-pointed golden stars.

At the centre of the arms is the figure of a horseman, flying on a fabulous steed (Arash) and shooting an arrow towards the stars. This subject of the emblem is linked to an episode in the heroic epic of the Abkhazians, the Narts, namely 'How Sasryq^wa Snatched a Star', mounted on his steed called Bzow.

The green symbolises youth and life, the white—spirituality.

The large golden 8-pointed star is a sign of the sun. The small 8-pointed stars symbolise the union of the two cultural worlds of East and West.

On the Symbolism of the State Flag of the Republic of South Ossetia



The three horizontal bands of white, red and yellow represent: moral purity (white), military prowess (red), and abundance and plentifulness (gold). The colours and their meanings are linked to the structure of ancient Scytho-Alanian society with its threefold division into: the aristocracy, the military, and the farming community.

Description of the Coat-of-Arms of the Republic of South Ossetia



A round shield containing a leopard against a mountain-background was the symbol of the mediæval Ossetian state. The colours of the flag are recapitulated in the coat-of-arms with golden leopard on golden ground, white mountains and a red sky. Running round the rim of the shield are the words 'Republic of South Ossetia' in Russian (at the top) and Ossetic (at the bottom). The prototype of the coat-of-arms exists in a manuscript in Georgia's Manuscripts' Institute, where it is noted: 'Coat-of-arms of Ossetia, devised by scholar-prince Vakhusht'i Bagrat'ioni in 1735'.

Flags of Post-Communist Georgia

The regime of Zviad Gamsakhurdia reintroduced in 1991 the flag that had been designed to represent Georgia during its period of Menshevik independence (1918–21). According to the *Oxford Family Encyclopedia*, edited by Steve Luck (1997), the wine-red colour represents the good times of the past and the future, the black symbolises Russian rule and the white represents hope for peace. However, from 25 January 2004, Georgia has reverted to earlier designs, basing its flag on that of the country's patron saint (St. George), as seen immediately below:



APPENDIX 3

Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz Conflict

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 cease-fire 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 the Communiqué of 13 January 1994.
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/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 peace-keeping force.

5. The parties reaffirm their request for the early deployment of a peace-keeping operation and for the participation of a Russian military contingent in the United Nations peace-keeping force, as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding of 1 December 1993 and the Communiqué of 13 January 1994. The plan for carrying out the peace-keeping operation will be agreed upon with the parties to the conflict.

The realization of the peace-keeping 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 only be reached once a final solution to the conflict has been found.

At this stage, the parties have reached mutual understanding regarding powers for joint action in the following fields:

- a) Foreign policy and forging economic ties;
 - b) Border guard arrangements;
 - c) Customs;
 - d) Energy, transport and communication;
 - e) Ecology and elimination of the 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 the 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 reestablishment 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 Abkhaz by resorting to arms.

For the Georgian side: A. Kavsadze;

For the Abkhaz side: S. Dzhindzholia;

From the United Nations: E. Brunner;

From the Russian Federation: B. Pastukhov;

From the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A. Manno.

Moscow, 4 April 1994

APPENDIX 4

*Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons
(Annex II)*

Signed on 4 April 1994
(Official English Version)

The Abkhaz and Russian 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 organised.

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 and 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 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 Gal[i] 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 an 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 of 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 programmes of displaced persons/refugees from Abkhazia and for the provision of relief integration and rehabilitation assistance to the Abkhazian 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 particular designated radio frequencies for radio communication 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: S. Jinjolia

For the Georgian side: A. Kavsadze

For the Russian Federation: B. Pastukhov

For the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: J. Amunategul

APPENDIX 5

*Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum
(The So-called 'Boden Document')¹⁰¹*

1. Georgia is a sovereign state based on legal norms. The borders of Georgia, approved on 21 December 1991, may be not be subjected to alteration, unless in compliance with the Constitution of Georgia.
2. Abkhazia is a sovereign formation, based on legal norms, established within the Georgian state. Abkhazia has a special status within the state, which is based on the Federal Agreement and determines the competences thereby constituting the guarantees of rights and interests of the multinational population of Abkhazia.
3. The distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum is based on the Federal Agreement—Constitutional law; Abkhazia and Georgia observe the provisions of the Federal Agreement. The Federal Agreement shall not be subjected to changes and amendments without the mutual consent of both sides.
4. The distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum will be determined, *inter alia*, on the basis of the Declaration of Measures on the Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict of 4 April 1994. The rights and competences of Abkhazia will be recognised within a broader scope than was the case in 1992.
5. The Constitution of Georgia shall be changed in accordance with the distribution of competences determined in the Federal Agreement; to this end it will be possible to use the Declaration of Measures on the Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict of 4 April 1994, namely its paragraph 7, concerning the 'Right to Joint-Measures'.
6. The Constitution of Abkhazia, on the base of which it is possible to lay the Constitution of Abkhazia of 26 November 1994, should be changed in accordance with the agreement on the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum, as determined in the Federal Agreement.
7. Both the Constitution of Georgia as well as the Constitution of Abkhazia should consist of similar provisions with regard to the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person, eliminating discrimination against the rights of national minorities. Both in the Constitution of Georgia as well as in the Constitution of Abkhazia nothing shall violate the indisputable right to the safe return to their homes of all displaced people in conformity with International Law.
8. The Georgian state and Abkhazia should agree the composition and activity of the Constitutional Court, which shall be guided by the Constitution of Georgia, the Constitution of Abkhazia and the Federal Agreement on 'The Basic Principles of the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhum'.

¹⁰¹ The Russian version is available as Document 304 in Volkhonskij et al. (2008.465–66).

APPENDIX 6

Measures to Ensure Security and Strengthen Mutual Trust between the Sides in the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict

Moscow, 16 May 1996

Representatives of the Georgian and South Ossetian Sides, with the mediation of representatives of the Russian Federation and with the participation of representatives of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania and of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), held talks on further progress to a full-scale political resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and, wishing to eliminate the traces of the conflict and to restore between them relations of peace and mutual respect;

convinced of the need to put an end to the grievous legacy of recent years and to stand on the path that leads to peace, trust and agreement;

affirming adherence to the provisions of the UN Charter, based on the principles and decision of OSCE, the universally recognised norms of international law;

guided by the principle of territorial integrity of states and the right of peoples to self-determination;

expressing satisfaction that, on the basis of the Agreement on the Principles for Resolving the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict and of the introduction of Mixed Peace-keeping Forces in July 1992, military actions ceased in the zone of conflict;

declaring readiness to proceed along the path of resolving the conflict in the spirit of mutual respect by exclusively political methods;

judging it essential to take steps which would lead to the full-scale resolution of the conflict, have agreed on the following:

1. The Sides to the conflict refrain from taking or threatening the use of force and from applying political, economic and other forms of pressure on each other.

2. The Sides will take all necessary measures to avert and suppress any actions contrary to law which infringe upon the rights of persons along ethnic lines.

3 The Sides will put into effect real measures to realise the decision reached on the problem of the refugees and displaced persons, suffering as a result of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

4. The Sides will arrange for persons who participated in the armed conflict but who did not commit military crimes or crimes against the civil population not to be subjected to criminal proceedings. The Sides will create in the immediate future conditions necessary for the work of law-enforcement organs to investigate the said crimes so that guilty persons take responsibility for their actions.

5. The Sides express satisfaction with the positive character of the practice of regular meetings between representatives of the law-enforcement agencies and will render all-round assistance for their work of normalising the criminal situation in the zone of conflict.

6. Proportionately with progress towards a full-scale resolution, the zone of Georgian-Ossetian conflict will be gradually demilitarised on the basis of special arrangements. Peace-keeping forces may be located in the demilitarised zone.

7. The Sides will deem it expedient to work out within the framework of the Mixed Control Commission a plan for the phased reduction of checkpoints and posts of the mixed peace-keeping forces, their concentration in the places of their permanent deployment, and the organisation of their service to take account of providing security for the population.

8. The Sides express readiness jointly and with the cooperation of international (including non-governmental) organisations to hold meetings of representatives of Georgian and Ossetian political and social organisations and scholars with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation and other countries, 'round table' gatherings of representatives of the creative intelligentsia, and meetings of journalists with the aim of exchanging objective information. The Sides will take measures to ensure the safe travel and visits of representatives of the mass-media.

9. The Sides will continue negotiations with the aim of achieving a full-scale political resolution.

10. The Sides note with satisfaction the readiness of the Russian Federation to be the guarantor, of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania to participate in the realisation of understandings achieved in the present Memorandum, and of OSCE to appear in the role of facilitator.

11. The present Memorandum comes into force from the moment of signing.

Completed in Moscow on 16 May 1996

For the Georgian Side: I. Menagharishvili

For the South Ossetian Side: V. Gabaraev

With the mediation of:

For the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (Russian Federation): A. Galazov

For the Russian Federation: E. Primakov

For OSCE: D. Boden

CHAPTER FIVE

RELATIONS WITH GEORGIA UNDER MIKHEIL SAAK'ASHVILI

The Ossetes, who in 1881 numbered 111,000 souls, are one of the most important of the Caucasian tribes. They have dwelt in the same region, under slightly different names, from the dawn of history. They had their golden age when their communities spread north and south of the chain, when the steppe was whitened with Ossete flocks, and the vintages of the Georgian hills were gathered in by Ossete labourers ... [T]hey had in their hands the keys of the Caucasus, the grass-passes leading from the sources of the Ter-ek and the Ardon to those of the Rion and the Kur, by which alone the range is traversable in summer by horsemen and troops ... The Ossetes appear to be quicker in temper than the neighbouring tribesmen ... It may be inferred that it is judicious to avoid petty wrangles with Ossetes.

(Douglas Freshfield, *The Exploration of the Caucasus*, 1896, vol. 1, pp. 100–103)

Zurab Zhvania (1963–2005) first attracted attention after entering politics as co-chairman of Georgia's Green Party, which was one of those small movements to join Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union of Georgia, and Zhvania became its Secretary General, serving as Speaker of Parliament from 1995 to 2001. A western-orientated reformer, he sought to encourage like-minded individuals to join him in the political arena, and it was Zhvania who in the mid-1990s persuaded the partly western-educated and multilingual Mikheil Saak'ashvili (b. 1967) to leave his employment at a New York law-firm and return home to enter politics. Saak'ashvili was elected to parliament on the CUG ticket in 1995 along with another western-looking campaigner against corruption, Nino Burdzhnadzze (b. 1964). Though Saak'ashvili was appointed Minister of Justice in 2000, all three became increasingly disillusioned with the ever-present corruption and Shevardnadze's lack of commitment to meaningful reform. Though Zhvania remained in the CUG longer than the other two, he resigned the Speakership on 1 November 2001, at which point Burdzhnadzze succeeded to the post. Whilst Zhvania sought to work with progressive forces within the CUG, Saak'ashvili formed a grouping that eventually became known as the New National Movement and achieved a prominent position as Chairman of the Tbilisi City Council (/sak'rebulo/), which he used to build his reputation and make himself the focus of opposition both to the country's president, under whose ultimate patronage he had entered politics just seven

years before, and to Shevardnadze's CUG in Parliament. Shortly after Saak'ashvili's victory in the local Tbilisi election, Zhvania formed his own oppositional faction, called the United Democrats.

The 'Rose Revolution'

The feeling that Georgia would benefit without Shevardnadze as president continued to strengthen. In early 2003, Zhvania and Saak'ashvili were members of a small party of politicians who visited Belgrade in the company of Lincoln Mitchell, Co-Director of the US-based National Democratic Institute, which had arranged the trip, in order to learn how former president Slobodan Milosevic had been unseated through mobilisation of oppositionists in peaceful mass-demonstrations. The lesson was evidently learnt and put to good use later in the year. In advance of the parliamentary elections (2 November 2003), Burdzhnanadze had sided with Zhvania in an alliance styled the Burdzhnanadze-Democrats. As results in the parliamentary poll started to trickle in, it became clear that a process of falsification in favour of groupings that supported Shevardnadze was underway, and oppositional actions began with leafleting on 4 November, followed by an initial rally on 8 November. With increasing numbers willing to participate in demonstrations, Saak'ashvili declared his intention to call for acts of civil disobedience. The official election-results were announced on 20 November, putting the National Movement in third place and the Burdzhnanadze-Democrats in fifth. Inauguration of the new parliament was set for 22 November. As tens of thousands of demonstrators massed in Tbilisi's Freedom (formerly Lenin) Square, Saak'ashvili and other oppositionists forced their way into the chamber, interrupting Shevardnadze's speech. After retiring to his residence, Shevardnadze declared a state of emergency, whilst Burdzhnanadze proclaimed herself Acting Head of State. The following day, Russian Foreign Minister Igor' Ivanov arrived to play the role of mediator and actually accompanied Zhvania in addressing the demonstrators. As elements in the police and military started switching allegiance to Burdzhnanadze, Shevardnadze realised that he had no option but to respond to Saak'ashvili's call on him to leave office and, after meeting (at Ivanov's prompting) Zhvania and Saak'ashvili, duly resigned around 9 p.m. Thus unfolded what has become known as Georgia's 'Rose Revolution'.¹

¹ For more details see Wheatley (2005).

With the National Movement and the Burdzhanaдзе-Democrats supporting just the one candidate between them in the presidential elections of 4 January 2004, Saak'ashvili was overwhelmingly elected, winning 96.24% of the votes cast. On 5 February, Parliament, temporarily reconstituted with its old membership, compliantly helped the new president garner additional powers by amending the Constitution to create the post of Prime Minister (to be appointed by the President with Parliament's endorsement) and granted the President the right, under certain circumstances, to dissolve Parliament. Zhvania became Prime Minister, and the new bloc called the National Movement-Democrats, uniting the parties of the triumvirate of Saak'ashvili, Zhvania and Burdzhanaдзе, won the new parliamentary elections on 28 March with 66.24% of the votes cast, which gave them 135 seats.

Saak'ashvili Vows to Restore Georgia's Territorial Integrity

Saak'ashvili undertook to restore Georgia's territorial integrity during his first term of office, having declared on 3 January in a provocative visit to Tamarasheni, a Georgian-populated village inside South Ossetia, for which the permission of the authorities in Tskhinval had not been sought, that 2004 would be the last year when South Ossetia and Abkhazia did not participate in Georgian elections. Although a high-ranking official of the South Ossetian Ministry of Defence, Viktor Mamitov, was shot dead on 9 February by Georgian police in the village of Eredvi, some seven kilometers from Tskhinval, it was neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia which was destined to be first to experience the consequences of the reintegrationist goal that Saak'ashvili had set himself.

Ach'ara Reintegrated

Aslan Abashidze's appointment as leader of Georgia's Autonomous Republic of Ach'ara (Adzharia) had been engineered in 1991 at the time of Gamsakhurdia's presidency. However, rather than implement a programme to abolish the region's autonomy, as Gamsakhurdia had envisaged, Abashidze schemed over the next thirteen years to establish his authoritarian rule and turned Ach'ara into his own and his clan's private fiefdom. Finance came from control of the frontier-crossing into Turkey (with its lucrative customs' post) at Sarpi and of the port in the regional

capital (Batumi); Abashidze also maintained direct political links with Russia. Though he eventually created a national party, called Revival (*/aghordzineba/*), Abashidze's relations with Tbilisi blew hot and cold, and he never dared to leave the safety of Ach'ara to visit the country's capital. During the demonstrations in Tbilisi that led to Shevardnadze's downfall, Abashidze arranged for bus-loads of his supporters to be transported to Tbilisi to buttress Shevardnadze's position, for he feared what might follow a reformist victory. The fear proved to be well-founded.

Oppositional groupings were formed and quickly grew in strength within Ach'ara. Unsurprisingly, there were problems with the ballot on 28 March, but Abashidze refused to allow the chairman of Georgia's Central Election Commission to enter the statelet on 14 April to organise a rerun. In response, Saak'ashvili ordered a demonstration of military power in the shape of exercises just along the coast around the Mingrelian port of Poti on 30 April. In his turn, Abashidze had some road-bridges connecting Ach'ara to the rest of Georgia destroyed and cut the railtrack. This resulted in much larger demonstrations in Batumi than previously, with the upshot that Abashidze and his family elected for exile in Moscow, whither they departed on 6 May, a move facilitated once more by Russia's Foreign Minister Ivanov. Central control was thus restored over Ach'ara with speed and ease, a development that emboldened the mercurial Saak'ashvili to seek a repeat-performance elsewhere. South Ossetia was the target. But Saak'ashvili forgot (or chose to neglect) the crucial fact that, whilst Ach'arans are ethnically Georgians (albeit predominantly Muslim), Ossetians are not and certainly had been given no encouragement to feel allegiance to Georgia since Gamsakhurdia's war and Georgia's attainment of independence.

On Georgia's Independence Day (26 May), Saak'ashvili decided to demonstrate his facility for languages by addressing short appeals in their native tongues to the Abkhazians² and South Ossetians, in an apparent proffering of the hand of friendship; regarding Abkhazia, mention was made of federal relations in the context of 'asymmetrical regionalism'. It was not, however, lost on each audience that the president's words of peace were uttered against the back-drop of the largest display of military

² Gamsakhurdia on at least one occasion had felt constrained to employ Abkhaz in the hope of attracting Abkhazian sympathies, and this is not the only instance where similarities can be detected in the behaviour of these two highly emotional and erratic leaders.

might that Tbilisi had ever witnessed.³ The Abkhazian authorities interpreted the offer as nothing more than a variation on the theme of Shevardnadze's 'maximal autonomy' and simply ignored it. In other words, a potential (albeit slim) chance for reconciliation was squandered. After all, Saak'ashvili had no personal responsibility for the wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and might have been able to capitalise on this, had he initiated his presidency in a more enlightened manner.

Saak'ashvili Moves against South Ossetia

On 31 May, the Georgian side introduced into the South Ossetian conflict-zone Interior Ministry forces, army special troops and heavy military equipment, thereby infringing the Daghomys Agreement. Early the following month, as a goodwill-gesture, fertiliser was despatched to local villages, and there was talk of a renewed rail-link and other benefits. But by the middle of the month the flourishing market in Ergneti, not far from Tskhinval but in Georgian-controlled territory, had been closed. The justification for this was that taxes were not being paid and that it was a source for trade in contraband. Whilst there may well have been some truth in this assertion, the market was a focus for intercourse between the two communities, who thereby demonstrated that, despite ongoing tensions and the political stand-off, which occasionally flared up into something more dangerous, they were perfectly able to get on with one another. The closure of the market harmed the local economy and further fuelled resentment.⁴ On 5 June, the South Ossetian Parliament addressed an ap-

³ See Giorgi Sepashvili's 'Saakashvili Speaks of Peace Amid Show of Force', where he describes the level of military participation in the parade as follows:

According to the Georgian Defense Ministry, up to 8,000 soldiers and officers from the best trained units of the armed forces and up to one-hundred armored vehicles, heavy artillery and 'Grad' missile launchers, as well as anti-aircraft missiles, were demonstrated at the military parade. The Georgian air forces also participated in the parade. Four Su-25 Frogfoot ground attack aircrafts, as well as Mi-24, Mi-14 and U.S.-granted UH-1H Iroquois 'Huey' helicopters flew over Tbilisi. A naval parade will be held in the capital of the Adjarian Autonomy, Batumi, which will also be attended by President Saakashvili. According to the official figures, 650,000 Lari (USD 325,000) was spent to hold the military parade.

Article available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7009>.

⁴ De Waal (2003.169–172) notes a parallel damaging effect some years earlier following the closure of the market in the village of Sadakhlo in southern Georgia, where Armenian and Azerbaijani traders were brought together to their mutual advantage despite their conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh.

peal to the Russian State Duma. It began by noting that developments over previous days were threatening to create a new seat of armed conflict and, recalling the results of the January 1992 referendum, ended with an appeal for recognition of the independence of the Republic of South Ossetia and for the taking of measures to protect the Russian citizens resident within it.⁵

From mid-July, crossfire and other incidents increased, leading to over a month of low-level fighting, with several deaths of mostly military personnel on both sides. Whether because of fear of Russian intervention or as a result of US pressure not to run the risk of pursuing the offensive, Tbilisi withdrew on 20 August all forces not part of the quadripartite peace-keeping units, whilst Ossetian armed formations returned to the Dzhava District. Sergej Markedonov (2010.27), a Russian specialist on Caucasian affairs, sees these July-events as the major turning-point in Moscow's attitude towards this hitherto 'frozen' conflict. He argues that, if, up until these events, the Kremlin had observed a position of neutrality and objectivity, henceforth it decided to lend support to the aspirations of the South Ossetians. One has to bear in mind the still unsettled problems between the North Ossetians and the Ingush over the contested Prigorodnyj Raion⁶ just across the mountains in southern Russia, and Moscow probably wished to avoid further instability in, and possible population-movements from, the Transcaucasus that would result from renewal of large-scale fighting. Whatever the truth of the matter, the significance of Saak'ashvili essaying the military option so soon after delivering his Independence Day speech was not lost on Tskhinval (or Sukhum).

Saak'ashvili had paid an early visit (February 2004) to Moscow, where he met President Vladimir Putin. The Georgian president contrived to arrive late, no doubt causing the first of many irritations to his Russian

⁵ For the text see Volkhonskij et al. (2008.225–6).

⁶ A slice of territory to the immediate east of the North Ossetian capital of Vladikavkaz (sometime known as Ordzhonik'idze or, even earlier, Dzauzhiq'au) historically peopled largely by the Ingush. When Stalin deported the Ingush along with several other ethnic groups from the North Caucasus to Central Asia during World War II, it was given over to the North Ossetians. After the rehabilitation of the deportees and their permitted return under Nikita Krushchev in the late 1950s, the territory remained part of North Ossetia, and fierce fighting erupted between the North Ossetians and the Ingush over rights to residency and ownership of property in the wake of the disintegration of the USSR. The problem remains unresolved, and Ingushetia has become one of the most troubled regions in the North Caucasus (along with its eastern neighbour Chechenia—recall that the Ingush and Chechen are closely related (Vei)Nakh peoples, who, for decades during the Soviet period, were united in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR).

counterpart, though at this stage the two leaders apparently concluded they could work together. But after the failure of the attempt to regain control of South Ossetia in August, Saak'ashvili and his corps of diplomats began to appeal to the international community, charging Russia with support for the 'separatists' and arguing for the withdrawal of Russian peace-keepers. Relations went into a spiral of decline. Rhetoric became increasingly bitter, as the sides made charges and counter-charges or took punitive measures against each other. The unambiguously stated desire by Saak'ashvili and his cabinet of (mostly) young(ish), English-speaking ministers, who over the years tended to rise, fall or move with amazing rapidity, to align Georgia with the West and its institutions quickly attracted the attention of the White House of President George W. Bush, suffused as it was with Neo-Con[servative] philosophy and associated suspicions towards a potentially resurgent Russia. So beguiled was the US president,⁷ notorious for his poor grasp of foreign affairs, that he was led ultimately to utter during his visit to Georgia in May 2005 his much-quoted (but overly flattering) designation of Georgia as the region's 'beacon of democracy'.⁸ Russo-Georgian relations under Saak'ashvili were, of course, ultimately fated to reach their absolute nadir in the so-called 'Five-Day War' of August 2008.

Despite suspicions of Tbilisi's intentions, an agreement to demilitarise the conflict-zone was signed on 5 November 2004 between Zhvania and Kokoit. At an international forum provided by a meeting of the Par-

⁷ His beguilement was reinforced no doubt by Saak'ashvili's contribution of Georgian contingents to both the 'Coalition of the Willing' in Iraq and NATO operations in Afghanistan (ISAF).

⁸ Many Georgians will undoubtedly have joined the Abkhazians and South Ossetians *inter alios* in deeming such a pronouncement to be risible hyperbole. The inability (or was it one more instance of self-delusion?) of Western policy-makers and commentators to see behind the froth of the Rose Revolution's spectacle and make a more sober assessment of the chasm between its declared democratic goals and the fact of a president increasing his own powers became an object of criticism among the majority of the commentariat only belatedly with the advantage of hindsight. For example: "Early in Saakashvili's first term the democratic promise of the Rose Revolution began to dissipate, though many policymakers in Brussels, and especially in Washington, ignored these warnings" (Cooley and Mitchell 2010.2). See also Wheatley's conclusion (2005,226):

Saakashvili's strategy has been to consolidate state authority by eliminating centres of power independent of the state, a tactic that proved successful in Adjara. However, while attempting to eliminate bureaucratic pluralism from within state structures, the new government made little effort to forge any meaningful links with society or to foster democratic pluralism. Power remained with the President and his loyalists, not with the people.

liamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg, Saak'ashvili took the opportunity to propose a peace-initiative based on the award of 'broad autonomy' to South Ossetia. Unsurprisingly, Kokoiti rejected this latest rehash of Tbilisi's long-standing naive conviction that a return to the *status quo ante bellum* would find favour in Tskhinval. Even by the time of Zhvania's death⁹ in February 2005, fortified armed positions in the conflict-zone had still not been dismantled. It is perhaps relevant at this point to observe that Irak'li Okruashvili had been appointed Georgia's Defence Minister in December 2004.

Okruashvili had been born in Tskhinval in November 1973 to an Ossetian father and Georgian mother; it is by his mother's name that he chose to be known. He had served as deputy to Saak'ashvili as Justice Minister in 2000–1 and in the wake of the Rose Revolution was nominated regional governor (/gamgebeli/) of Shida Kartli, the larger administrative unit which, as far as Tbilisi is concerned, incorporates South Ossetia. He remained in that post only until January 2004, when he became Procurator General, swiftly moving on in June to become Interior Minister until his transfer to the Ministry of Defence. He is particularly associated with the adoption of a hard-line stance in regard to the disputed territories, especially his native South Ossetia; on 1 May 2006, he stated that he would resign unless South Ossetia were returned to Georgian jurisdiction by 1 January 2007. In fact, however, it was Okruashvili's status which had altered by that date, for his ministerial portfolio was shifted to that of the Ministry of Economics on 10 November 2006, and he resigned seven days later.

Kokoiti's Initiatives

Okruashvili's time as Georgia's Defence Minister witnessed certain developments. Kokoiti had put forward his own initiative on 12 December 2005 in which he outlined plans for demilitarisation, socio-economic regeneration, political negotiations, and the establishment of a privileged economic ('offshore') zone to incorporate not only South Ossetia but also neighbouring districts in North Ossetia and Georgia. Tbilisi did not respond to this, but rather, on 15 February 2006, the Georgian Parliament

⁹ Though the cause of death was officially ascribed to carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty heater, not every objective observer was/is convinced that something more sinister had not occurred.

accused Russia of annexing Georgian land and demanded that the Daghomys Agreement be reviewed in the light of the alleged failure by the Russian peace-keeping troops to fulfil their mandate and further that the Russian contingent be replaced by peace-keepers from other countries. The Ukraine responded on 21 February by expressing a readiness to supply troops in the event of receiving appropriate mandates from the UN and OSCE. Of course, such a move was inimical to the South Ossetians, just as parallel suggestions for Abkhazia were out of the question in Sukhum, as the Ukraine had assisted Georgia in the 1992–93 war, and South Ossetia's Foreign Minister, Murat Dzhioev, wryly observed that the Ukraine might make a greater contribution to the strengthening of peace, if it ceased supplying arms to Georgia (Tanaev 2008.36). Tanaev also quotes Andrej Kokoshin, Head of the Duma's Committee for CIS Affairs, as declaring that, should the circumstances warrant it, Russia would have every right to take whatever measures might be necessary to guarantee stability and security and to defend Russian citizens living in the area (including the Russian peace-keepers).

In February, Kokoiti warned that Georgia was planning an operation to bring down the South Ossetian government and in March addressed an appeal to Russia's Constitutional Court that South Ossetia be joined to the Russian Federation, though once again no action was forthcoming. On 14 June, Kokoiti and the leaders of Abkhazia (Sergej Bagapsh) and Moldova's breakaway province of Pridnestrov'ja/ Transdnistria (Igor' Smirnov) signed a declaration of cooperation, which included a mutual defence-clause in the event of attack. On 15 August, South Ossetia began issuing its own passports. But the main event of the year was the presidential election, held on 12 November. In the Ossetian-controlled areas of South Ossetia, Kokoiti won an overwhelming victory (gaining 96% of the votes), and, in the referendum conducted simultaneously on the question of South Ossetia's independence, 95.2% of the electorate participated, with 99% voting in favour. However, in the Georgian-controlled areas, victory went to Dmitry Sanakoev (b. 1969), running under the banner of the 'Salvation Union of South Ossetia'. Sanakoev had served in various capacities in South Ossetia, gaining the premiership in July 2001, which he held until 1 December, when Kokoiti replaced Chibirov. Following the 2006 elections, Sanakoev set up an alternative, pro-Tbilisi administration in the village of Kurta (to the north of Tskhinval) and was denounced as a traitor by Kokoiti. These developments heralded the end of any peace-talks with the Saak'ashvili regime, and, on 10 May 2007, Saak'ashvili appointed Sanakoev

head of the so-called 'South Ossetian Provisional Administrative Entity'. Tbilisi set about pouring resources into the parts of South Ossetia under Sanakoev's control in the hope of weaning Ossetians away from Kokoiti's Tskhinval-based rule by putting on a display of the potential for the kind of more comfortable life South Ossetians might expect following renewal of association with Tbilisi.

Political Developments in Abkhazia

In Abkhazia, following his re-election to the presidency in 1999, Ardzinba became less and less visible as the effects of a progressively incapacitating, abnormal illness, the diagnosis of which was never revealed, increased in severity.¹⁰ He remained in full control of his mental faculties to the end (he died at the age of 64 on 4 March 2010¹¹ after being rushed to Moscow following a sudden deterioration) and continued to oversee all relevant political decisions. But, in general, this presidential term was one of intermittent strain and tension in Abkhazian society, and not only as a result of the stand-off with Georgia, though the 2001 events in the K'odor Valley should not be forgotten.

An early shock was the murder on 15 August 2000 of the 50 year-old lawyer and constitutional expert Zurab Achba as he was walking home in the early evening along the main road heading south-east out of the centre of Sukhum. No-one has ever been arrested for the crime, which is widely believed to have been linked to an internal investigation that Achba was pursuing. The loss to Abkhazian society of the possessor of such crucial expertise was immense.

Particularly influential in the initial stages of Ardzinba's second term was Anri Dzhergenia (b. 1941), one-time General Procurator, who was admired by Ardzinba not only because of family-ties but also because of his shrewd negotiating acumen. He served as Prime Minister from 7 June 2001 to 20 November 2002 and was regarded as strongly favouring closer association with Russia, leading some to postulate that this might have been the reason for his eventual removal from the premiership. For a time, he had the support of a grouping of veterans from the 1992–93 war known as

¹⁰ Speculation links the onset of Ardzinba's motor-neurone problems to his visit to Tbilisi in 1997.

¹¹ See my obituary in *The Independent* on 19 April 2010.

Amtsakhara 'Regiment/Band of Brothers',¹² though as the presidential elections approached (3 October 2004), its backing went to the ultimately successful candidate. *Amtsakhara*'s importance began to grow, and the organisation is credited with playing a leading role in bringing down the government of premier Gennadij Gagulia in April 2003. Gagulia had replaced Dzhergenia as prime minister, having been the first to serve in this capacity from January 1995 to April 1997 following the promulgation of Abkhazia's post-war Constitution. In late 2003, *Amtsakhara* even sought to impeach the president, for the same criticisms as mentioned in the preceding chapter were felt to be still applicable. In June 2004, one of the organisation's leaders, Garri Aiba, was shot dead.

On 22 April 2003, one-time KGB operative Raul Khadzhimba (b. 1958) assumed the premiership, which he held until contesting the presidential election the following year. Ardzinba let it be known that he anointed Khadzhimba as his preferred successor, and Russia too made it all too plain that Khadzhimba was also their choice to succeed, even warning of the imposition of extra sanctions, if the ballot went any other way. The ballot ultimately did go another way, and Khadzhimba's failure to secure the presidency is widely explained as a reaction against Russia's assumption that it could manipulate the electorate's choice to the advantage of its own favoured candidate. There were four serious joint-contenders for the offices of president and vice-president: Sergej Bagapsh with Stanislav Lakoba; Raul Khadzhimba with Vitalij Smyr; Sergej Shamba with Vladimir Arshba; Anri Dzhergenia with Ruslan Kishmaria.

Bagapsh was one of the leading figures in the movement *Apsny Ak'zaara* 'United Abkhazia' (literally 'Oneness of Abkhazia'), founded in March 2004 under the leadership of Artur Mikvabia to present a single opposition-candidate and transformed into a fully fledged political party in January 2009 with Daur Tarba as leader.¹³ A relatively new political grouping called *Aitaira* 'Rebirth; Revival' had first lent its authority to one-time Minister of the Interior and later Moscow-based businessman Aleksandr Ankvab, who, since his return to Abkhazia, has survived a number of assassination-attempts. But, though a fluent speaker of Abkhaz, Ankvab refused to submit himself to, as he saw it, the indignity of having his linguistic competence

¹² The word is difficult to translate. Incorporating the noun for 'fire' (a.mtsa), it can also signify 'family-circle' or 'kinship-group', but, in this context, it is probably best understood to carry a military connotation.

¹³ Tarba had previously headed the administration in the Ochamchira District, the post in which Bagapsh had first achieved political prominence.

tested by the panel set up to ensure that all candidates could speak the national language, as required by the Constitution, and so withdrew his candidacy. *Aitaira* then joined *Amtsakhara* in offering their backing to the Bagapsh-Lakoba ticket.

Bagapsh (1949–2011) had been appointed to head the Ochamchira District in 1982, a position he still held at the time of the fatal clashes on 15–16 July 1989, when, as explained in Chapter 3, thanks to an advance-warning from the then-head of the neighbouring Gal District, Vakht'ang Q'olbaia, that thousands had crossed the Ingur from Mingrelia and were on their way to join the fighting that had broken out the night before in the centre of Sukhum, Bagapsh's quick action in helping to organise the blowing up of a tanker on the bridge over the R. Aaldzga (aka Ghalidzga) just outside Ochamchira stemmed the influx and, thus, undoubtedly prevented much bloodshed. From 1997 to 1999 he had served in Ardzinba's cabinet as Prime Minister but thereafter had spent some years in the energy-industry. The fact that Bagapsh was married to a Mingrelian, Marina Shonia, no doubt contributed to his carrying the vote amongst the (mainly Gal-centred) Mingrelians, for whom special arrangements had been made to grant them eligibility to vote, an issue that would resurface, causing much debate and concern at the time of the 2009 election. Lakoba (b. 1953), a distant relative of Abkhazia's first Soviet leader, was born and raised in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and initially studied archæology, though he later turned to history, writing extensively on the history of Abkhazia (see, in particular, his 2001 and 2004 publications). Like many academics, he became involved in Abkhazian politics from the late 1980s when those with relevant expertise felt duty-bound to place their knowledge and skills at the disposal of their homeland at the critical time of the developing arguments and looming confrontation with Tbilisi.

Initially, the Electoral Commission declared that the Khadzhimba-Smyr pairing had won. But this result was challenged and overturned in the Supreme Court, which decreed that Bagapsh and Lakoba had actually achieved outright victory with 50.08% of the votes cast, whereas Khadzhimba-Smyr had garnered only 35.61% of the votes, followed by Shamba and Arshba (6.93%), and then Dzhergenia and Kishmaria (2.63%). Demonstrations followed. Khadzhimba's head-quarters were located in the Gulia Institute of Abkhazian History, Language and Literature, whose one-time director had been the outgoing president. At the height of the tensions, an elderly linguist from the Institute, Tamara Shakryl, was shot and killed. Though the postmortem determined that the bullet had rico-

cheted and that the death was thus accidental, an interpretation accepted by her family, there are still those who are convinced that her killing was deliberate. Naturally, the threatening chaos was viewed with a certain *Schadenfreude* in Tbilisi, where there was always a hope that Abkhazia might slip into civil discord based on the dialectal division of Bzyp Abkhazians to the north of Sukhum (the area from which both Ardzinba and Khadzhimba hailed) and Abzhywa Abkhazians to the south (the seat of Bagapsh's power-base). With the possibility that the situation could run out of control, a compromise was reached whereby a new ballot was to take place in January 2005 with Bagapsh and Khadzhimba running on a new joint-ticket of national unity.

Not surprisingly, Abkhazia's electorate was happy to vote in favour of the compromise and thus avoid any danger of civil war, though, realistically, difficulties were foreseen in the implementation of the pact. Bagapsh assumed the presidency, whilst Khadzhimba became Vice-President, a division of powers being agreed for the duration of their term of office. Ankvab was appointed Prime Minister with Leonid Lakerbai(a), the leader of *Aitaira*, his deputy; Shamba reassumed the role of Foreign Minister; Lakoba, who had made possible the Bagapsh-Khadzhimba coupling by withdrawing from the race, became Chairman of the Security Council. This leadership-team remained in uneasy alliance until a year after the Five-Day War of August 2008 in the run-up to the presidential election of December 2009. But for the time-being the question was whether the 2005 change of leadership in Abkhazia, where the new president was deemed to be more sympathetic to the position of the residents of the Gal District, would result in any shift in relations with Tbilisi, now that there too a new president and governmental team, with no responsibility for the war of 1992–93, were in office. And how would relations with Russia develop, given the initial lack of enthusiasm for Bagapsh in Putin's Kremlin?

Georgia and the Ukraine Voice NATO Aspirations

While the issues surrounding Abkhazia's presidential election were being played out, another event was unfolding in a different quarter of the former USSR that would have at least a tangential bearing on Transcaucasian affairs over the following years. This was the so-called 'Orange Revolution' in the Ukraine, which brought to power Viktor Yushchenko, who, like Saak'ashvili, was not exactly favourably disposed towards the Kremlin's leadership. In an astonishing move in January 2005, two US senators,

Hillary Clinton and John McCain, nominated the Georgian and Ukrainian leaders for the Nobel Peace Prize, which merely underlined the low level of understanding of relevant matters on the part of these representatives of the political élite in Washington. Both Saak'ashvili and Yushchenko had aspirations to join NATO, and Russia had no wish to see NATO encroaching further eastwards than it had already done in two waves of expansion, for such a third expansion would bring it to Russia's very western and southern frontiers.

Georgia had established ties with NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and its North Atlantic Cooperation Council as early as March 1994 in the days of Shevardnadze, and then tighter relations had begun in 1998, with the first joint-exercises taking place off the port of Poti in 2001. But serious moves to join the full alliance were initiated only in 2005 under Saak'ashvili when, in February, a Partnership for Peace liaison-officer was appointed to Georgia, and subsequently, in March, Georgia became a 'host nation', allowing transportation through its territory and air-space of NATO personnel and equipment. Of course, every country has the right to choose its own allies and alliances, and, in an unofficial referendum conducted in Georgia on 5 January 2008, 77% of those participating voted in favour of membership. But, regardless of this outcome, two questions were surely worth asking:

1. Whilst, given Georgians' well-known and long-standing antipathy towards Russia, one can understand their desire for some kind of external buttress for their long-desired and relatively recently (re)gained independence, was/is it really in Georgia's interests to seek membership of this organisation?
2. Was it really wise for NATO (or perhaps one should more accurately say certain members of NATO) to have encouraged such aspirations in the first place?

An additional issue with Russia that rankled with the Georgian government was the continued presence of the Russian military bases. As already noted, the four bases were located at: Vaziani (near Tbilisi), Akhalkalaki (in the mostly Armenian-populated south-western region of Samtskhe-Dzhavakheti), Batumi (in Ach'ara), and at Bombora near Gudauta (in northern Abkhazia), and an agreement reached in 1995 between Shevardnadze and Yeltsin had granted the Russians a 25-lease on them. As a result of continued dissatisfaction with this agreement, never ratified by Parliament, the Vaziani base was taken over by Georgians on 29 June 2001,

which was in accord with an understanding reached at an OSCE summit in Istanbul in November 1999, according to which the Vaziani and Gudauta bases would actually be vacated by 1 July 2001; the situation in Gudauta remained unclear. On 25 April 2005, the TV channel Rustavi-2 announced that an agreement had been reached that the bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki would be closed by 1 January 2008, and a formal declaration to this effect was made on 30 May 2005. As the base at Akhalkalaki was perhaps the main source of employment in the town, there was no enthusiasm amongst the local Armenian community for its demise, but close it did, along with the one in Batumi. On 13 April 2006, Sergej Shamba announced that the Bombora/Gudauta base had essentially ceased to function in 2001 and that only some 130 Russian peace-keepers and four of their helicopters were stationed there.

During the first two years of Saak'ashvili's presidency, Abkhazia basically maintained a watching brief, wondering what the repercussions would be for the region of Georgia's deteriorating relations with Russia. A warning signal of possible dangers to come was delivered by President Bagapsh in an interview for *Regnum* on 4 August 2005, when, speaking of Georgia's \$300 million military budget, he said: "We ask foreign diplomats, and ourselves, against whom is Georgia arming itself." Time would demonstrate the pertinence of the question.

One of the consequences of the 1992–93 war in Abkhazia that had a dire economic effect on not only Abkhazia but Georgia proper and, indeed, Armenia too was the loss of the rail-link that connected Russia to Tbilisi and onwards to Armenia.¹⁴ On 25 December 2002, a local train-service restarted between Sochi and Sukhum. Following repairs to this stretch of the line within Abkhazia in 2004, a direct service between Sukhum and Moscow was reinstated on 10 September that year. It remains a slow train, and many passengers prefer to cross into Russia to catch the faster service that starts/terminates in Sochi. All attempts to open the line from Sukhum southwards to allow trains to run once more into Georgia (and beyond) have come to nothing, as Georgia has always made the return of the Kartvelian refugees a precondition to the signing of any such agreement. And whilst the Abkhazian government continued to work with UNOMIG, to welcome visiting dignitaries, and otherwise to participate in meetings designed to further peace-negotiations or confidence-building, the irresistible force of Abkhazia's refusal to compromise on its independence always

¹⁴ The only other rail-access from Russia was the line that ran down the Caspian coast to Baku and thence back inland to either Tbilisi or Erevan.

came up against the immovable object of Georgia's own determination to preserve its ever more fictional territorial integrity as well as its insistence on the return of the refugees, the outcome being permanent stalemate.

From the end of the 1992–93 war, two structures claimed governance over Abkhazia: the authorities in Sukhum, referred to by the Georgians and their Western friends as the '*de facto* government', vs a Government-in-exile, known in Tbilisi as the '*de iure* government'. The latter had been based, for obvious reasons, firstly in Tbilisi and later in Zugdidi (capital of Mingrelia) since the end of September 1993 and had first been led by Tamaz Nadareishvili, an individual who roused strong feelings of antipathy amongst the Abkhazians for the rigidly uncompromising anti-Abkhazian stance he had adopted from the time of the pre-war split between Kartvelian and non-Kartvelian communities in Abkhazia, a stance that continued to the end of his life. Opposition to him amongst the Kartvelian veterans forced his resignation on 16 March 2004 shortly after Saak'ashvili's rise to power; he died at the age of 50 of a heart-attack on 31 August 2004. His replacement, Londer Tsaava, lasted only six months, as he was replaced in turn at the end of September by Irak'li Alasania (b. 1973),¹⁵ who, on 15 February 2005, was appointed as Saak'ashvili's representative at the Georgian-Abkhazian peace-talks. Surprisingly, in view of the fact that his father, Gen. Mamia Alasania, had been shot in murky circumstances at the close of the 1992–93 war, Alasania was able to establish good relations with his partners in Sukhum, even though at first the latter bridled at the thought of having to sit round a table with the man who claimed to head a rival authority.

Another paradox was that for years the Abkhazians had not only agreed to meet but had also established a good working relationship with Alasania's predecessor as chief Georgian negotiator, Giorgi Khaindrava, in his capacity as Minister for Conflict Resolution, for Khaindrava had, of course, issued one of the two fully documented genocidal threats from leading Georgians against the Abkhazians during the war in Abkhazia in his contribution to *Le Monde Diplomatique* of April 1993.¹⁶ With Alasania as lead negotiator, the Georgian-Abkhazian Coordinating Council was re-established. Alasania gave up the headship of the Government-in-exile on

¹⁵ Though Saak'ashvili's mother's maiden surname is also Alasania, it is unclear if there is any close family-connection between them.

¹⁶ The other was, of course, the threat to wipe out all of Abkhazia's Abkhazians in order to preserve Georgia's borders by Gen. Gia Q'arq'arashvili documented on video in the autumn of 1992.

24 April 2006, though he remained as the president's personal representative for Abkhazia until elevated to the position of Georgia's Ambassador to the UN on 11 September that year, a move which many (especially in Abkhazia)¹⁷ interpreted as the consequence of Saak'ashvili's resentment at the respect Alasania had managed to achieve amongst his Abkhazian partners and of the president's attendant desire to deny Alasania the potential popularity that would accrue to him, were he to achieve an actual break-through in negotiations with the Abkhazians.

'The Key to the Future'

On 4 May 2006, the Abkhazian president had submitted to Parliament a plan ('A Comprehensive Resolution to the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict'), which was approved on 7 May. Known as 'The Key to the Future', it resembled a similar proposal put forward the previous December by Kokoiti in respect of the conflict in South Ossetia. Abkhazia's *Apsny Press* said of the plan that it envisaged a settlement to the conflict within the framework of regional economic cooperation among the Black Sea states (*Apsny Press*, 5 May). Foreign Minister Shamba discussed the plan at the Coordinating Council's meeting in Tbilisi (the Council's first meeting since its suspension in 2001) that same month, and it was cautiously welcomed by both Alasania and Khaindrava, who conducted Shamba on a walkabout down Chardin Street in Tbilisi. Instead of greeting this rare, high-level visitor from Abkhazia personally or even simply letting it be known that he approved of such a visit, Saak'ashvili pointedly chose that selfsame day to travel with his Defence Minister Okruashvili to the military base in Senak'i (Mingrelia), close to the border with Abkhazia. The message from Saak'ashvili was again unambiguous.

Russian tourism to such northern Abkhazian resorts as Pitsunda, Gagra and New Athos was starting to attain the same high levels as experienced during the late Soviet period, and in 2006 the restrictions that had been imposed by the CIS for almost a decade were lifted (unilaterally by Russia), allowing anyone (with appropriate visas) to cross the Russian-Abkhazian border at the R. Psou. But a Georgian *démarche* that summer ensured that tourists were frightened off visiting Sukhum itself.¹⁸

¹⁷ This was not an exclusively Abkhazian interpretation; see (Georgian) P'aat'a Zaka-reishvili's comment later in this chapter.

¹⁸ Over the years there often seemed to be an upsurge in activities (including bombings) just prior to the start of Abkhazia's tourist-season.

Tensions Rise over the K'odor Valley

As remarked earlier, the Upper K'odor Valley had remained outside Abkhazian control since the end of the war on 30 September 1993 and had been notionally subordinate directly to Tbilisi. During Shevardnadze's presidency, a local Svan, Emzar Kvitsiani, had established himself as head of the district. On the pretence of carrying out a 'policing operation' in the Valley, on 22 July 2006, Saak'ashvili, perhaps buoyed up in confidence in the wake of the tumultuous visit to Tbilisi of President George W. Bush in the spring, despatched a contingent of 'law-enforcement officers' to take action against Kvitsiani, who had evidently refused to swear fealty to the new government in Tbilisi. The Abkhazians promptly complained of this infringement of the 1994 Moscow Ceasefire Accords, but, apart from some insignificant reprimands and calls for the ceasefire-agreement to be respected (as, for instance, in the UN Security Council's resolution of 13 October 2006), no action was taken against the Saak'ashvili regime. It had been hoped that Abkhazia's Foreign Minister Shamba might have had an opportunity to explain Abkhazia's position in an address to UN members, but instructions were issued by the Bush administration that Shamba should be denied a visa to enter the USA. He was thereby deprived of the opportunity to exercise his right to free speech before the world's community of nations.

On 27 July, Saak'ashvili compounded the gravity of the situation when he announced that Abkhazia's Government-in-exile would be relocated to the Valley. All of this had the effect of causing alarm in Sukhum, for, although it is often stated that no military assault could be mounted from the Valley because of the difficult mountainous terrain (for example, see Asmus 2010.148), those presenting this argument too easily forget that a military assault *was* mounted from precisely this area in October 2001 by the Chechen mercenaries under Ruslan Gelaev who had been contracted by the Shevardnadze regime. The Government-in-exile, now led by Malkhaz Akhishbaia, duly decamped from the relative comfort of life in the Mingrelian metropolis to take up residence alongside the Valley's hardy Svan denizens in the village of Chkhalta in September, just before the onset of the winter-snows. Henceforth, the term 'Upper Abkhazia' was introduced by the Georgian government to refer to their K'odor outpost. These provocative acts were reinforced by the construction in the vicinity of Zugdidi on the Georgian side of the border with Abkhazia of a youth summer-camp in the village of Ganmukhuri in order to inculcate in those

spending time there the notion that it was their patriotic duty to look upon Abkhazia as a slice of Georgian territory, currently out of Georgian control but eventually to be reunited with their motherland. Though the possibility of initiating military action to liberate the K'odor was debated in Abkhazia, the Abkhazian government continued with the policy of self-restraint that had held sway since September 1993. However, the presence of Georgian military personnel along with the Government-in-exile so close to the heart of the republic only increased Abkhazian resentment at what had been felt to be a huge national irritant for the preceding thirteen years.

Russo-Georgian Relations Deteriorate Further

The year 2006 was a time of growing tensions more widely in the region. In March, Russia decided to ban the import of Georgian (and also Moldovan) wines on the grounds that tests had allegedly shewn them to be contaminated with pesticides. This was then followed in May by a ban on the most famous of Georgia's many mineral waters, Bordzhomi, bottled in the village of the same name in the south-west of the country. These bans were interpreted in Tbilisi as punishment for Georgia's continuing overtures to NATO; the gas-pipeline from Russia to Georgia had been sabotaged on the Russian (North Ossetian) side of the border on 22 January, followed within hours by damage to the electricity-cables in the same region, the blame for both of which incidents Tbilisi had laid at Moscow's door. During a visit to Georgia by US Republican senators, it was claimed that John McCain's helicopter had been the target of gunfire as it flew over South Ossetia, though this accusation was later withdrawn; during his trip, McCain visited Tskhinval but did not manage to enter Abkhazia. While in Georgia, McCain became only the second American (after President Bush) to be decorated with the young republic's Order of St. George; in January 2010, he was able to add the Order of National Hero to his tally of Georgian medals. On 6 September, the Georgian police raided the head-quarters of a number of opposition-groupings, mainly targeting the party *Samartlianoba* 'Justice', accusing them of planning to organise, in cahoots with Igor Giorgadze,¹⁹ an armed coup against the government. Within weeks of the startling raids at the beginning of the month, four Russians

¹⁹ This is the Giorgadze who had served as Shevardnadze's Minister of State Security from 1993 and who fled into exile in Russia after being charged with involvement in the attempt on Shevardnadze's life on 29 August 1995.

were detained on 27 September, accused of being military intelligence-officers and charged on 29 September with espionage. Moscow's response was one of fury: all trade-, transport- and postal links were severed; many Georgians were rounded up and deported from Russia. The same day that the charges were laid against the Russians, Putin pointedly welcomed the South Ossetian and Abkhazian leaders to a forum in Sochi to discuss with them the economic development of Southern Russia.

Abkhazia Withdraws from the Peace-talks

The K'odor Valley was still hosting Georgian military personnel in 2007, and investment was targeted by Tbilisi at the region for various infrastructure-projects, mirroring the parallel exercise in that part of South Ossetia under Sanakoev's control; a branch of Zugdidi Bank was opened in the village of Azhara, boasting perhaps the only functioning ATM in the whole of Abkhazia (and certainly the only one to issue Georgian currency!). Needless to say, the Abkhazians were suspicious that weapons were being stored there, a suspicion that would prove to have been well-founded in the aftermath of the events of August 2008. On 3 February 2007, Davit Sigua, a local Mingrelian who was working with the Abkhazian government as chairman of the Gal electoral commission, was abducted from Gal town. Despite repeated protests and appeals, nothing was seen or heard of him again.²⁰ This was simply the last straw which led the Abkhazian authorities to announce a total halt to the negotiating process and to lay down three conditions for its resumption:

1. Removal of military personnel from the K'odor Valley;
2. Release of Sigua or, failing that, a statement about his fate;
3. The signing by the permanently bellicose Saak'ashvili of a non-use-of-force agreement with the Sukhum authorities.

Whilst there may no longer be any Georgian military personnel on Abkhazian soil, Tbilisi has never (voluntarily) complied with any of these conditions. On 20 September, a group of Abkhazian military personnel training near both the Georgian-occupied K'odor Valley and the border with Georgia were attacked; two Russian military trainers were killed and a number of Abkhazians injured.

²⁰ Rumour has it that he died under torture on the Georgian side of the border.

Given the overall situation then still obtaining, it is hardly surprising that tourists continued to stay away from Sukhum over the summer of 2007. But the topic on everyone's lips that season across the length and breadth of Abkhazia was the possible repercussion for the republic (as well as for South Ossetia) of the recognition of Kosovo, which was then expected to come later in the year from America and the EU states in the teeth of opposition from Serbia's ally, Russia.

Meanwhile, in Tbilisi, the temperature of Georgia's internal politics was starting to rise. On 25 September, former Minister of Defence Okruashvili proclaimed the formation of a new political party, Movement for a United Georgia, and followed this by making a series of outspoken charges against Saak'ashvili, accusing him of: corruption, responsibility for human rights' violations, and even planning the murder of Badri P'at'ark'atsishvili (long-time associate of Russian 'oligarch' Boris Berezovski and one of Georgia's wealthiest men, who at the time owned the Georgian TV-channel *Imedi* 'Hope' and was dabbling in opposition politics, being himself a potential candidate for the Georgian presidency); for good measure, Okruashvili also mused about the cause of the death of former premier Zurab Zhvania. Not surprisingly, Okruashvili was arrested. Before his release on a hefty bail, he retracted his accusations. He then fled to Germany but at the beginning of November appeared on *Imedi*, by then owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International Corporation, and, speaking from Munich, recanted his recantation, asserting that he had been subjected to psychological pressure while still in Georgia. He was subsequently granted political asylum in France. P'at'ark'atsishvili also departed from Georgia to take up residence in Downside Manor, his palatial residence in Leatherhead (Surrey, UK), where on 12 January 2008 he succumbed to a heart-attack; he was 52 years-old.

Anti-government demonstrations in Tbilisi, encouraged by Okruashvili's allegations and a personal address by P'at'ark'atsishvili shortly before his move to England, culminated on 7 November 2007 with the police being sent in to disperse the demonstrators, which they did with a widely acknowledged excess of brutality. Saak'ashvili declared a state of emergency, which lasted until 16 November and saw restrictions imposed on the media; *Imedi* was even taken off air. In order to wrong-foot the opposition, Saak'ashvili called a snap presidential election for 5 January 2008, some eight months short of the expected date, and formally resigned from office on 25 November. There has been speculation that Saak'ashvili might have had an additional motive for seeking an early renewal of his mandate,

namely his wish for the poll in Georgia to be conducted while he still had a firm ally ensconced in the White House. That support remained in place and steadfast, even though many foreign observers were shocked at the violence perpetrated on the streets of Tbilisi on 7 November and belatedly started to entertain doubts about the Georgian president's real commitment to democratic ideals.

Saak'ashvili Re-elected President

Saak'ashvili's ruse paid dividends: with the opposition in its usual state of disarray, he was returned to power. At the end of January, a much less neutral title was devised for the Ministry for Conflict Resolution, which was provocatively rechristened the Ministry for Reintegration by Prime Minister Lado Gurgenzidze, who appointed Teimuraz (Temur) Iak'obashvili²¹ its head, in succession to Davit Bakradze.²² This renaming, with all that it implied, infuriated the leaderships in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who were reinforced in their resolve to have nothing to do with Saak'ashvili and his machinations. The following month, on 17 February, Kosovo declared its independence and was recognised the following day by a host of major states. What would be Russia's reaction?

Aftermath of Kosovo's Recognition

Abkhazian hopes were not fulfilled, for Russia did not respond, as many had predicted, by immediately countering with its own tit-for-tat recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, as alluded to above, on 6 March, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that it was unilaterally lifting the CIS sanctions against Abkhazia that had been in place since 1996 and was requesting the CIS heads of state to assent to this move; Russia's own restrictions on trade with Georgia and the issuing of visas for Georgians, imposed in the wake of the quarrelling in 2006, remained in force. And, before handing over the Russian presidency to Dmitry Medvedev in May, Putin, on 16 April, ordered that closer ties be established between Russia's various ministries and their counterparts in both

²¹ It was announced in November 2010 that, in a cabinet-reshuffle, Iak'obashvili would become Georgian Ambassador to the USA, being replaced as State Minister for Reintegration by Ek'a T'q'eshelashvili, a former Foreign Minister.

²² Bakradze took over the role of Foreign Minister at this point.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This latter edict was issued following another seminal moment in the build-up to the August war.

Bucharest (Romania) was the venue for NATO's summit on 2–4 April. George W. Bush was in the last year of his presidency. As we have seen, Washington had for some years been a stout and indiscriminating supporter of Georgia, and the personal bond between Bush and Saak'ashvili seemed particularly powerful. So, perhaps Bush calculated that his charms were equal to the task of pulling off a coup amongst his NATO allies to benefit and buttress his Transcaucasian 'beacon of democracy'—he would be simultaneously plucking another state out of Russia's back-yard (and potential orbit) for good measure. Bush flew into Bucharest armed with the radical proposal that both Georgia and the Ukraine be granted immediate membership of the alliance. The more supine members, including the United Kingdom, were happy to give their assent, but the extent of the resistance from the more perspicacious states was reportedly such that Bush himself was ready to withdraw the proposal entirely and move on to other business. However, the two aspirant states had sympathisers among the alliance's newer member-states which, like them (as former constituent parts of the USSR), had previously been part of the Warsaw Pact, and whose leaders, for fully understandable reasons, had anti-Russian agendas of their own. It was these agendas that now determined their course of action. The lobby in question refused to leave the room until some positive proposal was tabled and approved. The compromise-deal was that a Membership Action Plan (MAP) would be virtually guaranteed to be offered at NATO's next summit that December, and the intervening months could be put to excellent use by the two states in order to strengthen their claims for admittance to the club that they (or, at least, their leaders)²³ were so eager to join. With this fateful decision the countdown to war began.

The period between NATO's April Bucharest meeting and the 7 August witnessed a number of developments which are straightforwardly recordable, but they have been subjected to widely differing interpretations. Those who detect Russian scheming behind the August hostilities stress Russia's hardly secret revulsion at the idea of seeing Georgia and the Ukraine embraced by NATO. An alternative explanation for the war exists, however. Saak'ashvili was determined to win NATO-membership for

²³ The level of support for joining NATO amongst the Ukrainian public was never as high as it was in Georgia. Following Viktor Yanukovich's victory in the February 2010 Ukrainian presidential election, its bid was withdrawn.

Georgia. But there was a widely held assumption that a country with disputed borders would find it all but (if not totally) impossible to gain admittance to that particular club. Is it conceivable that an impulsive leader like Saak'ashvili could have restrained himself from essaying any tactic finally to fulfil the pledge that he had given his people during both his presidential campaigns to restore his country's territorial integrity so as to eradicate the impediment over uncertain frontiers prior to that all-important NATO meeting in December. What, then, happened between April and August?

On 20 April, Georgia accused Russia of shooting down an observer drone that was flying over Abkhazian territory. This was an instance of the pot calling the kettle black, for, even if Russian planes should not have been active in Abkhazian air-space, the Georgians had no business sending up a drone (of Israeli origin)²⁴ over the demilitarised zone in the first place. A number of similar incidents followed (on 4 and 8 May, for example). Around this time the Abkhazians announced that they had indications that caused them to fear a possible invasion. As a precaution, Russia decided to increase its number of peace-keepers. Then, at the end of May, a special, 400-strong contingent of Russian military engineers arrived in Abkhazia to upgrade the stretch of railtrack from Sukhum south-eastwards to Ochamchira and Gal. In response, the Georgians charged that not only did the presence of these military personnel take Russian troop-numbers above the total permitted by the ceasefire-agreement but that the action indicated a clear preparation for an attack. What was never mentioned by those making this charge was the state of affairs on the railtrack across the Ingur in Mingrelia.

The revelation surfaced in the report 'Georgian War Footing Takes Concrete Form—Literally'²⁵ (from 19 May 2008). Two foreigners, well-versed in military matters, along with a Mingrelian refugee, happened to take a stroll towards the border with Abkhazia on 9 May and made a rather interesting discovery. The track there had already been upgraded (by non-local, high-quality labour to boot, according to informants from the vicinity) and beside it, close to the border, was a reinforced concrete-platform. The web-article is accompanied by co-author Ian Carver's photograph of this construction, which can have had but one purpose,

²⁴ Interestingly, at the time, Georgia's Defence Minister, Davit K'ezerashvili, held dual Georgian-Israeli citizenship.

²⁵ Available at www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=article&id=7164&lang=eng. The name given for the second co-author, namely Joni Simonishvili, was a pseudonym for American freelance journalist Jeffrey K. Silverman, who later requested that his authorship be acknowledged.

namely to facilitate the off-loading of tanks, which would have had nowhere to trundle other than into Abkhazia. The reporters of this discovery drew the strikingly obvious conclusion:

The presence of ongoing or near complete military infrastructure being professionally constructed in close proximity to the border demonstrates that Georgia is actually preparing for war against Abkhazia.

Despite the Abkhazians' continuing embargo on participation in formal negotiations with Georgia, but perhaps in view both of the escalation in tension and the respect in which Georgia's UN Ambassador Irak'li Alasania was held in Sukhum, he was received for an unpublicised visit on 12 May. This was the first such meeting in Sukhum since Bakradze's visit on 7 October the previous year, and it followed that by Matthew Bryza,²⁶ Condoleezza Rice's Under-Secretary of State for the region, on 10–11 May. During Bryza's meeting with Stanislav Lakoba, Chairman of Abkhazia's Security Council, he urged a return to the negotiating table, suggesting that otherwise Abkhazia could face a 'hot August'. With his customary sardonic wit, Lakoba quipped that Abkhazia had survived hot Augusts before (recalling the start of the war on 14 August 1992) and, if need be, would do so again... Bryza's comment has given rise to speculation that he and the State Department knew in advance that Tbilisi was planning some sort of action that summer. Rather astonishingly, one of Saak'ashvili's most uncompromising apologists and one who thus naturally blamed the Kremlin for provoking Saak'ashvili into the South Ossetian war, the late Ronald D. Asmus, then Executive Director of the Brussels-based Transatlantic Center and also Strategic Planner at the German Marshall Fund, wrote candidly about Saak'ashvili's planning for war against Abkhazia, although perhaps the reason why he chose not to try to hide this fact was in order to allow himself to argue that, if Abkhazia was the target, Saak'ashvili would not have ordered operations against Tskhinval on 7 August. And so, this is what Asmus happily told his readers:

The Georgians no longer had active military contingency plans for South Ossetia, but they had them for Abkhazia ... And it was over Abkhazia that tension rose in the spring and summer of 2008, as the two sides almost came to war (2010.85);

or again (2010.170):

²⁶ Appointed US Ambassador to Azerbaijan in May 2010.

It [*Abkhazia*] was where Georgian defense planning had focused, *where the Georgians had built up their own military capabilities*, and where Saakashvili had contemplated a military move. [Stress added]²⁷

Asmus, quite dispassionately, revealed that not only Bryza, but also the EU's Special Representative to the area Peter Semneby, as well as Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, were all aware of Saak'ashvili's designs on Abkhazia, though he lost no opportunity to state that Saak'ashvili was constantly warned against activating any such plans. For example, we read (Asmus 2010.143):

Bildt wondered whether Saakashvili was thinking out loud about a possible Georgian military operation against Abkhazia—and he was worried that the Georgian president seemed to be interpreting his talks with Bush as some kind of flashing yellow light for military action if things continued on their present course ... He immediately let his American colleagues know about the conversation, including his concern that Saakashvili was misreading the signals coming from the Bush Administration.

Of Bryza's and Semneby's awareness of a possible Georgian incursion Asmus then relates (2010.151):

Georgians, from the president down, had talked to Bryza—but also to his EU counterpart, Peter Semneby—*on occasion in years past* about the possibility of a Georgian military move in Abkhazia. [Stress added]

Since Tbilisi's intentions were manifestly an open secret, it would defy logic to imagine that Russia was unaware of them. Under such circumstances, the anticipatory measures taken by Russia that spring (*viz.* increasing manpower and upgrading the railtrack) could reasonably be argued to be nothing other than a prudent act by the power charged by the UN with regional peace-keeping.

The 21 May was the date set for Georgia's parliamentary elections. Holders of Georgian citizenship resident in Abkhazia (mainly the Gal District) were, of course, eligible to vote. But they had to cross into Georgia to do so. News of an untoward incident involving a bus-load of such Gal residents making the crossing into Mingrelia was broadcast by Georgia's well-oiled publicity-machine and portrayed as a terrorist act perpetrated by the Abkhazians against peaceful Kartvelians simply trying to exercise their democratic right to vote. The accusation was that, after it had crossed the border, the bus came under fire from the Abkhazian side of the frontier.

²⁷ And what had been discovered at the end of the railtrack in Mingrelia, as mentioned earlier, had, quite literally, been concrete confirmation of this intention.

Three passengers were injured, one seriously. But, as so often with such claims, the truth turned out to be at variance with the initial reports. An investigation carried out by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in conjunction with Georgia's Human Rights' Centre²⁸ demonstrated that the bus had been driven directly to a football-pitch by the village of Khurcha, where representatives of the Georgian media were in place to ensure speedy broadcasting of the event. This did indeed involve shooting, but all ordnance was fired from the Georgian side of the border; although the location was inside the demilitarised zone, Georgian security forces were quickly on the scene. In other words, the whole incident had been manufactured *in Georgia* in order to paint the Abkhazians in lurid colours and raise tensions (but for what purpose?). One might also ask what the deliberate shooting at a bus-load of Mingrelians reveals about Georgian attitudes to this ethnic group, who are, as we observed at the outset, officially categorised as 'Georgians'.

In the UN Security Council on 30 May, Alasania declared that Georgia would fly no more drones over Abkhazia. On 5 June, the EU Parliament passed a resolution calling for an EU border-mission to be deployed in the area and for the withdrawal of the extra forces that Russia had recently introduced there; Putin's 16th-April decree for closer engagement with Abkhazian and South Ossetian official bodies was deplored, and the Parliament insisted on it being rescinded. The following day, Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (1999–2009), arrived in Sukhum. His mission was to get the peace-talks restarted and seek changes to both the peace-keeping and negotiating formats. The talks were conducted in a friendly atmosphere, and it was noted with satisfaction that the Spaniard had the courtesy to refer to the Abkhazian head of state as 'President' Bagapsh. No agreement was achieved, however, and Solana stated on his departure that no changes could be forced on the Abkhazians but would have to be engineered through the mutual agreement of the sides. A report subsequently reached Sukhum that, before he left Tbilisi, he had been overheard expressing alarm at how the Georgians might act.

June also witnessed a strange development. A meeting was secretly arranged by NGOs in Sweden (15–17 June) between such leading figures as Abkhazia's Foreign Minister Shamba and, for the Georgian side, UN Ambassador Alasania. Asmus (2010.159) included a paragraph on it. He

²⁸ The relevant report may be consulted at: www.humanrights.ge/inbox.php?a=article&id=2754&lang=en.

claimed that Bryza and Alasania had proposed to the Abkhazian side at their earlier meetings in Sukhum such possibilities as:

- the establishment of a free economic zone allowing Abkhazia to form economic ties with other countries;
- an international civilian police-presence in Mingrelian settlements in the Gal District along the border;
- a non-use-of-force pledge from Tbilisi.

Asmus also asserted that, whilst the Abkhazians had seemed to find some appeal in these ideas in May, they were no longer so attracted in June. Whilst one can understand the allure of securing a non-use-of-force agreement from Saak'ashvili, as this had long been deemed a *sine qua non* for the resumption of talks, it is difficult to understand how the internationalising of a police-presence on any part of Abkhazian soil could have been even remotely entertained, for this idea had been floated before always to be rejected out of hand, as it would have undermined the Abkhazians' sovereignty and would have threatened to be a first step in reducing their control over the whole of their territory and in strengthening *pari passu* Tbilisi's position there, for the international community, from which such new policing personnel would be drawn, had from the very start of the conflict committed itself to backing Georgia.²⁹

Whilst the Abkhazian side has said little, if anything, about the talks in Sweden, here is the description provided by the International Alert document *Dialogue on Security Guarantees in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict. Understanding Conflict. Building Peace* of September 2009³⁰ (p. 13):

The Abkhaz side demanded the withdrawal of Georgian military units from the Upper Kodori Valley, as Georgia's actions violated previously signed agreements, including the Moscow Agreement of 14th May 1994. The Abkhaz side said that the withdrawal of Georgian forces from the Upper Kodori Valley would open up possibilities for the resumption of the negotiation process. Georgia, at the same time, sought to change the format of the negotiations

²⁹ Similarly, any attempt to transfer responsibility for supervising Abkhazian-Georgian negotiations from the UN to the EU was fiercely resisted by Sukhum, since there was no chance to prevent pro-Georgian policies being pushed through in Brussels/Strasbourg, given the EU's persistent pro-Georgian orientation, whereas at the Security Council Russia could exercise a veto on such moves.

³⁰ This is an abbreviated English version of a longer Russian text, the Abkhazian contributions to which were edited by Liana Kvarchelia (2009).

by giving a leading role to the EU and calling for the internationalisation of the peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone.

At the same time, Georgia's military capacity was increasing. In the absence of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities, this caused serious concern in Abkhazia. In these circumstances, Abkhazia urgently demanded the signing of a document on the non-resumption of hostilities and security guarantees. Shamba and Alasania managed to agree on the text of the document: 'A statement by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on international security guarantees [?]for] the non-resumption of hostilities'. [Giorgi] Khaindrava began drafting this text when he was the Georgian government minister for conflict resolution. In this statement the sides undertook obligations to renounce the use of force and threats of the use of force. At the insistence of the Georgian side, the statement included a provision on the return of refugees, which, after discussions with the Abkhaz, was formulated in such a way as to link the solution of this problem with previous agreements and resolutions of the UN Security Council on this issue.

Shamba and Alasania reached an agreement on the format, time and place of the signing of this document. It was to be signed in Sochi in the presence of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. It is possible that the signing of this document would have defused tensions between the parties—both between Georgia and Abkhazia, and between Georgia and Russia. More importantly, it would have reaffirmed a commitment to the peacekeeping mechanisms that existed at that time—the Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CPF) and UNOMIG. *However, President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia refused to sign the statement.* [Stress added]

One point mentioned neither by Asmus nor International Alert but which might have been broached at some stage during the talks over the early summer of 2008 was the suggestion that the K'odor Valley (and possibly even the Gal District) might be transferred to Georgian control as a trade-off for recognition of the independence of the remaining parts of Abkhazia. Even if such a land-for-recognition compromise had been deemed worthy of debate by the parties to the discussions, it was unceremoniously rejected, once Abkhazia's government in its entirety became acquainted with it.³¹

Throughout June, Abkhazia suffered a spate of explosions: on the 18th, two explosions damaged the railtrack near Sukhum; on the 20th, two

³¹ The idea of exchanging land (the Gal District was most often mentioned in this context) for peace had been floated occasionally over the years. Whilst, had it been tabled and taken seriously BEFORE the 1992–3 war, it might have led to a peaceful and viable separation of Abkhazia from Georgia, it was totally unrealistic to have thought it might prove acceptable to the Abkhazians after their clear military victory in 1993.

bombs went off in Gagra, causing injuries; on the 30th, two bombs exploded near the Sukhum market, again causing injuries; and, on 2 July, a device was thrown from a car at Russian peace-keepers beside the Ingur, once more causing injuries. Then, at 10.58 pm on 6 July, a bomb went off by a café in the town of Gal, killing four and injuring six people. The café was normally closed at that time, and so there may have been no intention to kill, but two Abkhazian security-officers (Dzhansugh Muratia, Sukhran Gumba) and a local interpreter for the UN (Anzor Lagvilava) were among the dead.³²

Diplomatic activity continued into July when German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier travelled to Sukhum for two days (17–18 July) of discussions relating to the plan he carried with him. Abkhazia's political status would be left as the last problem to be resolved, and foreign investment would only start to flow once the preliminary bundle of measures (confidence-building, signing a non-use-of-force agreement, and, thorniest of all, return of the refugees) had been implemented. Steinmeier's condescending attitude to the Abkhazians was perhaps reflected in the way he addressed Abkhazia's president, referring to him merely as 'Bagapsh'. It was only when the President imitated his guest by addressing the Foreign Minister as 'Steinmeier' that the visitor remembered his manners. Predictably, nothing came of the talks, for agreement pertaining to the refugees prior to the settling of Abkhazia's status was never likely to be achieved—after all, it never had been in the past. Tension in Abkhazia remained high, but the focus of attention was soon to shift back to South Ossetia, and the whole world would sit up and watch.

War in South Ossetia (August 2008)

From 15 to 31 July, the annual international training exercise known as 'Immediate Response' was conducted at the Vaziani military base near Tbilisi. Participating were 1,630 US servicemen, 1,000 military personnel from Georgia, plus 10 representatives each from Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Ukraine. At the same time, America and the Ukraine, along with 15

³² The largest bomb in Abkhazia that year was a car-bomb that detonated in the early hours of 25 September outside the Security Ministry, causing severe damage to the frontage of an apartment-block on the opposite side of the rather narrow street in which the Ministry stands. It has, however, been suggested that this incident might have been connected to internal matters rather than the conflict with Georgia. A barrier was later put in place to prevent vehicular access.

other countries (including Georgia), were conducting the NATO exercise 'Sea Breeze' in the Black Sea off the Crimea; it concluded on 28 July. As was often the case, Western exercises in the neighbourhood were matched by similar activity on the part of the Russian military. And, on 5 July, an exercise code-named 'Caucasian Frontier 2008' duly began. Participants were: units of the North Caucasus Military District, mainly the 58th Army, the 4th Air Force Army, Interior Ministry troops, and border-guards. Much has been made of this latter event; it has been interpreted as suspicious, if not downright sinister (e.g. Asmus 2010.21), in view of what was to occur only a few days later, but it is not normally set in the counter-balancing context of the other Transcaucasian and Black Sea training exercises in which Georgians participated alongside their Western friends.

Each year incidents regularly took place during the summer along the demarcation-line around South Ossetia, but those of 2008 seemed to be particularly intense. Sanakoev, the head of the pro-Georgian administration based in Kurta, survived an assassination-attempt on 3 July, when his car hit a landmine and came under fire. Five days later, Russian jets overflew South Ossetia as an indication that no Georgian incursion would be tolerated. Georgia raised complaints about alleged Ossetian shelling of Georgian positions and villages on 29 July. In reference to incidents following the attempt on Sanakoev's life, Saak'ashvili included the following in his letter dated 7 August and submitted by Georgia's UN ambassador to both the UN Security Council and General Assembly on 8 August (see UN document A/62/924—S/2008/535):

Then, they began attacking Georgian police, peacekeeping posts and mobile patrols. During the last few days, they undertook large-scale attacks and are continuing to attack peaceful civilians in villages.

No mention is made here of deaths having occurred at the end of July.³³ Subsequently, the situation evidently deteriorated when the Ossetians reported that residential areas and Ossetian villages had been targeted late on 1 August and in the early hours of the following morning, when six Ossetians were killed and fifteen wounded; contrary to Ossetian claims, Tbilisi asserted that Georgian forces were responding to incoming fire.

³³ Asmus (2010.26) writes:

Between 29 July and August 7, six Georgian police officers, eleven peacekeepers, and fourteen civilians were wounded. Two Georgia[n] peacekeepers were killed in action, and two later died of their wounds.

From this it is unclear when these deaths occurred.

Disparity between the accounts put forward by the opposing sides was nothing new and would surface again over the following days. But, because of the way things were developing, Tskhinval was partially evacuated as a precaution,³⁴ and, in anticipation of a story, some journalists arrived there.

The above-mentioned letter delivered to its UN addressees was a translation of an address Saak'ashvili delivered on Georgian TV³⁵ on the evening of Thursday 7 August. Certain statements included in this address gave confidence to residents of Tskhinval and Ossetian villages that there would be no escalation into full-scale war, and so they retired to their beds with a sense of reassurance. The relevant selections from the speech would be these:

I want to declare with full responsibility and confess that several hours ago, in my capacity as Commander in Chief of Georgia, I issued a very painful order directing all Georgian police forces and other units under our control not to return fire, even if they face intensive bombing. I did it deliberately ... But I once again would like to address you. My dear people, my dear fellow citizens! I love Ossetians as a President and as an ordinary citizen of this country. I admire and respect Ossetian history and culture. Every ethnic Ossetian has been an inseparable part of Georgian history for centuries. We are proud of you and our unity. Georgia is strong for its diversity. Georgia has never been and will never be a mono-ethnic country. Georgia belongs to all of us regardless of our ethnicity. Let's take care of our country together. Let's together avoid the violence. Let's work together for a better future. Let's forget everything negative that has happened in the past and let's together think about our common future.

A short time later, at 11.35 pm, on the very eve of the start of the Olympic Games in Peking, where most world-leaders were gathered, Saak'ashvili ordered his forces, who were clearly primed and ready, to implement the operation code-named /ts'minda veli/ 'Clean Field'...³⁶

At the start of the operation, Brigadier General Mamuk'a Q'urashvili, Chief of Peace-keeping Operations for the Joint Command in South Ossetia, stated on the TV-channel Rustavi-2 that the aim was 'to restore

³⁴ Following cessation of hostilities on 12 August, only 15,000 residents were reported to have remained in Tskhinval out of a pre-action population of 30,000.

³⁵ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18934&search=natural%20ally>.

³⁶ For a timeline from the Ossetian perspective of how events unfolded from 3.52 pm on 7 August through to 7.05 pm on 12 August, along with additional commentary, see the brochure *South Ossetian Tragedy. August 2008: Facts and Testimony of Genocide. Commentaries* (edited by Svetlana Mironyuk, Moscow, 2008). See also *The White Book. South Ossetian Tragedy. August 2008: Facts and Testimony of Genocide*, available at: <http://www.white-book2008.com/index.html>.

constitutional order', though he later described his pronouncement as 'unauthorised'. However, in similar vein, Premier Gurgenidze declared at the start of the working day: "The aim of our actions in the conflict-zone is to restore peace in the region, and we will not stop until we attain it." By this time, as news was beginning to circulate of Georgian shelling of Tskhinval with large-calibre guns and Grad multiple-launch rocket-systems, of casualties in the villages of Dmenis and Tsunar (Khetagurovo), and of SU-25 aircraft bombing the village of Kvernet, Russia's UN ambassador Vitalij Churkin called for an emergency-meeting of the Security Council. It met for 45 minutes in the early hours (New York time) on 8 August.³⁷ Puzzlingly, however, at this juncture when Georgia's military seemed to be in the ascendancy, Churkin could not secure agreement for a call for an immediate ceasefire, which moved him to include the following criticism in his concluding remarks:

But in her statement today in the Security Council the representative of the United States only once used the word 'condemn'—and that was against South Ossetia, for its alleged failure to attend one of the proposed meetings. And yet, they failed to find clear political terms to describe the aggressive actions of Tbilisi and of the Georgian armed forces attempting to invade Tskhinvali. It is precisely this inconsistency and this vagueness in the political position that are among the main reasons for the critical situation regarding the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict.³⁸

At mid-morning (10.41 am Moscow time)³⁹ Reintegration Minister Iak'obashvili reported that Georgia was in control of all settlements in South Ossetia other than in the Dzhava Region and that fighting was continuing in Tskhinval. By early afternoon the command-post of the Joint Peace-keeping Force had come under fire, and it was reported that there were dead and wounded; interestingly, Georgian members of the force had evidently left the post prior to the start of hostilities. It was not until late afternoon (4 pm), with locals having been sheltering in cellars for sixteen hours, that a relief-convoy of Russian armoured vehicles reached Tskhinval, followed by units of the 58th Army over the course of the coming hours. The Russians decided that, in view of the nature and level of the threat, they would not limit their activities to within the South Ossetian borders

³⁷ A summary of the meeting is in document SC/9417, available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9417.doc.htm>.

³⁸ For the full discussion at that meeting see: http://www.undemocracy.com/security-council/meeting_5951#pg002-bko8.

³⁹ Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia follow Moscow time, whilst Georgia is one hour ahead.

but would disable Georgia's ability to continue, or at some point in the near future to return to, armed intervention. Therefore, the military base in Gori, which controlled operations around South Ossetia, was targeted, as were other strategic objects, such as the airforce-base in Marneuli. Some 22 hours after giving his forces the green light, Saak'ashvili announced that, in the light of Russia's response, he would be withdrawing half of Georgia's contingent of 2,000 troops from Iraq; on 11 August, US planes ferried 800 troops and armoured vehicles home from Iraq to Georgia. The Security Council met for a second time later on 8 August, and the general tenor of the comments was one of criticism of Russia's response (rather than of Tbilisi's initial intervention), as revealed in this contribution from US Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad:

[T]he deteriorating situation, with the introduction of additional Russian forces and Russian bombings, caused serious concerns about that country's commitment to respect Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and about its own overall goals. The United States called on the Russian Federation to cease attacks on Georgia, respect its territorial integrity and withdraw its combat forces from Georgian territory.⁴⁰

Abkhazia Opens a Second Front

Though Saak'ashvili issued a warning to the Abkhazians not to take any actions of a military nature of their own, Bagapsh announced a general mobilisation,⁴¹ ordering personnel to present themselves at their muster-points on Monday morning (11 August). No-one knew if Georgia itself would also move against Abkhazia (to effect the incursion that had been planned there for the spring), where expectations were that it would. Also, it should not be forgotten that Abkhazia and South Ossetia had a mutual defence-agreement, and the easiest way for Abkhazia to fulfil its obligations was to pressure Georgian forces by opening a second front. Needless to say, there was a glaringly obvious place where this could be done.

Manifestly, there was discussion with the Russians about how to respond, and the decision was taken that, in order to eliminate the threat of similar aggression against Abkhazia, the situation obtaining in the K'odor Valley, which, as we have stressed above, had been a thorn in Abkhazia's

⁴⁰ See Document SC/9418, available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9418.doc.htm>.

⁴¹ It needs to be emphasised that this summons was the direct result of, and not a precursor to, Georgia's military adventure in South Ossetia.

flesh since the end of the war in September 1993 but more especially since the introduction there of military personnel in 2006, should finally be resolved. Over the weekend (9–10 August), the troops stationed there were softened up by bombing raids. At the same time, some 8,000 troop-reinforcements for the peace-keepers on the ground and 350 armoured vehicles were landed in Sukhum and Ochamchira and transported to the frontier along the Ingur, in readiness for the push that was planned for Monday 11 August towards the military base in Senak'i, which controlled operations in western Georgia (including the activities of Georgian forces in the K'odor Valley). The atmosphere in the region was extremely tense, and few residents had time to think about the Olympics or to watch anything other than reports emanating from South Ossetia, the Security Council or Moscow's military briefings conducted by Deputy-General Chief of Staff Colonel-General Anatolij Nogovitsyn; the fear was widespread that Abkhazia too might be imminently subjected to bombardment of the same order as that inflicted on South Ossetia or assault from the sea along its lengthy coastline, as had happened on 14 August 1992. Exaggerated estimates of the numbers killed in South Ossetia, which caused commentators to speak of an attempted 'genocide' (a potent and quite specific term far too easily bandied about, both in the Caucasus and elsewhere, and consequently in danger of suffering devaluation) only increased the collective sense of apprehension and anxiety.

News of the developments in Abkhazia reached the UN, and they were mentioned in condemnatory terms by various speakers (obviously excluding Ambassador Churkin for Russia) at the Security Council's third meeting on the crisis, held on 10 August. For example, the US Ambassador protested that

... the conflict had expanded with the launch of a Russian-backed military offensive in the Abkhaz region of Georgia, preceded by a demand by Abkhazia for the withdrawal of the peacekeeping presence in the Kodori Valley. That area had since been bombed in what was a direct challenge to a Security Council-mandated Mission, and some Abkhaz officials had stated their intention to drive Georgian officials out of the Valley.

To this Churkin retorted that

... over the past three or four days, the Council had been holding meetings on the situation, which had arisen due to the aggression by Georgia against South Ossetia. The meetings had begun at the initiative of the Russian Federation, which had insisted on an open format. Today's meeting was taking place on the joint initiative of Georgia and the United States. Everybody

knew how close relations between those States had become in recent years. During preceding meetings, Georgia's representative had named some supposedly Russian citizens in South Ossetia as proof that Russia was governing South Ossetia. According to the Russian delegation's information, however, Georgia had at least 127 advisers from the United States Department of Defense. On 7 August, the day when Georgia had launched military actions against South Ossetia, there had been a joint Georgia-United States military exercise under the name 'Immediate Response'. The current events were not unexpected ... Russia had on many occasions drawn international attention to the situation in South Ossetia, in particular Georgia's efforts to increase its offensive weapons. In fact, Georgia had increased its military budget by 30 times, and now the purpose of that action was becoming clear. When speaking of the close cooperation between the United States and Georgia, the Russian Federation did not wish to think that the United States had given the green light on the Georgian leadership's military action.

He went on to draw some pertinent parallels, observing:

When others were lamenting the death of civilians in Georgia, why weren't they worried about the attacks on villages in South Ossetia? How could the international community react when, despite all the international agreements—Russian peacekeepers were acting in South Ossetia in accordance with the agreement of 1992, signed by Georgia and South Ossetia—Georgia directly targeted peacekeepers and civilians? Had Georgia expected peacekeepers to run away as they had in Srebrenica? The Russian Federation could not allow the civilian population in South Ossetia or peacekeepers to be attacked. It was not occupying South Ossetia, and its reaction had been appropriate. The question was whether the Georgian side was reasonable in its aggression.⁴²

A combination of Abkhazian and Russian troops duly crossed the Ingur into Mingrelia on Monday 11 August. Any opposing military forces that might have been there previously had melted away, and so the contingent pressed forward to Senak'i, which they found to have been abandoned. The base was neutralised and all moveable hardware⁴³ removed to Abkhazia; some units reportedly even moved towards Georgia's second city of Kutaisi to see how prepared Georgian troops were to defend their territory, but no resistance was encountered even there. It should be stressed that there was no plundering of property or harassment of the local population in this

⁴² For the discussion from which these citations are drawn, see Document SC/9419, available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9419.doc.htm> or http://www.undemocracy.com/securitycouncil/meeting_5953#pg007-bk02.

⁴³ Including some 40 computers, which were sent to Moscow for examination.

operation, though at some point the provocatively positioned youth-camp just over the border at Ganmukhuri was razed to the ground.

Bagapsh decided not to send the (exclusively) Abkhazian infantry forces into the Upper K'odor Valley that Monday in order to give the local Svan population time to withdraw over the mountains into Svanetia for safety during the forthcoming assault on Georgia's military emplacements. The Abkhazians, thus, moved in at dawn on Tuesday 12 August, not knowing what difficulties would face them in clearing the Valley of a militia which had had two years to dig in since being deployed there in 2006. In fact, to everyone's surprise (and huge relief), it turned out that Saak'ashvili's men had simply fled (to the great consternation of those back in Tbilisi, who could not understand how troops occupying the heights could abandon their positions, without offering the slightest defence). The joke in Abkhazia was: 'So much, then, for US and other Western training!'⁴⁴ Those who object to this withering judgment argue that America's Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), which developed in 2002, "was initially a response to Moscow's demands for Georgia to allow Russian troops into the Pankisi Gorge in 1999 to pursue Chechen terrorists. Subsequent training focused on specific counter-terror capabilities and helping Georgian forces prepare to deploy to Iraq" (Asmus 2010.173).

Only one person lost his life in the liberation of the Valley. An Abkhazian, while checking a house for snipers, found a Georgian uniform and thought he would play a joke on colleagues: donning the uniform, he emerged, uttering a few words in Georgian—he was shot in the mistaken belief that he was an enemy-combatant.

Mines had been laid at certain strategic points, such as under the bridge in the village of Chkhaltá, and some of these locations were revealed to the Abkhazians by Svans who had stayed behind, thus earning for themselves respect and the right to retain and carry guns in the post-conflict period. The victorious soldiers were horrified at the amount of weaponry they discovered stored in dumps in the Valley.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Bechhofer (1921.14) for an earlier low evaluation of Georgians' fighting potential at the time of the Menshevik government.

⁴⁵ A catalogue of the weaponry was published in the newspaper *Respublika Abxazija* for 9–10 September 2008 (p. 2). The list is: Up to 10,000 rounds for hand-held anti-tank grenade-launchers of type RPG-7; Up to 600 individual rounds for hand-held anti-tank grenade-launchers of type PG-9; Up to 1,500 rounds for (?) under-barrel grenade-launchers; Up to 600 individual shells for 82mm mortars; Up to 350 unguided rocket-missiles (NURS) S-8; 124,000 5.45mm cartridges (one KAMaz truck-load); 43,200 cartridges with tracer-bullets TS; 8 individual 122mm howitzers D-30 plus 1,500 artillery-shells for them; 804 indi-

The military trophies amassed by the Abkhazians (from both the K'odor and Senak'i) were taken to Sukhum and put on display for a brief period of 24 hours, as the exhibition was prematurely closed, reportedly in response to a request from a mortified American Government.⁴⁶ Not unreasonably, the Abkhazians raised questions as to how the UNOMIG observers, who regularly patrolled the K'odor Valley (see Map 2 for the relevant area), had failed to notice the relevant stock-piles. Bemusement was, however, the Abkhazians' reaction at some other finds, such as a hut in Chkhaltva vaingloriously emblazoned with the title-board (in American-English!) 'NATO Information Center'! Another aspirational slogan written across a signpost-like wooden plank boasted (in Georgian this time) /chveni mizani axlosaa/ 'Our Goal Is Nigh'. One intriguing (and worrying) discovery was made on a computer that was conveyed to Sukhum for analysis. It contained a series of photographs depicting two males in US military fatigues giving instruction to a class of eager Georgians on how to construct improvised explosive devices; the photos were shewn to the plane-load of journalists ferried down from Moscow to both Tskhinval and Sukhum after the cessation of hostilities and speedily posted on the Net (at www.warandpeace.ru). As the Abkhazian infantry advanced up the deserted Valley, they came upon the branch of Zugdidi Bank in the village of Azhara and shot the ATM to pieces; custom-duty forms were still being blown around the shell of the building a year later.

By the end of Tuesday 12 August, the whole of Abkhazia was finally under the control of the authorities in Sukhum, thereby sealing the gaping wound that had festered since the war of 1992–93, and, indeed, at 4 pm the same day Russia declared that hostilities were finally at an end in South Ossetia—they denied that the ceasefire supposedly ordered by Saak'ashvili to take effect from 5 am on 10 August had been observed by Georgian forces.

vidual shells for 60mm mortars of American manufacture; 4 multi-purpose, light-armoured vehicles (MTLB); 4 anti-aircraft placements of the type ZU-23-2; one 57mm cannon; one rocket volley-firing system LAR. Also removed was a large amount of military-technical material for military units (tents, magazines for weapons, oil-cans, cartridge-pouches, spare-parts for weapons, belts, cases, etc...). Compare this with the description of the Georgian 'police-units' in Asmus (2010.148): "The Georgians had armed police units there that were the equivalent of light infantry and were capable of putting up a significant fight in mountainous terrain if attacked, *but they had little offensive capability.*" [Stress added]

⁴⁶ Apart from the USA, other countries that had provided Georgia with arms were: Israel, the Ukraine, the UK, Germany, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Poland; two vessels had been gifted to Georgia by Greece in 1998 and 1999.

Russian losses in the air had been higher than anticipated, largely as a result of such air-defence systems as Israel's Rafael Spyder and the Ukraine's SA-11, which Georgia had managed to acquire; America, apparently, also provided Tbilisi with information about Russian air-activity (as revealed in Asmus 2010.181). Reports from Israel on 11 August suggested that the export to Georgia of weapons and other military products would be terminated, whilst an Israeli paper (*Maariv*) put an estimated value of \$300 million on the military-technical cooperation between the two countries (*South Ossetian Tragedy*, p. 89).

Towards midnight on 10 August, a Russian warship patrolling off the coast of Abkhazia had been approached by four Georgian motorboats and had sunk one of them. As Georgia's naval vessels continued to pose a danger to Abkhazia, their home-port of Poti in neighbouring Mingrelia was one of the military objectives that Russia decided needed to be neutralised. This was among the sites temporarily occupied by the Russians, and all vessels that could pose a threat to Abkhazia were sunk at their moorings. When rumours of a Georgian ship sunk at sea filtered through to Abkhazia, they initially evoked feelings of disbelief which quickly turned to amazement; the sight of the remaining vessels cluttering the harbour in Poti was greeted with delight and satisfaction when broadcast on TV, especially as at least one of them (the *Diosk'uria*) had been pointedly christened by the Georgians after the ancient Greek designation for Sukhum.⁴⁷ After Russia's fleet became involved, Kiev announced that it would prevent the return to their base in Sevastopol in the Crimea of any vessels suspected of having engaged in combat off the Georgian coast, an eventuality that (Ukrainian) Nikita Krushchev could hardly have envisaged, when he transferred the Crimea from Russia to his native republic.⁴⁸

Despite the cessation of hostilities, Russian troops remained in position over large tracts of Georgian territory (viz. beyond the frontiers of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) until a formal agreement was signed with Tbilisi and its provisions implemented. Russian navy-vessels began not just to be seen anchored off the Abkhazian coast but even to appear in Sukhum bay, dock-

⁴⁷ Another Georgian patrol-boat, based in the southern port of Batumi, was named after Gen. Mazniashvili, who had stirred such hatred amongst the Abkhazians (and South Ossetians) for his 'fire and sword' tactics in their provinces during the Menshevik period.

⁴⁸ Russia's lease on the Sevastopol base expires in 2017. A feasibility-study conducted after the Georgian-Abkhazian war indicated that Skurcha (Ochamchira) could be developed to provide the best deep-water harbour anywhere along the Black Sea's eastern littoral. Might Ochamchira be destined to become a more dependable alternative to Sevastopol in the longer term?

ing beside the pier where in Soviet times tourists would embark for pleasure-cruises. They were fêted by the townsfolk, who would flock to have their photographs taken alongside them; on occasions, locals were even allowed to take a tour on board.

We saw above that the first response of the international community (barring Russia) following Georgia's engagement in South Ossetia late on 7 August/early on 8 August, as exemplified at the first session of the Security Council to discuss the matter, had been strangely muted. This all changed suddenly when the nature of Russia's response became clear. The need for international mediation was recognised, and, for whatever reason (perhaps because it was a Europe-based organisation, OSCE, which had long held the mandate for supervising happenings around South Ossetia?), it was decided to charge the EU with the task of intervening. The presidency of the EU at that time lay in French hands, and so it fell to French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and President Nicolas Sarkozy to exercise their diplomatic skills.

Kouchner flew to Tbilisi in the company of Finnish Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairman Alex Stubb on 9 August, whilst Sarkozy went to Moscow on 12 August. In addition to holding talks with Georgia's then-Foreign Minister, Ek'a(at'erine) T'q'eshelashvili, Kouchner also visited Tskhinval, where he seemed genuinely affected by the devastation he witnessed and the personal accounts he was given by those who had suffered in the onslaught. The attempt to agree on a text that would prove acceptable to all parties was fraught with difficulties. However, the 6-point, so-called Medvedev-Sarkozy plan was hammered out and taken down to Tbilisi on 12 August personally by the French leaders. The six points being proposed were:

- No resorting to the use of force
- Complete halt to hostilities
- Free access for humanitarian aid
- Withdrawal of Georgia's armed forces to their permanent positions
- Withdrawal of the Russian Federation's armed forces to the line where they were stationed before the start of hostilities; additional security-measures to be taken by the Russian peace-keeping forces prior to the implementation of international mechanisms
- International debate on the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and on ways to ensure their lasting security to take place

The Frenchmen arrived as a rally was taking place in the centre of the Georgian capital, but Sarkozy wisely refused to be coaxed into addressing the crowd. While the French were trying to persuade the Georgians to accept the document, the presidents of the three Baltic republics plus Poland and the Ukraine arrived. This prompted Saak'ashvili to leave the talks in order to appear with his opposite-numbers at the rally, where they all linked arms in front of the assembled throng in a display of former Eastern-bloc solidarity and defiance towards Russia.⁴⁹ Returning to his French guests, Saak'ashvili expressed his disappointment at the text, pointing out that there was no mention of Georgia's territorial integrity and insisting that he could not entertain any idea of South Ossetia and Abkhazia gaining a status other than that which Tbilisi had been offering for the previous decade and a half, for the wording implied that this was a distinct possibility. The French would not budge on the question of inserting a clause about territorial integrity, maintaining that it was their role simply to engineer a ceasefire. However, Sarkozy did succeed in persuading Medvedev to alter the wording of the sixth point, so that the final text of it read: Starting an international debate leading to the guaranteeing of stable security for South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁵⁰

The leaders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Kokoiti and Bagapsh) put their signatures to the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan in Moscow on 14 August. The next day, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice flew to Tbilisi in the hope of persuading Saak'ashvili to sign. After some stressful hours, Saak'ashvili too became a reluctant signatory. At the subsequent press-conference, his frustrations got the better of him, as he delivered the following rant:

So who invited the trouble here? Who invited this arrogance? Who invited these innocent deaths? Who is—not only those people who perpetrate them are responsible but also those people who failed to stop it. And who is now

⁴⁹ David Cameron, then leader of the Conservative opposition but later UK Prime Minister following Great Britain's May 2010 general election, was an early visitor to Tbilisi on 16 August—on 11 November 2011, in a demonstration of continuing UK support, Cameron welcomed Saak'ashvili to 10, Downing Street. A few days after Cameron's rush to Tbilisi, the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband followed in his footsteps. During a link-up from Tbilisi with Emily Maitlis for the BBC 2 *Newsnight* programme, broadcast worldwide on BBC World TV, Miliband made not a single mention of the South Ossetians in his interview about the war. And, in various appearances before camera, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer huffed and puffed in indignation not at Saak'ashvili's assault on South Ossetia but exclusively at Russia's actions in response, stating that there could be no normal relations with Russia under the circumstances then obtaining.

⁵⁰ For the Russian text of the final version of the Six Points see Tanaev (2008.241).

trying to look for every excuse, saying, oh, you know, Georgians might have started it. Excuse me? Twelve hundred tanks came into Georgia within few hours. There is no way you can mobilise those tanks in such a fast period unless you were ready. There were Russian pensioners taken off the streets of Moscow to fly the planes several days before the invasion. There was no way they were not preparing the invasion ... And, unfortunately, today we are looking evil directly in the eye. And today this evil is very strong, very nasty, and very dangerous—for everybody, not only for us ... I want the world to know, never, ever will Georgia reconcile with occupation of even one square kilometer of its sovereign territory. Never, ever.⁵¹

Rice's face during the delivery of this tirade from the individual in whom the USA had invested such hopes and political capital (not to mention hard cash) was a picture of exasperation!⁵²

⁵¹ Quoted from Asmus (2010.210), himself citing the site: www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=2&st=10&id=2712.

⁵² In spite of all the disappointment starting to be voiced about the Georgian president as calm began to be restored, Saak'ashvili (or perhaps henceforth one should more accurately speak of the Georgians rather than specifically their leader, who would increasingly be seen as but the latest in a line of flawed holders of the Georgian presidency) continued to attract support. During the days when the ceasefire was being negotiated, Senator John McCain, campaigning for the US presidency, enunciated the immortal: "Today, we are all Georgians!" Senator Joe Biden, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations' Committee and soon to become the US Vice-President, paid a visit to Georgia in the footsteps of Condoleezza Rice and stated he would propose an aid-package for Georgia to the tune of \$1 billion. During a trip to Washington in April 2010, when he was denied the bilateral meeting with President Obama that he desired, Saak'ashvili was pressed by a journalist to give an assurance that these funds had been used for exclusively humanitarian purposes; no such assurance was given. However, in an article "There's no one under the bus" (Foreign Policy at: www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/16/whos_under_the_bus) Samuel Charap, writing on 16 June 2010, observed that the Georgians "are deeply unhappy that the administration has continued the de facto embargo on U.S. arms sales that was imposed after the August 2008 war which they say is denying them the capacity to defend themselves", which suggests that the flow of US weaponry at least did dry up. Charap went on to cite the view of US Assistant Secretary of Defense Alexander Vershbow on the performance of the Georgian military: "In practically all areas, [Georgian] defense institutions, strategies, doctrine, and professional military education were found to be seriously lacking", and this after years of Western training. Writing to mark the second anniversary of the August 2008 war, John McCain returned to the theme of providing arms to Georgia (*The Washington Post*, 8 August 2010; see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/06/AR2010080605368.html>):

[I]t has been a struggle to get the administration to provide Georgian troops heading into combat even basic equipment, armored vehicles and replacement parts. Beyond this short-term assistance, Georgia needs long-term support to provide for its own defense. This is likely to entail antitank capabilities, air defenses, early-warning radar and other defensive systems that should not be misconstrued as U.S. endorsement for any Georgian use of force against its separatist regions.

The final signature was added to the ceasefire-agreement on 16 August when Medvedev himself signed. The wording of the text of the Six Points was widely criticised for laxness and imprecision, and Russia was able to exploit the fifth provision. Though withdrawal from the conflict-zones themselves began on 18 August, Russia was not going to be rushed into withdrawing troops from Georgian territory and held them in position at the check-points they had set up and at strategic spots, where considerable damage to infrastructure (such as the port in Poti, bridges and the railway-line) was inflicted. All of this was done in order to impede any resurgence in military movements on the part of Georgia.

Sarkozy revisited Medvedev in Moscow on 8 September to hammer out a supplement to the original plan, whereby:

- Russian forces would withdraw from their check-points and operations outside the conflict-zones by 15 October;
- Talks were to take place on a regular basis in Geneva on problems relating to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the chief participants being: Georgia, Russia and the USA (with the UN, EU and OSCE as co-chairmen and with representatives from South Ossetia and Abkhazia in attendance);⁵³
- A 200-strong European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to ensure compliance would be constituted.

The Russians declared they would quit Georgia by 10 October, but the *status quo ante bellum* was never to be restored.

American aid began to be delivered to Georgia from 14 August, and there were suspicions that it might not be of an entirely humanitarian nature. Tensions were then (?needlessly) raised after a summit of NATO foreign ministers on 19 August, when on 22 August USS destroyer McFaul of the US 6th Fleet entered the Black Sea, anchoring off Batumi on 24 August as part of 'Operation Assured Delivery';⁵⁴ US vessels were joined by those from such NATO allies as Germany, Spain and Poland. With Russian vessels on patrol not far to the north, off the Abkhazian coast, it was not long

At the same time, there was a belief in Abkhazian, South Ossetian and Russian circles that Georgia was already in a higher state of military preparedness than had been the case two years previously.

⁵³ The first meeting took place on 15 October.

⁵⁴ Vindimian (2010.6) claims that Turkey exercised its right under the 1936 Montreux Convention by refusing to permit (?more) US naval vessels to pass through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea.

before some started to recall the dangerous naval movements in the Caribbean during the Cuban missile-crisis.⁵⁵

The 21st August witnessed meetings in both Tskhinval and Sukhum to call for recognition of the independence of their respective states. That same evening the principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, Valerij Gergiev, himself a Moscow-born Ossete, together with the St. Petersburg Marinski Orchestra, gave open-air performances in Tskhinval of Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony, composed as a patriotic symbol of that city's defiance throughout the German siege during World War II, and of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique Symphony. But there will have been a difference of mood between the two capitals that day. The Abkhazians had, after all, finally regained control of the K'odor Valley with hardly any casualties, and, whilst most of the Svan residents there had elected to flee along with the Georgian troops, Bagapsh quickly declared that the Abkhazian government had no objection to those who had never taken up arms against the Abkhazians remaining in, or returning to, their K'odor homes.⁵⁶ And so, everyone was in high spirits and hoping for a positive outcome to their call. In Tskhinval and more widely in South Ossetia, on the other hand, emotions were still raw, and they were etched on the faces of those attending the concert. Regrettably, the pent up rage from the previous days (and, indeed, years) was vented by a section of Ossetian society in ways that would cast a long shadow over the republic's reputation.

As Georgian forces started to fall back, acts of vengeance began to be perpetrated against ethnic Georgians and their property, especially in the formerly Georgian-occupied villages north of Tskhinval. As is well-known, the tradition of vendetta is endemic to the Caucasus,⁵⁷ and there were Ossetes who saw this as their chance to exact revenge for wrongs⁵⁸ stretch-

⁵⁵ The notion of placing Soviet missiles on Cuba had entered Krushchev's mind when he was on vacation in Pitsunda (Abkhazia) and the closeness to the USSR of US missiles located just across the Black Sea in Turkey was drawn to his attention.

⁵⁶ By the summer of 2009, when the present author visited the area, very few Svans had responded. Abkhazian troops and trainee soldiers stationed there were under instructions only to greet any locals they met and not to attempt to engage them in conversation so as to avoid any possibility of a quarrel erupting.

⁵⁷ In one of his press-conferences at this period, Russian Foreign Minister Sergej Lavrov took mischievous delight in reminding Saak'ashvili that he himself had stated that blood-feuds in the Caucasus can be measured not in years but centuries.

⁵⁸ On 1 July 2002, a Russian plane, carrying holiday-makers, collided with a freight-plane over southern Germany. All on board both planes were killed. It transpired that a Swiss trainee-controller had made a fatal error, which led to the disaster. Some months later, the

ing back 90 years to the days when Georgia was independent under its Menshevik government and largely to rid the region of a Georgian presence once and for all.⁵⁹ The *Human Rights' Watch* report *Up in Flames. Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia*⁶⁰ lists a catalogue of human rights' abuses committed by Ossetians (and possibly others) in the wake of the military victory. The report suggests that, whilst in the early days the Russians seem to have taken steps to prevent some of these excesses, they later refrained from interfering and thus found themselves censured, along with the actual perpetrators, for such acts of omission.⁶¹ The consequence was a South Ossetia largely cleansed of ethnic Georgians, who, along with the Svans who had left the K'odor Valley on 11 August, added to the refugee-problems that Georgia had faced since the flight of most of the Kartvelian residents from Abkhazia in the autumn of 1993. Interestingly, resources were speedily found to erect houses to accommodate the 20,000 Georgian refugees from South Ossetia,⁶² whereas the bulk of the mostly Mingrelian refugees from Abkhazia had been left to their own devices, many (?most) living in wretched conditions since crossing into Georgia; for propaganda-purposes, a number were immediately housed in two hotels in central Tbilisi (including the former Intourist Iveria Hotel),⁶³ where they served as a constant reminder to Western visitors of Georgia's need for humanitarian assistance. However, when Saak'ashvili came to power in 2004, he smartly ejected them, offering

Swiss controller was murdered. He had been tracked down by a man who had lost his wife and children in the crash. The revenge-taker was an Ossete... No mercy was shewn to Ossetians who fought on the Georgian side; if captured, they were executed.

⁵⁹ According to the International Crisis Group's report 'South Ossetia: the Burden of Recognition' (Europe Report 205, 7 June 2010, available at www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/caucasus/georgia/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.aspx): "Today no more than 2,500 ethnic Georgians remain in South Ossetia, mostly in the Akhagori district" (p. 3), this being the eastern region mostly under Georgian control before the war but now hosting Russian troops a mere 50 km. from the Georgian capital. Nevertheless, the border between Akhagori and Georgia does remain open for those holding local residency-papers, even though, in general, South Ossetia's border with Georgia was closed in October 2008.

⁶⁰ 1-56432-427-3, January 2009, available at: www.hrw.org/reports/2009/01/22/flames-0.

⁶¹ A fascinating parallel to the US military's behaviour in Iraq, as revealed by the confidential documents posted on *Wikileaks* on 22 October 2010.

⁶² No such resources have ever been set aside, much less paid, in reparation for all the damage caused by Georgian military actions over two decades inside South Ossetia (or Abkhazia, where the amount of compensation would be considerably higher than for South Ossetia, given the extent of destruction).

⁶³ Renovated in 2009 and now the luxury Radisson Iveria Blu.

\$7,000 per room as compensation, on the grounds that they represented an eyecore in the centre of Georgia's metropolis.⁶⁴

Recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Following the 21st-August mass-meetings, events moved at an unanticipated pace. The Russian legislature met on 25 August and added its voice to the calls for recognition. At 3 pm (Moscow time) the following day, President Dmitry Medvedev announced in a live-broadcast from the Kremlin that the Russian Federation recognised the independent republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, belatedly demonstrating that what had been sauce for the Western goose in Kosovo was equally sauce for the Russian gander in Transcaucasia; diplomatic relations were established on 9 September 2008. The Gordian Knot that had left these regions in the uncertain limbo of a state of 'no war, no peace' since the early 1990s had finally been cut! Elation exploded on the streets of Sukhum within five minutes of the declaration as expressed by hooting of horns and automatic gunfire into the air from the passenger-seats in cars racing (even more wildly than usual) through the city, by the unfurling and flying of flags from windows, and by the uncorking of champagne-bottles. The celebrations went on until the early hours and were repeated across both new states. The universal hope was that all problems were now in the past and that a bright new dawn had broken. But the comment of Abkhazia's ailing war-leader and first president, Vladislav Ardzinba, was more soberly realistic in tone: "The dreadful times are behind us, but now the difficult times begin."

Of course, no-one would be so naïve as to argue that Russia had acted purely out of altruism. Vladimir Putin on his first visit to Abkhazia on 12 August 2009 publicly acknowledged this self-evident fact. The interests of Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia happened to coincide at the time and culminated in the act of recognition. As far as the newly recognised states themselves were concerned, the two long-disputed regions would have greater confidence in building their futures, firm in the knowledge that the

⁶⁴ Further removals at short notice to the provinces in late August 2010 gave rise to protests, some refugees even sewing their lips to indicate that their plight had been ignored for almost two decades. See Matt Robinson and Margarita Antidze's report *Georgia under fire over refugee evictions* for Reuters at <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE67Qo6B.htm>. Discontent at their abandonment was still being voiced at the time of writing.

level of the external threat from Georgia would be drastically reduced (if not entirely eliminated), were Russia to guarantee the inviolability of their borders or, as they have been artificially relabelled by those unable to bring themselves to regard them as international frontiers, the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL). Russia itself, on the other hand, would almost certainly gain a permanent presence in western Transcaucasia for both military bases and investment and could argue that agreements with governments it had recognised as sovereign on the delicate matter of troop-numbers in the region nullified any requirements in the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan for troop-reductions in the areas concerned.⁶⁵ Georgia's aspiration to join NATO was to all intents and purposes dead, for, even if there had been any doubt about it beforehand, there could be no question now that Tbilisi exercised (or ever would exercise) the slightest control over either Abkhazia and South Ossetia—membership for Georgia within its Soviet frontiers is inconceivable, and would NATO, especially with the Bush administration consigned to history, ever seriously contemplate admitting Georgia and thus having its troops in such precarious proximity to those of Russia? In fact, a commentary for *Newsweek* on 13 June 2010 entitled 'A casualty of reset relations'⁶⁶ made exactly this point:

Washington's reset with Moscow has one very clear casualty: Georgia. The U.S. insists that it still supports Georgia's territorial integrity. But Washington also says that Russia's ongoing occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia 'need no longer be considered an obstacle' to ratifying an agreement on joint civilian nuclear cooperation originally mooted after Russia's 2008 invasion. And even though Russia has failed to get international recognition for the rebel regions' independence, the U.S.'s growing closeness to Moscow effectively seals Georgia's dismemberment. Russia certainly seems to assume so: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recently told the Duma that the 2009 U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Charter is a 'relic of past U.S. policies'.

⁶⁵ Whilst Russian forces withdrew from Georgian soil, they are present in the K'odor Valley and in those parts of South Ossetia which were under Georgian control prior to the hostilities. Point 5 of the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan called for withdrawal to actual positions held prior to hostilities, but, following Russia's recognition of the two new states, it would be peculiar not to station troops where the recognised authorities of those states deem their presence to be essential (e.g. near Sak'en/Sakj'an at the head of the K'odor Valley). Western politicians or composers of recommendatory reports (such as those periodically issued by the International Crisis Group) who have these discrepancies in mind when they reiterate Russia's obligation to fulfil all the terms of the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan fail to appreciate that such ritualistic calls effectively set them in a modern-day *Nephelococcygia* (or Arisphanes' 'Cloud-Cuckoo Land').

⁶⁶ See <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/06/13/a-casualty-of-reset-relations.html>.

NATO, too, is warming to Moscow and cooling toward Tbilisi. A NATO–Georgia Commission set up in September 2008 hasn’t set any concrete membership targets for Georgia to meet. That’s a clear signal the alliance is in no hurry to talk about Georgian accession. More, the French are close to completing the sale of missile-bearing warships to Russia, which plans to deploy them to defend Abkhazia. Even old friends like Poland and the Baltics, which once clamored for NATO membership, now seem relieved by Washington’s step back from NATO expansion and missile-defense plans.

All in all, that leaves Tbilisi pretty isolated. But old friends who once saw Georgia as a strategic bridgehead now see it as more of a liability—in the process sending a signal to Moscow that the West prefers to strike diplomatic deals rather than get tangled in conflicts in Russia’s backyard.

Though Russia was savagely condemned worldwide for allegedly violating international law in terms of the nature and extent of its actions during the Five Day War (to say nothing of its recognition of 26 August),⁶⁷ Nicolai Petro, Professor of Political Science at the University of Rhode Island (USA), presented a detailed counter-argument (2009). Whatever view one takes, in essence, the Kremlin checkmated Georgia and its Western backers and even gained some (albeit perhaps transitory) *kudos* elsewhere in the Caucasus for being perceived to have acted in defence of the interests of fellow North Caucasians.⁶⁸ Despite the Jeremiah-like warnings that, by challenging a neighbour’s territorial integrity and recognising secessionist regions, the Kremlin could have provided a stimulus to demands for independence in many territories across the vast swathes of the Russian Federation and undermined its own case for retaining control over them, no such separatist reaction has so far been detected. If, however, regime-change in Tbilisi had ever been a prime Russian *desideratum*,⁶⁹ as many

⁶⁷ Leading Swedish diplomat Carl Bildt, who, as is clear from the pages of Asmus (2010), was privy to Saak’ashvili’s intention to attack, at different times, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, used most undiplomatic language in this regard. He predicted a ‘miserable’ lot of other countries (naming Belarus, Syria, Cuba and Venezuela) as likely to follow Russia’s lead in granting recognition. He was particularly scathing of South Ossetia: “South Ossetian independence is a joke. We are talking about a smugglers’ paradise of 60,000 financed by the Russian security services. No-one can seriously consider that as an independent state.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_recognition_of_Abkhazia_and_South_Ossetia. And in general, for some reason, Sweden has taken a noticeably hard line among European states over the question of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

⁶⁸ Though the Ossetians are, of course, speakers of an Iranian language, the bulk of them live in the North Caucasus.

⁶⁹ The mutual loathing between Saak’ashvili and Putin is no secret. The former, something of a giant among Georgians at 6’4”, once reportedly referred to Putin as a ‘Lilli-Putin’, whilst Putin is said to have commented to Sarkozy during the negotiations: “I want to hang Saak’ashvili by the balls.”

speculated, this goal was not achieved, though Saak'ashvili was officially categorised in Russia as a *persona non grata*; Georgia broke off diplomatic relations on 29 August (the Swiss Embassy in Moscow handling necessary business on Georgia's behalf), and flights between Russia and Georgia were again suspended, having resumed earlier in 2008 after the first suspension following the spying row of 2006. But, if it turned out to be game, set and match to Moscow, who was actually responsible for the war in the first place?

No-one in South Ossetia or, when news of the developments reached it, Abkhazia had the slightest doubt that hostilities were initiated by the Georgian forces' assault on Tskhinval and its environs late on 7 August. And such early statements by Georgian military and political leaders as those quoted above gave no reason to suppose otherwise. Could there possibly have been an alternative explanation? Once it transpired that Russia was not prepared to hang back and allow Georgia's military to re-establish control over the province by force of arms, a different version of how events had unfolded that night began to be disseminated. The prime mover in this was none other than the Georgian president, who seemed never to be off the world's TV-screens, often seated in his presidential office with the flag of the EU illegitimately on display, draped on a standard to his rear, as he frenetically sought to argue that, far from Tbilisi's having initiated hostilities 'to restore constitutional order', a Russian column had first entered South Ossetia via the Roki Tunnel, which left him with no alternative but to order his forces into action in order to mount a defence against what he argued to be the vanguard for an outright invasion of Georgian territory. According to this version, then, it was Russia which was responsible for the war.

Who Began the War?

The world's media desperately rushed to cover this David-vs-Goliath battle but, initially at least, far from conducting their own careful and objective investigations so as to be able to cast meaningful light on developments on the ground for the benefit of their viewers/readers, they essentially devoured what was fed to them by Saak'ashvili's hyperactive propaganda-machine and, by so doing, significantly contributed to the overall obfuscation and poor understanding in their respective home-countries of what

was actually taking place.⁷⁰ One example of such egregious misreporting would be the broadcasting of pictures of buildings in Tskhinval which had been ruined in the Georgian shelling, while claiming that the devastation depicted was in Gori (Stalin's birthplace) and had resulted from Russian bombing! Randy Scheunemann and his Mercury Group public relations' firm⁷¹ happily served as the enthusiastic agents of spin for Saak'ashvili's version of events. Moreover, reports began circulating that Tbilisi was even a target for takeover and that the Saak'ashvili regime would be toppled to be replaced by one much more amenable to the Kremlin.⁷² The Georgian allegation was, for a time at least, deemed to be not merely plausible but actually the more likely explanation for what had occurred—"Was it remotely conceivable," mused pundits and political leaders alike, "that any leader of such a tiny country as Georgia would embark on an adventure that would risk bringing his armed forces into face-to-face conflict with those of Russia?" Since such a scenario simply defied reason, the alternative just had to be true...or did it?

Doubts about the credulity of Georgian assertions eventually, however, started to surface, and searching questions began to be asked. In the second half of October, Tim Whewell, one of the BBC's best-informed correspondents on Russian affairs, was allowed access to Tskhinval. What he saw and presented in various formats (TV, radio, written publications) as

⁷⁰ For an enlightening discussion see Akhvediani (2010); her article appears in a largely otherwise far-from-commendable collection of essays—see Hewitt (2012) for my review. Of the BBC's channels only BBC World TV was available to the present writer, tuning in at the time from Abkhazia, and so I was unable to assess the quality of the corporation's broadcasts across the board, but I would like to take this opportunity to praise the reporting of Sarah Rainsford, who, prior to Tim Whewell's reports filed some time later from South Ossetia itself, struck me as the one BBC reporter whose material seemed to be consistently objective and accurate.

⁷¹ Sheunemann was a prominent lobbyist for Senator John McCain, one of Georgia's/Saak'ashvili's most vociferous supporters.

⁷² Greg Simons in his presentation at the *Central and East European International Studies Association conference - International Strategic Communication and Conflict: The Georgian-Russian War of August 2008* (St Petersburg, Russia, 2–4 September 2009) discussed the propaganda-war, in which Russia's defeat was frankly acknowledged by Russian Foreign Minister, Sergej Lavrov. Simons addresses such aspects as: the use of English by Georgian spokesmen (as opposed to Russian by Russian representatives); the readiness of Georgian leaders (most notably Saak'ashvili) to make themselves available to the media (vs the reticence to do so by their Russian counterparts); the exploitation by Georgia's PR-agency of the world's media's news-frames; the framing by Georgians of the struggle as one between independence-seeking Georgia and resurgent, totalitarian Russia (the question of the South Ossetians' desire for independence from unwanted domination by Tbilisi being totally ignored here); etc... 'Too many lies and inconsistencies in the Georgian story' was one of Simons' highly germane sub-headings in his presentation.

a result was not at all what Georgians wished to be seen, heard or read.⁷³ Whewell's reports were (predictably) rubbished in Tbilisi on the specious grounds that, as he was allowed into South Ossetia by the Russians and from Russian territory, *any* coverage resulting from that trip must perforce be suspect. But even two OSCE monitors in the region felt they could not remain silent. *Times Online* reported their comments thus:⁷⁴

Ryan Grist, a former British Army captain, and Stephen Young, a former RAF wing commander, are said to have concluded that, before the Russian bombardment began, Georgian rockets and artillery were hitting civilian areas in the breakaway region of South Ossetia every 15 or 20 seconds. Their accounts seem likely to undermine the American-backed claims of President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia that his little country was the innocent victim of Russian aggression and acted solely in self-defence. During the war both Grist and Young were senior figures in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The organisation had deployed teams of unarmed monitors to try to reduce tension over South Ossetia ... On the night war broke out, Grist was the senior OSCE official in Georgia. He was in charge of unarmed monitors who became trapped by the fighting. Based on their observations, Grist briefed European Union diplomats in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, with his assessment of the conflict. Grist, who resigned from the OSCE shortly afterwards, has told *The New York Times* it was Georgia that launched the first military strikes against Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital. "It was clear to me that the [Georgian] attack was completely indiscriminate and disproportionate to any, if indeed there had been any, provocation," he said. "The attack was clearly, in my mind, an indiscriminate attack on the town, as a town." Last month Young gave a similar briefing to visiting military attachés, in which he reportedly supported the monitors' assessment that there had been little or no shelling of Georgian villages on the night Saakashvili's troops mounted an onslaught on Tskhinvali in which scores of civilians and Russian peacekeepers died. "If there had been heavy shelling in areas that Georgia claimed were shelled, then our people would have heard it, and they didn't," Young reportedly said. "They heard only occasional small-arms fire".

But such was the insistence with which the Georgian authorities pressed their case that the Council of the EU decided on 2 December 2008 to set

⁷³ His report for BBC Radio 4's *File on 4* entitled 'Georgia accused of targeting civilians' is available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/7692751.stm. See also his *New Statesman* article of 20 November 2008 'South Ossetia: the plaything of Russia—or Georgia?' at: www.newstatesman.com/europe/2008/11/georgia-russia-black-south.

⁷⁴ Jon Swain's *Sunday Times* report of 9 November 2008 entitled 'Georgia fired first shot, say UK monitors' was accessed at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article5114401.ece>. It is available at: <http://circassianworld.blogspot.com/2008/11/georgia-fired-first-shot-say-uk.html>.

up an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) headed by Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, who was well acquainted with the region from previous diplomatic service there, with a mandate to conduct a 6-month investigation into all aspects of the war; a budget of 1.6 million euros was earmarked for the purpose. And it was not only overseas where searching questions about the war were being asked.

Georgia Examines Georgian Actions

The Georgian Parliament established its own commission of inquiry, and extremely revelatory testimony was presented on 25 November at an understandably lively session, televised by the Rustavi-2 channel. The speaker was Georgia's former ambassador to Russia, Erosi Kitsmarishvili (appointed in November 2007). He confessed to there having been long-term (?continuous) planning for military action during Saak'ashvili's presidency, first against South Ossetia (during Okruashvili's term as Defence Minister) and then against Abkhazia in May of 2008, thereby justifying the foreboding that the Abkhazian leadership had expressed at the time. With reference to the latter possibility, Kitsmarishvili maintained that military instructors from Israel had been brought in to help prepare for it and that sources close to Saak'ashvili had told him that a green light had been given by Washington, though this allegation of US approval was strenuously denied.⁷⁵ So, why was no action actually taken in the spring of 2008 against Abkhazia? On 12 October, *Radio Liberty's* level-headed blogger Ia Antadze conducted an interview with Nino Burdzhnandze entitled 'Nino Burdzhnandze: Our government has been unable to draw any conclusion from this war',⁷⁶ in which we read (beginning with a quote from Burdzhnandze):

"In April 2008 there was a danger that Georgia would get involved in blood-letting but in Abkhazia rather than South Ossetia." She [Burdzhnandze]

⁷⁵ See 'Ex-Envoy's Hearing at War Commission Ends in Brawl' at: www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20026. In an earlier article 'Saakashvili "planned South Ossetia invasion": ex-minister' by Brian Rohan for *Reuters* on 14 September 2008, Okruashvili was quoted as saying: "Abkhazia was our strategic priority, but we drew up military plans in 2005 for taking both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well." See www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSLD12378020080914?sp=true.

⁷⁶ The Georgian original is /nino burdzhnandze: chvenma xelisuplebam veranairi dask'vna ver gamoit'ana am omidan/. The whole interview (in Georgian) is available at: www.tavisupleba.org/content/article/1850015.html.

claims to have been active in stopping this, but, for reasons of state, she chose not to make all this public at the time.

The Tagliavini Commission's Findings

Possibly because of the considerable amount of diplomatic activity taking place around Abkhazia at the time, as described above, Saak'ashvili's attention became focused on South Ossetia. Kitsmarishvili's testimony also included a statement to the effect that, at 4 pm on the afternoon of 7 August, Saak'ashvili phoned him to say that war was starting—it should be recalled that this was some two/three hours before Saak'ashvili assured the citizens of South Ossetia that they could sleep peaceably in their beds; Kitsmarishvili declined to go into details about the content of that phone-call. During his own evidence at the hearing three days later, Saak'ashvili denied Kitsmarishvili's allegations and reiterated that his order to his troops to engage was in response to a Russian invasion. The Tagliavini Commission's report was finally published on 30 September 2009 (delayed from its planned release in July because of the last-minute submission of some documents). To the surprise of no-one in South Ossetia or Abkhazia, it concluded that Georgia had initiated hostilities and that these actions were never intended to be of a merely defensive nature.⁷⁷

Those who, for whatever reason, deemed it worthwhile to seek an excuse for Saak'ashvili's extraordinary behaviour could no longer pretend that Moscow acted and that Tbilisi reacted.⁷⁸ And so, a tactic by the relevant apologists has been to argue that Russia and South Ossetia so con-

⁷⁷ The report is available at: www.ceiig.ch. Both sides are condemned in it for human rights' abuses, and Russia is accused of an unjustified over-reaction and of contravening international law in conferring recognition. Illegal too (in international law) were judged the issuing of Russian passports to South Ossetian (and Abkhazian) citizens (in a process that has come to be styled 'passportisation') and then using the threat to Russian citizens as a justification for military intervention. Though intervention to protect one's peacekeepers is justified, again the scale of Russia's response was considered to be wholly disproportionate—the precise number of Russian peacekeepers killed and the exact timeline of their death (viz. prior or subsequent to the intervention) could not be determined. Russia's early claim to be acting to prevent 'genocide' is also dismissed, given the relatively low numbers of victims (the lowest in all of Georgia's post-Soviet wars); however, initial reports did speak of large numbers of casualties, and at that stage no-one really knew the true picture; the Ossetians maintained that the total number of those killed remained to be finally established.

⁷⁸ Saak'ashvili's assertion that he was left with no alternative, as not to have taken action would have meant the end of his political career (if not his life), would only be relevant in the event of a Russian invasion taking place before Tbilisi sent troops to attack Tskhinval,

nived through a series of provocations as to set a none-too-well-concealed trap, into which the hapless Saak'ashvili blithely wandered (or, perhaps indeed, eagerly propelled himself). This is the central thesis advanced by Asmus (2010).⁷⁹ Although Asmus did not conceal the fact that "Georgia was upgrading its defenses with the help of Israel and Ukraine" (p. 142), he refrained from quoting any figures. In actuality, the defence-budget increased from \$36 million in 2003 to a staggering \$990 million in 2008 (Kvarchelia 2010a).⁸⁰ Asmus, on the other hand, whenever mentioning Georgia's military capability, did his utmost to downplay its significance in terms of: manpower, equipment, training, and battle-readiness, all designed to imply that Saak'ashvili would never voluntarily have started a shooting war. But, as with so many lines of argument in the book, Asmus himself proved to be most effective at undermining his own case, for in this instance he elsewhere remarks of Mikheil Saak'ashvili's thinking (p. 78):

Building Georgian military strength was one way to reduce Russia's asymmetrical position and strengthen his [MS]. He wanted the Russians to know that, if they provoked a fight with him, he was capable of fighting back.

But, when all is said and done, if the inevitable result of being provoked could be disaster and humiliation for one's country (let alone oneself), then the wisest course of action would surely be not to succumb to provocation in the first place.

Self-Deception as Possible Explanation for Tbilisi's Actions?

Perhaps a different scenario should be considered. Since the end of armed confrontation in the early 1990s, the virtually unchallenged supposition had been that the South Ossetian question would be far easier to solve than that of Abkhazia. And so, on the basis of available data, what possibly (and I would suggest that the appropriate adverb is probably) happened is that

and, as we have just seen, no evidence for such an incursion was uncovered by the Commission.

⁷⁹ For critical comments on this work see Hewitt (2011; 2012a) and Tom de Waal's review 'Missiles over Tskhinvali', available at: www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=23230.

⁸⁰ Alternatively expressed, it has been stated that spending over relevant years increased from 1% to 8% of Georgia's GDP. Kvarchelia's paper was delivered at the conference 'Independence of Abkhazia and Prospects for the Caucasus' (Istanbul, 30–31 May, 2009). It can also be consulted at: <http://abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/563-recognition-of-abkhazia-lkvarchelia.html>.

Saak'ashvili made up his mind to 'solve' it, while the world's attention was directed towards the Peking Olympics. His troops were obviously in position and primed for action, and the hope will have been exactly as revealed by another piece of evidence presented on 25 November by Kitsmarishvili at the hearing into the war. Apparently, Reintegration Minister Iak'obashvili boasted on 19 June that Tskhinval could be taken in three hours.⁸¹ When Kitsmarishvili interjected that Russia would certainly react, were such an attempt to be made, Iak'obashvili is said to have replied: "The Russians will not even raise their fingers about it." Buoyed up with a false sense of confidence constructed on the kind of bravado Kitsmarishvili had heard two months earlier from Iak'obashvili, the impetuous Saak'ashvili might well have elected to issue his battle-order, probably expecting no response from Russia but hopeful that, if there was one, one or more of his Western friends would rally to Georgia's assistance. All sides seemed to anticipate some kind of *démarche* from Georgia over the spring or summer of 2008, and so it was hardly surprising that, when it came, Russia was able with reasonable speed to activate its own planned response, though what did surprise was the magnitude of that response and the ferocity that was unleashed in order to put a stop once and for all to Tbilisi's threatening posture towards both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The permanent loss of both states was merely underlined by the recognition that ensued on 26 August. And the glaringly obvious conclusion to be drawn from this scenario?—one more reckless gambit by a flawed Georgian leader had ended in total and ignominious failure.⁸²

Regardless of one's assessment of Saak'ashvili's decisions in the build-up to the war, are there any clues to his attitude to the peace-process(es) in general? Whilst the commonly accepted view has been that the Abkhazians or the South Ossetians have played the part of the awkward squad, causing lack of progress over the years of negotiations, a devastating insight into Saak'ashvili's government's serial undermining of attempts to foster con-

⁸¹ This comment is alarmingly reminiscent of the similar boast to be able to conduct 'a small victorious war' by Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachëv that led to Moscow's catastrophic embroilment in the first war in Chechnia (with all the horrendous consequences that followed therefrom).

⁸² Saak'ashvili had manifestly learnt nothing from his one time patron Shevardnadze's similar folly in starting the war in Abkhazia on 14 August 1992, for in the end pupil effectively emulated patron in shattering his fellow citizens' hopes of establishing a prosperous and stable independent Georgia within the republic's Soviet borders.

fidence-building between the sides came in a 3-part article published in the Georgian newspaper *Rezonansi* 'Resonance' by P'at'a Zakareishvili.⁸³

Between 1997 and 2007, some twenty meetings were organised, under 'Chatham House rules',⁸⁴ to bring together Georgian and Abkhazian representatives from a variety of backgrounds (NGO-workers, journalists, academics, politicians, etc...) in informal settings somewhere in Europe and thereby to provide them with the kind of communications' channel which was lacking in the Caucasus itself. Since the first two gatherings were held in the Austrian village of Schlaining, the meetings became known as the *Schlaining Process* and were jointly facilitated by the Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), though the final six meetings were solely organised by the London NGO.⁸⁵ In all, 59 representatives from Abkhazia and 56 from Georgia took part, and regular attenders often built up good personal relations. Political scientist Zakareishvili was one such regular participant and was thus in an excellent position to notice changes in practice and attitudes. His article begins with his main overall conclusion:

...[R]elying on the facts, I attempt to set out the Georgian government's policy, which, in my opinion, is directed against Georgian-Abkhazian and, one supposes, Georgian-Ossetian direct and regular relations. This policy was realised by means of undermining the permanently operating Georgian-Abkhazian informal meetings.

Zakareishvili suggests that, unlike Shevardnadze, Saak'ashvili did not favour the involvement of holders of responsible posts on the Georgian side in regular, bilateral meetings with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The first sign of things to come was a week in advance of a meeting in Ljubljana organised by the *International Institute for Strategic Studies* for 7–13 February 2005, when ruling-party parliamentarians Giga Bok'eria (1st Deputy Foreign Minister from April 2008) and Giorgi Arveladze were due to meet South Ossetian representatives. A week prior to the meeting, Saak'ashvili forbade them to attend, on the grounds that allowing political

⁸³ The article was entitled /rogor sp'obda nabitdh nabitdh "vardebis" xelisupleba kartul-apxazuri arapormaluri shexvedrebis p'rotsess/ 'How the "Rose" government step by step ruined the process of Georgian-Abkhazian informal meetings' and appeared in the editions of 19–20–22 September 2008.

⁸⁴ Named after the practice followed in meetings at the British government's foreign policy think-tank Chatham House, whereby no specific quotes can be assigned to individuals who spoke in closed meetings, though the general tenor of comments made may be reported.

⁸⁵ Conciliation Resources have organised other meetings outside the *Schlaining Process*.

leaders from Georgia to meet representatives of a separatist regime on foreign soil would not serve Georgia's interests and that such meetings should take place exclusively within Georgia. Saak'ashvili made his position clear in a declaration on 7 April (printed the following day in the Georgian newspaper *Sakartvelos Resp'ublik'a* 'Republic of Georgia'):

Travelling to different towns with Kokoiti and Bagapsh has finished. I personally have no intention of meeting Kokoiti and Bagapsh. I won't be going anywhere to enquire after these folk. If they want anything, let them come to Tbilisi. I'll give them my work-address and even my home phone-number; let them come and enquire after me, and I'm ready to talk with them frankly.⁸⁶

Zakareishvili proceeds to illustrate how, through a series of (near) last-minute withdrawals from planned talks of leading figures on the Georgian side, any remaining confidence that the Abkhazians and South Ossetians might have had left in the good faith of the Georgian side simply evaporated.

On 31 July 2005, the 15th Georgian-Abkhazian meeting in the *Schlaining Process* was scheduled to take place in Vienna. Abkhazia's participants were: Chairman of the Security Council Stanislav Lakoba; Deputy Premier Leonid Lakerbaia; Chairman of the Central Electoral Commission Batal Tabaghua; Presidential Adviser Sokrat Dzhindzholia. Present for Georgia were: State Minister Giorgi Khaindrava; Deputy State Minister Giorgi Volski, and Project Coordinator for Georgia, Zakareishvili himself. But the person the Abkhazians had especially wanted to see was Saak'ashvili's personal representative for the conflict, Irak'li Alasania, who at the time also headed the so-called 'Abkhazian Government-in-exile'. However, as recollected by Zakareishvili, on the very day of the talks, Alasania withdrew for unspecified reasons. Zakareishvili concluded:

The Vienna meeting clearly demonstrated a new, surprising dynamic: the Abkhazian side seeks a means of dialogue with the Georgian side, whilst the Georgian side strives in every way not to permit such relations.

The final damaging withdrawal described by Zakareishvili concerned the London meeting (27–30 July 2007). Initially, there was agreement that

⁸⁶ This dismissive view of the Abkhazians and Ossetians is confirmed by Asmus' summing up of Saak'ashvili's position (2010.142):

The Abkhaz leadership was not interested in a political dialogue with Tbilisi and, he [MS] continued, *they were just a bunch of criminals anyway*. Negotiating with them was hopeless. [Stress added]

parliamentarians Davit Bazghadze and Roin Dzhanashia from the majority-party would attend, along with Giorgi Kadzhaia, member of the Security Council. But, on 20 July, Bazghadze, informed Zakareishvili that Speaker of Parliament, Nino Burdzhanaдзе, had contacted him to say: “We (here one must probably suppose the government of Georgia is meant) do not participate in meetings of such a format”, whilst a year before it had been Burdzhanaдзе herself who had given permission to Bazghadze to take part in the 17th-March 2006 gathering!

Zakareishvili speculates on a number of hypotheses in an attempt to account for Saak’ashvili’s stance, though he acknowledges that he is not in a position to draw any definitive conclusion. Among such possibilities are:

- the Georgian president’s failure to appreciate the importance to Georgia of maintaining such contacts;⁸⁷
- his desire for an exclusively military solution;
- his envy of Alasania’s close relations with the Abkhazians and a consequent desire to undermine him (removing him from direct responsibility for Abkhazia by despatching him to the UN on 12 June 2006), though, as the author himself observes, not all the incidents he describes involved Alasania;
- his desire to undermine civil society in Georgia by making it appear that its advocates are incompetent when it comes to making a contribution to resolving crises;
- his determination that no-one but he should gain the *kudos* that would accrue to whoever served up a final resolution to the problems.

Zakareishvili ends his musings with these words:

On 4 August 2008, Aleksandre (K’akha) Lomaia, Secretary of the Security Council, proclaimed: “Let’s not kid ourselves; it’s necessary to conduct a dialogue with Russia and not keep going off to Sukhum and Tskhinval”. There were four days to go to 8 August...

⁸⁷ Zakareishvili is one of the individuals interviewed in Mamuk’a Kuparadze’s aforementioned documentary film /nebis arkona/ ‘Absence of Will’ (2009). In his interview, Zakareishvili takes the opportunity to highlight the contempt Saak’ashvili demonstrated for pursuing contacts with the Abkhazians when he visited the military camp in Senak’i near the Abkhazian border on the very day of Foreign Minister Shamba’s visit to Tbilisi in May 2006, as described earlier in this chapter.

The Days are Numbered for the UN and OSCE Presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Within days of Russia's recognition, Stanislav Lakoba mentioned to me in his office that, in his view, now that Abkhazia's independent status had started to be recognised internationally, it would no longer be possible for the UN Observer Mission, stationed at the Aitar base on the outskirts of Sukhum, to keep the final two words (*viz. in Georgia*) of its designated title, the acronym for which over fifteen years had been UNOMIG. He said that he had raised this issue with the head of the Mission, who had replied that no change was likely to be sanctioned. Lakoba's conclusion was simple and stark: "In that case, they'll be told to leave." Thus began months of wrangling in a search for a compromise that would satisfy all parties. And a parallel quarrel ensued over OSCE's role in South Ossetia, as the South Ossetians insisted that, unless the Organisation accepted that its officers were henceforth operating in two distinct countries, they would not be allowed entry into South Ossetia; the same also applied to observers of the EUMM, set up in accordance with the supplementary accord of the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan. There was no objection whatsoever in principle to the presence of such observers in the relevant territories—indeed, in Abkhazia at least there were high hopes that an accommodation could be reached, as relations were good, and the UN presence provided well-paid jobs to many locals and thus made a significant contribution to the economy. But negotiations came to nothing, and UNOMIG's mandate was wound up (as of 30 June 2009) by the following draft-resolution, short and to the point:

United Nations
Security Council

S/2009/310
Provisional
14 June 2009
Original: English

Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America: draft resolution
The Security Council,

Recalling all its relevant resolution including resolutions 1808 of 15 April 2008 (S/RES/1808), 1839 of 9 October 2008 (S/RES/1839) and 1866 of 13 February 2009 (S/RES/1866),

Considering the report of the Secretary-General of 18 May 2009 (S/2009/254),

1. *Decides* to extend the mandate of the United Nations mission for a new period terminating on 30 June 2009;
2. *Decides* to remain actively seized of the matter.

This resolution, of course, applied to the entire Mission and not just to its operations inside Abkhazia, where a handful of staff remained to deal with humanitarian matters, and so this particular UN presence on the Georgian side of the border too thus came to an end; OSCE likewise withdrew its staff from Georgia.

The Geneva Process Begins

Tbilisi's continuing wrath over Russia's behaviour towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia was reflected in the endorsement granted by Parliament on 26 September 2008 to a draft-law on the now designated 'occupied territories',⁸⁸ placing restrictions on rights of entry, property-ownership and business/investment. The final version was signed into Georgian law by Saak'ashvili on 31 October⁸⁹—an amendment from February 2010 concedes access to South Ossetia from Russia for the provision of 'urgent humanitarian assistance'. Legal manoeuvres in Tbilisi were deemed to be a total irrelevance by Sukhum, Tskhinval and Moscow, and, as such, they were simply ignored. But, on 15 October, all parties presented themselves for the 1st round of talks in the Geneva Process that was established in accordance with the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan. These talks began with squabbling over procedural (rather than substantive) matters, the Russian representative, Giorgi Karasin, legitimately questioning what the point of such talks might be, if the Abkhazian and South Ossetian delegates were to be disbarred from direct participation in the discussions.

One paramount but elusive goal from the start was to achieve the signing by Georgia of a non-use-force agreement, just as this had been made one of the pre-conditions by the Abkhazians for the resumption of peace-talks between Tbilisi and Sukhum after Saak'ashvili introduced troops into the Upper K'odor Valley in 2006. Georgia has repeatedly stated that it will sign such an agreement with Russia alone, but, of course, it is not Russia that needs such a guarantee; it is the targets of past and potential Georgian aggression (*viz.* Abkhazia and South Ossetia) which insist on such an assurance as a *sine qua non* for moving forward on establishing good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. At the 11th round of talks (8 June 2010), the

⁸⁸ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19612>.

⁸⁹ In Opinion 516/2009 of 13/14 March 2009, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission offered a number of criticisms on the various provisions of this Law, including the observation that "the questions of the international responsibility of the Russian Federation cannot be regulated on the basis of national law, but on the basis of international law". See [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2009/CDL-AD\(2009\)015-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2009/CDL-AD(2009)015-e.asp).

Georgian delegation argued that, since the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan began with a ceasefire-agreement, it is superfluous to demand another. But, again, that ceasefire was between Russia and Georgia, leaving Sukhum and Tskhinval as exposed as before—on 19 October 2010, at the end of a summit between Nicolas Sarkozy, Germany's Angela Merkel, and Dmitry Medvedev, the French president added his voice to the call for Saak'ashvili to put his signature on an appropriate non-aggression guarantee. Whatever the eventual outcome, it was agreed early on that the talks in Geneva should be compartmentalised, allowing for discussion of security and humanitarian issues to take place in parallel groups. On 23 June 2010, Nadir Bitiev, one of the members of the Abkhazian delegation, announced that Abkhazia was temporarily withdrawing from the next round of talks (27 July) in protest at the way their views were being consistently ignored. The text of the statement read:

The Republic of Abkhazia has informed the Office of the Secretariat overseeing the five-party talks directed at peace and security in the Caucasus that it is temporarily withdrawing from future discussions because the sessions have not produced tangible progress. The talks come out of provisions in the Sarkozy-Medvedev Agreement that followed the 2008 war in which Georgia attacked the Republic of South Ossetia, resulting in a defensive action by the Russian Federation that thwarted Georgian aggression. These talks are aimed at establishing a dialogue between Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia and are co-moderated by the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

My Government believes the concept of the Geneva talks is sound, and we want to be active participants in a series of discussions which are productive. We regret having to make this decision at this time. We have done so because the co-moderators have consistently failed to facilitate the talks in a constructive and impartial manner.

The Abkhaz Government will return to the proceedings when the co-moderators present a concrete document that includes propositions from all of the parties and enables open discussion and debate. We hope that such a document will be forthcoming in a reasonable timeframe.

Nadir Bitiev,

Senior Aide and Deputy Official Representative to the President
Republic of Abkhazia

Although an Abkhazian delegation did attend on 27 July, it consisted of lower-level personnel. The hope was that the co-chairmen⁹⁰ would there-

⁹⁰ The co-chairmen at the time were: Pierre Morel, Special Representative of the EU, Antti Turunen, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Georgia, and Bolat Nurgaliev, Special Envoy of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

after take a more accommodating approach to the positions of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, and representation at the normal level was later resumed.

One positive outcome of the Geneva Process was the creation at the February 2009 meeting of an Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), whereby at critical moments local officials could be summoned to meetings to try to forestall incidents or defuse tensions along the border or, in the event of something untoward happening,⁹¹ to try to ensure that situations do not spin out of control. In South Ossetia, the IPRM was suspended because of the detention by Georgians of South Ossetian citizens. But in the case of Abkhazia, though the Abkhazians were understandably critical of how infiltration onto their territory could continue when the EUMM was supposed to have monitors in place on the Georgian side of the border, this mechanism proved reasonably effective and worked well, until late April 2012. The head of the EU monitoring team, Polish General Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, when asked why his team had not been tasked with investigating six murders on the Abkhazian side of the border in March, was reported as replying: “Give us access to your territory, and we will get busy with your corpses”—the EU monitors were, of course, never allowed access to Abkhazian territory because its mandate treats Abkhazia as part of Georgia, but it was charged with facilitating the IPRM process. The Abkhazians regarded Tyszkiewicz’s flippant remark as an indication of disrespect for the dead of one side to the conflict and declared the Pole *persona non grata*. This led to the cancellation of the IPRM meeting planned to take place in Gal town on 24 April and to the suspension of the process as long as the Pole’s tenure in office continued. As Abkhazia’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Irakli Khintba, said in an interview with Apsny Press on 3 May 2012:⁹²

[W]e have nothing against the EUMM continuing its activities on the territories bordering on Abkhazia and South Ossetia as envisaged in the Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan. The main thing is that the the EUMM’s activities should contribute to strengthening security and stability in the region. It is clear that that will not happen if the EUMM leadership serves the interests of the

⁹¹ As with the killing on 1 June 2010 of Abkhazian Customs’ official Gennadi Kvitsinia, followed two days later by that of the head of the administration in the village of Rep, Dmitri Katsia, both in the Gal District; another security-official had been blown up in the village of Chuburkhindzh on 29 January.

⁹² For the English version, see <http://www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/855-irakli-khintba-interview-for-apsnypress-may.html>.

authorities in Tbilisi instead of acting strictly in accordance with the Mission's mandate.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia Strengthen International Ties

Meanwhile, impervious to Georgian objections and in the face of constant condemnation from Georgia's Western friends, Russia began to proceed with the process of formalising ties with the two new republics. Diplomatic relations were established on 9 September, before which Nicaragua had become the second UN member-state to grant recognition (on 5 September), establishing diplomatic relations with Abkhazia on 10 September 2009 and with South Ossetia on 14 April 2010. Since then recognition has been won from Venezuela (10 September 2009) and three tiny island-states in the Pacific Ocean: Nauru (15 December 2009);⁹³ the Republic of Vanuatu, with which Abkhazia established diplomatic relations on 23 May 2011;⁹⁴ and Tuvalu, with which diplomatic relations were established on 18 September 2011.

On 14 September 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov flew into Sukhum airport (in Babushera, near Dranda), the first time the airport had been used for such a flight since the end of the war in 1993. He held talks with the Abkhazian leadership after first visiting Tskhinval. These meetings were followed on 17 September by the signing in Moscow of agreements on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance,⁹⁵ which envisaged bilateral action in the economic, legal and security fields, includ-

⁹³ Nauru's act was widely condemned as allegedly being the direct consequence of a Russian bribe.

⁹⁴ This event became clouded in much confusion, impinging on the local electoral process. For some days, one source would deny that recognition had taken place, only to be contradicted by another spokesman, and so on. In answer to a question tabled in the British House of Lords by Lord Nic Rea about developments with regard to Vanuatu, a member of the British Commonwealth, Lord David Howell in a written answer stated on 14 July: "Most recently, on 3 July, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary [William Hague] wrote to Prime Minister Kilman asking him not to recognise Abkhazia"—see <http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Lords/ByDate/20110714/writtenanswers/part034.html>. According to Abkhazia's Ambassador-at-large in the Pacific, Juris Gulbis, the USA and UK (along with Australia) have been much exercised by the potential for recognition from such island-states and have been extremely active in strenuously seeking to deter such moves and/or have the decisions to offer recognition rescinded (personal communication). Gulbis had to decamp from Fiji in April 2012 in order to avoid a Georgian attempt to have him extradited for his activities in support of Abkhazia.

⁹⁵ The texts of these agreements are reproduced in Zakharov et al. (2010), the treaty with South Ossetia on pp. 452–59, that with Abkhazia on pp. 460–67.

ing the construction and use of military bases;⁹⁶ dual citizenship was to be recognised, common transportation was to be established, and there was to be development of energy- and communications-infrastructure. The accords were to be valid for ten years and open to renewal every five years, though the lease on the military bases (e.g. at Bombora, near Gudauta, in Abkhazia) was to last for 49 years. Moscow stated that it intended to deploy 7,600 troops, divided between the two republics. Building on these agreements, further accords were signed in March 2009, whereby Abkhazia was assured of \$68 million from the federal Russian budget, whilst South Ossetia would gain \$81 million. The management and upgrading of Abkhazia's railways and airport were signed over to Russia for 10 years in exchange for loans and investments; moreover, Russia was also granted oil-exploration rights in Abkhazia's section of the Black Sea for five years.

Further accords on security were signed on 31 March 2009, according to which South Ossetia and Abkhazia awarded Russia powers to protect their borders and, in Abkhazia's case, to guard its coastal waters as well. As stipulated by the agreements, Russia's Federal Security Service was to set up a border-control administration along Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's borders with Georgia. Assistance would be offered to the republics for training specialists in border-control. In return, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were to provide the administration with premises, airspace and landing fields. The agreements were to remain effective only until Abkhazia and South Ossetia were in a position to form their own border-control bodies.

Abkhazia's 2009 Presidential Election

The accords with Russia gave rise to a good deal of soul-searching amongst the general population and provided the opposition in the run-up to the Abkhazian presidential election in December 2009 with ammunition to fire at the incumbent for not thinking about the real, long-term interests of Abkhazia in his negotiations with the Kremlin. However, in defence of his acceptance of the relevant terms, Bagapsh pointed out that the upgrading of both the railway and airport were to the benefit of every resident of Abkhazia, but Abkhazia itself was in no position either in terms of technical expertise or material and financial resources to carry out the essential work; fixed-term leases were, thus, the best way to proceed. With regard

⁹⁶ See <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/VDUX-7K6RPE?OpenDocument> on developments with specific reference to Abkhazia.

to border-protection, the manpower available to Russia afforded a greater level of protection, and the cost of personnel and equipment came not from Abkhazia's budget but from Russia's (contrary to the similar arrangement in Armenia, where the costs were borne by Armenia's state-budget).

Criticism of Bagapsh surfaced on 18 May 2009, when the Forum of National Unity (*Z'lar Rak'zaara Aforum*), headed by Daur Arshba and Astamur Tania, former adviser to ex-president Ardzinba, voiced concerns. Ten days later, Raul Khadzhimba resigned as Vice-President to run again against Bagapsh in December. His complaints about government-policies, however, seemed somewhat disingenuous, given the role he had played within the administration for the previous four years. Khadzhimba won the backing of the National Unity Forum, the veterans' organisation *Arwaa* 'Soldiers', founded in May 2007, and *Akhjatsa* 'Hornbeam', a party formed in support of Khadzhimba as early as 2003, headed by Akhra Bzhanias, nephew of Tamara Shakryl, who was the demonstrator accidentally killed in the 2004 demonstration at the time of the previous presidential election, as described above.

Campaigning turned rather ugly on occasions over the summer. Essentially everyone appreciated (as they still appreciate) that Abkhazia had been left with no option but to cultivate its ties with Russia, and so challenges to Bagapsh in this respect somewhat smacked of opportunism. However, a particularly thorny issue concerned the question of entitlement to voting rights. The right to vote derived from possession of an appropriate passport.⁹⁷ Those who did not possess the necessary passport for the 2004/5 election were given a special document (Form 9) to serve as an alternative voter registration-card, and many Kartvelian (mostly Mingrelian) residents received it, with the result that some 12,000 took part in the ballot. Possibly because it was widely believed that the Kartvelian (Mingrelian) vote had swung the 2004/5 election in Bagapsh's favour (his wife being Mingrelian), the opposition began agitating over who amongst Abkhazia's Kartvelian residents should be entitled to vote in 2009, given

⁹⁷ At the time of the 2004/5 election, this effectively meant an old-style Soviet passport. The blank forms had been acquired from Aslan Abashidze's Ach'ara some time after Georgia achieved independence, when, for obvious reasons, that type of document was no longer being issued to Georgian citizens. Such passports were due to expire in 2008. An alternative document was ordered from Turkey, but Georgia intercepted and confiscated part of the first consignment in 2003. Replacements arrived but were found not to be of the recognised international standard, and so they were not issued until Bagapsh, by then president, decided to have them distributed in 2006 (effectively as an internal identity-card); new passports meeting international standards began to be issued only in 2010.

that most of them did not possess the necessary Abkhazian passport. The issue became hugely contentious—Kartvelians wishing to acquire an Abkhazian passport are supposedly required to waive their claims to citizenship of Georgia, because Abkhazia's Law on Citizenship permits only Abkhazo-Russian duality of citizenship.⁹⁸ At one point Bagapsh proposed that there should be a mass-issuing of passports to all Gal Mingrelians who had returned prior to 2005, thereby granting them the right to vote. When Parliament was debating the matter, it was stormed by oppositionists, who, manhandling the Deputy-Speaker Irina Agrba in the process, demanded that the order be sent back up to the President for reconsideration, as such a sensitive matter should not be determined overnight without careful analysis of what the consequences might be of such a mass-granting of citizenship. During the heated public debate around this issue, some rather unpleasant statements were made about the role of the Gal Mingrelians in the 1992–93 war and their very right even to remain living within Abkhazia (let alone to participate in the imminent ballot). The League of Voters for Fair Elections⁹⁹ was naturally exercised by the way things seemed to be developing and was moved to offer advice to all parties, including the Central Electoral Commission, on how to resolve the threatening crisis. The upshot was that only 3,581 Gal Mingrelians were eligible to cast their vote on 12 December, and, according to the Central Electoral Commission, out of this total 2,947 exercised that eligibility (56% voting in favour of Bagapsh).

On 12 August 2009, Vladimir Putin paid a long anticipated but much postponed day's visit to Sukhum. On the morning of the visit, a bomb exploded on the central thoroughfare in Gagra, killing two persons, and the dull thud of a further explosion echoed around Sukhum itself as Putin was

⁹⁸ Whilst Abkhazia might recognise such dual nationality, Russia still officially did not. Any ethnic Abkhazian, wherever in the world they might reside, is eligible to apply for Abkhazian citizenship, as may anyone of Ubykh descent living overseas. This has caused some resentment among Circassians, who have not been granted the same eligibility, despite the number of Circassians who fought for Abkhazia in the 1992–3 war. The reason is that, whilst Circassians have eponymous regions in the North Caucasus, Ubykhs do not. Initially, when the new Abkhazian passports began to be distributed, they were not offered to Abkhazians living overseas. This was in order to avoid problems with Russia, which, having recognised the validity of these documents, would be unable to control the passage through its territory of diasporan Abkhazians resident in Turkey. But, from April 2011, Russia and Turkey introduced visa-free travel for their citizens. This resulted in the anomaly whereby ethnic Abkhazian Turkish citizens who had not yet acquired an Abkhazian passport could then travel without a visa to Russia but needed to obtain an Abkhazian visa to enter their ancestral homeland.

⁹⁹ In Abkhaz *Lamysla Alxrakʷa Rymjʷapgarazy Abcyjʷtsʷa Reidgylara*.

holding his last meeting of the day with a group of elders, though in this incident there were no casualties. Putin laid a wreath at the central memorial to those who had fallen in the Georgian-Abkhazian war, an event which attracted a large, impromptu crowd of enthusiastic well-wishers, who were, however, disappointed to be denied the opportunity of taking any personal photographs. In addition to talks with the leadership, the Russian Prime Minister exceptionally set aside time to hold a session with oppositionists, most prominent amongst whom was Khadzhimba, who was singled out for the privilege of receiving a warm embrace.¹⁰⁰ Within days of the visit, Bagapsh's administration suffered the loss of its leading intellectual, when Chairman of the Security Council, Stanislav Lakoba, resigned. For some time he had felt sidelined in the decision-making process and was not prepared to be taken for granted any longer, especially as he was convinced that it had been his readiness to withdraw from the vice-presidential race and to advise his supporters to back Bagapsh in the 2005-rerun of the 2004 election which had significantly contributed to the latter's victory at the time. Though courted by rival candidates for the 2009 election, he kept his own counsel and returned to academia.

Despite the divisions opened up during the campaign and the dispute over voting rights, Bagapsh, perhaps still basking in the after-glow of having been in office at the time when recognition from Russia was secured, gained an outright victory, winning 61.16% of the ballot with the former Premier, Aleksandr Ankvab, as his running-mate, thereby nullifying any need for a second round of voting. Khadzhimba, with Director of the Research Institute Vasilij Avidzba as his running-mate, garnered only 15.32%, many voters, especially those from Abkhazia's various minority-communities, perhaps having been disenchanted by the chauvinism that had surfaced during the latter's campaign. Zaur Ardzinba, running with Khrips Dzhopua, one-time head of the Ochamchira District, was supported by a faction within the Forum for National Unity and came third with 9.14%, and in fourth place was the wealthy businessman Beslan Butba¹⁰¹ with 8.25%. Predictably, some questions were raised about the legitimacy of the ballot, but the view of the League of Voters for Fair

¹⁰⁰ It will be recalled that Khadzhimba had been Putin's favoured candidate in 2004/5. For the English translation of the interchanges at Putin's meeting with the oppositionists that day see: <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2009-149-39.cfm>.

¹⁰¹ Butba owns the independent TV-station *Abaza*, which sought a licence to broadcast to the whole of Abkhazia rather than continue to be restricted to just the capital, but this extension was promised only after the election; in fact, it was only after Ankvab assumed the presidency in August 2011 that the necessary licence was granted. Butba also owns

Elections, which had overseen earlier elections in Abkhazia, and other (including foreign) monitors¹⁰² was that the election was properly conducted and fair, with only minor infringements which could not have affected the overall result. In a post-election reshuffle, the long-serving Foreign Minister, Sergej Shamba, became Prime Minister, whilst his former deputy, Maxim Gvindzhia, took over the foreign affairs' portfolio. On 12 May 2010, Khadzhimba became Chairman of the Forum of National Unity.

Post-Recognition Existence

Although there are many parallels between Abkhazia and South Ossetia in terms of their relations with Tbilisi, there are crucial differences:

- the size and geographical position of the (coastal vs land-locked) territories;
- the number and composition of the population;
- the resource-base for the running and sustaining of a viable economy;
- the experience of government (given that for most of its Soviet existence Abkhazia was an autonomous *republic*, whilst South Ossetia had only the lower status of an autonomous *region*) and the native talent available both to fill government-posts and/or perform adequately therein.

Both Silaev (2009) and the aforementioned *International Crisis Group* report (No. 205, 7 June 2010) examine these issues, and the latter document in particular paints a rather dismal picture for South Ossetia:

- the population-figure is disputed but is obviously much lower than it was even before the war of 2008;
- the job-opportunities are restricted;
- it is unclear whether the majority truly favours independence or union with North Ossetia.¹⁰³

hotels and restaurants in Sukhum as well as the Russian-language newspaper *Èxo Abxazii* 'Echo of Abkhazia'.

¹⁰² In addition to home-observers, some 81 monitors came from 24 countries, though official delegations were sent only from countries that had recognised Abkhazia, mainly Russia, the others being present in a private capacity. Many expressed their surprise and satisfaction at the high level of competence with which the elections were held, and all concluded that they fully conformed with international norms (Liana Kvarchelia, member of the League—personal communication).

¹⁰³ Any kind of return to union with, or autonomy within, Georgia is inconceivable. Whilst Kokoiti at various times during his presidency spoke of his preference for union with

February 2009 saw the temporary suspension by Moscow of funding after the Accounts' Chamber found that less than a third of the \$55 million in priority-aid had been delivered and only \$1.4 million actually spent. Russians held prominent ministerial posts, including Vadim Brovtsev, who was ferried in from Cheljabinsk and appointed Prime Minister on 5 August 2009, after pro-Kokoiti forces won the parliamentary elections in May.

Kokoiti did not command universal support, but those who offered criticism ran the risk of being tarred with the label of lacking in patriotism. Though they were to some degree rivals who enjoyed a relationship that at moments experienced friction, Kokoiti backed Brovtsev when widely challenged in April 2010 (including by parliamentarians) for mismanagement of funds for reconstruction. Kokoiti's term ended in November 2011. In the elections on 13 November, Anatolij Bibilov, the Minister of Emergencies and the candidate backed by Russia's President Medvedev, and former Minister of Education Alla Dzhioeva each garnered 25% of the vote, thereby triggering a run-off on 27 November. In this, Dzhioeva, with the support of the Central Election Commission, claimed victory with some 57% of the votes cast (against 40% for her opponent), but her path to becoming the first female leader of a Caucasian state (in modern times, at least) was blocked when Bibilov lodged a complaint of corrupt practice. The Supreme Court ruled the election invalid and declared that a new ballot should be held in March 2012 but banned Dzhioeva from contesting it.¹⁰⁴ These developments served to reinforce the fears that had regularly

North Ossetia, such talk is unwelcome to the Kremlin, as any moves in that direction, however sensible they might appear to external observers, would immediately be condemned by Georgia and its Western friends as 'proof' that what Russia wanted all along was just to grab a slice of 'Georgian' territory in order to acquire the means to put pressure, whenever it felt it to be expedient, on Tbilisi. As for the South Ossetians themselves, by no means all of them wish to unite with their northern kin, many of whom regard the southerners as too 'georgianised'.

¹⁰⁴ Oliver Lenz drew the parallel with Abkhazia's presidential election of 2004 in his comment 'Snow revolution or South Ossetian winter?', in which he quotes the observation by French ex-diplomat Maurice Bonnot, one of the observers in Abkhazia's 2011 presidential election, to the effect that "South Ossetia's political actors need to learn how to lose". Lenz's article, posted on 4 December 2011, is available at: <http://taklama.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/snow-revolution-or-south-ossetian-winter/>. On the same day, Batal Tabaghua, Chairman of Abkhazia's Central Electoral Commission, put out a statement condemning the interference in the work of South Ossetia's Central Electoral Commission by South Ossetia's Supreme Court (see <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/761-the-supreme-court-of-so-illegally-interfed.html>), and on the following day, Batal Kobakhia, then Chairman of the Abkhazian Parliament's Committee on Human Rights, called upon the leaderships in both South and North Ossetia to abide by their constitutions and not to pressure journalists

been voiced that, if allowed to stagnate, South Ossetia could turn into little more than a garrison-region (if, as many would argue, it had not done so already)—the whole 4th Military Base, previously located in Mozdok (North Caucasus), was reportedly transferred to South Ossetia in early 2010.¹⁰⁵

In order to counter Georgia's relentless anti-Ossetian propaganda, the Ossetians had taken a leaf out of Saak'ashvili's book and, in 2009, employed the Los Angeles-based public relations' firm Saylor Company to represent them, with a brief to spread general awareness of South Ossetia and the aspirations of its citizens, and to attempt to improve its image. Representatives of the firm then visited Abkhazia that summer, and a parallel contract was signed with the Abkhazians. A further positive development for the South Ossetians was that, as of 1 March 2010, they became able to travel to Russia with internal ID-cards based on visa-free travel-agreement.¹⁰⁶

Georgia's hostility continued unabated towards its lost territories. In mid-August 2009, the Turkish freighter *Buket*, carrying 2,000 tonnes of petrol and 700 tonnes of diesel, was detained in international waters (i.e. outside Georgia's jurisdiction) by Georgian coastal patrols and impounded in what can only be described as an act of piracy; its captain was arrested. Despite Russia's promise to make good the loss of fuel, this incident caused some panic at Abkhazia's petrol-pumps. On 31 August, a Georgian court sentenced the captain to 24 years imprisonment for contravening the 'Law on [the] Occupied Territories'.¹⁰⁷ Though he was freed shortly afterwards, following high-level intervention from Turkey, the ship and its cargo remained impounded. The threat to Abkhazia's trade with Turkey was obvious, and Russia promptly promised to increase its naval protection for vessels sailing to and from Abkhazia in the Black Sea.

Tbilisi Resumes its Belligerent Stance

In a calculated slight against Russia, the huge memorial to the fallen in World War II in Georgia's second city of Kutaisi was demolished on 19

reporting events surrounding the South Ossetian election (see <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/statements/762-open-letter-to-the-leaders-of-republic-n-ossetia-alania-and-the-republic-of-s-ossetia.html>).

¹⁰⁵ Regnum, 1 February 2010.

¹⁰⁶ See <http://mfa-rso.su/node/8>.

¹⁰⁷ 'Georgia jails Turkish ship captain for 24 years' at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21411.

December 2009. Given the pride in their country's sacrifice in what all Soviets termed *The Great Patriotic War*—Georgia lost 10% of its population in that upheaval, and the names of those who perished in the struggle were honoured by inclusion in a diligently compiled Red Book during the 1980s —, this was an act of unbelievable insensitivity. Adding to the outcry that followed was the fact that a mother and her 8 year-old daughter were killed in the explosion. Moscow quickly announced plans to rebuild the monument on Russian soil, though one-time Georgian premier, Zurab Noghaideli, who in December 2008 joined the opposition and founded his Movement for a Fair Georgia, stated that it should be reconstructed in Georgia itself. The memorial's destruction left the site clear for the construction of a new, modern-style building to house Georgia's parliament, which Saak'ashvili had decided should decamp from the capital after the elections in October 2012. On 7 June 2012, a 30 year-old construction-worker became the project's third victim when scaffolding collapsed.

At the end of December 2009, Georgia's Centre for Human Rights disapprovingly placed on its website (www.humanrights.ge) a clip from an army-training film, which, in a quite exceptional display of bad taste, the minor channel *Sakartvelo* 'Georgia', founded in 2007, had been running, though it is uncertain for how long. By way of a recommendation as to how Georgia's goal of regaining the lost territories might be achieved, the clip portrayed Adolf Hitler addressing a rally in 1932 with the rabble-rousing advice:

We must understand once and for all that we shall never be able to regain the lost territory with prayers, which have become a formality, nor with hopes in the League of Nations, but with the strength of our weapons.

In an article on this broadcast entitled 'Hitler calls on Georgians to win back Abkhazia'¹⁰⁸ (27 December 2009), Kirill Kolodin contrasted this martial call with an apparent change of heart embodied in a much-trumpeted document that was published a month later.

¹⁰⁸ See www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/392-hitler-calls-on-georgians.html for the English translation or, for the Russian original www.izvestia.ru/georgia1/article3136970/. Supposedly patriotic militarism also featured in the 2007 popular song by Nino Badurashvili /psous ts'q'ali/ 'The Water of the Psou', the video for which portrayed male dancers in military uniform performing to words which stated that Georgians would soon again be drinking the waters of the Psou—in other words, that they would soon be standing along Russia's border with Abkhazia.

'State Strategy on [the] Occupied Territories'

Although for years Tbilisi had pressed for increasing isolation of Abkhazia (objecting to the unilateral lifting by Moscow of the CIS sanctions imposed in 1996 and advocating the placing of restrictions on Abkhazians and South Ossetians seeking visas to travel beyond Russia),¹⁰⁹ there seemed to be a change of course at the start of 2010. On 28 January, Temur Iak'obashvili, whose ministerial responsibilities (viz. 'For Reintegration') had in reality turned into a sinecure with Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 26 August 2008, unveiled the Georgian government's 'State Strategy on [the] Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation'¹¹⁰ and thereafter touted it around various Western capitals to a fanfare of approval. The view within the 'occupied territories' is that this document is aimed not at them at all but at Georgia's international partners and (existing or potential) donors in a further specious game of point-scoring. They highlight the cynicism underlying many of the assertions in the document. The fundamental goal of peacefully reintegrating the said territories and their populations into Georgia's constitutional orbit simply ignores the fact that for two decades the Abkhazians and South Ossetians have made it abundantly clear that they have absolutely no desire to be so (re)integrated or 'to enjoy the rights and privileges available to every citizen of Georgia'. The document's claim to reject the pursuit of a military solution is belied by the obstinate refusal of Tbilisi under Saak'ashvili to sign a non-use-of-force agreement both before the war of 2008 and throughout the subsequent rounds of talks in Geneva, which ever appear in danger of collapse as a result. "The Strategy," it is declared, "seeks to counter the isolation and division resulting from occupation" and "Georgia opposes the isolation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinval Region/South Ossetia

¹⁰⁹ There are numerous cases of visas being refused to Abkhazian citizens by Western embassies in Moscow. One case of a boy needing urgent medical treatment was raised by then-Foreign Minister Shamba on 13 May 2009 (see <http://osinform.ru/13529-glava-mid-abkhazii-zajavil-diskriminacionnoj.html>). The German Embassy refused to issue a visa on the grounds that citizens of Abkhazia should apply to embassies in Tbilisi for their visas to visit EU countries (including Germany). Shamba raised the issue as an example of the abuse of Abkhazians' human rights.

¹¹⁰ Available at: www.civil.ge/files/files/SMR-ENG.doc. The official English translation omits the definite article, but, since the document has no pretensions to being applicable to all occupied territories around the world (e.g. Palestine), the article is clearly necessary. For my comment on the document see: 'Canute Syndrome' at <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/419-the-canute-syndrome-by-george-hewitt.html>; also available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/feb/24/georgia-strategy-abkhazia-theory>.

and recognises the negative repercussions of isolating the populations living there”, but, as just noted, isolation was precisely what Tbilisi itself was demanding for years. The aim of “supporting the preservation of cultural heritage and identity, and advancing their promotion and exposure both domestically and internationally” is deemed to be a joke in the worst possible taste when set against the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage, as illustrated by the torching of Abkhazia’s Research Institute along with its precious library and archive in the autumn of 1992.¹¹¹ Whilst Georgia is set on securing de-recognition and reintegration, both moves would be anathema to the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, who keenly desire engagement with, and investment from, the outside world (sc. in addition to Russia) but have no wish whatsoever to have Tbilisi mediate or filter such engagement and investment, as outlined in the Strategy or its associated Action Plan, published in July 2010¹¹²—engagement for the Abkhazians has to be direct and unconditional.

On 14 November 2008, Iak’obashvili had told an audience at Tbilisi State University that Georgia had a “mission to save the Abkhazians and South Ossetians from Russian domination”. In similar vein, in an interview for *BBC World TV* at the time of the August 2008 war, the then-Deputy Ambassador in London, Giorgi Badridze, later promoted to Ambassador, asserted that only Georgians could best protect the interests of the South Ossetians and Abkhazians. But, when assessing statements by Georgian representatives, Shaun Walker’s observation in his piece ‘The Kosovo Precedent’ (*Prospect Magazine*, April 2008) urged suitable caution:

A Russian political analyst told me about a Georgian minister who has been a friend of his since schooldays. “When we get together and have a drink, he tells me how he thinks the Abkhaz are scum and he wishes he could hang them all ... But when he talks to the west, suddenly it’s human rights, democracy, rule of law ...”¹¹³

¹¹¹ One might also mention the damage inflicted on the house-museum of the Ossetian linguist Vasilij Abaev and on the statue of Ossetia’s national poet, Kosta Khetagurov, in Tskhinval in 2008.

¹¹² In September 2010, the Georgian government introduced an Act on modalities for controlling the activities of international NGOs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to the chagrin of many directly or indirectly concerned, alarmed at the likely negative consequences for their projects and ability to operate in general.

¹¹³ Such, indeed, were the considerations and attitudes which led me to describe the Strategy, its contents, and whatever the philosophy that lies behind it might be, as a total irrelevance in my own immediate reaction, published on 24 February 2010 in *The Guardian Online*. ‘Georgia’s fine, lofty, useless strategy’ at www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/feb/24/georgia-strategy-abkhazia-theory.

Allusion was made to the Strategy in the *International Crisis Group's* Europe Report No. 202 (26 February 2010) 'Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence'.¹¹⁴ Though the compilers acknowledge the Strategy's paternalistic tone¹¹⁵ and note that it "ignores Abkhazian self-determination aspirations" (p. 15), they believed they had detected a welcome development:

Still, the paper contains divergences from past policy. For example, it abandons some official standard terminology, such as 'puppet regime', referring instead to 'the populations and/or authorities in control of Abkhazia ...'.

Now, whilst this may be true of the English version, which, it has been speculated, was actually the original language of composition (it being designed more to appeal to foreign audiences than to influence the Abkhazians or South Ossetians), one needs to delve a little deeper and consider the Georgian version. This has an additional one-page appendix, which offers the Georgian readership a definition of terms employed in the document. The term 'The power controlling Abkhazia and the Tskhinval Region/South Ossetia' is glossed thus for the benefit of Georgian readers:

The *puppet-regimes* created and supported by the power of the occupier on the occupied territories of Georgia. [Stress added]

This well illustrates that nothing has changed in the psychology of those who devise these schemes and at the same time suggests a salutary lesson: mastery of the Georgian language is an absolute *sine qua non* for anyone claiming expertise in Georgian affairs.¹¹⁶

Within the framework of the Action Plan associated with Georgia's State Strategy, Tbilisi eventually proposed to issue Abkhazians and South Ossetians wishing to travel beyond their borders (or further afield than the Russian Federation at least) with so-called 'neutral travel documents' (or 'neutral identity-cards'). The purpose was to tempt them away from acquiring Russian passports, attempting to travel with which, as noted above, could lead to difficulties in gaining visas to enter certain countries. The Abkhazian authorities were so exercised by this proposal and the readiness

¹¹⁴ Available at: www.crisisgroup.org/en/regios/europe/caucasus/georgia/202-abkhazia-deepening-dependence.aspx.

¹¹⁵ Incidentally, this is a deep-seated attitude to their Caucasian neighbours which the said neighbours deem to be a most unattractive trait, something that most foreign visitors and commentators totally fail to appreciate.

¹¹⁶ This is one reason (another being her exemplary objectivity) why Liz Fuller of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFERL) is by far the best of the regular commentators on Georgian affairs.

of some governments to accept these documents in lieu of normal passports that their Foreign Ministry issued a statement about the matter on 30 January 2012. The statement stressed that, as this was yet another stratagem in the two-decades-old campaign to reestablish Soviet Georgia's borders, the offer of such documents would be no more successful than the attempt to force Georgian passports on the Abkhazians had proved to be. After all, although the documents might not carry any such title as 'Passport of Georgia', they would still be issued by Georgian governmental agencies, with the consequence that their acquisition would be just as despised and unacceptable to the citizenry of Abkhazia. The determination was expressed to have the question of winning international recognition of Abkhazia's own passports discussed at the Geneva talks.¹¹⁷

Further Anti-Russian Moves in Georgia

That there was no change in the mind-set of the Georgian authorities was illustrated by another example, and one did not need to understand a word of Georgian to realise that a TV-programme broadcast on the evening of 13 March 2010 by the channel *Imedi* 'Hope' was yet another monstrous miscalculation; given the closeness of the station's owner to Saak'ashvili, the widespread assumption was that the President's approval would have been sought and granted before transmission. Although the announcer stated prior to the start that what viewers were about to see was a hypothetical scenario of how another war with Russia might begin, no-one tuning in late would have seen any warning on screen that they were watching a fantasy. What was shown was edited footage from the war of August 2008 purporting to be shots of a new invasion, accompanied by a commentary informing Georgians that their president had been killed and

¹¹⁷ See <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/statements/793-statement-mfa-abkhazia-jan.html>. At a meeting in Sukhum on 21 June 2012 with a delegation from the US Embassy in Georgia, Abkhazia's Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed how the willingness to recognise these documents by the USA, Japan and the Czech Republic only provoked further negative feelings towards these governments; see <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/politics/887-viacheslav-chirikba-received-a-delegation-of-the-us-embassy-in-georgia.html>. On 6 June US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, had appeared at a joint press-conference with Saak'ashvili where she stated that her government would soon be recognising the 'neutral passports'. This prompted Abkhazia's Deputy Foreign Minister to say that "he was 'somewhat disappointed' but not surprised by Hillary Clinton's statement. He was not surprised because the Abkhaz have become accustomed to unfriendly moves by the US administration"; see <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/politics/874-the-us-decision-to-recognize-the-so-called-neutral-passports.html>.

the country was under attack. Mass-hysteria, along the lines of Orson Welles' (in)famous *War of the Worlds* radio-broadcast of 1938, ensued, with serious questions subsequently asked both at home and abroad as to what the motives behind such an outrageous and pointless spoof could possibly have been.¹¹⁸ Luke Harding, writing for *The Guardian* the following day, suggests a motive, which might strengthen belief in Saak'ashvili's involvement, namely:

It is no coincidence that Imedi TV's extraordinary broadcast came days after Georgia's opposition leader, Nino Burdzhnadzze, held talks in Moscow with Putin, and called for the restoration of ties. Announcing that Russia had bombed Georgian airports and seaports, the 30-minute bulletin said that Burdzhnadzze had taken power. The broadcast appears to be an ill-conceived dig at Georgia's opposition, before important elections for a mayor of Tbilisi in late May.¹¹⁹

Russo-Georgian relations continued to bump along the bottom of the abyss into which they had sunk in August 2008. Former Georgian premier Zurab Noghaideli visited Moscow several times in 2009, even meeting Putin in December that year. The possibility of allowing some charter-flights between Tbilisi and Moscow for the summer of 2010 was raised, and the *Airzena* company did manage to put on some flights in January 2010. Though denied a licence, because of predictable Georgian opposition, to operate international flights to and from Sukhum, the restarting of the Moscow-Sukhum route was nevertheless planned for July 2010, albeit not involving one of Moscow's main airports—as of the summer of 2012, no such service had been instituted, however. Three days before Nino Burdzhnadzze visited Moscow for her meeting with Putin on 4 March 2010, the Russians reopened the Q'azbegi-Zemo Larsi border-crossing on the Georgian Military Highway, which had been closed for 'repairs' (*remont*) since July 2006. For their pains in trying to improve relations with a Kremlin which famously declared its adamant refusal to deal with Saak'ashvili, both Noghaideli and Burdzhnadzze have been branded 'collaborators' and even 'traitors'. Perhaps sensing that his beacon was starting to be viewed in the West as shining ever more dimly, Saak'ashvili began in mid-2010 to culti-

¹¹⁸ It seems that CNN picked up the story and broadcast it, neglecting to state that it was a spoof (Robert Crabtree—personal communication).

¹¹⁹ See 'Russian invasion scare sweeps Georgia after TV hoax' available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/14/russia-georgia-fake-invasion-report>. The text of the broadcast can be found at: www.polit.ru/news/2010/03/14/g.html.

vate relations with Iran, meeting the Iranian Foreign Minister in Tbilisi and reaching various agreements, such as a visa-free travel-regime and the opening in Batumi of an Iranian consulate.

Tbilisi Cultivates the North Caucasus

If cynicism was believed to have motivated the composition of the *State Strategy on [the] Occupied Territories*, then this charge was also levelled in connection with the holding in Tbilisi on 20–21 March 2010 of a conference entitled 'Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes: the Circassians and the Peoples of the North Caucasus Between Past, Present and Future'. It was a joint-venture between Georgia's Ilia State University and the US Jamestown Foundation, which provided the funding. Once Sochi, located on historical Ubykh land, was proclaimed to be the venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics, groups of Circassians saw this as an opportunity to publicise the expulsion from their ancestral lands of large numbers of North West Caucasians by Tsarist Russia after the Caucasian War was brought to a close with their submission in 1864. The act of surrender to Russia by the North West Caucasian resistance-alliance took place at Krasnaja Poljana, the very site chosen to host the skiing competitions. Sections of the Circassian community believe that Russia has no right to host the Games on land acquired by force of arms, and great offence was caused at the close of the preceding Vancouver Games, when it was claimed that this area had historically belonged to the Cossacks, with not a mention of the North West Caucasians, who had in reality resided in and around the area. Given that Abkhazia has perforce become closely allied to Russia and given that amongst the North Caucasians the closest to the Abkhazians in every sense (geographically, genetically, linguistically, culturally and emotionally) are the Circassians, here was an opportunity for Tbilisi to play a little mischief in North Caucasian affairs, a long-troubled and potentially even more unstable region on Russia's southern flank; the possibility of engineering a rift between the Abkhazians and their Circassian cousins would be an added bonus.¹²⁰ Though a few Circassians did attend the Tbilisi gathering, they

¹²⁰ Boycotting of the 2014 Games has even been mooted in certain American quarters in order to try to pressure the Kremlin into altering its policy towards Georgia (with particular reference to its stance regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia). See David L. Phillips' policy-paper for the Atlantic Council (July 2008) 'Restoring Georgia's Sovereignty in Abkhazia'; my reply 'Georgia's trilogy of tragedies or a reply to David L. Phillips' is available at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/conflict/82-georgias-trilogy-of-tragedies.html>.

did so as individuals interested to hear what was said rather than as representatives of any official Circassian bodies.¹²¹

Further moves to consolidate Georgia's ties to the Circassians were to follow. Firstly, on 20 March, the Georgian Parliament resolved to recognise what happened to the Circassians (but not the Abkhazians!) in the 19th century as 'genocide'. Then, on 12 October the same year, Saak'ashvili signed an order for the establishment in Tbilisi, under the aegis of Georgia's Ministry of Culture, of a Centre for Circassian Culture.¹²² In December 2011, the Georgian Parliament gave approval to a so-called National Security Concept, part of which involved relations with Russia. Parliament created a Committee for Diaspora and Caucasian Issues, which held its first public meeting on 2 May 2012 to discuss an 18-page draft of a 'State Strategy on Relations with the Peoples of the North Caucasus'.¹²³ Three weeks later on 21 May, Saak'ashvili unveiled Georgia's 'Monument for the Victims of the Circassian Genocide', which is (somewhat provocatively) located at Anak'lia, on the Black Sea coast not far south of the border with Abkhazia¹²⁴—the 21 May 1864 was the date which saw the surrender of the North West Caucasian alliance at Krasnaja Poljana. Wreath-laying also took place over the border in Abkhazia on 21 May, where the Abkhazians were conducting their own ceremony of remembrance. On 31 May 1990, a foundation-stone was laid on the Sukhum sea-front where the Abkhazians planned to erect a memorial to *all* the victims of the Caucasian War, but the complexities of life at the time, the subsequent war, and the years of post-war austerity meant that it was only on 27 September 2010 that they were able to open the monument, commissioned from Gennadij Lakoba.¹²⁵

Georgia Launches a New TV-channel

Saak'ashvili's sudden passion for Circassian history followed another venture launched in October 2009. This was when the Georgian government set up a Russian-language TV-channel *Caucasus One* to concentrate pri-

¹²¹ Most Circassians are probably well aware that, during the Great Caucasian War, Georgians helped in the subjugation of the North Caucasus. From the large-scale involvement of Circassians in the 1992–93 war in Abkhazia, they also know how Tbilisi has more recently treated fellow North West Caucasians.

¹²² See <http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/news/66010.html>.

¹²³ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24714>.

¹²⁴ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24790>.

¹²⁵ See <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/misc/862-in-abkhazia-the-day-of-remembrance-for-the-victims-of-the-caucasian-war-is-being-marked.html>.

marily on Caucasian affairs and counter anti-Georgian content of official Russian broadcasts. In late January 2010, however, the French satellite-provider *Eutelstat* withdrew its platform, allegedly as a result of Russian influence. Then, according to a report of 23 July 2010 by Tbilisi-based Molly Corso,¹²⁶ the notionally independent *Georgian Public Broadcasting* (GPB) decided on 14 July to outsource the station's operations, next day naming the firm *K7*, run by British journalist Robert Parsons,¹²⁷ as the one selected to be offered the management-contract.

In a further attempt to cultivate pro-Georgian sympathies amongst the North Caucasians (and at the same time, no doubt, to irk the Kremlin), Georgia unilaterally announced on 13 October 2010 that it would allow North Caucasians to enter Georgia and stay for up to 90 days without having to obtain a visa. The reason, as given by Deputy Foreign Minister Nino K'alandadze, was 'to restore Georgia's traditional relations with neighboring peoples'.¹²⁸ On 1 March 2012 Georgia went further and unilaterally waived its visa-requirement for all citizens of Russia.

Abkhazia's Census (2011)

A census was taken in Abkhazia in February 2011.¹²⁹ This was not actually the first attempt to discover the makeup of the republic's post-war population, for one had been conducted in 2003. However, the results, though never officially revealed, were deemed to be unreliable. Preliminary figures for the 2011 survey appeared on 28 March, counting the total population at 242,826. As the year ended (28 December), revised data came out, indicat-

¹²⁶ 'Media outsourcing deal raises concern about government meddling in public broadcaster', available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61593>.

¹²⁷ This is the same Robert Parsons we met in Chapter 4 reporting for the BBC's *World Service* out of Tbilisi in the final days of the Georgian-Abkhazian war. As Parsons himself acknowledged that 'several members of the government' were involved in the negotiations, it is reasonable to conclude that, despite GPB's supposedly independent status, Parsons' firm was Saak'ashvili's personal choice to do battle over the airways on behalf of Georgia. From 2003 to 2005, Parsons was director of the Georgian service at Radio Liberty. For his comment on the August 2008 war see 'Georgia: more sinned against than sinning' at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/29/georgia.russia>.

¹²⁸ See the Jamestown Foundation report 'Moscow angered by Georgian move that breaks the North Caucasus' isolation' at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4cbfdb252.html>.

¹²⁹ For a short commentary see <http://taklama.wordpress.com/2011/12/29/a-first-look-at-abkhazias-census-results/>. See also (in Russian) <http://apsnypress.info/news/5084.html>, posted on 28 December 2011; an English version is available at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/general/779-the-population-of-abkhazia-stands-at-240705.html>.

ing that the total was slightly reduced, standing at 240,705. Respondents were able to define their own ethnicity, and, as the table below shows, the overwhelming majority of the 46,367 Kartvelian residents chose to continue the post-1930 Soviet practice of classifying themselves as ‘Georgians’, even though, as should be well understood by now, almost all of them will have been Mingrelians.

Main Population of Abkhazia (February 2011)

Abkhazians	122,069
‘Georgians’	43,166
Armenians	41,864
Russians	22,077
Mingrelians	3,201
Greeks	1,380

If these figures were accurate, the Abkhazians had finally (sc. since the mid-late 19th century dramatic reduction in their home-population) achieved the status of an absolute majority (at 50.71%) in their motherland. The Abkhazian total did, however, still look to be on the high side, considering both that the number of Abkhazians in the whole of Soviet Georgia in 1989 had been 95,853 and that 4% of their number within Abkhazia were reckoned to have perished during the 1992–93 war. Only the eventual breakdown of the initial figures can demonstrate the balance between natural growth and influx from outside (e.g. immigration from the diaspora-community based in Turkey). As for the Kartvelian and Armenian figures, they might have been expected to have been somewhat higher.¹³⁰ In any case, Abkhazia’s total population remained under half what it had been at the time of the last Soviet census in 1989.

Unanticipated Developments in Abkhazia (2011)

Bagapsh had twice hoped to visit the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey in 2007, but the trips had been cancelled as a result of pressure on Turkey from Georgia. However, in April 2011, permission was finally granted, though what would otherwise have been regarded as a great success was

¹³⁰ Regarding the situation of the Armenians in Abkhazia, see Richard Berge’s ‘Armenians and Abkhaz Ethnic Democracy—Current Trends, Future Prospects’, available as a download at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/774-armenians-and-abkhaz-ethnic-democracy-by-richard-berge-.html>.

somewhat tarnished by the fact that rumours had been spread in advance by the Khadzhimba opposition about the allegedly overly concessionary nature of Bagapsh's relationship with the Kremlin. The result was that not all local leaders were willing to meet the visitor, and, in the meetings that did take place, Bagapsh had to spend time defending the reasons behind the specifics of the relationship that he had sanctioned. But Turkey was not the only country on Bagapsh's itinerary for 2011.

Though at the time the invitation was received in Sukhum, there was suspicion that someone might have been playing a joke, the Oxford Union was serious in wishing to have Bagapsh as their guest to deliver a speech, and to answer questions, about Abkhazia's position in the world; Chatham House, London's respected think-tank for international affairs, also hoped to take advantage of Bagapsh's presence in the country and to offer him the opportunity to make an address. As preparations were underway for what would have been a remarkable journey (given the pro-Georgian stance of various British governments over the years, the mere issuing of a visa would have been noteworthy), Bagapsh went to Moscow in May for a routine operation to correct a smoker's complaint. Days after the operation, while recuperating in the clinic where the operation had been carried out, Bagapsh suffered some kind of relapse and passed away on 29 May.¹³¹

On the day of the funeral, Putin travelled once again to Sukhum to pay his condolences to the mourners.

Vice-president Ankvab took over the reins of government until elections could be organised. And it was decided that the election should be held on Recognition Day (26 August). There were three candidates: Ankvab himself, with Mikhail Logua as running-mate; Prime Minister Sergej Shamba, with Shamil Adzinba¹³² as running-mate; and Khadzhimba, with Svetlana Dzhergenia, widow of the first president Vladislav Ardzinba, as running-mate. In the run-up to election-day, Ankvab and Shamba resigned their governmental positions in order to prosecute their campaigns. The candidates undertook to avoid underhand tactics, and this undertaking was largely, but not entirely, honoured...

¹³¹ For my obituary in *The Independent* see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/sergei-bagapsh-politician-who-guided-the-republic-of-abkhazia-through-its-troubled-beginnings-2305641.html>. It was published on 2 July 2011.

¹³² Adzinba, head of Abkhazia's youth-movement, was born, and spent his early years, in the Georgian port of Batumi and thus, like Ankvab, speaks Georgian in addition to Abkhaz (and Russian).

The campaign¹³³ saw the candidates travel the length and breadth of the republic, holding meetings in all regional centres (including Gal). The television-channel(s) gave blanket-coverage to these and to a series of interviews with the candidates and their running-mates. The campaign head-quarters, of which Shamba's had the air of being by far the best funded and most active, produced various types of electioneering materials (in both Abkhaz and Russian): leaflets, news-sheets, websites, manifestos; Ankvab behaved most abstemiously in this respect and was the last to put out his manifesto.

On 15 August, supporters of Shamba organised a meeting outside Sukhum's Philharmonic Hall where they screened scenes from a video in which Tengiz K'it'ovani was heard stating that Ankvab had been well-aware in August 1992 of Tbilisi's plans to deploy troops on the territory of Abkhazia. The imputation was clear: Ankvab could not be trusted to lead the country, if he had in some way colluded with the Georgians in the lead-up to the war. With this charge in the air, an interview given by ex-President Ardzinba to the newspaper *Respublika Abxazija* in 2003 (15–16 April) resurfaced. In this interview, Ardzinba had essentially made the same accusation, using the Georgian form of address /bat'ono/, loosely translatable as 'sir!', when mentioning Ankvab in order to underscore the imputation that Ankvab's relations with Georgia(ns) were (or, at least, had been) suspiciously close. Ankvab did not deign to offer any response, possibly because he had dealt with the charge at the time of the Ardzinba interview. In this response, entitled 'It is impossible to make a cut-out history of Abkhazia from presidential myths and cock-and-bull stories' (in Russian),¹³⁴ Ankvab stated that he had known no more than Ardzinba about Tbilisi's plans at the time, and so, if any blame was to be attached to the Abkhazian leadership for acting inappropriately in order to forestall eventual hostilities, then it was Ardzinba, as head of the administration, who should be the one to be made to answer for his own decisions and/or (lack of?) actions at the time. As Georgian propaganda had often referred to Ardzinba's Turkish ancestry (with the aim of raising a doubt about the extent of his Abkhazian affiliation), Ankvab countered Ardzinba's pro-Georgian jibe with one of his own, ending his piece with the phrase 'Vladislav Bey'.

¹³³ See my article 'Abkhazia: presidential election, political future' at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/george-hewitt/abkhazia-presidential-election-political-future>.

¹³⁴ See: <http://www.abkhaziya.org/server-articles/article-847baceb2603f5d90cd9f9a6a36c9652.html>

To imagine that (especially Abkhazian) voters would be impressed by anything coming from the mouth of the man who had led the Georgian forces into Abkhazia on 14 August 1992 was naive in the extreme. The tactic backfired, and even though Shamba disclaimed all knowledge of it, he almost certainly suffered the consequences, for a number of voters stated that, whilst they had intended to cast their ballot in his favour, they switched to Ankvab after the K'it'ovani affair. Polling passed off smoothly and (*pace* The New York Times, which reported that there were no international observers) actually in the presence of well over 100 observers from across the globe (including Russia, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Japan, Nauru and Fiji), who travelled from polling-station to polling-station and from town to town on the day. Participation in the poll was marked in each voter's passport, which prevented multiple voting. Ballot-papers were dropped into transparent boxes. Counts were conducted in the stations so that there could be no possibility of tampering during transportation, and, in addition to official observers, ordinary citizens could be seen peering through the windows of the buildings where the counts were underway as a further guarantee against malpractice.

According to the official figures provided by Batal Tabaghua, head of the electoral commission, the turnout of 101,192 represented 71.92% of those eligible to vote. Ankvab won outright, garnering 54.86% of the votes. He was followed by Shamba with 21.04%, marginally ahead of Khadzhimba with 19.83%. Ankvab was formally inaugurated at the end of September. Coming into office with the knowledge that the electorate's expectation of him was that he would prove to be a stalwart champion of the drive against corruption, fight in defence of law and order, and ensure that Abkhazia preserve and strengthen its independence (including from Russia), he quickly set about making changes in personnel. Among these was the awarding of the ministerial brief for foreign affairs to Vjacheslav Chirikba, former adviser to President Bagapsh and head of the Abkhazian delegation to the Geneva talks. Chirikba thus became the first member of any Abkhazian government to have wide experience of the West, having lived for many years in Holland, where he gained a doctorate (in North West Caucasian philology) from Leiden University.

The year 2011 ended with a statement issued on 29 December by Abkhazia's Foreign Ministry offering to facilitate repatriation to Abkhazia for any members of the diaspora living in Syria in view of the deteriorating situation in that country. And the first group of returnees from Syria, numbering twenty-seven, of whom twelve were children, arrived in Sukhum

on 5 May 2012.¹³⁵ Saak'ashvili, on the other hand, in his New Year's address to the nation urged his compatriots to mimic the Jews' aspirational seasonal greeting of 'Next Year in Jerusalem!' with the words 'Next Year in Sukhum!' (= /gaisad soxumshi/). As for the Georgian Parliament, it concluded its final year of sitting in the capital before its relocation to Kutaisi with a vote on 27 December that should perhaps give pause to those who laud Georgia as a 'beacon of democracy'. In her 3rd-January 2012 report for Radio Liberty entitled 'Georgian Parliament ignores election-law recommendations', Liz Fuller noted:

The Georgian parliament voted ... in the third and final reading to endorse a new draft Electoral Code intended to replace the one adopted in 2001, which has since undergone no fewer than 46 amendments. The new code fails, however, either to address perennial criticisms by successive international election-observation missions, or to incorporate proposals by opposition parties aimed at ensuring a fairer distribution of mandates that might undercut the ruling party's large parliamentary majority. In addition the parliament ignored the most crucial recommendations by the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's expert legal body, to which the draft was submitted for comment...¹³⁶

Problems within the Abkhazian Church

In January 2012, Archimandrite Dorofej Dbar of the Orthodox Church of Abkhazia paid a visit to Istanbul, where he was officially received by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In an interview he gave to the Russian-language paper *Èkko Moskvy* 'Echo of Moscow'¹³⁷ Dbar explained that, when the Georgian bishop left Abkhazia,¹³⁸ the priest Vissarion Apliaa, who was now in his forties at the time, took complete charge of the Sukhum Eparchy. Apliaa failed in his attempt to persuade the Russian Patriarch Aleksej II before the latter's death at the end of 2008 to sanction the Abkhazian Church's removal from the Georgian Church for association with that of Russia. When Aleksej's successor, Kirill I, maintaining his

¹³⁵ See <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/diaspora/858-compatriots-have-returned-to-abkhazia-from-syria.html>.

¹³⁶ See http://www.rferl.org/content/georgia_ignores_election-law_suggestions/24441200.html, posted on 4 January 2012.

¹³⁷ See either <http://apsnypress.info/analytic/5164.html>.

¹³⁸ In the interview it is stated that this took place in 2008 after the Five-Day War, but in fact it was after the 1992–93 war that the bishop left. Dbar was unclear how this error in the printed interview came about (personal communication).

predecessor's stance,¹³⁹ dispatched a representative to the monastery in New Athos (to the north of Sukhum) in 2010, the result was a schism within Abkhazia as a group of younger reformers came together under Dbar, heading what they declared to be a Holy Metropolis. The ultimate aim was (and remains) for the Abkhazian Church to achieve autocephaly, though, in the meantime, the goal was to ask the Constantinople Patriarch to define the canonical status of the Church in Abkhazia, where internal reconciliation would be a necessary first step towards the further development that might eventually lead to the desired autocephaly.¹⁴⁰ Needless to say, the Georgian Patriarch, Ilia II, continued to claim sovereignty over Abkhazia's ecclesiastical matters.¹⁴¹

Abkhazia's President Ankvab Survives Assassination-attempt

Ankvab chose not to live in the presidential residence on the south-eastern outskirts of Sukhum, preferring to travel each day along the main highway between his office and his home in the northern town of Gudauta. And at least four of the reported six attempts on his life since 2005 took place on the route of his daily journey. And it was Wednesday 22 February 2012 when the latest incident occurred, as the presidential motorcade was heading for Sukhum. A roadside-bomb was detonated, and this was followed by sustained gunfire. Two bodyguards were killed, but the president (this time) escaped injury. No-one had been arrested in connection with the previous attacks, and, with no arrests made in the immediate aftermath of this incident either, speculation about the reasons behind it began.

Discussing the need for changes in his 2011-manifesto for the presidential race Ankvab had not shirked from naming areas in need of reform (pp. 22–3):

It goes without saying that such changes will also entail reorganisation or, put another way, reform in the remaining structures (ministries and departments). This particularly applies to the power-structures, principally to the system of the Interior Ministry, which should be a real defender of social order and of the battle against criminality.

¹³⁹ See the article by Nikolaus von Twickel at <http://apsnypress.info/en/analytic/301.html>.

¹⁴⁰ The sides were to sign an agreement on 24 January, but, at the last minute, Apliaa declined.

¹⁴¹ Brittany Pheiffer's 'Another Abkhaz Independence Debate' of 14 February 2012 at: <http://www.evolutsia.net/another-abkhaz-independence-debate/>.

Given Ankvab's stated intentions and the lack of previous arrests, suspicions began to focus on the relevant power-structures. Indeed, as part of his comment on the events of 22 February leading local journalist Inal Khashig reminded his readers in *Ekho Kavkaza* 'Echo of the Caucasus' of action taken by Ankvab only days before the attack:¹⁴²

In the past week alone, he [Ankvab] has targeted the Interior Ministry with all its ancillaries, purged the Prosecutor General's office, dismissing two of the prosecutor-general's deputies, suspended the work of the Migration Service, and dismantled the Gagra district economic staff. He has spoken openly, without any circumlocutions or beating about the bush, about corruption, the illegal sale of passports, citizenship and land, about money embezzled and inept officials who terrorize both business and the man in the street.

Investigation into the incident proceeded, leading to the arrest of a number of suspects. But, on 17 April, as 53-year-old Aslambej Kchach, Security Council Chief from 1993 to 96, Abkhazia's Interior Minister from 1996 to 2003, and vice-presidential candidate for Beslan Butba in the 2009-presidential election, was about to be taken in for questioning, he shot himself in his bedroom; on the same day another suspect already in detention, Timur Khutaba, was found hanging in his prison-cell, whilst a third suspect also attempted suicide.

Between the twin-shocks of the assassination-attempt and the April-suicides, parliamentary elections were held. The turnout in the two rounds of voting fell below 50%, 44.51% going to the polls on 10 March, whilst in the second round on 24 March this crept up to 46.21%. One hundred and forty-eight candidates contested the 35 constituencies on 10 March, but that day only 13 passed the necessary threshold in Abkhazia's majoritarian system. One of these was Raul Khadzhimba, chairman of the opposition-party 'The Forum of National Unity of Abkhazia', who thus returned to the centre of politics after defeat in the presidential election of 2011. At this juncture, there was speculation that he might become the next Speaker, but, on 3 April, it was Valerij Bganba, a member of the previous parliament, who gained this post. A further 20 deputies were elected on 24 March; a re-run on 6 May was necessary in one constituency (No. 1), where the turnout was too low, and the Supreme Court was called upon to rule on the contested vote in the 21st polling-district, where toponymist Valerij Kvarchia was eventually re-elected as a deputy. The ballot was again over-

¹⁴² For the English version, see www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/803-an-attack-on-sovereignty-by-inal-khashig-.html.

seen by a range of international observers, who once more gave their approval to the fair way that the ballot was conducted.

Originally, one hundred and fifty-six candidates had put their names forward, thirty-five being nominated by registered political parties vs one hundred and twenty-six by 'initiative groups'; there was some doubling in nomination. The Central Election Commission approved one hundred and fifty-one names, and then three of these withdrew. Ethnically speaking, of the remaining one hundred and forty-eight candidates no fewer than one hundred and twenty-five were Abkhazians (roughly 50% of the population), underlining the dominant position of Abkhazians in local politics since 1993; alongside these were eleven Armenians (around 17% of the population), eight Russians (some 10% of the population), two Greeks, two Kartvelians (around 20% of the population), one Kabardian and one Ossete. Of the thirty-five successful candidates, three were Armenian and one Mingrelian. Only one woman, Emma Gamisonia. One of those who failed to secure election was none other than Aslambej Kchach.

In terms of political affiliation, whilst four of the eleven candidates from opposition-parties were successful (all from Khadzhimba's party), only three members of the main party that supported the Bagapsh-Ankvab ticket in 2009 ('United Abkhazia') were elected, though the party's chairman, Daur Tarba, was not among them. This might be interpreted (at first glance) as an expression of disappointment in the first seven months of Ankvab's presidency. But this would not necessarily be an accurate assessment, for 'United Abkhazia' was the creation of, and particularly associated with, the late Sergej Bagapsh, whereas Ankvab's party-support had originally come from smaller groupings, which did not nominate any candidates in this election.

Perhaps the outcome of the voting indicated that the electorate had decided to assert itself by not following previous voting-patterns but rather, in the spirit of 'a plague on all your houses', to give their support to some new blood in the hope that a parliament so constituted would be more likely to buttress Ankvab's anti-corruption drive. If so, this could betoken a growing level of sophistication in the young state. It should also be stressed that Ankvab did not seek in any way to influence the outcome of the ballot, all of which must be seen to speak favourably of the health of Abkhazian democracy.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ For comments on the election see Ó Beacháin (2012), an article also available at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/876-the-dynamics-of-electoral-politics-in->

South Ossetia Gains New President

On 23 January 2012, Alla Dzhioeva, who had been declared the winner in South Ossetia's presidential election on 11 November 2011 by the local Central Election Commission, gave an interview to *The Georgian Times*.¹⁴⁴ She took the opportunity to complain about the behaviour of outgoing President Kokoiti, of whom she had been a long-standing critic, and of the Supreme Court; both president and court, she claimed, had applied pressure to Bella Plieva, Chairman of the Central Election Commission, with regard to the Commission's declaration of Dzhioeva as the winner. She naturally asserted that the new elections, scheduled for 25 March and for which a test of the candidates' proficiency in Ossetic and Russian had been belatedly introduced, would be illegitimate.

After declaring that she expected to be inaugurated as South Ossetia's legitimately elected president on 10 February, Dzhioeva was involved in a mysterious incident on the evening of 9 February which resulted in her being hospitalised. The following day *Gazeta.ru* reported that shortly after the incident:¹⁴⁵

the republican media spread a message from the acting president Vadim Borovtsev, in which he warned of a prepared coup d'état. "Dzhioeva publicly announced about her inauguration on February 10, which contradicts the decisions of the South Ossetian parliament," Borovtsev said. Later it became known that Dzhioeva's husband, Mel Tskhovrebov was arrested and that the ex-presidential candidate's office was being searched.

With Dzhioeva sidelined, two rounds of voting in the rescheduled elections went ahead, and, on 9 April, Leonid Tibilov, former chief of the the South Ossetian security-service from 1992 to 1998, was declared President after garnering over 54% of the vote in the run-off with Davit Sanakoev. Following his victory, Tibilov signed a decree on 23 May appointing Dzhioeva Deputy Prime Minister with the portfolio for social services.¹⁴⁶

abkhazia-by-donnacha-o-beachain.html; also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abkhazian_parliamentary_election_2012.

¹⁴⁴ See <http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/interview/70897.html>.

¹⁴⁵ See http://en.gazeta.ru/news/2012/02/10/a_3995613.shtml.

¹⁴⁶ See http://english.ruvr.ru/2012_05_24/75765024/.

A New Figure in Georgian Politics

Businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili, who in March 2012 was ranked 153rd in the 2012-Forbes List, reportedly being worth \$6.4 billion net, decided to move into politics. After declaring his intention to form a party in opposition to the governing *United National Movement* (in Georgian /ertiani natsionaluri modzraoba/), he was stripped of his Georgian citizenship in October 2011. Though born in Georgia, it seems that his Georgian citizenship was awarded by presidential decree in 2004. The website *T'abula* notes: "According to the Constitution of Georgia and Article 32 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Citizenship of Georgia, the acquisition of another country's citizenship by a Georgian citizen causes an automatic loss of citizenship of Georgia." Thus, when Ivanishvili's acquisition of French citizenship became known on 7 October 2011, Georgia's Civil Registry acted to deprive him of his status in the country of his birth.¹⁴⁷ Undaunted, Ivanishvili pressed ahead, forming a movement styled *Georgian Dream* (in Georgian /kartuli otsneba/) at the end of the year. Some months later, on 19 April 2012, he announced the formation of the coalition *Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia* (in Georgian /kartuli otsneba-demok'ratiuli sakartvelo/), with which were associated such individuals as former ombudsman for human rights Sozar Subari, former diplomat Tedo Dzhaparidze, early supporter of Saak'ashvili but subsequently Chairman of the Republican Party Davit Usupashvili, the writer Guram Odisharia, and the party *Our Georgia-Free Democrats* (in Georgian /chveni sakartvelo-tavisupali demok'rat'ebi/), founded on 16 July 2009 by Georgia's UN Ambassador at the time of the August 2008 war. On 11 June 2012, a court imposed a fine of 148,650,131 Georgian laris on one of Ivanishvili's companies for allegedly making an illegal contribution to the new political party. On appeal, this was halved to 74,325,065 laris (\$45.4 million).¹⁴⁸ These moves prompted the EU's foreign policy supremo, Baroness Catherine Ashton, to issue a statement, read on her behalf on 4 July during a debate in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, part of which stated:¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ See <http://en.tabula.ge/article-6250.html>.

¹⁴⁸ The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association's comment 'What was Bidzina Ivanishvili fined for?' on their website for 28 June 2012, at: http://gyla.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1361%3Awhat-was-bidzina-ivanishvili-fined-for-&catid=45%3Anews-eng&Itemid=1&lang=en.

¹⁴⁹ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24969>. Whatever the purpose of the court-cases, the Georgian parliament passed on 28 June 2012 an amendment to the election-code that would allow Ivanishvili to contest both the parliamentary and presidential elec-

We have noted with concern the perception that the government is trying to hinder participation of opposition leader Ivanishvili, resources are deployed against him and laws on party finance are being applied in one-sided way. We must insist that laws are correctly and transparently applied to leave no possible doubt that due process has been followed,

On 14 March 2012, Ivanishvili, Alasania and Usupashvili appeared before a group of Western diplomats, at which meeting Alasania charged that Saak'ashvili's Ministry of Defence and law-enforcement agencies were setting up in Zugdidi (capital of Mingrelia) unlawful 'paramilitary groups... preparing for civil war and confrontation'. Saak'ashvili was, he claimed 'not paving the way for free and fair elections' but rather 'for the official execution of the political opposition'.¹⁵⁰

Whilst these developments in internal Georgian politics might appear somewhat removed from the central concerns of the conflicts examined in this book, their relevance can be seen in the following. On 22 June 2012, the official Abkhazian news-agency Apsny Press issued a report on a meeting called by President Ankvab to discuss the deteriorating security-situation in the Gal District. Secretary of the Security Council Stanislav Lakoba made some pertinent observations. Having alluded to the enunciation of fears by oppositionists in Georgia of groups being trained in Zugdidi ultimately to be activated to destabilise Georgia and give Saak'ashvili an excuse to declare a state of emergency and cancel elections, as adumbrated above, Lakoba remarked:¹⁵¹

It is interesting that this effectively coincided with the liberation from prison of many Georgian terrorists who operated in Abkhazia under Shevardnadze but were sentenced to long prison terms after Saak'ashvili came to power. However, they were all released at this time before serving out their prison-terms. Groups of them underwent training in special centres in Anak'lia under the auspices of the Georgian special services and Western instructors. Soon, these groups will appear in the Gal District and carry out a series of acts of sabotage and terrorism.

tions (see <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24936>), though Ivanishvili insisted on restoration of his Georgian citizenship.

¹⁵⁰ See Vladimir Socor's commentary 'Ivanishvili's coalition reveals destabilizing potential' for *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (volume 9, issue 63) of 29 March 2012 at: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=39198](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39198).

¹⁵¹ See the Apsny Press website at: <http://apsnypress.info/news/6587.html>. See also <http://www.abkhazworld.com/news/conflict/832-the-abkhaz-side-has-expressed-serious-concern.html>.

Furthermore, it was reported on 25 June 2012 that, during his trip to Italy, Abkhazia's Foreign Minister Chirikba had given an interview to *Limes* in which the following was included:¹⁵²

I'm sure that if it were another president and not Saakashvili, there would be a possibility of reaching an agreement. We need more pragmatic interlocutors, like the leader of 'Our Georgia-Free democrats' Irakli Alasania or the leader of the 'Georgian Dream', Bidzina Ivanishvili, who has recently come into politics and who will take part in parliamentary elections for the first time. Ivanishvili is a man of business and may be quite pragmatic, a man who will understand what the solution is that will benefit everyone.

It will be recalled that there had been speculation at the time of Alasania's appointment as Georgian Ambassador to the UN that Saak'ashvili had made this decision to remove Alasania from heading the negotiations with the Abkhazian authorities so that he would not be the one to benefit from any *kudos* resulting from any breakthrough in the talks.

Then, on 12 July 2012, the person presented by Ivanishvili to voters in the west Georgian spa-resort of Ts'q'alt'ubo as 'standard for a politician' was none other than P'aat'a Zakareishvili, who has figured in these pages as a critic of Saak'ashvili's policy towards the Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ivanishvili was quoted by *Ėkho Kavkaza* as predicting:¹⁵³

After our coming to power, P'aat'a Zakareishvili will be assigned the function of returning our Abkhazian and Ossetian brothers and our territories.

Onward to 2013

It is impossible to complete the account of relations between Abkhazia, South Ossetia and indeed Russia, on the one hand, and Georgia under Saak'ashvili, on the other, as, at the time of writing, Saak'ashvili's second term of office continues. It is not due to expire until 2013. If recent precedent is avoided, Saak'ashvili will become the first president of Georgia not to be unseated by unconstitutional means. Speculation since the summer of 2010 has been that, as Tbilisi started to reduce the powers of the president whilst increasing those of the prime minister, Saak'ashvili could be planning to ape the actions of his Russian *bête noire*, Vladimir Putin, and

¹⁵² See the website of 'Citizens for Democracy in Georgia' at: <http://www.democracyin.georgia.org/abkhazia-fm-we-need-pragmatic-interlocutors-like-ivanishvili-and-alasania-for-dialogue1>.

¹⁵³ See <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/archive/news/20120712/3235/2759.html?id=24643123>.

seek to become Georgia's premier when his path to the presidency is blocked by Georgia's constitution.¹⁵⁴ In line with this speculation, Georgia's parliament amended the Constitution on 15 October 2010 to allow a move in 2013 to a new model of government with enhanced powers for the parliament and government.¹⁵⁵ In the meantime, Saak'ashvili named Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, a man with a reputation for not shrinking from difficult decisions, having been responsible for cleaning up the police, to be the country's new Prime Minister on 30 June 2012 in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections in October. On 3 July, the new Prime Minister announced a four-year 12.2 billion-dollar programme entitled More Benefit to the People, thereby leading to speculation that Saak'ashvili might not be planning to move over to the premiership in 2013 after all.¹⁵⁶

Only time will tell how events will play out. But, based on the evidence of the years since the Rose Revolution, one prediction would seem to be reasonably uncontroversial—as long as Saak'ashvili remains at, or close to, the centre of Georgian politics, relations with Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Russia are unlikely to experience any significant change, let alone improvement.

¹⁵⁴ See the comment "Saakashvili's critics are convinced that the constitutional amendments under discussion are designed specifically to enable him to remain in power as prime minister after his current (second) term expires in January 2013" in *RFERL's* report 'Georgian President Rejects Venice Commission Criticism Of New Constitution', available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/Georgian_President_Rejects_Venice_Commission_Criticism_Of_New_Constitution/2151856.html.

¹⁵⁵ See S. Markedonov's 'Saakashvili forever?' at: http://rbth.ru/articles/2010/10/27/saakashvili_forever05068.html.

¹⁵⁶ See Paul Rimple's 'Saakashvili, it seems, will not pull a Putin' in *The Moscow Times* on 8 July 2012 at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/saakashvili-it-seems-will-not-pull-a-putin/461798.html>.

CHAPTER SIX

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT¹

tvalit brma sdzhobia gonebit brmasao
'Blind of eye is preferable to blind of mind' (Georgian proverb)

A Centuries-old Attraction

Given the geographical position of the Caucasus at the inter-section of Europe and Asia, straddling north-south and east-west trade-routes, it is hardly surprising that over the centuries it has attracted the attention of acquisitive external powers. If in their age of colonial expansion the early Greeks had little interest in the hinterland behind their outposts on the eastern sea-board of the Black Sea (their Pontic Euxine), late republican and early imperial Rome would vie for power in Transcaucasia with Seleucid Persia, Parthia and Armenia. The conversion to Christianity in the 330s of King Mirian in central Georgia, following the precedent set by Armenia some 30 years before, and anticipating in turn that of Caucasian Albania, did not lead to an unshakeable association with western cultures and/or civilisations. The reason was that Christianity was to battle there for centuries first with Zoroastrianism and then with Islam, introduced first by the Arab presence in Tbilisi and its environs in the central region of Kartli, and subsequently by Persian influence in eastern areas and by (Seljuk or later Ottoman) Turkish influence in both western Georgia and amongst the North West Caucasian tribes in Abkhazia, Ubykhia (around today's Sochi) and Circassia up to the Kuban basin, places where Genoese trading-posts had earlier been established. The bleak period of Mongol domination and depredation should also not be overlooked.

In more recent centuries, as Muscovy began to expand and turn its eyes southwards in the hope of securing access to warm-water ports, it was inevitable that the Caucasus, affording outlets on the Black Sea, a natural line of defence courtesy of the almost impregnable mountain-barrier running from the Black to the Caspian Sea, and a potential forward-base for a

¹ Some of the topics to be discussed below will be a reiteration or elaboration of remarks in preceding chapters.

move against British interests in regions to the north of India in the 19th-century's Great Game (see Hopkirk 1990) would prove too alluring a morsel for tsarism's voracious appetite to ignore and leave for other powers to gobble up.² And so, for some two centuries, from the time of Russia's first significant involvement in the region (via its 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk with Erekle II, King of Kartli and K'akheti, its subsequent construction of the Georgian Military Highway to connect North Ossetia with central Georgia, and its initial encounters with North Caucasian tribes at that same period) to the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991, the Caucasus (including Transcaucasia) fell firmly within the Russian/Soviet orbit. With the demise of the USSR, Russia again resumed the role of an external player in what thereafter became designated as (one part of) its Near Abroad.

Foreign interest in, and engagement with, the current conflicts between the Georgians, on the one hand, and the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, on the other, can mostly be viewed in terms of the activities of governments, governmental institutions (e.g. the UN), and (international) non-governmental organisations. During the Soviet era, knowledge of its peripheral republics and even more so of their (potential) internal problems was virtually non-existent at (quasi-)governmental levels in the West; if known about and/or researched to any degree at all, relevant expertise lay with a handful of individual academics, usually in the fields of linguistics, or regional history, literature and geography.³ And, until the collapse

² Britain, under Lord Palmerston's guidance as first Foreign Secretary and then Prime Minister, was ultimately too concerned to prevent Russian advances in the Balkans to be concerned with its territorial expansion in the Caucasus.

³ As explained in the Preface, my own background lay in Georgian/Caucasian linguistics. It was as part of research conducted in Tbilisi during a British Academy supported sabbatical trip to Georgia during the final months of 1987 that I gathered information about the events which had taken place in Abkhazia during the years 1937–53 in preparation for a talk delivered in January 1988 at London University's School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES); this presentation was eventually published in the proceedings of the seminar-series concerned (Hewitt 1989). I drew on that information in composing in May 1989 my attempt to calm the emotions that seemed to be spiralling out of control in the Georgian anti-Abkhazian (indeed, anti-minority) rhetoric. This intervention took the form of what was fashionable at the time, namely an 'Open Letter' (in Georgian) addressed to the Georgian people. Immediately after the fatal clashes in Sukhum and Ochamchira on 15–16 July 1989, Givi Gumbaridze, 1st Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, who was on a visit to Ochamchira, just outside of which the River Aaldzga (Ghalidzga) represented the 'front line' in the tense stand-off between the massing Abkhazians and Kartvelians, agreed to meet me in the office of the Head of the Ochamchira Region, Sergej Bagapsh, on Monday 17 July. Evidently as a direct result, my Open Letter (Hewitt 1989a; my own translation back into English can be read at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/conflict/637-an-open-letter-to-the-georgian-people-1989.html>) was published in Tbilisi just four days

of the USSR, there was in any case no real opportunity for outside-involvement in any meaningful sense. However, things changed, albeit slowly, after the USSR's demise.

Early Missions by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation and International Alert

The outbreak of war in Abkhazia on 14 August 1992 resulted in two early missions of enquiry being despatched in November of that year. One was by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO),⁴ based in The Hague and then headed by Dutch international lawyer Dr. Michael van Walt van Praag,⁵ and it was led by the former British Labour Minister of Health, (the late) Lord David Ennals. The other was organised by the London-based NGO International Alert (IA), one of whose founding-members had been Lord Ennals' (then already deceased) brother, Martin. Before the UNPO report was ready for publication, Lord Ennals, whose post-mission interview on Abkhazia for *The Guardian* was, for some reason, never published, was in the audience at an open session at Chatham House in London on 23 November to hear an address by Georgia's then Foreign Minister Aleksandre Chik'vaidze. The exchange between the two of them on events in Gagra (specifically Chik'vaidze's accusation of a massacre of Georgians by the Abkhazians vs Ennals' strenuous rebuttal of the same) was incorporated as part of Appendix 6 in my 1993 article.⁶ UNPO's second, post-war mission produced the already cited report (Overeem et al. 1995) which crucially emphasised (once again) the lack of evidence to substanti-

later on 21 July, even though the text had lain in the relevant editorial office for some weeks. When Abkhazian friends had learnt that the Georgian recipients had no intention to publish the piece, they translated it into Russian and put it on display in glass-cases in the centre of Sukhum as was generally done in Soviet times with the central Russian daily newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestija*.

⁴ In my 1993 article I wrongly described this organisation as an affiliate of the UN.

⁵ The head of UNPO had already visited Abkhazia in July 1992 and had addressed a letter to both Shevardnadze and Ardzinba prior to the outbreak of hostilities to warn of the danger of just such an escalation. As remarked in the preamble to UNPO's 1st report of its mission in November 1993, only Ardzinba replied to the letter. The report may be consulted in *Central Asian Survey*, 12.3, 1993, pp. 325–345. Also conducting his own, one-man fact-finding mission to Georgia in July–August 1992 on behalf of the Catholic body *Pax Christi* was Egbert Wesselink—see Wesselink (1992).

⁶ This was done in order to illustrate how important it is to subject to the keenest of scrutiny Georgian assertions of misbehaviour on the part of their opponents, for, no matter how highly placed the source, a mismatch is often revealed between assertion and reality.

ate the oft-repeated charge of ethnic cleansing of Abkhazia's Kartvelian population at the end of the war.

The leading members of the International Alert team were one-time CIA officer (the late) Paul Henze (though at that time he was affiliated to the Rand Corporation) and his fellow-American Enders Wimbush, at the time Director of Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (RFERL), still then based in Munich, though now it has relocated to Prague. Their report was published in January 1993 and presented that same month at a day's seminar at IA's London headquarters. Those invited to the presentation (including the present author) were sent a copy of the report in advance. So astonished was I at the content that I felt compelled to compose a response, distributed to all in attendance on the day of the seminar. My criticism began thus:

This is a deeply flawed (not to say totally unprofessional) and indeed dishonest document, a fact that should be brought to the attention of all who read it. It is flawed because the duty of such a commission should be to form an *objective* judgment on the basis of its background-research and its discussions with both parties as to where the truth actually lies among the various (counter-) claims and not merely anecdotally to repeat, as is often the case here, the claims themselves in the context of a one-sided running-commentary. It is dishonest insofar as, after largely disparaging the Abkhazian leadership (in terms of its 'academic' nature, lack of administrative experience, and 'poor' grasp of international law), it proceeds actually to advocate two courses of action which have formed the very fundamentals of Abkhazian *desiderata* from the beginning, namely that (i) Abkhazia be awarded the status of a full republic within Georgia, and (ii) Abkhazia enter into federal (?confederal) relations with Georgia.⁷

Paul Henze's Later 'Contributions'

The following month, Henze was due to be the main speaker in the session devoted to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict at the Jimmy Carter Center's International Negotiating Network (17–19 February, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA). Again, his paper was distributed to participants in advance. In the event, Henze failed to appear and so could not be exposed to questioning, but, as with his earlier paper, this document too suffered

⁷ I entitled my response /sinte muoti gok'o, utole rek da?/, which is a Mingrelian proverb meaning 'Why do you need light, if you are blind?'. The whole text is available for consultation at: www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/515-comments-on-georgia-international-alert.hewitt.html.

from serious shortcomings.⁸ Not surprisingly, this report had occasioned a formal complaint from the Abkhazians.⁹ Since IA's director, Kumar Rumpesinghe, was also present at the Carter Center gathering, being a member of the Center's board, the opportunity was taken to arrange a meeting between him and the Abkhazian delegation (Natella Akaba, Liana Kvarchelia and Galina Kalimova).¹⁰ I too was present and witnessed the personal apology that Rumpesinghe delivered to the delegation for IA's (ir) responsibility in producing and then licensing the publication of such a defective document, but, regrettably, Rumpesinghe never followed this up with the public apology that was promised at the meeting and which the matter certainly warranted. However, regardless of its inauspicious beginnings as an actor on the Caucasian scene, IA did not lose its interest in the region, extending its activities eastwards into South Ossetia and then northwards into Daghestan and Chechenia.¹¹ On 29 November 2010, IA organised in Brussels an international roundtable on Georgian-Abkhazian relations with representatives from the sides, European institutions and the UN.¹² As part of their programme Cultural Dialogue in the South Caucasus organised various events in Farnham and London between 11 and 15 June 2012 for representatives of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabagh. And, specifi-

⁸ Once more I prepared a response for distribution to participants. It was given the Georgian title */sibrdzne sitsruisa/* 'The wisdom of the lie', after the famous work of moral tales by the 17th/18th-century Georgian man-of-letters Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani. It can be found at www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/514-sibrjne-sicruisa-reply-to-phenze.html.

⁹ The letter carried the signature of Natella Akaba but was drafted by Liana Kvarchelia and Arda Inal-Ipa, who found themselves together at the time in Moscow (Kvarchelia—personal communication).

¹⁰ Dr. John Colarusso of McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada) was also present to help present the Abkhazian case, as were the late Yahia Kazan and his son Yanal, ethnic Abkhazians who had taken up residence in New Jersey after Israel's seizure of their home on the Golan Heights, where they lived as part of the North West Caucasian (mainly Circassian) diaspora. For several years they were active lobbyists for Abkhazia in America, providing financial backing for a variety of initiatives both in Abkhazia and abroad. They eventually lost the confidence of Ardzinba's administration, which withdrew their warrant to act as Abkhazia's representatives in America, after the distribution of an unsanctioned letter that suggested that Abkhazia was well positioned to take action against Western oil-interests, given the proximity to Abkhazia of the pipeline running from the Caspian to Georgia's Black Sea port of Supsa.

¹¹ Reference has already been made (Chapter 5) to IA's post-August 2008 Russian-language report (Kvarchelia 2009) and its abbreviated English version. See also their publication *International Engagement in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict Resolution Process* of May 2010.

¹² See <http://www.international-alert.org/press/archive/php?id=438>.

cally on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, their 48-page report 'Prospects for the regulation of Trans-Ingur/i economic relations' by Natalia Mirimanova appeared in March 2012.¹³

As for Henze, he paid his first post-war visit to Abkhazia from 29 May to 1 June 1997 in the company of the then-US ambassador to Georgia, William Courtney. His impressions of this trip were published in his 'Abkhaz diary—1997' (Henze 1998). On this occasion, a response was produced by the Moscow-based Abkhazian Yura Anchabadze.¹⁴ Anyone familiar with the cowboy-serials churned out by the Hollywood studios in the 1940s-50 for Saturday film-clubs or television will understand the simplistic template employed by Henze to guide his readers of this work towards the 'correct' appraisal of each party to the conflict: the Georgian side of the border is portrayed in the purest of white, whereas black is the universal colour reserved for Abkhazia.

Whilst Henze's writings in themselves might be dismissed as being of no significance, they are all too symptomatic of a fundamental and constant defect of the Western (especially the American) approach to the issues at the very core of this book. Georgia was one of the easiest parts of the USSR to visit during the last decades of Soviet rule, and the bounteous hospitality of the Georgians, with whom, despite the republic's multi-ethnic makeup, most travellers came into contact, coupled with the average Georgian's devil-may-care freedom in proclaiming to all and sundry their resentment of Russian domination earned them perfectly understandable sympathy and admiration. Then Shevardnadze's perceived role in the collapse of both the Berlin Wall and ultimately the USSR itself only underscored the perception that the Georgians were eager Western partners-in-waiting. Both those reared with a Cold War mentality or, in more recent times, those of a Neo-Con persuasion give the distinct impression that their view of the world rests on the superficial calculation: Russia was a threat to the West for much of the 20th century, and so any state (or part thereof) able to demonstrate its anti-Russian credentials deserved/deserves unreserved support, whereas those deemed to be pro-Russian were/are to be shunned and treated with suspicion as potential foes in their own right.¹⁵ Georgia was recognised, as we have seen, with no proper under-

¹³ Available for download at: <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/prospects-regulation-trans-inguri-economic-relations>.

¹⁴ See 'An Abkhazian's Response to Paul Henze's "Abkhazia Diary—1997"' available at: www.kapba.de/SomeObservations.html.

¹⁵ Recall Henze's fulsome praise of the Circassians for their unbending resistance to Russia's advance against the North West Caucasus in the 19th century (Henze 1992), a stance

standing of the nature and depth of its internal ethnic difficulties. What appears (and appeals) to Westerners as an attractive superabundance of freedom-loving self-confidence comes across more like an unwelcome (not to say threatening) paternalism and overweening arrogance to the republic's non-Georgian (past or present) residents. Given the geographical realities for Abkhazia (and South Ossetia), as vividly captured in the title of Stanislav Lakoba's 1992 article 'Between hammer and anvil',¹⁶ when the potential threat became an all too concrete reality, there was no alternative for them but to seek succour from their northern neighbour, as they well knew that Georgia could by then be confident of indiscriminating support from its new Western partners, as indeed it still benefits from such support to the present day. This reliance on the Kremlin only deepened Western suspicions of both the motives of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, on the one hand, and the role played by Russia in the two conflicts, on the other.

Double Standards

Conversely, the application of double standards manifested over the years in the West's attitude towards Tbilisi, on the one hand, and Sukhum or Tskhinval, on the other, created a very jaundiced view in Abkhazian and Ossetian societies of the relevant countries' much vaunted championing of human rights and their claims to be a ready buttress for the advancement of democratic values around the world; it additionally strengthened the suspicions, already sufficiently entrenched from Soviet days, of the West's motives for engaging with the region at all. The specific issue of this double-standard approach was addressed in 1999 in an unpublished conference-paper by Liana Kvarchelia.¹⁷ Among her observations to illustrate the glaringly antipathetic attitudes towards Abkhazia were:

- total lack of response by the international community not only to Abkhazian pleas to halt Georgian actions (including racially motivated killings) but to the alarm-bells present in materials published by such respected organisations as Amnesty International;

reflected by at least parts of the international Circassian community in their opposition to the holding of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi and its environs, lands that were occupied by North West Caucasians prior to 1864.

¹⁶ Published in the Russian-language *Respublika Abxazija* with the title 'Mezhdu molotom i nakoval'nej' on 29 February 1992.

¹⁷ Delivered in Sukhum on 22 July.

- the sending of a UN investigative mission only at the end of hostilities in Abkhazia in reaction to a Georgian invitation cynically proffered in the expectation of receiving backing for their charges of ethnic cleansing at the end of the war in Abkhazia;
- the report by Human Rights' Watch, which appeared a full year after the war's end and which turned out to be more concerned with the use of Russian weaponry by the Abkhazians than with any abuses of human rights committed during the Georgian occupation of Abkhazian territory;
- the lack of compunction about receiving at NATO head-quarters in Brussels in June 1999 the leader of the 'Abkhazian Government-in-exile' (the late) Tamaz Nadareishvili, despite his role in orchestrating acts of terrorism and sabotage in the Gal District of Abkhazia.

The isolating of, and imposition of sanctions on, the citizenry of Abkhazia and South Ossetia created a decidedly unhealthy siege-mentality. And one highly regrettable consequence of this series of measures is that those NGOs which have developed within (primarily) Abkhazia and which work in partnership with Western funders suffer from perhaps an even more negative image locally than parallel organisations in other parts of the former Soviet space.¹⁸ Although they have been scrupulous in rejecting cooperation with, and funding from, any Western partner which has as a publicly stated goal the preservation of Georgia's territorial integrity (e.g. USAID—see Kvarchelia 2010.55), many in Abkhazian society who are unfamiliar with the West and its less perfidious structures seem inclined unquestioningly to subscribe to the adage "He who pays the piper calls the tune". They thus conclude that any provider of funds or those in receipt of them must be working in the West's rather than Abkhazia's true interests, which only increases pressure on such NGOs and hinders their ability to effect changes for the improvement of the health of their society. This background of mutual wariness, suspicion and even resentment should be borne in mind in any discussion of foreign involvement in the conflicts.

The Role of the UN an OSCE (earlier CSCE)

Useful summaries of the activities of international inter-governmental structures and international NGOs in Abkhazia¹⁹ can be found respec-

¹⁸ For NGOs in Georgia see Companjen (2004).

¹⁹ The London-based VERTIC (later LINKS) organisation under the Maltese Dennis

tively in articles by Akaba (2010) and Kvarchelia (2010). Akaba follows Paye and Remacle (1996) in noting that, though the preeminent role of the UN in the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute is normally highlighted, the CSCE actually strove to exercise an influence over events unfolding in Georgia as early as March 1992 in the immediate aftermath of Shevardnadze's return to his former communist fiefdom very much to the benefit of the returning Georgian figure-head, thereby betraying from the start of its activities in Georgia a pro-Georgian bias vis-à-vis the existing and developing conflicts. The Belgian authors additionally pointed out (p. 111) the UN's defiance of its own Charter by admitting (i) Armenia and Azerbaijan (2 March 1992) despite the war being fought between them over Nagorno-Karabagh, and (ii) Georgia (31 July 1992) in spite of ongoing civil war in Mingrelia (not to mention the dangerously deteriorating situation in Abkhazia, which became the object of military action a mere fortnight after the granting of UN membership to Georgia).

As Georgia was a UN member-state, the UN quickly became engaged once the war began in Abkhazia. Following the first ceasefire negotiated in Moscow on 3 September 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed Swiss Ambassador Eduard Brunner his special representative for Georgia, with one of his duties being to liaise with the CSCE Chairman in Office. The UN's Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established on the basis of the Security Council's resolution 858 of 24 August 1993.²⁰ The Mission was originally to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire-agreement of 27 July 1993, but the resumption of hostilities in September, which speedily led to the Abkhazians' ultimate victory, meant that that resolution was effectively deprived of force, so that for the Mission to continue activities on the ground a new resolution (SC 881) was passed on 4 November, granting a temporary mandate that authorised contacts with both parties, as well as with the Russian military contingent, oversight of the situation, and the passing of information to the UN headquarters. Once the peace-agreements were signed in Moscow in May 1994, the Security Council passed resolution 937 on 27 July 1994, which extended the Mission's basic mandate and raised the number of military observers to 136; there were also non-military staff active at the Mission. Among the

Sammut took an early, but at the time poorly informed, interest in the South Ossetian conflict.

²⁰ All UN resolutions, statements by the Secretary General and other UN documents pertaining to Abkhazia between 1992 and 2009 have been gathered together and published in three volumes under the general editorship of Vjatcheslav Chirikba (2012).

Mission's new responsibilities were: (a) oversight of the activities of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS, effectively Russian) peace-keeping forces, introduced as part of the 1994 accords to exercise control over the demilitarised zones along the R. Ingur and in the Upper K'odor Valley, and, especially important in view of events in the summer of 2006; and (b) overseeing the withdrawal of Georgia's military forces from the K'odor Valley to places beyond 'Abkhazia (Republic of Georgia)'.²¹

The Mission's base was first located near the resort of Pitsunda, delightful for those billeted there but far removed from any likely flash-point in/near the demilitarised zone; it was later relocated to the *Aitar* complex on the south-eastern outskirts of Sukhum. The number of military observers fluctuated over the years, as each six-month mandate was renewed. These renewals required the agreement of both parties to the conflict, and, though Tbilisi occasionally postured with threats to withhold its permission, the Mission remained on the ground until its continued presence was finally vetoed by Russia on behalf of Abkhazia in the Security Council in 2009 following months of wrangling in an attempt to devise a new title for it that would be acceptable to all concerned, the Abkhazians categorically rejecting the words 'In Georgia' once recognition by Russia had been achieved.

Though the UN and CSCE (later OSCE) collaborated, as early as 1993 their division of labour was, as stated earlier, that the UN took the leading role in Abkhazia, the OSCE in South Ossetia. Despite the fact that the UN had the interests of its member Georgia at heart, it came to be seen in Abkhazia as a less biased organisation than the OSCE, the actions of which were deemed to be fundamentally aimed at restricting Russia's role in Transcaucasia and which at its 1994 summit in Budapest offensively referred to the 'ethnic cleansing and mass-expulsion of people' (as though this were a proven fact) with reference to the outflow of most of the Kartvelian population at the end of the war in Abkhazia. In similar fashion, in paragraph 20 of OSCE's Lisbon summit of 3 December 1996 there was condemnation of 'ethnic cleansing' committed against Kartvelian communities.²² And further reinforcement of OSCE's position came in para-

²¹ It was the practice in UN documents to place '(Republic of) Georgia' immediately after any mention of Abkhazia in order to underline the UN's view that Abkhazia was still a part of Georgia. Introduction of the term *de facto* to preface the political title of the offices held by Abkhazian politicians from c.1997 was interpreted as a positive move (Akaba 2010.13).

²² See: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/oscelisb.htm>; also available for download at: www.osce.org/mc/39539?download=true.

graph 17 of the Declaration issued at its Istanbul summit in November 1999.²³

As for the UN, it was more guarded in its language, referring, for example, to the ‘unacceptable nature of demographic changes resulting from the conflict’ in the Security Council’s resolution 993 of 12 May 1995 (Akaba 2010.10); as already noted in Chapter 4, on the basis of its own investigation on the ground in October 1993, the UN reported that it could find no convincing proof of ethnic cleansing by either side (Documents S/26795). Nevertheless, it did not escape the notice of the Abkhazians and other minorities within the republic that no-one at the UN or within the wider international community had raised any concerns when thousands of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Russians and Abkhazians themselves were uprooted at the start of military action in August 1992 and that the UN only began seriously to engage with the region when defeat was inflicted on the Georgians, an attitudinal posturing that was clearly paralleled again at the start of hostilities in South Ossetia on 7/8 August 2008. When the UN Office for the Defence and Encouragement of Human Rights in Abkhazia (Georgia) was set up on 10 December 1996 in accordance with Security Council resolution 1077 of 22 October that year, it was to be a joint-operation conducted by staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and OSCE (Akaba 2010.11).

Now, when human rights are mentioned in the context of Abkhazia, the Abkhazians have the impression that it is only the rights of Kartvelians that arouse Western interest and concerns. The suggested opening of a human rights’ office in the town of Gal was rejected by the Abkhazians, who would also point to examples like the letter which Knut Vollebaek (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities) wrote to Abkhazia’s President Bagapsh from The Hague on 29 May 2008 accusing the Abkhazian authorities of banning education in the Georgian language and pointing out that Gal Mingrelians “strongly disapprove of the attempts by the *de facto* authorities to impose a ‘Mingrelian’ identity and language on Georgians in the Gali district through the education system.” He wrote:

Some of my [Abkhazian] interlocutors emphasized that the *de facto* authorities would only find education in Georgian in the Gali district acceptable if Georgian schools there use history and geography textbooks elaborated by Abkhaz authors and used in Abkhazian schools. I stand ready, Mr. Bagapsh, to assist you with the printing of such textbooks in the Georgian language.

²³ See http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/osce/text/summit_declaration.htm.

Vollebaek was also concerned about moves “to force Georgians in the Gali district to take Abkhaz ‘citizenship’ and at the same time ‘renounce’ their Georgian citizenship.” In fact, teaching in the medium of Georgian was/is not banned in the Gal District, where Georgian is the language of instruction in some thirteen schools; the teachers receive funding from Georgia and, in the absence of alternatives, use Georgian textbooks. In a press-release by Apsny Press on 29 January 2009, the then-Premier Aleksandr Ankvab²⁴ was quoted as saying that the government would brook no interference by international organisations or NGOs in matters of education, though he then went on to say that he “did not exclude the possibility of reviewing the offer of the High Commissioner of OSCE to translate Abkhazian textbooks into Georgian.” However, by the summer of 2012, there had been no reports of moves in this direction, although in its comment on Vollebaek’s meeting with Ankvab on 16 July 2012 *Vestnik Kavkaza* ‘Herald of the Caucasus’ interestingly stated that Vollebaek had declared that Abkhazia has no problems regarding the study of languages in the Gal District.²⁵

During the years when the UN had a permanent presence in Abkhazia, staff-members naturally had the opportunity to come into close and frequent contact with Abkhazians and their representatives and thus to get to know them directly, free from the filter of Georgian propaganda. As a result, it was noticeable how often sympathy for local aspirations came to be evinced by them (albeit mostly in private, for the obvious reason that they wished to avoid compromising their position with Tbilisi).²⁶ The same can be said of many others with experience of both parties to the conflict, such as workers for international NGOs or journalists who take the trouble to visit Abkhazia to judge the situation for themselves.²⁷ It would, of

²⁴ Ankvab became Vice-President after the election in December that year and President in the election on 26 August 2011.

²⁵ See <http://www.unpo.org/article/14574>.

²⁶ Note, however, the public statement by Maurizia Jenkins (Independent Consultant, Former Political Officer of the United Nations Mission in Georgia) entitled ‘A personal journey towards the recognition of Abkhaz independence’ (27 June 2012). It was first published in Russian in *Respublika Abkhazija*, but the English version is available at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/889-a-personal-journey-towards-the-recognition-of-abkhaz-independence-by-maurizia-jenkins-.html>.

²⁷ By way of illustration, one might mention two visitors to Abkhazia from Scandinavian countries, both acquainted with the situation in Georgia, who, in conversation in 2008, volunteered their assessment that Abkhazia was, in their considered opinion, a more democratic country than either Georgia or Russia, a view repeated by several individuals who witnessed the way the presidential election of 2011 and the parliamentary election of 2012 were conducted—see the commentary on the presidential election of 26 August 2008 by

course, be invidious to name any such individuals in case of jeopardising ongoing or future projects, since the Georgian authorities do not easily tolerate any expression of sympathy and understanding for the stance of their opponents, but that the phenomenon exists is a telling fact.

On 1 March 2010, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of the Finn Antti Turunen as his special representative for Georgia. The alternative candidate for the post, Heidi Tagliavini, had proved unacceptable to the Georgians in view of her commission's hardly supportive report of 2009 on the cause of the August 2008 war. Turunen, who replaced the Belgian Johan Verbeke in this function, had previously served from 2007 as the Head of Finland's Permanent Mission to OSCE in Vienna, and, during Finland's presidency of the organisation in 2008, will have had no option but to become intimately acquainted with both sides in the Georgian-South Ossetian dispute.²⁸

As we have seen, OSCE's (originally the CSCE's) mission in Georgia began under a cloud of Abkhazian and South Ossetian apprehensions thanks to their perception of its pro-Georgian bias. And one might say that the clouds had not lifted by the end of the mission, given the revelations of OSCE officers R. Grist and S. Young over the Organisation's inertia in the face of the build-up to Georgia's move against South Ossetia on 7 August 2008, as discussed in Chapter 5. OSCE's mission ended in Georgia and South Ossetia at the same time that UNOMIG's mandate for Georgia and Abkhazia was brought to a close in July 2009. In terms of international observers in the field, it is only the small contingent of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) established by the extended Medvedev-Sarkozy Plan of September 2008 that remains, operating exclusively on the Georgian side of the respective borders.

former French diplomat and election-observer Maurice Bonnot 'Alexander Ankvab: Veni, Vidi, Vici' written for Abkhaz World and available at: www.reflectionsonabkhazia.net/index.php/maurice-bonnot. (August 2012). Also, as recently as 2009, at least three interested Westerners who had entered Abkhazia from Georgia explained how they had been warned by Georgian acquaintances that they might be in danger once having crossed into a land run by a 'criminal' regime. They added that what they had seen with their own eyes on the ground bore no resemblance at all to what the Georgians seemingly imagined life to be like in the republic. I was reminded of sitting through a lecture in London in May 2008 by a former leading military figure in NATO who spoke of Abkhazia being in the hands of an élite committed to Moscow and divorced from ordinary citizens and their aspirations—as the speaker frankly acknowledged, he had never personally set foot in Abkhazia. Similarly without the slightest acquaintance of Abkhazian realities but ever ready aggressively to champion the Georgian cause in UK and European institutions are the (current or former) British MPs, Bruce George, Denis MacShane and Andrew Rosindell.

²⁸ See <http://formin-origin.finland.fi/Public/default.aspx?contentid=187206&nodeid=15145&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>.

(International) NGOs

Kvarchelia's 2010 survey of international NGO activity in Abkhazia begins with the observation that such organisations moved into Georgia proper immediately after the collapse of the USSR in order to lend support to the post-communist regime's attempts to develop a modern civil society (cf. Companjen 2004). Involvement in Abkhazia, on the other hand, came in the wake of Abkhazia's victory in the war and had the very different goal of finding a solution to the conflict; only later, as the organisations became more familiar with Abkhazia's needs on the ground, did they recognise the need for help in the parallel development of a democratic civil society here too.

After some early activity on the part of the American universities of Maryland and George Mason, along with the Norwegian Refugee Council, the main, long-term actors eventually became: Conciliation Resources (London), whose Caucasian section was directed up to 2008 by Dr. Jonathan Cohen;²⁹ International Alert (London), whose work, as we have seen, moved on from its less than promising beginning;³⁰ the University of California (Irvine) Center for Citizen Peace-building, whose co-founder and co-director is Prof. Paula Garb;³¹ the Berghof Centre for Constructive Conflict Management (Germany); the South Caucasus Bureau of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Germany); the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), whose Caucasus section was long in the capable hands of Tom de Waal before his move to the Carnegie Foundation, from where he continued to impress with his flow of sensible commentaries on Caucasian themes, set up partnerships to encourage local journalists, and their informative reports are published on the Net in English translation. Kvarchelia noted a more recent interest in the region by the Swedish *Kvinna till Kvinna* 'Women for women' and, from 2007, the Spanish *Centro Internacional De Toledo Para La Paz* 'Toledo International Centre for Peace'.

In general, the above-named organisations have sought, and continue, to seek to inculcate an appreciation of the need for mutual understanding

²⁹ Cohen joined International Alert just as the storm over the 1993 Henze/Wimbush report was abating and so had something of a baptism of fire when it came to his introduction to the question of Abkhazia.

³⁰ One should perhaps also mention the engagement in the region of Human Rights' Watch.

³¹ During her time in Russian academia, she had studied, and published a book on, Abkhazian centenarians (1987).

between the conflicting parties and the necessity of avoiding any renewal of hostilities, based on objective assessment of the initial causes of the conflict. Representatives of the respective parties (e.g. NGO workers, academics, journalists, etc..) are often brought together for discussions on issues of mutual interest, avoiding the most contentious question of ultimate status, and perhaps taken to areas that have experienced conflict but have nevertheless found ways to live with former foes, such as in Northern Ireland, where they are introduced to local political leaders who have experienced the often painful business of reaching a compromise. Various publications have appeared over the years as a result of such sponsored collaboration across the divides (e.g. Cohen 1999; Garb et al. 1999, the first in a series of volumes; Kvarchelia 2009)—individuals on both sides have also collaborated with Westerners who have taken an interest in Caucasian affairs for such ventures as that which resulted in the joint-publication in 2000 by the prolific Belgian constitutional expert Bruno Coppieters, (Georgian) Davit Darchiashvili and (Abkhazian) Natella Akaba.

When visiting Abkhazia, the Western partners always travel via Georgia, so as not to offend Georgian sensitivities, for the official Georgian view is that any foreigner who enters Abkhazia (or South Ossetia) from any other country (essentially Russia) than Georgia has set an illegal foot on Georgian territory and is therefore liable to arrest and either a fine or imprisonment. When the UN had a presence in Abkhazia, it was customary for such visitors to take one of the regular UN flights from Senak'i (Mingrelia) to Sukhum, but, since the removal of the UN presence and the consequential cessation of such flights, access has been via the land-crossing over the R. Ingur bridge. Nevertheless, the neutrality of the relevant international NGOs has, as mentioned above, not always been properly understood, even by governments. In the previous chapter the condemnation of Saak'ashvili's manoeuvres to undermine the Schlaining Process (run by Conciliation Resources, in early association with the Berghof Centre) by P'aat'a Zakareishvili, long-time participant for Georgia in joint-meetings organised by various of the aforementioned NGOs, was highlighted. As Kvarchelia (2010:55–6) explains, realising the inability of his officials to influence the unbiased stance of the mediators, Saak'ashvili lost interest in a process where neutrality was interpreted as tantamount to support for the non-Georgian position.³²

³² This perspective seems to be shared by the already mentioned British MPs Denis MacShane and Andrew Rosindell, both of whom have tabled parliamentary questions

When full-scale fighting erupted in August 2008, many of those working in relevant (international) NGOs who had been striving to find a peaceful solution by promoting mutual understanding through dialogue despaired of what had possibly become of all their efforts and pondered whether they would have to start the whole process from scratch. Of course, partnerships continued, but an indication of the extent to which hostility towards internal Abkhazian NGOs (at least those whose funding came from abroad) remained entrenched in certain sections of Abkhazian society was to surface in a welter of immoderate and ill-informed criticism in early summer 2010 after the film 'Absence of Will' by the Georgian director Mamuk'a Kuparadze was shown on Abkhazian TV, followed by a live debate in the presence of Kuparadze himself, permission for whose presence in Abkhazia had been granted by Premier Shamba.

In 2007, Conciliation Resources and the Heinrich Böll Foundation had funded the filming of a number of short documentaries, including one consisting of parallel reports by Abkhazian journalists sent to Georgia and by Georgian journalists sent to Abkhazia; Kuparadze had either directed or been involved in all six. In 2008, the two organisations funded the 'Absence of Will' documentary, which was briefly mentioned in Chapter 5. In addition to Shevardnadze himself and former General (later Defence Minister) Gia Q'arq'arashvili, also interviewed were such informed commentators as the Tbilisi-based half Abkhazian/half Georgian historian Gia Anchabadze and RFERL's blogger-journalist Ia Antadze, plus the Mingrelian writer Guram Odisharia, who used to live on the south-eastern outskirts of Sukhum and whose account of events at the very start of the war, incorporated in the film, directly contradicted Shevardnadze's immediately preceding assertion that K'it'ovani had had no tanks when his forces entered Abkhazia (and specifically Sukhum) on 14 August 1992. Although the film, depicting, as it did, Kartvelians questioning their state's own past actions, should have been welcomed as a positive step, being an (albeit belated) acknowledgement of error, the hysterical reaction condemned the bringing of the director to Abkhazia, as well as the broadcasting of the film on official TV, and led to savage calls for the banning of all NGOs—those staff responsible for arranging Kuparadze's visit and the film's broadcast should, it was even proposed by some, be handed a one-way ticket across the Ingur... This incident alone well illustrated how much work was still to be done within Abkhazia in order to inform society of the

critical of the activities in Abkhazia of Conciliation Resources, an organisation whose activities over the years have been nothing but praiseworthy.

advantages of engaging with the West, of accepting the spread of its values and practices, and, ultimately, of recognising the need for, and inevitability of, reconciliation with Tbilisi.

Apart from such well-known organisations as the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières, which came early to the region, special mention must be made of the important role played in post-war Abkhazia by the British-based Halo Trust. Despite their efforts in de-mining operations, the last skull-and-crossbones signs disappeared from the verges on the stretch of the main highway running from the capital south-eastwards down to the Gal Province as well as on the Ochamchira-T'q'varchal road only in 2007, though some inland-areas remained to be cleared even thereafter. The Trust also helped in the rebuilding of bridges along the main highway, which had been destroyed during the war, contributing to the difficult travel-conditions that prevailed in that part of Abkhazia for years after the formal cessation of hostilities.

NGOs in South Ossetia

In 2011 there were over thirty NGOs operating in South Ossetia. Prominent among these were:

- *Farank*, under Kosta Dzugaev, providing socio-economic and cultural support to the local youth;
- the NGO Resource-Centre, under Lira Tskhovrebova;
- *Fidaen*, under Salima Kotolova, concerned with demography;
- the International Health Fund, under El'za Dzhatieva;
- Dina Alborova's Agency for Socio-economic and Cultural Development;
- Tajmuraz Gabaraev's Social Fund of Peace-Keeper;
- Irina Janovskaja's Journalists for Human Rights;
- and *Kedr*, under Inal Ostaev, a social organisation for ecological research and initiatives.³³

The Georgian Economy

The US State Department's document *Background Note: Georgia* of 21 June 2010³⁴ provided useful data on Georgia's economic position. A combina-

³³ I am grateful to Artur Tsutsiev and Kosta Dzugaev for providing me with this information.

³⁴ See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm>.

tion of the damage inflicted during the August 2008 war with Russia and the global economic crisis resulted in Georgia's economy shrinking in 2009 by 4%, but a recovery began in 2010, helped by 38 countries and 15 international organisations pledging support to the tune of US \$4.55 billion to Georgia at the donors' conference on 22 October 2008 in Brussels. Of this total package, US \$2 billion consisted of grants and the rest of low-interest loan-guarantees. The pledges amounted to approximately US \$3.7 billion to meet the urgent needs arising out of the conflict itself together with priority infrastructure-investment for the years 2008–10, the balance being aimed at ensuring that the financial and banking sector did not fail. The package included US \$1 billion from the United States alone. On 29 July 2010, the World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved the US \$50 million Second Development Policy Operation (DPO-2) for Georgia. This was the second in a series of three operations designed to provide direct budgetary support to back the key-objectives of the Government's policy-reform agenda, aimed at mitigating the impact of the economic downturn, facilitating recovery, and preparing Georgia for post-crisis growth. The announcement³⁵ concluded with the note that the "World Bank commitments to Georgia total approximately US \$1.4 billion for 49 projects". Suspicion was, however, voiced in certain quarters that this might enable Tbilisi to divert other monies to the military.

Georgia's turnover in foreign trade for the first quarter of 2010 was \$1.36 billion, an increase of 15% on the previous year. Exports were valued at \$339 million, a 55% yearly increase, whilst imports amounted to \$1.02 billion, an annual rise of 6%. The country's trade-deficit for the first quarter of 2010 stood at \$681 million, a decrease of 9% from one year earlier. During this period, Georgia's largest export was ferro-alloys (amounting to \$57 million); oil-products were its largest import (totalling \$119 million). And Turkey maintained the place it had achieved some years before as Georgia's largest trading-partner, accounting for \$496 million in the first half of 2010.³⁶ Estimated figures for the whole of 2010 reckoned exports to total US \$2.46 billion vs US \$3.083 billion for 2011, whilst those for imports totalled US \$5.027 billion in 2010 vs US \$5.96 billion for 2011. Turkey headed the list of trading-partners with a share of 14.1% for exports

³⁵ Citation from: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22663396~_pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html?cid=ISG_E_WBWeeklyUpdate_NL.

³⁶ Cited from Vindimian (2010.3), who in turn refers to www.civil.ge/end/article.php?id=225448&search=Turkey.

vs 15% for imports; Azerbaijan and Bulgaria were next in line for exports, whilst the Ukraine and Azerbaijan followed for imports—interestingly, Russia held fourth place at 6.3%, whereas China came after the USA in seventh place (5.4%).³⁷

Turkey

Turkey is also a country of special importance in terms of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and not solely for its just noted position as Georgia's main trading-partner. In addition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil-pipeline, which began to operate in 2006, there is the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas-pipeline, also operative since 2006, and the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway, an integral part of the East-West Transport Corridor (the so-called 'New Silk Road'), which was due to be completed by the end of 2012 (Vindimian 2010.3). Turkey formally recognised Georgia's independence as early as November 1991 (i.e. even prior to the dissolution of the USSR; see Vindimian 2010.3).³⁸ The Turkish-Georgian frontier splits historical Georgian-speaking lands, with the result that ethnic Georgians living in the ancient provinces of T'ao, K'lardzheti and Shavsheti are Turkish citizens (and, of course, the vast majority of the Kartvelian Laz community too live inside Turkey, as their native territory runs along Turkey's north-eastern Black Sea littoral from Rize to the Georgian border at Sarpi). On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of ethnic Abkhazians (along with their Circassian and Ubykh cousins) also live in Turkey as a result of the massive population-movements in the last third of the 19th century. There are, thus, lobbies (actual and potential) for both sides in the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute.³⁹ Turkish Abkhazians (along with Circassians living there) provided both fighters (not a large but still a significant cohort) and money to buy weapons during the 1992–3 war. For over a year from 1994 to November 1995 the little boat *Ritsa*, privately owned by a wealthy Abkhazian, Artur Sabua, made regular sailings between Sukhum and Trebizond (Trabzon), carrying both passengers and as much cargo as could be piled into the small space available; while in sight of the Turkish

³⁷ Data are cited from http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurrent/georgia/georgia_economy.html.

³⁸ Available on-line at: http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB_196_2010.pdf.

³⁹ In fact, Turkey is something of a treasure-trove, if one wishes to find ethnic Caucasians without actually visiting the Caucasus. For the distribution of speakers of Caucasian languages there see Map 18 in Koryakov (2002).

coast, it flew the Russian flag, but, once out of view, the Abkhazian flag was proudly hoisted. Many of the passengers from Abkhazia had no proper international travel-documents, but the Turkish authorities were happy for them to enter and leave Turkish territory in this way, as many of them were small-traders, who bought Turkish goods to sell back in Abkhazia, where, at that time, almost all of the still limited array of eye-catching items on sale in shops or from street-vendors seemed to be of Turkish origin.

The *Ritsa* boat-link was stopped after Georgia complained to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)—in the summer of 2012 it was taking tourists on evening-trips around Sukhum Bay. However, freight has continued to move in both directions between the two ports. Abkhazia refused to agree to Georgian demands to make inspections of cargoes, and, on occasions, this leads to confrontations and confiscations, as in the case of the tanker impounded in the summer of 2009 and the sentencing of its captain to 24 years incarceration, even if he was quickly released after high-level Turkish intervention—in fact, Vindimian (2010.5) states that between 1991 and 2003 no fewer than 40 Turkish vessels were seized, followed by a further 22 between 2004 and 2006.⁴⁰ Four years on from recognition, hopes remained high that a passenger-service to Turkey could be resumed and that even flights could be instituted once Sukhum's airport at Babushera (near Dranda) was fully refurbished. Despite reports in April 2010 that the International Civil Aviation Authority had acceded to Tbilisi's demands to refuse to assign the airport the necessary code, military flights fly from Russia, and, as of August 2011, the Abkhazian authorities were confident that passenger-flights would be established not only with Russia but with at least three other countries, although at the time of writing (August 2012) these hopes had not been realised.

Much might depend on the nature of Turkish-Russian relations, which in the last years of the third millennium's first decade achieved a greater warmth than had been seen for many years; shortly after the fighting in August 2008, Ankara and Moscow jointly proposed the creation of a 'Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform' (Vindimian 2010.6). Continuation of this rapprochement, such as, for instance, the introduction in April 2011 of visa-free travel between the two countries (as mentioned in the previous chapter), could allow for the easing of a number of tensions, but a return to historical rivalry for dominance in western

⁴⁰ At the start of August 2010, a Ukrainian vessel, with a crew of 11 Ukrainians and one Russian, was detained (See <http://www.unpo.org/article/11446>).

Caucasia could equally produce the negative results. As Russian influence grows in Abkhazia as a natural consequence of its recognition of the republic (coupled with the dogged determination of the West not to upset Tbilisi by making any positive moves of its own in Abkhazia's favour), the question is often asked whether Russia would take kindly to an increase in influence from Turkey, especially if it smacked of Islam.

A contentious topic in the summer of 2010 was the closure of the Basharan School in Gagra. For some years it had offered a high-quality education to specially selected children in Abkhazia, teaching Abkhaz, Russian, English and Turkish, which enabled the brightest pupils then to enter higher education in Turkey. The school's funding came from a religious sect headed by a Turk resident in America, Fethullah Gulen, who would not be welcome even in his homeland because of his religious activities, and, whilst Abkhazia's Vice-President at the time, Aleksandr Ankvab, responded to parents' complaints by wafting before them a letter claiming that funds for sponsorship had dried up, a suspicion persisted that the closure was somehow the result of Russian pressure, motivated by a desire to shut off a possible source of subtle proselytism. But for many years (certainly going back to the late 1980s) a strong desideratum for the Abkhazians had been to encourage as many members of the Turkey-centred diaspora as possible to resettle in the ancestral homeland—in the Adapazari region of Turkey alone there are more Abkhazian villages than in the whole of Abkhazia.⁴¹ If direct passenger-routes were to be opened up again between Turkey and Abkhazia, then such individuals could travel direct, without any need to risk whatever might be the inconveniences of passing through either Russia or Georgia.⁴²

Turkey, along with Bulgaria, Russia, Romania and the Ukraine, participates with Georgia in the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR). The two neighbours also cooperate under the aegis of the Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) on the Black Sea (the so-called 'Ukraine Initiative'), which seeks to buttress peace and stability in the Black Sea (Vindimian 2010.4).⁴³

⁴¹ I thank Slava (Vjacheslav) Chirikba for this detail.

⁴² Georgia is open to Turkish Abkhazians, but, for obvious reasons, they tend not to take advantage of this route to/from the homeland. Since the introduction of visa-free travel between Russia and Turkey, the queues at both Sochi airport's passport- and security-control and the Psou border-crossing perhaps represent the main inconvenience in the itinerary through Russia.

⁴³ Vindimian herself cites the *National Security Concept of Georgia* at: http://embassy.mfa.gov.ge//idex.php?sec_id=16&lang_id=ENG.

Russia's main ally in Transcaucasia is land-locked Armenia, which has been cut off from overland-connection with Russia since the closure of the railway through Abkhazia. Opening of the land-border between Armenia and Turkey, much discussed since 2009, would take some pressure off Armenia and make it less dependent on Georgia (and Iran, for the border at New Julfa remains open), with which there are potentially contentious matters over rights to churches and the teaching of Georgian in Armenian schools that have simmered beneath the radar for years. For obvious reasons, Armenia has made no fuss over these issues as it cannot risk having essential supplies of gas and the like cut off by an enraged northern neighbour. But, even if the crossing to Turkey were opened, could Armenians feel confident that it would remain so? There are obvious gains for all concerned (Armenia, Abkhazia, Russia, and, if only they could see it, the Georgians too), if the rail-link could be restored to its Soviet-era effectiveness. But, although Russia holds the concession from Abkhazia to upgrade the system, will funds be forthcoming, if there is no possibility of continuing rail-traffic into Georgia (and beyond)? And such an extension is only likely to be carried through once the overall conflict is finally settled.

Europe

Once Georgia joined the CIS (1993), it became eligible for inclusion in the European Commission's TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme, launched in 1991 to provide technical assistance to the emerging states. Georgia also became a participant in the European Union's TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), which came into being in 1998; its permanent Secretariat was established in Baku in 2000. Europe and Georgia share a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), and, since 2007, TACIS has been replaced by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which has its own Action Plan with the EU, the implementation of which Neighbourhood Action Plan was designed to fulfil the provisions of the PCA itself. It arose out of the EU's enlargement on 1 May 2004 and aimed to build ties in new areas of cooperation, encouraging and supporting Georgia's objective of further integration into European economic and social structures, during its envisaged five-year framework.⁴⁴ Georgia also became an active participant in

⁴⁴ See 'EU/Georgia Action Plan', available at: http://www.ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp_action_plan_georgia.pdf.

the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, offering bilateral and multilateral measures and assistance for enhanced EU cooperation with the Caucasus, Belarus, Moldova, and the Ukraine. The start of negotiations on an EU Association Agreement to replace Georgia's PCA was planned for July 2010. Apart from participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace programme,⁴⁵ Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1999. The leader of the delegation that decided in favour of Georgia's admittance was (at the time) the British Labour MP Terry Davis, who subsequently served as the CoE's Secretary General (1 September 2004–1 October 2009). Like many visitors before and since, the delegation was impressed by the blandishments of Georgian hospitality, whilst its visit to Abkhazia resulted in Davis and Abkhazian president, Vladislav Ardzinba, reportedly taking an immediate dislike to each other.⁴⁶ Ignoring (or simply ignorant of) Georgian officialdom's involvement in the acts of terrorism and sabotage that such groups as The White Legion and The Forest Brethren had been conducting in Abkhazia out of Mingrelian territory,⁴⁷ the Council deigned to take account of only one outstanding human rights' issue facing the Georgian government, namely the problem of the Meskh(et)ians (or so-called 'Meskhetian Turks').⁴⁸

Starting on the night of 15 November 1944 some 144,000 residents (though different sources quote different figures) of Georgia's south-western province of Meskheti were deported to Central Asia. Largely consigned to oblivion in Georgia, they were 'rediscovered' during that heady period in 1988 when previously taboo-subjects were becoming topics for discus-

⁴⁵ In June 2010, Georgia's contribution to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan became the second largest from a non-NATO state, with 962 soldiers. And on 21 March 2012 Molly Corso reported for *Eurasianet* that Georgia would soon become the largest non-NATO contributor with 1,685 troops stationed there by 2013, a commitment naturally much appreciated in Washington; see www.eurasianet.org/node/65164.

⁴⁶ I had briefed Davis before his departure to the Caucasus, and, after his return, he was gracious enough to ring me to say that he was not prepared to allow one man (viz. Ardzinba) to veto Georgia's entry into the CoE.

⁴⁷ Similar complicity by the Georgian government in the infiltration of terrorists into Abkhazia was seen again in 2001, as already related, when Chechen fighters were conveyed across Georgia from the P'ank'isi Gorge into Abkhazia's Upper K'odor Valley to carry out murderous attacks (including the downing of a UNOMIG helicopter).

⁴⁸ Until the ethnicity of the group is properly investigated and determined, my preference is to use the more neutral description 'Meskh(et)ians'. An ethnographic study of the region was conducted in the 1930s by Sergei Mak'alatia, who began his monograph on the region by classifying the local residents as islamised, turkified Georgians (see Mak'alatia 1938.5).

sion and investigation. A Georgian film-crew visited some of these deportees, and nationalist leaders like Merab K'ost'ava and Zviad Gamsakurdia took up their cause, proclaiming that they should be brought home, taught Georgian, if they did not know it already, and reintroduced to Georgian Orthodoxy. However, the enthusiasm to return them quickly abated, when it was revealed how many of them regarded themselves not as Georgians but as Turks, and Muslim Turks to boot! As a non-native community, those resident in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley were targeted by local nationalists in the upheavals of 1989, and many sought to flee, intending to resettle in Georgia. Making it as far as either Azerbaijan or the Krasnodar Region in southern Russia, they found their way into Georgia barred. The Georgian arguments in defence of their policy of no admittance, or at least against mass-resettlement to Meskhети in particular, included:

- fear that settlement in a border-area of 'ethnic Turks' (or, at least, Muslims with Turkish sympathies) could lead to separatist demands in favour of a neighbouring state;
- (a variant of the former) fear that, as the areas vacated in 1944 had been resettled by Armenians, since everyone knows of the animosity between Turks and Armenians, Meskhети's Armenians deserved protection!⁴⁹
- assertion that the country is simply full.⁵⁰

In the face of this impasse, the CoE set Georgia a condition on membership, namely that within 12 years a solution should be found to the problem of the Meskh(et)ians. America came to the aid of some 11,500 of those eking out a miserable existence in the Krasnodar Region,⁵¹ when, between 2004 and 2007, with the help of The International Organisation for Migration, they granted them the right to settle in America. Writing for the Caucasus Reporting Service (No. 641 on 16 May 2012) section of International War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), Salome Achba noted that it was only in 2007 that the Georgian authorities passed the legislation in order to grant permission for the Meskh(et)ians to return, albeit without any undertaking to provide returnees with any financial assistance or to facilitate their relocation to their places of pre-Stalin domicile, because their ancestral homes had long

⁴⁹ Anyone aware of the traditional animosity between Georgians and Armenians could be excused for finding the sudden manifestation of concern for (part of) the country's Armenian population cause for a wry smile.

⁵⁰ For a flavour of the debate, see the articles published on pp. 2–3 of the Georgian-language daily *k'omunist'i* 'Communist' on 17 June 1989.

⁵¹ Whence they had found the crossing into Abkhazia understandably closed to them.

been occupied by others. Some 500 had been awarded repatriant status at the time of Achba's report, whilst applications from a further 5,000 were then pending. Though the Human Rights' Ombudsman was arguing for greater efforts to be made to aid integration, the governmental authorities acknowledged no obligation financially to correct an act of the wartime Soviet state, though others pointed out that this argument should have been advanced at the time of Georgia's accession to the CoE in 1999.⁵²

As both Georgia and Russia are members of the CoE, their delegates are present for debates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), where they thus had the opportunity to stress the points favouring their respecting sides in Heidi Tagliavini's Fact-Finding Mission's report on the August 2008 war, when it was formally presented on 28 April 2010. British MP David Wilshire came in for strong criticism from the Georgians for merely having displayed the temerity to agree to a meeting with South Ossetians in the so-called 'embassy of the breakaway region in Moscow'.⁵³

Over the years, the European Parliament has heard a number of critical statements about Russia's actions vis-à-vis Georgia, including calls to ban the issue of visas for citizens from Abkhazia and South Ossetia travelling on Russian passports. In fact, Germany has proven especially zealous in implementing this restriction, denying visas even to those wishing to travel for medical or educational reasons. In July 2010, a delegation from Germany was due to visit Abkhazia with co-leader of the Green Party, Cem Özdemir, as its head. Being of Circassian descent, Özdemir was particularly interested in seeing for himself developments in Abkhazia. But on the morning of the delegation's departure from Germany, he received a call from the German Foreign Ministry to say that Georgia had lodged a complaint about the proposed visit, and he was 'advised' not to break the embargo on Abkhazia by appearing there. He complied, and so the delegation travelled without him and had a series of positive meetings with politicians, NGOs and academics. Asked about the scandal of the non-appearance of Özdemir, they said that efforts simply had to be increased to heighten awareness of Abkhazia and its goals amongst both the German public and policy-makers—*mutatis mutandis* the same applies to Western policy-makers and public across the board.

⁵² Information from Salome Achba's 'Meskhetians struggle to find place in Georgia' at: http://www.mail-archive.com/caucasus_reporting_service_english@mailman.iwpr.net/msg00062.html.

⁵³ See <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22235>.

On 1 December 2009, the British Labour politician Baroness Catherine Ashton was appointed (to everyone's surprise, including, it would seem, her own) the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. On 28 May 2010, she announced her intention to abolish the post of EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus (along with that for Moldova), thereby suggesting a diminution of EU interest in the region. The Swedish holder of the post, Peter Semneby (successor to Finland's Heiki Talvitie), saw his 5-year mandate come to an end on 28 February 2011, though, in the face of so much criticism of the abolition of this post, it was reinstated and Philippe Lefort was appointed from 1 September 2011. In the wake of the August 2008 war and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia (and South Ossetia), Semneby at least seemed to realise that some new thinking was necessary and in 2009 conceived the notion of 'engagement without recognition', which was taken up by British observer of the Caucasus Tom de Waal,⁵⁴ and, in the summer of 2010, by the American commentators Lincoln Mitchell and Alexander Cooley.⁵⁵ To what extent this idea would be acted upon by policy-makers⁵⁶ and what exactly its proponents envisaged as its ultimate goal still remained to be seen at the time of writing. If indeed it is pursued, then the Abkhazians (and, should it extend to them, the South Ossetians) can naturally be expected to take advantage of what is on offer, while continuing to press their claims for wider recognition and persevering in their two-decades-long resistance to all pressure to rejoin any kind of Georgian polity, whether federalised or not (see Coppieters, Kovziridze & Leonardy 2003).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Lincoln Mitchell, Alexander Cooley and Tom de Waal's 'A New Start for U.S.-Georgia Relations?' of 23 June 2010, available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=event&id=2958>. On 17 June, de Waal wrote of the importance of preserving Semneby's post as a means of providing the EU with a direct link to Abkhazia (at least) in his piece 'The risks of losing a special role in the Caucasus', available at: www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/the-risks-of-losing-a-special-role-in-the-caucasus/68268.aspx. For his article from June 2011 'Georgia's choices: charting a future in uncertain times' see: carnegieendowment.org/files/georgias_choices.pdf, which includes some far-from-rosy comments on the state of the Georgian economy.

⁵⁵ See Masha Udensiva-Brenner's report 'Abkhazia briefing: Alexander Cooley and Lincoln Mitchell urge the West to change its policy', relating to an address on 26 April 2010 at The Harriman Institute (<http://www.harriman.columbia.edu>). The pair reiterated their call in a further paper 'Engagement without Recognition: A New Strategy toward Abkhazia and Eurasia's Unrecognized States' in *The Washington Quarterly* 33.4 of October 2010 available on-line at: <http://www.twq.com/10october/index.cfm?id=409>.

⁵⁶ Speaking in his office on 11 August 2010, President Bagapsh stated that nothing concrete had resulted from such a supposed change of attitude and that, as far as he was concerned, it was still only rhetoric, a view that most Abkhazians would probably endorse a further two years on.

⁵⁷ For a useful summary of the EU's role with reference to Abkhazia see Abkhazian

The EU's Parliament did nothing to further the possibility of the EU being regarded in either Abkhazia or South Ossetia as a constructive player (whether currently or potentially) in Transcaucasian affairs when, on 17 November 2011, its members passed a resolution recognising the two states as 'occupied territories'.⁵⁸ In so doing the Europeans were following in the footsteps of the US Senate, which had passed a parallel resolution on 29 July. The parliamentary text was hailed by Saak'ashvili as a 'historic document' that set the legal basis for the 'irreversible [re]unification of Georgia'. One of the authors of the resolution, Polish law-maker Krzysztof Lisek, flew to, and was fêted in, Tbilisi the day after the vote; the celebrations included the award to him of the Order of St. George—it will be recalled that Poland was one of the countries that insisted on at least a minimally encouraging outcome for Georgia (and the Ukraine) from the NATO meeting in Bucharest in April 2008.

The USA

Georgia's most prominent and thus influential ally for most of the period of its post-communist existence has been the United States. As was noted above, President George Bush Snr. recognised Georgia on the very day that the USSR was dissolved but did not establish diplomatic relations because of concern over its democratic deficiencies. The first US ambassador was appointed on 9 September 1992, and, some three months after his appointment, Kent Brown⁵⁹ made the following statement during an interview broadcast on the UK TV-channel BBC2:

I would put my money on Mr. Shevardnadze. I think no matter where he was or in what position, I would put my money on him, because I respect him greatly just as a human being and as a strategic thinker.

Here we see encapsulated the prevailing contemporary assessment of Shevardnadze, and it was largely this which shaped the West's positive

political scientist Irakli Khintba's 'The EU and the Conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood: The Case of Abkhazia' of 23 September 2010, available at: <http://www.boell.de/intlpolitics/europetransatlantic/europe-transatlantic-eu-conflicts-abkhazia-10215.html>.

⁵⁸ For a commentary (in Russian) on this resolution by Khintba, see: <http://allsmmedia.monitoring.blogspot.com/2011/11/17-2011.html>. It was posted on 20 November 2011 shortly before he was named as Abkhazia's Deputy Foreign Minister. An English version is available at: <http://abkhazworld.com/headlines/753-commentary-on-the-resolution-of-the-eu-all.html>.

⁵⁹ John Bass, Barack Obama's appointee to the post (16 October 2009), became the sixth US ambassador.

attitude towards Georgia and brought the country significant benefits, once Shevardnadze had returned to his homeland in March 1992, at a time when it was already in a state of chaos (with no legitimate government and wars raging in South Ossetia and Mingrelia) and about to plumb a deeper nadir when war was ignited in Abkhazia on 14 August. Once committed, the US (indeed the West in general) has followed a policy of staunch support for Georgian territorial integrity, which consequentially has meant rigid opposition to Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence. It is unlikely that all the gains that came tumbling into Georgia's lap in the spring/summer of 1992 would have accrued in the absence from the scene of Shevardnadze, but questions must surely be asked about the justification for the early favourable evaluation of Shevardnadze the man and leader, as exemplified by Brown's panegyric, in the light of the following judgment of his last years in power contained in the aforementioned *Background Note: Georgia*, namely:

The later years of former President Shevardnadze's administration were marked by rampant cronyism, corruption, and mismanagement.⁶⁰

However, whereas Shevardnadze may have been uncritically and indiscriminately deemed to be the right man for the occasion in 1992, by the mere act of ousting Shevardnadze in the coup⁶¹ that came to be known as the 'Rose Revolution' of November 2003, Saak'ashvili not only achieved the presidency but also directly assumed (with a lack of international critical judgment to parallel what had happened eleven years earlier with his predecessor) the mantle of America's darling, and Georgia, as a state, has largely continued to be looked upon with favour by its legion of supporters, even if few would wish to emulate President Bush (junior) in christening it a 'beacon of democracy'.⁶² Interviewed by M. Gagua and L. Tughushi for Democracy & Freedom Watch on 22 June 2012, political scientist Alexander Cooley of New York's Columbia University⁶³ drew an interesting distinc-

⁶⁰ The relevant sections of Wheatley (2005) should also be consulted in this connection.

⁶¹ One should not forget that a coup *ex vi termini* is an unconstitutional act, even if, in this case, there was no bloodshed involved.

⁶² It will be fascinating to see how historians appraise Saak'ashvili, once he has retired (or is retired) from the scene. Speaking on 2 July 2012, Shevardnadze stated that his allowing power to pass into Saak'ashvili's hands was 'the gravest sin', for which he was ready to repent and apologise a thousand times, given the 'dictatorship' that his successor had created, and he pledged his support for Ivanishvili's Dream Party; see <http://rt.com/politics/georgian-passing-saakashvili-sin-168/>.

⁶³ Cooley gave a very similar interview to Tavisupleba which appeared on their Georgian website on 28 June 2012; see <http://www.tavisupleba.org/content/alex-cooley/24628658>.

tion between Saak'ashvili's policies for modernisation and democratisation, arguing that, whilst his modernising credentials might remain intact, his programme for democratisation stalled from the moment that riot-police were let loose on demonstrators in November 2007.⁶⁴ Such an assessment has obvious consequences for the argument that Abkhazia and South Ossetia would have brighter prospects in a democratic and prosperous Georgia, for, if Georgia's economy is heavily dependent on Western (mostly American) aid and democratic progress is in abeyance,⁶⁵ there is clearly no advantage to set against the palpable risk of again adopting the position of minorities in a Georgia that remains hostile to (unwelcome) minorities.

On the theme of Georgia's economy, serious monetary assistance to Georgia from the USA began in 1993. The Appendix to this chapter presents the three parts of *Appendix II from a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (22 December 2009)* (see Lugar 2009), which set out the annual amounts and categories of US aid to Georgia for the years 1992–2009 (with projections for 2010). The Senate's report clearly indicates that it was from 1998 when the inflow of US dollars rose steeply, which is perhaps not accidental, as this coincided with the time that, as a result of the re-evaluation of the Caspian oil-reserves, the idea was mooted of laying a pipeline to bring the oil from Baku to the Turkish port of Ceyhan via Georgia.

US-Georgian relations were cemented *inter alia* by the US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership (January 2009). The Charter outlined the importance of the relationship in terms of strategic partnership as well as their mutual intentions:

- to enhance cooperation in defence and security;
- further to develop cooperation for the economy, trade, and energy;
- to promote democracy;
- and to build people-to-people and cultural exchanges.⁶⁶

html. And, indeed, along with fellow-author Lincoln A. Mitchell, he raised concerns about Georgia's progress towards democracy in their 2009-article 'No way to treat our friends: recasting U.S.-Georgian relation', which is available at: http://www.idea.org/Georgia_No%20way%20to%20treat%20Our%20Friends..pdf.

⁶⁴ See <http://dfwatch.net/georgians-do-not-have-enough-information-about-abkhazia-98898>.

⁶⁵ Freedom House's 2012-rating for Georgia at 4.82 actually places it below the score of 4.83 achieved by Shevardnadze's last year of corrupt governance in 2003! See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2012/georgia>.

⁶⁶ The full text of the Charter can be found at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm>.

Provisional figures (as of 2 April 2012) for Georgian trade with the United States gave a total of US \$389.2 million.⁶⁷

In sum, then, the United States has provided over \$3 billion in assistance to Georgia since its independence in 1991, including, as stated above, \$1 billion in the aftermath of the 2008 war with Russia, which was declared to be targeted at support for reconstruction, stabilisation and helping Georgia reinvigorate democratic, economic, and security reforms. Furthermore, Georgia was one of the first countries to receive a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact, to the tune of US \$295 million over 5 years, with an another \$100 million added following the August 2008 conflict. Georgia's compact is focused on rehabilitating regional infrastructure and supporting enterprise-development. As for aid dedicated to reforms in the domain of security, it is stated that

U.S. assistance builds capacity in Georgia's security sector by enhancing the professionalism and capacity of the armed forces, furthering its ability to secure its borders, improving law enforcement, and addressing cross-border challenges such as trafficking in persons and narcotics.⁶⁸

On 14 May 2002, Colonel Otar Shalikashvili, chief advisor of the US Defence Secretary for US-Georgian military cooperation and brother of John, the former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke to an audience at the Georgian Institute for Public Affairs in a meeting organised by the Tbilisi Centre for Strategic and Security Studies. His theme was the US-sponsored Georgia Train and Equip Programme (GTEP) that was due to begin on 27 May that year and to last 18 months; Turkey too was involved in this scheme. The plan was to spend \$64 million to increase the capabilities of the Georgian armed forces.⁶⁹ It naturally brought a significant number of US (and other) military advisers to Georgia. Though the scheme formally ended in April 2004, it was transmogrified in January 2005 into the Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Programme (SSOP), which aimed to build on the achievements of its predecessor by continuing the drive to bring the standards of Georgia's military forces up to those expected in the West (no doubt with possible NATO membership in

⁶⁷ See the US State Department's Background Note: Georgia at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm>.

⁶⁸ For further details of US assistance, see: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/140638.htm>.

⁶⁹ See 'Col. Otar Shalikashvili on Details of the Train-and-Equip Program' (17 May 2002) at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=1873>.

mind).⁷⁰ But, whilst a number of statements have been made to the effect that the training offered by the US (and other Western) advisers in Tbilisi has been directed towards the tasks that the Georgian contingent would face in Iraq (and later in Afghanistan) and has not been of a sort that would assist Georgian forces in any operations undertaken against Abkhazia or South Ossetia,⁷¹ it is precisely in this denial that the Abkhazians and South Ossetians harboured strong suspicions that the truth might well be otherwise.

The Abkhazians felt there were indications that American military personnel had set foot on their territory following Saak'ashvili's deployment of troops in the Upper K'odor Valley in 2006. They also pointed to the incriminating evidence of the photos found on a computer captured when the Valley was retaken on 12 August 2008 which, as described earlier, depict trainers in US military fatigues demonstrating to Georgians how to construct improvised explosive devices. Both Abkhazians and South Ossetians link such suspicions to the way the USA and other arms-suppliers exhibited such insouciance in the face of Georgia's enormous military spending under Saak'ashvili.⁷² Even Georgians themselves were raising questions about this. On 19 July 2007, Georgian journalist K'oba Lik'lik'adze wrote an important article for IWPR entitled 'Government says sharp rise in defence spending will professionalise army but questions are asked about why the money is being spent', in which one reads:⁷³

Georgia, which has made breathtaking increases in its defence spending over the last two years, looks set to beat all records this year.

In late June, the Georgian government increased the defence ministry's budget of 513 million laris (315 million US dollars) by 442 million laris (260 million dollars).

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, Georgia currently has the highest average growth rate of military spending in the world. Some independent experts are worried that the spending is

⁷⁰ Georgia's military ties with Turkey ante-date those with the USA, collaboration having begun in 1992–93, intensifying in 1995–96, when Georgia first voiced NATO aspirations. In March 1997, the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement (Vindimian 2010:3).

⁷¹ See, for example, Howard Cincotta 'U.S. Military Aid to Georgia Was Never Directed at Russia. Training focused exclusively on counter-insurgency and Iraq, expert says', at: <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/October/20081006142300dmslahrellek4.056948e-02.html>.

⁷² Zakharov et al. (2010:468–76) set out in tabular form the military assistance provided by foreign states to Georgia as of 2008 in terms of hardware, training and finance.

⁷³ Available at: http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=337250&apc_state=henpcrs. See also: <http://www.geneva.mid.ru/disarm/21.html>.

not fully accounted for, while others say that it could undermine the peace processes with the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia....

Boris Chochiev, deputy prime minister of the de facto government of South Ossetia and the main negotiator with Tbilisi, went further, blaming western countries for the situation. He told IWPR that his government constantly raised the issue of Tbilisi's military build-up with the international community but did not get a 'sensible answer'.

"We are astonished at the position of countries that are calling on us to disarm while at the same time they are arming the aggressor, Georgia," he said. "It's not Georgia that is increasing its budget. The money is being given them by the West." [Stress added]

The continuing worry up to the summer of 2012 was that, despite the lesson of recent experience (culminating in the war of August 2008), precisely the same mistakes had been/were being made again by the selfsame players.

Apart from this major concern, the US' main role has been to lend its powerful voice to the insistent call for restitution of Georgia's 'territorial integrity'. Under President George W. Bush, verbal declarations were supported by the banning of the issue of visas to Abkhazian spokesmen (such as long-serving Foreign Minister Shamba) to enable them to visit the UN to present there the Abkhazian case to the widest possible circle of diplomats. Republican support continued in the Obama era with Senator John McCain's unswerving advocacy for sending military equipment to Georgia, as, for example, in his article in *The Washington Post*, 8 August 2010.⁷⁴ Saak'ashvili, for his part, publicly stated how much he learnt from his 'teacher', the late Richard Holbrooke,⁷⁵ who was quick to come to Saak'ashvili's defence after operations began (to go awry) in South Ossetia in August 2008. And Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, gave the Georgian government (at least) moral support in the summer/autumn of 2010 by taking their lead in styling Abkhazia and South Ossetia as 'occupied territories',⁷⁶ a quite absurd misuse (not to say, abuse) of language subsequently enshrined in a US Senate resolution of April 2011, as noted above for this body as well as others.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/06/AR2010080605368.html>.

⁷⁵ See: <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/04/10/mikheil-saakashvili-where-are-my-western-friends.html>.

⁷⁶ See my "Occupied" or "Liberated" territories? The smoke and mirrors of Caucasian semantics' at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/headlines/509-occupied-or-liberated-ghe Witt.html>.

⁷⁷ Perhaps the latest token of such (mis)usage appears in S. Neil MacFarlane's 'Georgia: *National Security Concept* versus National Security', a report published by Chatham House in association with Tbilisi's Centre for Social Sciences in August 2012, where he writes:

The USA (along with such allies as the UK and Australia) also chose to bring pressure to bear not only on those countries which dared to follow Russia in recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia but also on those which indicated that they might do so. Fiji was one such Pacific island-state where it was rumoured that after a golf-match with a senior US representative no further moves were taken in the direction of offering recognition. The Dominican Republic was cultivated from late 2010 through to the spring of 2011, when the intervention of Philip Gordon, Hillary Clinton's Under-Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, thwarted progress. And on 8 November 2011, the State Department sent Tuvalu's Prime Minister an unsigned letter from Hillary Clinton expressing 'serious concern' over his government's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Reminding the Premier of the recently signed Shiprider Agreement and the USA's immediate support for the island in its water-emergency, the Honourable Secretary of State urged reconsideration of the decision to offer recognition, as, if it stood, there would be 'consequences' for the bilateral relationship...

In addition to state-actors, interest in (particularly) Abkhazia began to be displayed by Americans working for think-tanks towards the end of George W. Bush's second term in office. Two notable examples, both, no doubt, reflecting opinions popular amongst certain sections of the US commentariat, were David L. Phillips and the late Ronald D. Asmus.

With recognition of Kosovo's independence in the air and consequent anticipation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia of what that might mean for them, Phillips was one of those who sought to dampen expectations with his contribution 'Some Thoughts on "Abkhazia is not Kosovo"' to *Transitions Online* (7 February 2008).⁷⁸ He followed this in July of the same year with a lengthy policy-paper for the Atlantic Council of the United States, entitled 'Restoring Georgia's Sovereignty in Abkhazia',⁷⁹ which advocated a carrot-and-stick approach to both Abkhazia and Russia, if no movement

"Russia attacked Georgia and occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper REP PP 2012/01).

⁷⁸ Available at: www.ceeol.com/aspx/issuedetails.aspx?issueid=e608ee42-9c1f-4967-a952-755cfe7bfc6c&articleId=a3fada4a-0710-4618-9db1-1e511cb1a0eb. My response can be viewed at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/analysis/6-some-thoughts-on-abkhazia-is-not-kosovo.html>.

⁷⁹ See <http://www.acus.org>. My detailed reply 'Georgia's trilogy of tragedies or a reply to David. L. Phillips', posted on the day of Russia's recognition of the two new states, can be consulted at: <http://www.abkhazworld.com/articles/conflict/82-georgias-trilogy-of-tragedies.html>.

towards restitution of Georgia's territorial integrity was forthcoming. None was forthcoming, for everything changed with the war in August.

Subsequently, in a bid to present an early book-length defence of the Georgian president and, *pari passu*, to castigate the Kremlin and its actions in the summer of 2008, Asmus published in 2010 the book which figured in the discussion of the events of 2008 in the preceding chapter (namely *A Little War that Shook the World. Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*), following up the article 'A war the West must stop' which he had written for *The Washington Post* on 15 July 2008.⁸⁰ To what extent America's long-standing, resolute support for Georgia will prove to have helped or hindered Georgia's path to establishing itself as a successful, stable, peaceful, democratic, independent state is perhaps a question for future generations to address and answer. America itself, however, will probably continue to enjoy a rather secure presence in a non-Muslim country through which Caspian oil flows westwards and which affords it speedy access, should it need it, to Iran and other ever sensitive spots around the Near/Middle East (not to mention Georgia's role as a staging-post for Central Asia)—in this context of *Realpolitik*, it would be understandable if the fate of this or that Caucasian minority faded into insignificance in the list of priorities of the external forces concerned.

The Commonwealth of Independent States

Georgia was taken into the CIS in the wake of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's rebellion, which appeared to be pushing remorselessly eastwards towards Georgia's second city of Kutaisi following the rout of Shevardnadze's forces at the end of the war in Abkhazia in September 1993. In return, Russia offered its assistance, and the Zviadist rebellion collapsed. Though it was notionally CIS peace-keeping forces which were introduced along the Georgian-Abkhazian frontier in accordance with the peace-accords of 1994, it was essentially Russia which provided the troops. In pursuance of the pro-Georgian policy being pursued at the time, the CIS imposed sanctions against Abkhazia in 1996 (lifted a decade later unilaterally by Russia's outgoing President Vladimir Putin). Unsurprisingly, an immediate consequence of the August 2008 war was that Georgia's Parliament voted unan-

⁸⁰ See: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/14/AR2008071401845.html>. For my comments on Asmus' book see Hewitt (2011; 2012a).

imously to withdraw from the CIS, and, in accordance with the CIS charter, this measure took effect one year later. Perhaps to Moscow's surprise (and disappointment?), no state belonging to either the CIS or the parallel Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) followed the Kremlin's lead in recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russia

When it comes to describing Russia's involvement in the conflicts, one is faced with an immense difficulty. According to popular (and perhaps one might even say official) Georgian opinion, Russia is both the ultimate and proximate cause of Georgia's problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The argument *in toto* might be summed up as follows:

Having created 'artificial' administrative structures on its territory in order to frustrate any eventual drive to break away from Moscow's control, the Kremlin instigated anti-Georgian forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as the USSR moved towards dissolution. Following the war in South Ossetia, Russia engineered a peace-keeping role for itself in ceasefire-agreements signed in Daghomys, actually won the war for Abkhazia and then managed to acquire a similar peace-keeping role there too in conformity with the Moscow Agreement of 1994. As a 'participant' in the conflict, Russia should never have been given such responsibilities, but its resulting presence on the ground provided it with the perfect opportunity for further destabilisation of independent Georgia via the 'puppet-regimes it installed'⁸¹ in Tskhinval and Sukhum, culminating in the setting of a trap into which Mikheil Saak'ashvili was duly enticed on 7 August. Russia was well-prepared to respond with an excessive demonstration of force, which it deployed in order to punish Georgia for its NATO ambitions and which it hoped would be enough to lead to the downfall of Saak'ashvili and his government. That this did not happen was a defeat for Medvedev and Putin (especially the latter, given the nature of his personal relations with Saak'ashvili), but the recognition offered to both republics on 26 August 2008 was nothing other than a flimsy fig-leaf to cover Russia's 'occupation' of these 'Georgian' territories. Further aggression is to be expected from a state still unreconciled to its loss of empire in 1991, unless the West stands firm in its defence of Georgia's territorial integrity and succeeds in removing the 'occupying forces', thereby effecting the ultimate reintegration of territories lost to Tbilisi in the early 1990s.

⁸¹ To employ the derogatory phrase found so frequently in the works of Asmus (2010 *passim*) and others.

Though, at the moment this book was being completed (summer of 2012), the Georgian leadership remained buoyed up and jubilant both over the annual post-2008 vote in the UN General Assembly with an ever increasing number of nations voting in favour of the return of Kartvelian refugees to Abkhazia and South Ossetia⁸² and over the use of the term 'occupied territories' by Hillary Clinton, her UK counterpart after the 2010 British general election, William Hague, the US Senate, OSCE,⁸³ and finally the EU Parliament, it was always susceptible to fretting that the 'resetting' of Russian-American relations early in his presidency by Barack Obama might lead to a diminution (if not complete abandonment) of US support for Tbilisi. Any questioning of the standard Georgian thesis has always been interpreted in Georgian society as being motivated by lack of objectivity or outright pro-Russian sympathies on the part of the said commentator, but the true cause of hostilities is a real matter for debate, and it will be addressed in the final chapter.

Russia could hardly fail to be 'involved' in the conflicts, given the following considerations:

- local geography;
- its history of imperial expansion into the Caucasus;
- its remodelling of tsarist control once Soviet power was established across the region from 1921;
- the presence in all relevant areas of ethnic Russians;
- the Soviet legacy that left regional republican economies integrated with that of the Russian Federation;
- and the West's complete indifference, which gave/has given the Abkhazians and South Ossetians no alternative other than to look to Moscow for support.

With reference to the Soviet-era integration of the Russo-Georgian economies, for example, at one time nearly 100% of the USSR's citrus fruits were grown in Georgia, and for several years after the disintegration of the USSR, Russia remained (despite the conflicts) Georgia's main trading-partner. But in 2006, Russia imposed bans on all Georgian exports of wine, fruits and vegetables, along with mineral water; severed all direct transportation

⁸² See http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2643_july_5_2012/2643_ernest.html.

⁸³ For OSCE's July 2012 vote see <http://dfwatch.net/osce-passes-resolution-about-georgia-21913>.

links; and eliminated postal services and the issuing of visas.⁸⁴ Georgia thereafter reorientated its trade-relations toward the EU, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North America, and elsewhere, which raises doubts about Tbilisi's interest in seeing the rail-link to Russia (through Abkhazia) reinstated.

The Kremlin never acceded to any of the periodic demands emanating from Abkhazia that the (post-1931) autonomous republic be removed from Georgia and assigned to Russia. The most that Moscow and Tbilisi were prepared to concede were the awarding of Georgia's second university to the city of Sukhum and the introduction of a small amount of local TV-broadcasting in Abkhaz, gains which were achieved in 1978 after a campaign of civil disturbance in the region, which saw Georgian road-signs defaced and Georgian Party Boss, Eduard Shevardnadze, despatched to Sukhum with instructions to calm the situation and restore order. Transferring the direct subordination of Abkhazia from Tbilisi to Moscow was always a step too risky for the (post-Stalin) Kremlin to contemplate.

Georgians' hostility towards Russia, never far from the surface, was exacerbated by the deaths of peaceful demonstrators in the centre of Tbilisi on 9 April 1989, even though the Russian troops had been sent in with the approval of the Georgian Communist Party's General Secretary, Dzhumber P'at'iashvili. Moreover, the fact that the demonstration had been partly objecting to the restated demand issuing from Abkhazia in the shape of the Lykhny Declaration (18 March 1989) for a restructuring of the administrative link between Tbilisi and Sukhum in line with that obtaining throughout most of the 1920s hardly helped Georgian-Abkhazian relations in those unbridled days of nationalist fervour. As is well-known, the first fatal clashes between Abkhazians and Georgians took place in July 1989 over the issue of Tbilisi's attempts to undermine the viability of the Abkhazian State University by removing the Georgian-language sector and manoeuvring to set up a Branch ('Filial') of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum, a move that the special commission sent down by the Ministry of Education in Moscow, the only body empowered to sanction the establishment of such an institution of higher education within the USSR, decided was unlawful. And within 36 hours of the first deaths, Soviet Interior Ministry conscripts were deployed by Moscow in mixed settlements to keep the Abkhazian and Mingrelian communities apart, a move to which there were no official objections, and, most certainly, there were none on

⁸⁴ From January 2009, direct charter flights between Tbilisi and Moscow took place intermittently.

the ground, where these young men were welcomed by all residents in the mixed communities concerned.

The course of the Kremlin's attempts to keep a lid on deteriorating relations between Tbilisi, on the one hand, and either Tskhinval or Sukhum, on the other, at a time (1989–91) when (Soviet) Moscow could still claim a certain level of legal responsibility and, indeed, obligation to take action in a union-republic suffering from inter-ethnic strife can be followed in the collection of documents collated by Volkhonskij, Zakharov and Silaev (2008), from which copious citations have been adduced in earlier chapters during our own survey of events; relevant pronouncements and/or legislation from post-communist Russia (up to 2006) are also included in that volume.

Unlike the situation obtaining in July 1989, Russia was in no position to send in troops to separate the opposing forces on 14 August 1992, when the fighting began in Abkhazia. Moscow, in the person of President Boris Yeltsin, was, however, involved in moves to engineer ceasefires, just as it had been Moscow's intervention in the South Ossetian war that had led to the Daghomys Agreement of 24 June 1992, with a Russian contingent awarded a role in the quadripartite peace-keeping forces set up in compliance with the Agreement, as described in Chapter 4. The Abkhazian war took place at a time of great socio-economic upheaval in Russia, when most things (including, of course, weapons) could be purchased for a reasonable amount of cash (or some desirable commodity). As Georgians' anti-Russian sentiments were well-known to the Russian public, it is hardly surprising that some ethnic Russians (sc. in addition to those citizens of the Russian Federation from the North Caucasus who came to Abkhazia's aid out of a sense of mountaineer-solidarity) should have chosen to fight on the Abkhazian side. Equally, certain factors should not be forgotten, though some (if not all) of them regularly are:

- Yeltsin and Shevardnadze were old Politburo colleagues;
- there are grounds for suspecting Yeltsin's actual complicity in Shevardnadze's Abkhazian (mis)adventure;
- Yeltsin applied pressure on the Abkhazian leader Vladislav Ardzinba to consent to the unwelcome September 1992 ceasefire;
- and, under Yeltsin's presidency, Moscow largely followed a pro-Georgian line after the war.

It is not, therefore, surprising to hear from Abkhazian sources that information about Abkhazian troop-movements during the war might have

found its way to Georgia's field-commanders, just as those Russians sympathetic to the Abkhazian cause might similarly have passed information about Georgian intentions to the Abkhazians.

The role of Russia(ns) in the unfolding of military actions is, thus, difficult to assess accurately, but from the figures of the dead broken down by regional origin in Pachulia (2010), there can be no doubt that Abkhazians provided the overwhelming majority of the fighters who gained the ultimate victory over Shevardnadze's ill-trained and ill-prepared army. Again, as in the case of South Ossetia, Russia was awarded a crucial role in the resulting peace-keeping activities. And it needs to be constantly reiterated that these arrangements were made with the full approval of the UN and the international community more widely, whose concerns and interests at the time lay not at all in the Caucasus but rather in the Balkans, where the slaughter unleashed by the unwise and precipitate recognition offered to the constituent parts of Yugoslavia was, perhaps understandably but nevertheless regrettably, preoccupying European and (to a lesser extent) US thoughts.⁸⁵

Georgians and their apologists tend conveniently to ignore the sanctions imposed by Russia on Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the aim of pressuring them to compromise on their anti-Georgian stance. From the Georgian perspective, Russia's failure to force that compromise simply resulted from the Kremlin siding with the 'separatists'. On the other hand, the Abkhazians' complaint is that the presence of the peace-keepers (or UNOMIG, for that matter) failed to put a stop to:

- Tbilisi-inspired terrorism committed by Mingrelia-based groups like The Forest Brethren and The White Legion;
- the large-scale attempt to reignite hostilities in May 1998;
- the infiltration of the late Ruslan Gelaev's Chechen band in 2001;
- or the deployment of troops to the Upper K'odor Valley in July 2006.

The South Ossetians could also with justification point to the non-prevention of Saak'ashvili's attempt to retake South Ossetia in 2004.

The atmosphere definitely began to change once Putin took the decision to make Russian passports available to citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This move was widely castigated as an infringement of international law. The Abkhazians and South Ossetians, however, rather viewed it as the righting of the wrong that otherwise denied them the basic free-

⁸⁵ This mirrored the situation in the mid-19th century, when, principally, the British government chose the Balkans rather than the Caucasus to confront Russian expansion.

dom to travel outside their homelands, though, as we saw in the previous chapter, some countries then still refused to grant visas to Abkhazians and South Ossetians travelling on Russian passports, insisting that they apply for Georgian passports once their old Soviet documents finally expired (assuming that such documents had survived the ravages of the wars in their respective republics in the early 1990s in the first place), and the vast majority refused to bend to this demand.⁸⁶ Georgians and their sympathisers also saw the issuing of passports as Moscow laying the ground for justification of later military action in defence of 'Russian' citizens under threat from Tbilisi.

Russia found itself charged with provoking, either directly or via South Ossetian 'proxies', Saak'ashvili's attack on South Ossetia on 7 August 2008.⁸⁷ However, it was mainly the scale of the Russian response to the Georgian attack that the Tagliavini commissioners highlighted⁸⁸ and which led to Russia being condemned in the report prepared for the EU. In addition to the nature of that response, including the positioning of its troops beyond the actual conflict-zones well inside Georgian territory for some weeks after the cessation of hostilities, Russia stands accused of not acting with sufficient determination to restrain acts of revenge committed by South Ossetians against local Georgians and their property, acts which resulted in a new wave of refugees crossing into Georgia to add to the large numbers of those who had fled the original wars.

In the 2008-fighting in Abkhazia, Russia certainly deployed (land-, air-, and sea-) forces once the assault on Tskhinval had started. Georgian troops in the Upper K'odor Valley were softened up over the weekend of 9–10 August by Russian air-activity, allowing (exclusively) Abkhazian ground-troops to move in on Tuesday 12 August. Abkhazians also crossed the Ingur-border to advance against the military camp at Senak'i in Mingrelia (even apparently advancing as far as Kutaisi to test the nature of Georgian defence-readiness).

Whilst Georgia and its backers were still in late 2012 calling upon Moscow to fulfil all aspects of the Medvedev-Sarkozy Ceasefire, Moscow's

⁸⁶ The same objection applied to the acquisition of Georgia's so-called 'neutral passports' once the creation of these appeared on the agenda, as explained in Chapter 5.

⁸⁷ Asmus (2010 *passim*) was remorseless in levelling this charge, alleging that there had been a build-up of Russian forces in South Ossetia in excess of the numbers permitted under signed agreements.

⁸⁸ There were also the issues of 'passportisation' and the rush to raise the cry of 'genocide' which, as mentioned in Chapter 5, were two arguments used by Russia to justify the (scale of the) intervention.

decision of 26 August 2008 to recognise both Abkhazia and South Ossetia changed the situation entirely in the eyes of Moscow, Sukhum and Tskhinval. South Ossetia had a relatively small pool of locals with sufficient experience to fill the necessary posts. This resulted from the fact that, for 70 years up to its winning *de facto* independence, South Ossetia had been endowed with only a relatively low level of autonomy by virtue of its status as an 'autonomous region'. It was, thus, not as well-prepared for self-government as Abkhazia, which, from the start of the Soviet period, had first been a 'union-republic' (for most of the relevant decade in treaty-association with Georgia) and then from 1931 an 'autonomous republic' and where the pool of expertise was also larger. As a consequence, it was hardly surprising that Russian personnel were invited to help run the administration.⁸⁹

For some years Russia had expressed a desire to become a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but entry had been blocked by Georgian objections arising out of the issues surrounding Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia refused to accede to Georgian demands that it 'de-occupy' the said territories, and there was obviously no way that Georgian customs' officers would be allowed to stand on either side of the Russo-Abkhazian and Russo-South Ossetian borders to control the flow of goods. However, in early November 2011, a compromise was reached whereby the Swiss authorities were to arrange a contract with internationally licensed, neutral monitors to stand on the Russian side of the said borders to monitor relevant traffic. As a consequence of this agreement, Russia achieved its goal, whilst there would be no infringement of either Abkhazian or South Ossetian sovereignty or any impediment placed on cross-border traffic.⁹⁰

There was some discussion in the previous chapter of the agreements signed by the late President Bagapsh with the Kremlin over the guarding of Abkhazia's borders, the upgrade of the railway, and the refurbishment of the airport, all of which disconcerted elements within Abkhazian society. After Bagapsh's death, it emerged that significantly more agreements had been reached and documents signed than just the above three, but the content of the agreements was at that time uncertain. Naturally, this too

⁸⁹ In the context of the withering criticism directed at South Ossetia's (and, to a lesser extent, Abkhazia's) reliance on Russian personnel, the number of American 'advisers' in Tbilisi is a frequent rejoinder.

⁹⁰ On 3 November 2011, Saak'ashvili predicatably boasted on his presidential website that this represented a 'victory' for Georgian diplomacy. See: <http://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News?p=7086&i=1>.

aroused dissatisfaction, and, once revealed, the details could obviously affect posterity's judgment on Bagapsh's presidency and legacy.

Two bones of contention with Russia emerged while Bagapsh was still in office. The first concerned the 'Turbaza', an area of land encompassing a rather pleasant stretch of beach and hinterland close to the south-eastern centre of Sukhum Bay. The complex had two accommodation-blocks, though one was not in use after the war, and the usual facilities of a sanatorium. The land belonged to Abkhazia, but the facilities were run by Russia for Russian tourists, with wages paid by Russia for all the local staff employed. The dispute concerned responsibility for refurbishing the complex, the upshot being its closure just before the 2011 tourist-season. By 2012 the dispute had been resolved, with Abkhazia taking charge. But, since the state-budget had no provision to cover the costs involved, the result was that the complex remained inoperative.

The second question concerned jurisdiction over the northern border-village of Aibga and its environs. It will be recalled that the native Abkhazian population was deported from this area in the 19th century. The village today is populated by only a negligible number of ethnic Russians, who do not speak Abkhaz and are not exactly privileged in terms of the services provided to them. The question, therefore, arose as to whether they would not be better off, if ownership of the area were transferred to Russia. Since Abkhazia's borders are already reduced from what they were historically, Abkhazians having occupied land as far as the R. Mzymta (if not, indeed, beyond) in modern-day Russia before the 19th-century migrations, the Abkhazian government is not minded to cede anything further to its neighbour. There is a feeling that it is not simply concern over the fate of an insignificant number of Russians that is motivating this territorial challenge but rather the potential for exploiting mineral deposits located there. The two sides agreed to set up a joint-commission to investigate the matter. Topographer and member of parliament Valerij Kvarchia was appointed head of the Abkhazian delegation. In 2011, he published a booklet laying out the defence of Abkhazia's position; the booklet includes a wealth of maps indicating Abkhazia's borders at various points in history. At the time of writing, it remained unclear how the controversy would be resolved, but the very fact of the existence of these two post-recognition disputes was an excellent indication that the Abkhazian authorities are far from being the 'puppets' they have been consistently painted by Georgian propaganda.

The answer to the oft-posed question as to how Russian influence is likely to spread and deepen in both young republics will rather depend on what policy towards them the international community eventually decides to pursue. Should that decision be in favour of 'more of the same', then the only influence to be felt in them will perforce be Russian.

APPENDIX

US Assistance to Georgia 1992 to 2009 (in 3 parts)⁹¹

Appendix II.—U.S. Assistance to Georgia, 1992–2000 (Part I)
(\$ millions, by fiscal year)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
GEORGIA									
Economic Growth	0.94	1.79	11.94	7.81	10.14	10.12	33.85	32.61	35.26
Governing Justly & Democratically	0.21	2.04	4.11	3.08	4.28	5.37	16.66	15.68	20.50
Humanitarian Assistance	0.53	22.95	32.60	34.98	6.35	8.52	24.23	14.47	21.04
Investing in People	0.15	0.44	0.95	0.80	0.60	1.00	3.75	5.30	4.04
Peace & Security	0.00	2.80	0.00	0.10	0.60	0.79	19.47	21.39	28.30
GEORGIA TOTAL	1.83	30.02	49.60	46.71	21.97	25.79	97.95	89.45	109.13

*Does not include \$315 million supplemental Economic Support Fund (ESF) appropriation for Georgia under the Disaster Relief and Recovery Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2008 (Division B, P.L. 110–323).

**Does not include \$242 million supplemental AECA appropriation for Georgia under the Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009 (P.L. 111–32)

⁹¹ Appendices II and III from *Striking the Balance: U.S. Policy and Stability in Georgia. A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate. December 22, 2009.*

Appendix II.—U.S. Assistance to Georgia, 2001–2009 & FY92–09 (Part II)
(\$ millions, by fiscal year)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	FY 92–09
GEORGIA										
Economic Growth	41.17	33.45	32.09	26.84	35.26	27.54	23.39	18.54	20.69	403.41
Governing Justly & Democratically	12.89	21.75	19.79	12.97	13.79	13.92	12.99	13.73	13.40	208.36
Humanitarian Assistance	12.30	14.18	11.05	2.00	1.90	2.12	1.84	1.84	2.46	215.37
Investing in People	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.88	11.90	7.98	7.16	8.24	7.88	71.05
Peace & Security	29.00	21.93	24.24	20.15	23.38	15.94	13.25	7.71	5.56	234.60
GEORGIA TOTAL	95.36	91.31	87.17	72.43	86.23	67.49	58.23	50.06*	52.00**	1,132.79

*Does not include \$315 million supplemental Economic Support Fund (ESF) appropriation for Georgia under the Disaster Relief and Recovery Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2008 (Division B, P.L. 110–329)

**Does not include \$242 million supplemental AEECA appropriation for Georgia under the Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009 (P.L. 111–32)

Appendix III.—U.S. Security Assistance and Training in Georgia
(\$ millions)

	Foreign Military Financing (FMF)	Section 1206	Georgia Train and Equip (GTEP)	Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (GS SOP)	Coalition Readiness Support Program (CRSP)	Foreign Military Sales Deliveries	International Military Education and Training Program (IMET)	Total
FY 2002	55.5	—	64.5	—	—	3.6	.889	124.5
FY 2003	6.9	—	—	—	—	9.8	1.18	17.88
FY 2004	12	—	—	—	—	7.3	1	20.3
FY 2005	11.9	—	—	—	—	11.5	1.4	24.8
FY 2006	11.8	—	—	60	—	10.5	1.26	83.56
FY 2007	9.7	6.5	—	28	—	25	1.15	70.35
FY 2008	9	11.5	—	71	—	72.3	.799	164.6
FY 2009	11	—	—	—	—	—	1.15	12.15
Total FY 2002–2009	127.8	18	64.5	159	—	140	8.9	518
FY 2010 (request)	16	—	—	—	24	—	2	43

Source: Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT—OR NOT!

apxazak tkua: ghoronti k'os gach'q'oruni, ch'k'uas midughansia

'An Abkhazian has said: "If God becomes angry with someone, he strips him of his intelligence"' (Mingrelian proverb)

Georgia

Georgians tend to see, and present, themselves as perpetual victims. It is true that history has often dealt them a cruel hand in the shape of ill-disposed external forces, but, in respect of the issues examined here, it is, as I hope the preceding chapters have persuasively demonstrated, more a case of Georgians being their own worst enemies. The conclusion which forcefully suggests itself from the foregoing discussion is that the tribulations that have befallen Georgia since the last years of Soviet domination have essentially been the direct consequences of the Georgians' very own rhetoric and actions, which time after time (whether dictated by Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze or Saak'ashvili)¹ have been directly contrary to their own real interests.

Even if one ignores the advocacy by prominent Georgians of colonising [sic] a depopulated Abkhazia following the late 19th-century migrations and accepts the Georgian argument that the importation at that time of non-Abkhazians was simply part of tsarist policy, and, in similar vein, even if one forgets the ethnicity of the dictator who was directing Soviet policy at the height of the repression of the Abkhazians, their language and cul-

¹ The hope that the emergence of a generation of Georgian leaders who had benefited from exposure to Western education and values would see Georgian politics raised to a higher plain was shattered by Saak'ashvili and his coterie of similarly Western-educated ministers. Saak'ashvili's New Year message to his people at the start of 2010 was still infused with martial overtones as he encouraged them to hold a hoe (or book or computer) in one hand but a weapon in the other in order to ensure their children were born in freedom (cf. http://www.allgeo.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6242:saakashvili-delivers-new-year-address&catid=39:internal-policy&Itemid=2). For 2011 he wished his fellow-citizens "to continue moving forward united like a fist towards victorious Georgia" (see www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23006), whilst for 2012 his prediction was "the empire will inevitably fall and Georgia would be 'liberated'" (see www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24327).

ture from 1937 to 1953 and accepts the Georgian argument that this was just one token of the Kremlin's nationality-policy, the venom of the anti-minority rhetoric that infected Georgian society from late 1988/early 1989 is surely alone sufficient to explain the tragedies that ensued. This volume, unlike all others that have touched upon the relevant issues, includes copious citations direct from damning Georgian sources, which, given the limitations on space, represent but a snapshot of the total output that could have been referenced. As the authors were Kartvelian politicians, academics or other members of the intelligentsia,² it would be preposterous to seek to lay the blame for the content of their outpourings on Russia (specifically the Kremlin). Georgian nationalist vitriol came to focus on the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, nations they deemed to be unwarrantedly privileged by virtue of residing in eponymous autonomies on what was regarded as 'Georgian' soil. It was the threats implicit (and, occasionally, even explicit) in these very manifestations of Georgian chauvinism which largely motivated the reactions amongst the Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities. Moreover, these peoples did not accept the Georgian explanations of earlier events that so negatively impinged upon them, notably those that had occurred in the years of independent Georgia's Menshevik government. And here too Georgian actions could hardly be attributable to any outside party; significantly, it was on the path to revive that very Menshevik independence (albeit in a modern-day context) that Tbilisi set out as Moscow's grip on the Union began to slacken under Gorbachev's *Glasnost'*. But, it is legitimate to ask, were the consequences that proved so disastrous for so many as a result of Georgia's drive for independence truly inevitable?

Since the Abkhazians had begun to express dissatisfaction with their status and treatment even during Stalin's lifetime and had protested with letters or demonstrations every decade thereafter, it was logical that, under *Glasnost'*, they would press their grievances once again (witness *The Abkhazian Letter* of 1988). However, despite all the pressures and provocations described in preceding chapters from 1988/9 to the start of the war in 1992, it was not outright independence from Georgia that was ever being demanded but rather the establishment of the kind of treaty-relationship

² The rare Georgian voices that spoke out against the burgeoning chauvinism found themselves subjected to the same torrents of abuse that non-Georgian critics routinely receive(d). The philosopher Merab Mamardashvili was one such, and the contumely that was heaped upon him was widely judged to have contributed to his early death from a heart-attack at the age of 60 on 25 November 1990.

that had governed relations between the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian SSR for most of the 1920s (up to Abkhazia's demotion by Stalin to an autonomous republic in Stalin's native Georgia in 1931). Negotiations on just such a draft-treaty were scheduled to take place on 14 August 1992. But this was the day that Georgian tanks fatefully rolled across Abkhazia's historical border with Georgia.

It has been suggested that it was to thwart these negotiations that Shevardnadze's National Guard went in. But, if such was the simple goal, this could have been achieved merely by boycotting the talks. Running the risk of war in a multi-ethnic territory where the communities were so intermingled and where there existed a high ratio of mixed marriages must surely have been predicated on a more compelling calculation. With a ceasefire secured in South Ossetia, what was the main danger facing Georgia's State Council, headed (since the end of March) by Shevardnadze? It was the civil war raging in Mingrelia, where Gamsakhurdia's supporters wanted the 'local boy made good' returned to the presidency. Given the number of ethnic Mingrelians (probably in excess of a million) in Georgia, it has long been my firm conviction that the State Council gambled that playing the Abkhazian card would serve to unite all Kartvelians under the national banner, rallying them against a perceived common foe.³ That gamble failed miserably, as, fortunately for the Abkhazians, the Zviadists did not abandon their anti-Shevardnadze struggle. The defeat eventually inflicted by the Abkhazian alliance on Georgia's forces meant that, as of 30th September 1993, Abkhazia was lost to the Georgian Republic, which itself quickly went into a downward spiral and only avoided becoming a failed state⁴ thanks to Russian military (sc. in quashing the Zviadist rebellion) and Western financial assistance.

Whilst one might argue that South Ossetia was not so absolutely divorced from Georgia at the time when its 1992 ceasefire was signed, it certainly became so after Saak'ashvili's misadventure in August 2008. Though the authorities in Tbilisi still doggedly but vainly strive, even if fully supported by the West, to regain the two territories, almost every step

³ The same hypothesis is proposed by Spartak Zhidkov in his Introduction to the aforementioned collection of wartime-reminiscences by eye-witnesses prepared in Russian and English versions in Abkhazia over the summer-autumn of 2012.

⁴ Saak'ashvili himself told an audience in Washington in March 2011 that the Georgia he inherited "was a classical failed state". Cited from Thomas de Waal's 2011 Carnegie Endowment's 52-page paper 'Georgia's choices: charting a future in uncertain times' (pp. 5–6); available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/06/13/georgia-s-choices-charting-future-in-uncertain-times/iid>.

taken over the years of conflict has achieved quite the opposite outcome to that intended, resulting in the two republics being pushed ever closer to Russia, which, once Yeltsin's presidency was over and Putin realised the potential for regional leverage that a presence south of the mountains would give Moscow, responded more favourably to their overtures—it was hardly pressure or blandishments from the north which could be said to have motivated this orientation. Georgia was defeated in both Abkhazia (1993 and 2008) and South Ossetia (2008), and yet the realisation seems never to have dawned that it is the victors, not the vanquished, who dictate settlement-terms. Both republics are prepared to go no further than to establish normal, good-neighbourly relations with Georgia; it has surely long been beyond dispute that they will never become part of a single Georgian state again. Had the Georgian leadership proposed restructuring along federal lines, with meaningful power devolved to the regions (especially those where the main minorities resided), as Georgia moved from Soviet republic to independence, the transition might have been achieved harmoniously; as even the Abkhazians seemed ready for such a relationship, the Ossetians too might have found it, if not appealing, then at least a possibility worthy of serious consideration. Would such a structure have suited (and, indeed, suit) the Georgian state overall?

When one considers the map, two areas stand out immediately. These are (a) the southern Georgian province of Kvemo (Lower) Kartli (specifically the districts of Dmanisi, Bolnisi and Marneuli), which abuts Azerbaijan and is home to Georgia's Azerbaijani community, and (b), in the neighbouring south-western province of Samtskhe-Dzhavakheti, the districts around Akhalkalaki and Ninots'minda (formerly Bogdanovk'a), which share a border with Armenia and which are predominantly populated by Armenians. Both areas are economically deprived, and each ethnic group tends to cleave not to the metropolitan centre but rather to its respective eponymous republic across the border, from which news-media are received.

With respect to Dmanisi and Marneuli, it should not be forgotten that it was here where the first fatal ethnic clashes in Georgia occurred (mid-July 1989). In that year's census, some 307,556 Azerbaijanis resided in (Soviet) Georgia, representing 5.7% of the population. By the time of the 2002 census for Georgia proper (sc. minus Abkhazia and South Ossetia), this figure had fallen to 284,761, though the Azerbaijanis' percentage actu-

ally rose to 6.5%,⁵ thereby making them the second-largest ethnos after the ‘Georgians’ (*recte* Kartvelians), whose total was 3,661,173 (83.8%). Azerbaijanis are not well-integrated into Georgian society, only 15.2% knowing Georgian as their second language vs 0.3% claiming it as their first language.⁶

Georgian-Azerbaijani problems in the late 1980s were not limited to relations between the two communities within Georgia. It will be recalled that Article 107 of Georgia’s Menshevik Constitution (1921) referred to Zakatala as an integral part of the state. More properly known in Georgian under the name Saingilo, where the Ingilo dialect of Georgian is spoken, this pocket of land was assigned to the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan, and the position of Georgians there did not escape the attention of Georgia’s increasingly nationalist press in the late 1980s. *Literary Georgia* on 4 November 1988 printed (p. 5) an article by Manana Gigineishvili, Guram Gegeshidze, and Vakht’ang Rodonaia entitled /zghvari/ ‘Limit’, in which one reads:

In 1979, Mola Zade published a book of falsification entitled ‘The Toponymy of Azerbaijan’s Northern Regions’, in which he judged the toponyms of Saingilo to derive from Turkish. In 1987, Gara Akhmedov in an article published in ‘Elm Ve Heat’ considered the speech of the Ingiloans to be an independent, non-Georgian language ... In A. Geibulaev’s book ‘The Toponyms of Azerbaijan’, with the aid of ridiculous and forced arguments, the Ingiloans are declared to be the remnants of one of the Persian tribes living in the Caucasus ... Azerbaijani historians asseverate that the Georgian monuments surviving in Saingilo are of Albanian origin. The tendentiousness of Azerbaijani scholars reaches even to the point of their declaring the Ingiloans to be Azerbaijanis christianised as a result of incursions by Georgians. All of this is printed in publications of the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences.

Readers may both sympathise with this righteous indignation and yet smile at the irony, given the parallels between such deliberate Azerbaijani distortions of (Georgian) Ingiloan realities and those of Abkhazian realities manufactured by Ingoroq’va, whose ‘hypothesis’ was being resurrected with such relish by a range of Kartvelian commentators around this very

⁵ As already noted, the validity of the data for this census has been queried. These figures are quoted from Broers (2008.277), himself citing *Basic Results of the First General Census of the Georgian Population* (Georgian State Statistical Department, 2004); however, Wheatley (2009.10), citing /sakartvelos mosaxleobis 2002 ts’lis p’irveli erovnuli saq’oveltao aghts’eris shedegebi/ ‘Results of the 2002 First National, Universal Census of Georgia’s Population’ (Georgia’s State Department of Statistics, 2003), gives 283,632.

⁶ These figures compare with 9.3% vs 0.9% respectively in the 1989 census. Data cited from Broers (2008.279).

time. Whilst any tensions there might have been with neighbouring Azerbaijan in the USSR's dying years receded as relations between Tbilisi and Baku warmed, when the possibility of exporting Caspian oil via Georgia (and attendant profits) came onto the agenda, both the issue of the Ingiloan Georgians and the problems surrounding the integration within Georgian society of local Azerbaijanis remain.

In 1989, Georgia had a population of 437,211 (8.1%) Armenians. By 2002, this had fallen to 248,929 (5.7%); second-language knowledge of Georgian had risen from 20.3% in 1989 to 33.8%.⁷ Even allowing for those resident in Abkhazia⁸ and thus absent from the 2002 census in Georgia, this is a dramatic decline.⁹ By no means all of Georgia's Armenians are confined to Samtskhe-Dzhavakheti, where they represent 55% of the overall population, but in the Akhalkalaki district the percentage rises to 94% and to 96% in Ninots'minda (Broers 2008.278). Whilst ethnic clashes have been avoided, relations have left much to be desired. There have been disputes with the Georgian Church over ownership of churches and graveyards, and the closure of the Russian base near Akhalkalaki was not welcomed by local Armenians, many of whom were employed there. Armenian politicians in Erevan have been reluctant to support activists in Dzhavakheti, who have called for autonomy, because of the need to preserve friendly relations with Tbilisi. Given Armenia's problems with Azerbaijan to the east over Nagorno-Karabagh and the still unstable relationship with Turkey to the west, if the flow of goods (including fuel-supplies) via Georgia stopped, Armenia's only open border would be with Iran. Nevertheless, when Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze visited Erevan in October 2010 and was asked about the problem of 'Dzhavakhk', the name by which Armenians refer to Dzhavakheti, he rather undiplomatically replied that no such place exists on the map and that there was no problem with Georgia's Armenian community. Edmond Azadian's report¹⁰ of the visit alluded to the banning of the Armenian organisation *Virik*, the detention

⁷ Quoted from Broers (2008.277/279). Wheatley (2010.10) gives the 2002 total as 235,653.

⁸ 76,541 in 1989 vs 44,869 according to the 2003 census, the trustworthiness of which, it will be recalled, has been questioned —cited from Clogg (2008.308).

⁹ Georgia's Russian population has decreased even more sharply, from 341,172 (6.3%) to a mere 67,671 (1.5%) (Broers 2008.277).

¹⁰ 'Commentary: a grim prospect for Armenians in Georgia', filed on 25 October 2010 and available at: www.mirrorspectator.com/?p=4096. Writing on 28 November 2011, Gurgen Shirinyan, posted an article with the ominous title 'Only armed struggle can save Javakhk'—see: <http://hetq.am/eng/opinion/7308/only-armed-struggle-can-save-javakhk.html>.

of activist Vahakn Chakhalian, and the refusal by Georgia to grant a visa to his French lawyer. Thus, here too lies potential trouble for Tbilisi.¹¹

The whole spectrum of Georgia's post-conflict inter-ethnic problems was surveyed by Broers in 2008. Subsequent to his paper's publication (May), conflict was reignited, and events that August (notably Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) removed these two republics from the equation. Wheatley (2009) then went on to address the specific and highly contentious issue of language(s) in the light of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML), which Georgia pledged to sign and ratify within a year of joining the Council of Europe; thirteen years on, the Charter remained unratified. Whilst the expectation that citizens of a state should know that state's official language might seem fit and proper, in the view of Georgia's history of nationalism, one could understand why the rural Armenians and Azerbaijanis, who seemed content to communicate in their native tongue or Russian, might have harboured fears of attempted assimilation, if Georgian were not to be introduced sensitively and in the context of officially endorsed bi-/multilingualism.

Considering all of the above, one cannot help but speculate whether many of Georgia's problems from the late 1980s might not have been eased or avoided altogether, had federalisation of the republic taken place (or at least been seriously proposed) prior to (or at the time of) independence. Although that hypothetical chance was squandered, would it not be reasonable to suggest that, in order to lessen the risks of the eruption of further trouble, possibility of federalisation should still be realistically entertained by the powers-that-be within Georgia's reduced borders? If so, it might be wise to consider that the establishment of federal units should not be restricted to just the two southern provinces discussed above. Ach'ara would be one obvious candidate, given its autonomous status throughout the Soviet period arising (in part, at least) out of its confessional distinctiveness; the post-Mongol kingdoms of Imereti(a) (in the west), Kartli (in the centre), and K'akheti(a) in the east would also be candidates, each possibly

¹¹ It is, of course, to the region of Meskheta in the Samtskhe-Dzhavakheti province that the ('Turkish') Meskh(et)ians hope to return. By the end of 2009, despite the bureaucratic obstacles placed in the way of their acquiring all necessary documentation, over 70,000 applications had been lodged from those demanding the right to be resettled in Georgia. In 2009, the UN Refugee Agency criticised the Georgian government for its tardy handling of this issue in its 4 December 2009 report at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b1e0df41a.html>. For further discussion of this topic see the sub-section *Europe* in the previous chapter.

incorporating the sparsely populated mountain-regions to their north. But the most controversial inclusion as a federal unit would be Mingrelia, possibly incorporating Svaneti(a)—controversial because of the argument over the status of Mingrelian (and Svan), viz. languages vs (sociolinguistic) dialects.

The extent to which Mingrelians and Svans are, in their heart of hearts, content with their post-1930 categorisation as ‘Georgians’, of whom they are regularly described as mere ‘sub-ethnic groups’, remains to be ascertained, assuming a means to do so can possibly ever be devised. But there is definitely a level of discontent at the argument propounded in the context of the ECRML by certain linguists (e.g. T’ariel Put’k’aradze, Teimuraz Gvantseladze and Manana T’abidze), according to whom Mingrelian and Svan must be classified as dialects, since designating them as languages is deemed to be laying the foundations for further dismemberment of the Georgian state, a treacherous act, as they see it, playing into the hands of the Kremlin!¹² As Wheatley rightly observes (2009:38):

The challenge for the Georgian state and for Georgian society is to become genuinely convinced that regional or minority languages are an expression of cultural wealth, rather than a threat to the interests of ethnic Georgians.

He also notes that a crucial key to protecting minority-languages “is to raise their prestige so that those who speak them appreciate them as worthy of protection” (p. 18). I myself have long argued that such a raising of prestige would come from awarding Mingrelian (and possibly Svan) some level of literary status and thus a presence in the classroom,¹³ which would be most easily achieved in the context of devolved regional government.

The suggestion just advanced has relevance for Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian relations. If the Abkhazians and South

¹² A potent defence (in Georgian) of their language-status by Mingrelian Gia Ok’udzhava is available at: www.scribd.com/doc/30758966/Put-Lingvistebi. It is entitled /kartveluri enebi da “evrop’uli kart’ia regionaluri da umtsiresobata enebis shesaxeb” (kartveli “put’-lingvist’ebi” da “ertoblivi sakartvelostvis” mebrdzoli mati ist’orik’osi mimdevrebi/ ‘The Kartvelian languages and the “European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages” (Georgian “Put’[k’aradze-like =Sham]-Linguists” and their historian-supporters fighting for a “Collective Georgia”’). He writes, addressing directly those who object to the award of language-status, thus:

As to the Mingrelian-Laz and Svan languages, what is insulting is not their being declared mere dialects, the real insult to the children of this region resides in the expected dangers which you and your protectors link to the existence of these languages or to their finding a place in the Charter of Languages.

¹³ See, for example, Hewitt (2010).

Ossetians were to see Georgians evincing real concern not only for the country's Armenian and Azerbaijani communities but also for the well-being of two of Georgia's neglected sister-languages (Laz-speakers, and thus their language, being essentially confined to Turkey), whatever ethnic classification is applied to their speakers, they might come to feel confident that a peaceful *modus vivendi* could conceivably become achievable with neighbouring Georgia, once restructured along federal lines, even if they would never entertain re-entering that polity as constituents of the federation. Establishing good-neighbourly relations, of course, presupposes that Tbilisi will have taken the painful (but, in reality, the ultimately ineluctable) step of formally recognising loss of jurisdiction over two of its former Soviet autonomies.

A further prerequisite for wider harmony in the region will be realisation by Georgian leaders that neither pursuing NATO membership nor the sport of state bear-baiting is (or ever was) in their own national interest.

Abkhazia

At the cost of one death, Abkhazians regained control over the whole of their territory on 12 August 2008 and saw the start two weeks later of the inevitably slow process of winning recognition (initially from Russia alone). This indisputably made them winners from that 'hot' month. Their task remained (as of 2012) to build on their still fragile but important gains.

Despite Abkhazians' resistance to pressure (both Western and Russian) over the years, old thinking persists amongst influential Western commentators. Kurt Volker,¹⁴ for example, published an article in *The Washington Post* on 25 May 2010 entitled 'Sochi Olympics offer a lever on Russia and rights'. Regarding Abkhazia (and South Ossetia), he advocated:

non-recognition of statehood, non-acceptance of travel documents issued by the two territories; no official travel to these areas unless the access is from Georgian territory; no investment in, or trade with, business entities based in these territories; and no U.S. or E.U. visas for officials of the break-away governments, unless it is on terms the United States and Europe decide upon. But it should be equally clear that the West is prepared to lift these

¹⁴ US Ambassador to NATO July 2008 to May 2009, Managing Director of the Center on Transatlantic Relations at John Hopkins University and Senior Adviser at the Atlantic Council of the USA.

policies quickly should there be agreement with Georgia on internationally supervised autonomy.¹⁵

In his aforementioned interview of June 2012 'Georgians do not have enough information about Abkhazia',¹⁶ Alexander Cooley suggested that Western attitudes were no longer to be characterised as being conditioned by a 'Cold War mentality', preferring to put it this way:

Even so-called experts, analysts, foreign policy people, senators or representatives, who are engaged with the region, still view the US policy as being one where they should strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the former soviet states. That's a code word for saying we should lessen their dependency on Russia.

But, of course, the transparent anti-Soviet thinking of such old Cold War warriors as the late Paul Henze, as discussed earlier, does not essentially differ in terms of goals from Cooley's interpretation of Western attitudes two decades after the fall of the USSR, for in both cases the aim was/is reducible to the imposition of restrictions on Moscow's reach, rather than properly to evaluate and treat appropriately each former Soviet dependency (or former Eastern bloc constituency) in its own right. However one accounts for the shades in the spectrum of Western opinions about post-Soviet Georgia, even the proponents of 'engagement without recognition' presumably harbour belief in future reunification, otherwise why deny outright recognition to the secessionist republics at once? Can one perhaps detect a hope, occasionally verbalised, amongst the more materialistically minded commentators that, if Georgia advances economically, the temptation of higher living standards might lure back the departed? But, whilst Abkhazians are certainly keen to better their material lot, especially after so many years of deprivation and hardship, they are unlikely to prove so venal as to endanger the liberty that they achieved at such a cost. And, in any case, it would be reasonable to counter such a simplistic expectation by pointing out that those familiar with rural areas in Georgia (outside the main targets for investment in development and construction-work, such as Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi as well as Saak'ashvili's grand schemes for a ski-resort in Svaneti(a) or the even more grandiose plan to create an entirely new city, Lazik'a, to house half a million and to be situated on the coast

¹⁵ See www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/05/21/AR2010052102233/html.

¹⁶ At <http://dfwatch.net/georgians-do-not-have-enough-information-about-abkhazia-98898>.

between Abkhazia and Poti)¹⁷ regularly report that there is little benefit to be seen there from all the millions that have poured into Georgia's coffers anyway.

Of course, there are two major obstacles standing in the way of wider recognition: the refugees, and constitutionally guaranteed rights for all the ethnic groups living in Abkhazia. Whatever opinion one holds about how the bulk of Abkhazia's pre-war Kartvelian population came to be living outside the republic, the international community insists that they are entitled to return home. The Abkhazian authorities must, therefore, constantly reiterate the following points:

- much of the pre-war housing-stock has been destroyed, rendering their mass-accommodation a practical impossibility;
- Tbilisi has paid not one *kopek* (/tetri/penny) by way of war-reparations, and priority for the still straitened budget must be given to improving life for the communities that remained loyal during and after the war;
- it is unreasonable to expect the Abkhazians to allow themselves to be swamped¹⁸ once more by a population so easily swayed by Georgian nationalist fervour both before and during the war; it is fully justifiable continually to stress the answer to the oft-posed question as to why it was the rise in the Kartvelian population of Abkhazia that roused such resentment, when the arrival of other ethnic groups was more readily tolerated, is that only the Kartvelians proceeded to claim actual ownership of the territory, questioning the very right of the Abkhazians even to live on their ancestral land;
- Georgia, as the aggressor in 1992, should be required¹⁹ to take more seriously its responsibilities and treat the mostly Mingrelian refugees from Abkhazia, who have largely been used as a propaganda-tool to manipulate international opinion, more generously in line with the treatment given to the truly Georgian refugees from South Ossetia in 2008;²⁰

¹⁷ This was announced in Zugdidi on 4 December 2011. The name derives from the ancient kingdom on the Black Sea's (south-)eastern coast. See www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24230.

¹⁸ The following figures are quoted by Clogg (2008.308) for Abkhazia's 2003 census, though the Abkhazian total is widely seen as inflated, whilst those for Armenians and 'Georgians' [*recte* Kartvelians] are understated: Abkhazians 94,597 (44.1%); Armenians 44,869 (21%); 'Georgians' 40,443 (19%); Russians 23,420 (11%); Others 10,687 (5%); Total 214,016.

¹⁹ Indeed, this is something that should have been organised from the moment that it became clear that there could be no quick return.

²⁰ An example of the way that local Kartvelians (mainly Mingrelians) were/are treated as second-class 'Georgians' is well-illustrated from Spartak Zhidkov's aforementioned Introduction to a set of reminiscences about the 1992–93 war, unpublished at the time of writing but with the provisional title of 'Incinerated in the Flames of War':

- once Abkhazia achieves universal recognition as an indisputably *de iure* member of the international community and conditions are appropriate, it will undertake to put in place a programme for returning more refugees north of the Gal District, as long as they agree to become citizens of Abkhazia and abide by its Constitution.²¹

As for the matter of building a modern, democratic society with equal rights for all,²² the problems are many and challenging.²³ It is essential to sweep away existing attitudes and practices (including the tradition of favouring kin, so prevalent in small societies constructed around the extended family) and to introduce appropriate standards in such fields as education, the health-service, policing, the judiciary, banking, taxation, the media, along with a whole panoply of laws in such areas as property-ownership²⁴ and rights to citizenship and of citizens (including language-rights). These last are particularly sensitive, given the ethnic make-up of Abkhazia. The implementation of the 2007 Language Law, which envisages a gradual shift from Russian to Abkhaz across all spheres of public life, will create difficulties even for certain Abkhazians, many of whom have

Shortly before the end of the war, Georgian representatives who arrived for talks with the Abkhazian military were negotiating the transfer to them of the Georgians [Kartvelians—Translator] who had died on one section of the front, where the Abkhazians had conducted a successful offensive. The Georgian delegates, looking at the dead, were saying: 'We'll take this one, and this one, and that one.' 'So, what about the rest?' asked the Abkhazian officers. 'They're locals; we have no need of them!' came the reply.

²¹ The depopulated districts of Ochamchira and Gulripsh are crying out for manpower on the land, where jobs were largely undertaken previously by Mingrelians. Though there is no longer a UNOMIG presence in Abkhazia, the UNHCR and UNDP still operate there, and in 2004 they commissioned Paul Wooster to conduct a needs-assessment. His report 'The agricultural sector in Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli and Gali, Abkhazia, Georgia' appeared in January 2005; it is available at: erc.undp.org/evaluationadmin/downloaddocument.html?docid=1756. I am grateful to Michael Costello for bringing it to my attention. An announcement 'UNICEF Spearheads a National Immunization Campaign Aimed at Keeping Abkhazia Polio-Free' posted on 3 December 2010 on the site <http://www.thenewsmarket.com/Releases/StoryDetailPage.aspx?GUID=e2e1d636-6687-4a28-b778-8f4c3fb19a0b&lr=ls&bhcp=1> spoke of the second stage in the joint UNICEF-EU-Abkhazian drive against polio, initiated in 1998, taking place between 6 and 12 December.

²² The current restriction of the presidency to an Abkhaz-speaking Abkhazian seems reasonable, as long as the language is endangered, though, in the longer term, it might be politic to drop the reference to ethnicity.

²³ See Clogg (2008) for a valuable discussion. The Abkhazian authorities will find a useful 'to-do' list in the concluding chapter of Trier et al. (2010:177–122), a book which should have been appraised prior to publication by someone more knowledgeable about Abkhazia than the authors; see my review (Hewitt 2011a).

²⁴ Properties unclaimed within 10 years of the end of the war have reverted to the State.

only weak, if any, competence in the language. Pragmatism will, in all likelihood, prevail, but, whilst the Abkhazians' main cultural concern must be to ensure the survival of Abkhaz, the linguistic needs of Abkhazia's other ethnic groups require sensitive handling. The Abkhazian situation can be seen as a microcosm of that existing in (Soviet) Georgia, and there must be no repetition of the mistakes committed by (late-Soviet/early post-Soviet) Georgia in alienating minorities and thereby creating internal enemies. If most of the ethnic groups, in recognition of the fact that the Abkhazians suffered the greatest losses during the war with Georgia, in which, it must not be forgotten, *all* non-Kartvelians were targeted, seem content for the moment at least with the Abkhazians holding most positions of power, the feelings of the Kartvelians are not so clear, even if they are not wholly negative.²⁵

A decision on acquisition of Abkhazian citizenship, passport, and thus voting-rights for the Kartvelians, all of whom are entitled to, and many of whom possess, Georgian citizenship/passports, when the Abkhazian Constitution permits only joint-Russian citizenship, will remain complicated as long as Tbilisi refuses to sign a non-use-of-force agreement or until a final, comprehensive resolution to the conflict is reached. As regards language-rights, since Abkhazia's Kartvelians are almost exclusively Mingrelian, the Abkhazians should, in my long-argued personal opinion, capitalise on this. If this population wants their children educated in Georgian, this should be permitted, on condition that Mingrelian receives a place in such schools' curricula. Abkhazians do not regard Mingrelians as Georgians and should act accordingly. Whilst Mingrelian identity cannot be *forced* (back) on this population (in the way, incidentally, that Georgian identity has actually been forced on them from c.1930), every attempt should be made to *encourage* them to regain their lost self-awareness.²⁶ It was, after all, with Mingrelians (as the historical buffer between Abkhazians and Georgians) that the Abkhazians had most intercourse and with whom marriages were frequently contracted.²⁷ So, more should be done via the media to raise the profile of Mingrelian in the Gal District and

²⁵ See the April 2010 survey conducted by O'Loughlin et al. (2010).

²⁶ Abkhazians often say how much they pity the Mingrelians, observing: "At least we Abkhazians know who we are and have not lost our ethnic identity" (sc. in the way that the Mingrelians have succumbed to Georgian pressure to do so).

²⁷ For an insight into Abkhazian attitudes towards Mingrelians (and indeed Abkhazian life and *Weltanschauung* in general), see Fazil Iskander's Chegem tales, where the Mingrelians equate to the 'Endurskies'—the Russian originals appeared in 1979 and 1981, whilst Susan Brownsberger's English translations came out in 1983 and 1984, respectively.

to make local Mingrelians feel themselves to be a respected part of Abkhazia's multi-ethnic society. Weaning them away from the pull of Tbilisi can only serve the interests of the Abkhazians, especially if moves towards granting Mingrelians greater prestige *qua* Mingrelians help stimulate Mingrelians across the Ingur to press for federal rights within Georgia, which should also be in the long-term interests of the Mingrelians themselves (if only they would realise it).

Addressing many of Abkhazia's needs depends on adequate funding, and investment from as wide a range of sources as possible would surely be desirable for the purpose of stimulating healthy competition for the exercise of influence. Given Abkhazia's natural attractions and potential across a range of areas, wider recognition would pave the way for such inflow of capital, helping to create a virtuous circle for all concerned. In the meantime, Abkhazians will undoubtedly take advantage of any actual fruits that might eventually flow from the policy of 'engagement without recognition' and hope for further benefits accruing once their cause becomes better understood.

South Ossetia

Whilst there are parallels between South Ossetia and Abkhazia, there are also deep differences. Though it was South Ossetia which suffered the Georgian onslaught late on 7 August 2008, Abkhazia too witnessed military action; both were recognised by Moscow at the same time; and the presidents of the two republics frequently appeared together on state-occasions (especially during the presidencies of Bagapsh and Kokoiti), conducting a joint-visit with their entourages in the summer of 2010 to Nicaragua and Venezuela, the two South American countries to have followed Russia's lead in granting recognition. However, the relative weakness of the South Ossetian claim to independence is widely regarded as damaging to the much stronger case of Abkhazia. And so, each should be judged on its merits.

Assuming it can be conclusively demonstrated that the South Ossetians do really desire independence (rather than union with their northern cousins within the Russian Federation), they and their leaders will need to work hard to convince the doubters (in some cases, as we have seen, the scornful) that this is not an unrealisable dream; the manoeuvrings to ensure that Dzhioeva did not succeed to the presidency at the end of Kokoiti's term will have done nothing to enhance South Ossetia's reputation. They

have to demonstrate that they possess both a population of viable size with the experience and skills required to run a 21st-century state and the basis of a functioning economy, independent of grants from Russia. Russia's 1st Deputy Foreign Minister, Igor' Shuvalov, stated in August 2010 that South Ossetia would receive a grand total of \$916 million for reconstruction; of this \$154 million had been delivered, whilst a further \$222 million was earmarked for 2011,²⁸ though there have been frequent rumours that not all monies have actually found their way to designated schemes. There is also the issue of the future of the Georgian refugees and internal relations with Georgians living within South Ossetia, especially the predominantly Georgian-settled Leningor (Akhggori) District, to be faced.

If there is a preference for union with North Ossetia, then this should be clearly enunciated, even if the Kremlin would find it embarrassing on the grounds that this would be interpreted as 'proof' that Russian intervention in August 2008 and subsequent actions were for the base purpose of grabbing territory south of the main Caucasus range.

International Community

Georgia remained essentially off the international community's radar for most of the Soviet period, occasionally registering on the screen when some disaster occurred, as with the killing of demonstrators in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989. So, it is hardly surprising that foreign ministries in Western capitals had no ready policies for dealing with the fallout from the USSR's collapse (especially as it affected such peripheral areas), since, by common consent, that cataclysm caught even professional Kremlinologists off guard.

In its haste to act, it was as if the international community had chosen to constrain itself by devising a specific variant of *Occam's Razor*²⁹ which decreed *Res publicae non sunt multiplicandae praeter necessitatem* 'States should not be multiplied beyond necessity'. The 'necessity' here was crucially to be determined not by peoples/nations aspiring to (re)establish their own state but rather by the exclusive club whose membership was restricted to those privileged to have already acquired through historical serendipity not only ownership of a state but also the consequential and

²⁸ See <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100813/160182651.html>.

²⁹ *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* 'Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity'.

crucial power to deny membership to others, such 'black balling' being the norm.

The decision to refuse to consider recognising any state-entities below the level of the fifteen Soviet union-republics,³⁰ as reflected in the offer of US recognition by President George Bush Snr. on the very day that the USSR ceased to exist at the end of 1991, was totally arbitrary and effectively stripped the two minorities whose problems form the core of this book of the possibility of exercising their right of self-determination in an immediate and straightforward fashion. The failure of Georgia to win wider recognition (and diplomatic relations with America) did, however, indicate an awareness of the serious deficiencies that characterised that country at the time (and, in truth, for long after). But this prudent caution was totally jettisoned from late March following the return to his strife-riven and increasingly chaotic homeland of Eduard Shevardnadze.

Given the favourable impression Shevardnadze had made overseas during his five years as Gorbachev's Foreign Minister, it was fully to be expected that benefit would accrue to Georgia after his return, since Shevardnadze numbered among his friends such powerful players as US President George Bush Snr. and his Secretary of State James Baker, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, as well as British Premier John Major and his Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. But the haste with which recognition was granted and diplomatic ties established before the end of March must surely be acknowledged to have been at best unwise and at worst utterly indecent, exhibiting a cavalier insouciance for the possible consequences. Though collusion between Washington, London and Bonn cannot be excluded, only Major and Hurd had reason to hurry, as their Conservative government was predicted to lose the upcoming British general election (scheduled for 9 April); in the event, the predictions proved inaccurate, however. Once Britain, which was about to assume the six-month chairmanship of the EEC (from July), took the initiative, all other European states followed suit. If it was indeed the desire of the Conservative leadership to be the ones while still in office to pay Shevardnadze their share of the debt of gratitude they felt the West collectively owed him for his perceived role in bringing down not only the Berlin Wall (1989) but the USSR itself, then upon their shoulders must rest the lion's share of the blame for all that followed from what, with hindsight,

³⁰ Or, *pari passu*, the constituent republics of Yugoslavia.

must be judged to have been nothing less than an act of gross irresponsibility.³¹

The argument of the Abkhazians in particular that Tbilisi's own annulment of all Soviet legislation since the annexation of Georgia in 1921 had removed their territory from the constituency of Georgia counted for nothing (assuming that relevant Western chancelleries were even aware of the argument).³² Henceforth, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were deemed by the recognising states to be *de iure* parts of the Republic of Georgia, and Tbilisi could fully anticipate international support for actions taken to restore and then maintain its 'territorial integrity'. But did Georgia actually exist as an integrated entity at the time? The status of Abkhazia was contested, and wars were ongoing in both South Ossetia and Mingrelia. Whilst March's Europe-wide decision to recognise was imprudent, it was compounded over the summer by the added folly of showering upon Georgia such beneficences as membership of the IMF, World Bank, and the UN, without the imposition of a single condition, and this at a time when, it is worth re-emphasising, Georgia lacked any legitimately mandated government.

It has seemed to me since 1992, and I have long argued the point, that what should have happened was the following. If his Western friends in high places felt they were in debt to Shevardnadze *the man* (as opposed to the office he held in Georgia at that moment), they should at least have recognised that he was then operating in a totally different environment from the one he was in when he came to their attention and earned their respect and even friendship. The State Council of Georgia, which he then headed, should have been notified that recognition and the other favours listed above would be forthcoming following fulfilment of these minimum conditions:

- Ending the war in South Ossetia
- Ending the war in Mingrelia
- Reaching a peaceful accommodation in Abkhazia
- Conducting the elections scheduled for the autumn freely and fairly

³¹ Yet one more example, one might conclude, of meddling in a far-away country of which the meddlers know nothing.

³² Equally ignored, even (one might say) by the Abkhazians themselves, was their possible right *qua* colony to claim independence from Georgia as the colonial power, for the acknowledgement of their colonial practices in Abkhazia by certain Georgians at certain moments in history was largely quite unknown, as the relevant texts were in Georgian.

- After securing a democratic mandate, introducing appropriate constitutional reforms to demonstrate that Georgia was on the path to constructing a polity demonstrably worthy of UN membership

This unique opportunity was squandered, when the favours were granted quite unconditionally; Georgia was consigned to Shevardnadze's stewardship, and the world's attention promptly shifted to the Balkans. Thereafter, if they received consideration at all, the Abkhazians and South Ossetians seem to have been regarded as little more than inconvenient nuisances. But, irritatingly for those who hold this opinion, they do not regard themselves as inconveniences and have vigorously demonstrated for two decades that they will not permit outsiders sympathetic to Tbilisi to dictate to them where their destiny must lie.

The international community (including Russia) was wrong to gamble on recognising Georgia within its Soviet borders, thereby effectively granting international validation to Stalin's division of the relevant territories and peoples. Russia, annoying as this has proven to the bulk of the international community, made amends. It is time for Russia's lead to be followed. Ideally, Georgians would themselves accept reality, grant recognition, and then concentrate on ensuring that their troubled state avoids further fracturing. Such a voluntary move must, however, on the basis of the history and attitudes revealed in earlier chapters, be deemed to be highly implausible. And so, Georgia's Western friends should recognise that the best way to prove their friendship would be to persuade Tbilisi of the futility of pursuing self-defeating policies and to declare that, whether Tbilisi agrees or not, general recognition of the two republics will be granted at a date to be determined.³³ Why? Because it is simple common sense, being the obvious way out of the current stalemate and the best path towards an equitable, peaceful, and long-lasting solution. Naturally, admitting mistakes and committing u-turns are always uncomfortable for reluctant politicians to contemplate; humble pie is not a dish enthusiastically consumed, especially as an added bitter pill would be the implicit acknowledgement that Russia actually acted correctly on 26 August 2008 in offering its own recognition. But, if in 1991–92 the West effectively colluded in sanctioning Stalin's concept for the structure of his homeland,³⁴ continu-

³³ One persuasive technique might be gently to remind Tbilisi that Georgia's sizeable international debt could be called in at any time.

³⁴ Soviet maps of Georgia following the wartime-deportation of the Karachays, Balkars, Chechens and Ingush, one of which is included in this volume as Map 5, display an even grander conception, with 'Georgian' territory extending to include Mt. Elbrus.

ing to support Tbilisi will simply strengthen Georgians' self-delusion in their fantasy that the lost territories can be regained, postpone the day when the conflicts will finally achieve resolution, and, as is blindingly obvious to all observers, result in these territories becoming in the meantime ever more closely fused to Russia. For its part, Russia is hardly likely to refrain from acting to enhance its own position of influence and dominance, and it can hardly be censured for so doing.

Abkhazians have made it abundantly clear that they do not wish to be part of the Russian Federation. As all informed commentators agree that Abkhazia has real potential for viable independence (and, indeed, proved it over the course of its first two decades of independent existence), granting recognition would allow for the input of Western influence and investment to provide a healthy counterbalance to that already flowing from Russia. Nevertheless, Abkhazians would want to preserve a Russian presence as part of the mix if for no other reason than to ensure that the West, with its proven pro-Georgian bias, could not undermine their independence and engineer reincorporation into Georgia. With recognition, a developing economy, proper constitutional arrangements establishing equal rights for all the republic's ethnic groups, and internationally guaranteed security, suitable conditions might finally be created for the Abkhazians to feel confident about becoming more flexible on the demand for a return (albeit carefully regulated) of more of the Kartvelian refugees. Without movement on recognition, the future for the refugees is certain to remain as bleak as it has been since their departure.

The question of South Ossetia is more problematic. As of the end of 2010, it is widely regarded as little more than a Russian military outpost, incapable of sustaining independence. Return to Georgian control is inconceivable, and many would probably conclude that union with North Ossetia is the logical solution. But is this what the South Ossetians want? And would the international community easily tolerate direct transfer from the jurisdiction of one recognised state (virulently demanding reintegration and intolerant of any alternative) to that of another? If a referendum on the future of the territory were held under existing circumstances, the result would almost certainly not be accepted internationally. And so, recognition would allow for a plebiscite to be arranged under international supervision. If the vote favoured union with North Ossetia, that should be allowed to proceed; if the vote favoured independence, then there should be an international effort to help sustain it.

Majority opinion holds that even the *de facto* independence characterising South Ossetia and Abkhazia from the early 1990s (let alone the *de iure*

status claimed after 26 August 2008) is illegal in ‘international law’. But this amorphous concept is essentially little more than the aggregation of state-practice; if a sufficient number of states (how many and, more importantly, which ones are conveniently unanswered questions) elect to practise appropriately, a declaration of independence miraculously attains sudden ‘legality’. To what extent, then, do Abkhazia and South Ossetia satisfy the four conditions for statehood laid down in Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention (26 December 1933)? Those conditions are (see Hille 2003.17; 2010.28):

- permanent population
- defined territory
- government
- capacity to enter into relations with other states

And the answer given to each of the questions by the governments of the two republics concerned would definitely be in the affirmative.³⁵ The borders of the territories are not in serious dispute (current discussions over Aibga on the Abkhazian-Russian border and its environs apart), and, if Abkhazia had an irredentist claim against any state, it would be against Russia for that slice of territory up to the older northern border along the R. Mzymta, an unlikely scenario; stable governments have been serving in both republics since their separation from Georgia, based on presidential and parliamentary elections, which have been conducted in accordance with the respective constitutions (albeit with the occasional, regrettable hiccup)—this is in sharp contrast to the unconstitutional ousting of both President Gamsakhurdia (1992) and President Shevardnadze (2003) in neighbouring Georgia; and capacity to enter into international relations has been demonstrated by the recognition offered by six UN member-states (including a permanent member of the Security Council) and subsequent exchange of diplomatic representatives—Abkhazia, at least, has a number of honorary consuls in place in a variety of countries who are empowered to issue visas for entry to that republic. As to the first point, Sukhum and Tskhinval would argue that their respective populations are indeed permanent, but the issue of the Kartvelian refugees from both territories is always likely to be an (and maybe *the*) obstacle raised by the international community; each year since 2008 there has been a non-binding vote in the UN General Assembly underlining the right of the refugees (IDPs in the UN’s preferred terminology) to return to their pre-war

³⁵ For a detailed presentation of Abkhazia’s case see Chirikba (2010).

places of domicile.³⁶ And the question of the refugees was addressed earlier in this chapter. It is, however, salutary to recall at this juncture that, if in many quarters there are reservations as to whether Abkhazia and South Ossetia completely satisfy one of the Montevideo Convention's four conditions, Georgia unarguably did fail to satisfy two at the time when recognition was offered (sc. by the EU) and diplomatic relations established: the frontiers of the state were in doubt—war was actually raging in two areas (South Ossetia and Mingrelia); and there was no legitimate government, President Gamsakhurdia having been ousted in a coup (though he was in power when the USA recognised, but did not establish diplomatic relations with, Georgia)—elections did not take place in Georgia until 11 October 1992, by which time war in Abkhazia had begun, which only served to underscore the disputed nature of Georgia's borders.

But it is not so much the hoops through which an aspirant state has to jump in order to establish its legitimacy in the fluid and ever-evolving code that is 'international law' as basic *justice* that is paramount for the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Is it not naïve, they might reasonably ask, to suppose that the dividing line between states existing at an arbitrary point in time must (by international *fiat* that not only ignores their claims and protestations but even bars them from making their case at such international fora as the General Assembly of the United Nations) remain inviolable for ever more and that minorities oppressed or facing physical annihilation be similarly awarded but a single right, namely the 'right' to accept such an externally imposed lot in silence?

We have seen that Great Britain (in step with allies) did nothing to stop Georgian aggression in Abkhazia in 1992 or in South Ossetia in 2008³⁷ and even blocked Russia's UN call for a South Ossetian ceasefire before Russia proceeded with its own operation to halt Georgia's incursion. When Russia was the villain, beginning early encroachment upon North West Caucasian territory, the Briton (more specifically, Scot) and ardent Turkophile David Urquhart railed against Lord Palmerston's refusal to join the championing of Circassian resistance with these words of reproach (Robinson 1920:62):

The power of England does not reside in her bayonets ...; it resides in the confidence which men have placed in her firmness and integrity. Her supremacy can only be endangered by the conquests of independent States,

³⁶ The latest vote at the time of writing took place on 3 July 2012—see <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24963>.

³⁷ History might find the aphorism *Qui tacet consentire videtur* 'Silence appears to be token agreement' of relevance when it comes to determining the extent of the responsibility for all the consequences that followed from these decisions.

and aggression but rallies strength around her as the defender of endangered nationalities. When she proclaims herself the lover of peace at the expense of honour, when she asserts herself the friend of the powerful and the ally of the aggressor, she ceases to have a situation among mankind, not because her fleets are disarmed, but because her character has sunk.

Mutatis mutandis, over a century and a half later, this has the sad ring of an all too uncomfortably pertinent commentary on the West's collective privileging of state-power over the rights of the two endangered minorities whose causes have been presented in the body of this work.

Postscript

Though it is beyond the remit of this book, I would suggest that the third Transcaucasian 'hot spot', Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh to the Armenians), should also be internationally recognised. It was the first of the three Transcaucasian territories to experience war in the late Soviet/early post-Soviet period, and yet, whilst the other two regional war-zones on which this book has concentrated began their path to international recognition in 2008, Nagorno-Karabagh has thus far failed to achieve such a breakthrough. That said, the House of Representatives of the State of Massachusetts passed a resolution on Monday 13 August 2012 calling upon the US President and Federal Government to offer recognition.³⁸ The resulting six Transcaucasian states (five, if South Ossetia were to opt for union with North Ossetia and actually united with it) should then be encouraged to form a regional 'common market', which might in the longer term lead to the establishment of some kind of (con)federal arrangement. The memory of inter-state squabbling between Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians from the time of the Russian Revolution up to their absorption into the young Soviet state is not a happy precedent,³⁹ but mutual concord is surely an ideal to which all players should aspire (or be persuaded to aspire by those who truly have their best interests at heart).

PPS After the opposition's victory in the 2012-parliamentary elections in Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili became Prime Minister, P'aat'a Zakareishvili was awarded the portfolio of the Ministry for Reintegration, whilst Irak'li Alasania became Minister of Defence.

³⁸ See <http://www.reporter.am/go/article/2012-08-13-massachusetts-legislature-backs-artsakh-s-independence->

³⁹ Indeed, Tracey German (2012) has argued that, geography apart, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have never had anything in common to form the basis for a sense of regional commonality.

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