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Analysis

A European Path for Abkhazia: Yesterday's Pipe Dreams?

By Walter Kaufmann, Potsdam

Abstract

In 2004, many optimistic observers hoped that a democratizing Georgia with the prospect of European integration would provide a more attractive interlocutor for Abkhazia to negotiate a mutually acceptable resolution to the conflicts, with the possibility of a reconfigured political relationship between Sukhumi and Tbilisi. Those hopes came into question after hostilities in South Ossetia in summer 2004 and then faded after the Georgian military operation in the Kodori Gorge in July 2006 and the increasing political standoff between Georgia and Russia caused by Georgia's striving for NATO membership. The Abkhaz leadership never warmed to European initiatives because they always started with support for Georgia's territorial integrity. A number of unresolved questions now burden Europe's efforts to contribute to a conflict resolution process in the region at a time when the most likely outcome is that Russia will be able to effectively annex Abkhazia.

Unrealized Hopes

When Georgia, together with Armenia and Azerbaijan, was accepted into the "European Neighbourhood Policy" group of states in the spring of 2004 in response to the Georgian "Rose Revolution", optimistic observers assumed that the country's convergence with Europe could contribute significantly to a peaceful resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in the middle- to long-term. The hope, shared in Georgia and the West alike, was that with support from Europe, Georgia would make solid progress in reforms seeking to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and economic liberalization, resulting in convergence with the EU to the extent that the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would want to peacefully reunite with Georgia on a "Path to Europe".

On the Abkhaz side, as well, there was a real hope, at least among the supporters of authentic independence, that an opening towards Europe would not only give the de-facto republic additional political and economic alternatives to its lopsided dependence on Russia, but also allow it to reach a sustainable peace with Georgia as part of a move to include the Southern Caucasus in a long-term process of European integration.

Five years later, little seems to remain of this "European option". The military escalation between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia and the unilateral recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia appear to have solidified the hostile separation of Georgia and Abkhazia far beyond the foreseeable future. The prospects not only for reintegrating Abkhazia into the Georgian state, but also for any other possible form of peaceful Georgian-Abkhaz reconciliation, that would take into account Georgian interests and include a rehabilitation of refugees, appear to be more bleak than ever. How-

ever, the outlook for an independent, European development trajectory for Abkhazia beyond annexation by Russia is similarly unpromising.

In the following article, we will attempt to show in a few broad strokes how the main actors have been disposed in the past five years towards the idea of a "European perspective" for Georgian-Abkhaz relations, and will subsequently enquire as to options for reinvigorating a "European perspective" to resolve the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, at least in the long term.

Georgia: NATO First

When negotiations between Brussels and Tbilisi on the European Neighbourhood Plan (ENP) for Georgia were underway in 2004 and 2005, the government of President Mikheil Saakashvili exhibited a proactive and demanding attitude, much to the surprise of the European Commission. The Georgian delegation demanded a number of changes concerning the master plan presented by Brussels. One of its most urgent demands was that provisions for EU involvement in the Georgian separatist conflicts be established in a prominent place in the action plan. However, the Georgians did not envisage the EU's role to be that of an impartial negotiator, but expected Brussels to complement the US as an ally and counterweight to Russia in the efforts to reestablish Georgian control over the secessionist regions. At this time, one fundamental problem of the Georgian policy approach, as well as of the European one to some extent, was the belief that the secessionists could be enticed to "return to Georgia" through economic and political incentives alone, without addressing the actual conflicts and their causes.

In June 2006, the Georgian government presented a peace plan designated as a "road map" that concurred

in one essential point with the “Key to the Future” document presented two months earlier by the Abkhaz side (see below): It advocated consultations “on the involvement of Abkhazia in European regional institutes and projects, including the European Union Neighbourhood Policy, and Black Sea cooperation processes”. Of course, the Georgian and Abkhaz sides disagreed broadly when it came to the concrete conditions of such involvement. However, between autumn 2005 and summer 2006, as the Georgian president’s special envoy for Abkhazia at the time, Irakli Alasania, met with unusually positive responses in his numerous official and informal contacts with the Abkhaz de-facto government, it certainly seemed conceivable that pragmatic and temporary solutions could be found that would facilitate the inclusion of Abkhazia in the ENP program below the threshold of the sensitive status issue.

In July 2006, President Saakashvili’s Abkhaz policy, which had already been oscillating between de-escalation and confrontation, took a sharp u-turn. Alasania and the minister in charge of conflict resolution issues, Giorgi Khaindrava, were relieved of their portfolios. The Georgian armed forces occupied the Kodori Gorge, which is situated on the Georgian side of the armistice line and was demilitarized after the ceasefire, in order to put down the rebellion of a rogue Georgian warlord. In the course of this operation, the region was renamed the district of “Upper Abkhazia” and designated as the official seat of the Abkhaz government-in-exile. The Kodori Gorge, as well as the Gali region in the south of Abkhazia, which is populated by Georgian returnees, were the scene of numerous manipulations and violations of the armistice treaty by the Georgian, Abkhaz, and Russian sides over the following two years. Talks with the Abkhaz side had been disrupted; furthermore, in September 2006, the Georgian government also began to obstruct Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue initiatives by Western European governments unless they submitted to the control of the Georgian government from the outset. This approach was justified, off the record, by concerns that in the course of the debate over Kosovo, the Abkhaz might succeed, like the Kosovars, in winning recognition and legitimacy for their independence aspirations.

The deterioration of the Georgian-Abkhaz situation coincided with two developments that had considerable influence on the conflict regions: The deepening domestic divide in Georgia, culminating in the violent crackdown on major demonstrations in November 2007, and the way in which the European discourse was completely replaced by the question of the country’s imminent NATO accession. Instead of the vague prospect of

long-term convergence with the EU, the Georgian government now focused its policy on a rapid US-sponsored process of NATO accession as a way of winning effective security guarantees vis-à-vis Russia as well as extracting from the alliance unequivocal support for Georgia in its separatist conflicts. Instead of Europeanizing the conflict regions, the new strategy was to push for an internationalization of the conflicts in order (from the Georgian point of view) to ward off Russian aggression with the help of the US and NATO.

Abkhazia – Multivectoral Orientation or Russia First?

In Abkhazia, the attitude towards the EU during the last five years has been cautious and ambivalent. Fundamental skepticism and distrust towards the EU as part of the political “West” have been strong, since Western European countries and even more so the US are blamed for one-sided partisanship towards Georgia that ignores both the causes and the development of the conflict. At the same time, the close link to Russia as the protector state is regarded, even by critics of Russian policy, as the only guarantee against military and political revanchism by the Georgian side.

However, in the years leading up to the events of August 2008, there were frequent (at least verbal) expressions of views that went beyond regarding the relationship of Georgia and Abkhazia to the EU as a zero-sum game. On the one hand, it was believed, a successful democratization and Europeanization of Georgia would reduce the threat of war for Abkhazia. On the other hand, a stronger EU engagement in the region would ensure a more stable geopolitical balance. Finally, it was believed that Abkhazia had an interest in gaining support for its own transition towards democracy and the rule of law in order ultimately to benefit economically and politically as a recognized partner in the Black Sea regional integration process. Since his electoral victory in 2004, achieved against Russian pressure, de-facto Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh and his entourage have tirelessly emphasized that Abkhazia was pursuing a “multivectoral foreign policy”. This was expressed most visibly in the “Key to the Future” document presented by Bagapsh in April 2006, the first paragraph of which stated:

“The processes of economic integration in the Black Sea region and prospects for more intensive economic and regional cooperation within the framework of the ‘European Union’s broad neighborhood strategy’ could become the [guarantees for...] good-neighborly relations.”

At the same time, the de-facto Foreign Ministry was even elaborating an Abkhaz version of an ENP action

plan. However, these intentions were only given limited expression in terms of practical, independent policy. While there was a certain openness towards carrying out EU projects that went beyond humanitarian aid to include civil society, human rights protection, and confidence-building between Georgia and Abkhazia, the Abkhaz side did not develop any reform efforts of its own modeled on EU norms in the problematic areas of justice, anti-corruption measures, or government administration. Furthermore, the Abkhaz leadership under Bagapsh, in spite of some positive steps, continued to waver on the matter where, despite obvious security-policy dependency on Russia, evidence of independent action would have been essential for creating confidence with external actors – in the matter of equal political and legal status for the approximately 50,000 Georgians who (with informal Abkhaz permission) have returned to the Gali region.

Since the Georgian deployment in the Kodori Gorge, Abkhaz foreign policy has fully returned to the Russian slipstream. The leadership of the breakaway territory has not been able or willing to embark upon independent political initiatives towards Georgia or the EU ever since.

Russia – “No NATO” First

Similar to the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, Russia has always had difficulties in comprehending the language of the “soft approach” as a hallmark of EU policy. While, despite the EU’s financial engagement, its promises of material and political advantages to be derived from a values-based rapprochement with Europe necessarily appeared vague to the Abkhaz leadership, and were furthermore conditional from the start on the stipulation – unacceptable to the Abkhaz side – of a return to the Georgian state, Russia offered “hard currency” that was more in accordance with Abkhazia’s immediate requirements and much in response to immediate fears of a rearming Georgia: Military protection, passports, pension payments, economic investment, and tourists. Thus, the EU’s actions were largely allowed to proceed unimpeded, since over the past five years, only one issue has ultimately mattered both for Russians (who opposed it) and for Georgians (who were in favor): The prospect of NATO membership for Georgia, which Russia perceived as part of US-led policy to roll back Russian influence in the Southern Caucasus. The strategy of de-escalation and détente, which was included, at least in rudimentary form, in the EU policy towards the Abkhaz conflict, thus rapidly fell victim to the escalation fueled by Russia and Georgia: While the Georgians were fanning

the flames to generate more international attention and indignation towards Russia, the Russians were eagerly doing the same in order to turn the spotlight on the potential NATO member’s volatile secessionist conflicts. The outcome is well-known: Since the August 2008 war, there has been no more talk about early NATO membership for Georgia, and Russia’s control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia is stronger than ever.

The EU – Soft-Power Approach and Increased Political Involvement

Unlike the US, which began to pursue a clear geopolitical strategy in the Caucasus at the end of the 1990s and has become a close ally of the Georgian state with its aspirations for NATO membership, the EU hesitated for a long time to strengthen its engagement in the Southern Caucasus. Many in the EU believed that this region was too distant and too complex, while at the same time being too close and important to Russia for the EU to compete with Moscow here. As far as the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was concerned, the EU’s ability to effectively mediate between the parties to the conflict was compromised from the start by the fact that the European institutions lacked the political will to engage in any kind of conflict analysis and strategy that would potentially question the unanimous support of Georgia’s territorial integrity..

The ENP aside, a “Common European Policy on Georgia” has so far remained largely elusive, especially given that policies concerning Georgia often run into the EU’s Russia policies which are perhaps even more divisive. Coordination between the various interests and policy approaches of the European Commission, the Council, and the 27 member states remains difficult even after the war of August 2008. Furthermore, until the beginning of the Geneva multi-party negotiation “Geneva Talks on Georgia” after that war, the EU had no mandate for becoming involved in negotiation processes.

At the level of the Commission and its delegation, the EU has extended considerable support for the economic rehabilitation of the immediate conflict zones and the improvement of the humanitarian situation since the mid-1990s, and even more so since the inclusion of Georgia in the ENP program. EU-funded projects have been as depoliticized as possible and were not conditional on progress in the conflict resolution process (rebuilding infrastructure, hospitals, water supply etc.). In 2006, the EU started to support income-generating activities outside the immediate conflict zone. These included other parts of Abkhazia, such as the capital of

Sukhumi, and western Abkhazia. In addition, the EU offered support for civil society development and confidence-building measures, such as capacity-building for NGOs and universities, supporting civil society dialogue with the authorities, and supporting meetings between civil society leaders from Abkhazia and Georgia.

It is precisely because of the “apolitical” nature of its work and its overtures that the European Commission was able over a long period to gain access to decision-makers in Abkhazia. However, apart from financial assistance, there was little success in communicating more general political messages and information about the EU to a broader audience in the sense of a “soft-power” approach.

As demands by some EU member states and by Georgia for more active political engagement by the EU in the Abkhaz conflict became more vociferous, the latitude for European programs in Abkhazia was reduced accordingly. On the one hand, the Georgian government was increasingly forceful in voicing its claim for complete political control of all EU projects conducted in Abkhazia. In return, the Abkhaz side became notably less tolerant in the matter of projects being referred to in tenders, contract papers, etc. as part of the “EU programs in Georgia”.

In 2004, the EU responded to demands for stronger political engagement by nominating a EU Special Representative (EUSR), whose initially quite limited mandate was later extended to include “contributions” to peaceful resolution of the Caucasus conflicts. In regular journeys to Georgia and Abkhazia, the EUSR, together with several EU ambassadors accredited in Tbilisi, ensured that the EU was perceived more visibly as a political actor. Due to the continuous emphasis on Georgia’s territorial integrity as the point of departure for Europe’s political engagement, however, Georgians and Abkhaz became convinced that the EU was supportive or hostile to their respective positions.

After the August War: Finding the path back to “Europe”?

In the conflict region itself, the events of August 2008 have considerably reduced the scope for political action. At the international level, Russia has irrevocably removed itself from the official position of a “facilitator” through its invasion of Georgia and the unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, the role and the political responsibility of the EU have visibly increased through its co-chairmanship of the “Geneva Talks on Georgia” and the deployment of a military observer mission to Georgia, albeit only on the Geor-

gian side of the conflict divide at this time. The EU now has a second special representative on the ground in the Southern Caucasus, especially appointed for the conflicts in Georgia. Its Eastern Partnership Initiative has given the ENP a broader political profile in Georgia as well. In the Abkhaz perception, however, the EU has now permanently joined the Georgian side as an actor in the political process, and must be kept at arm’s length and treated with extreme caution.

It is all the more urgent that a consistent European strategy for Abkhazia be developed that is based on a realistic assessment of the current situation and includes credible incentives for an “aperture towards Europe” for both parties to the conflict. In terms of dealing with the immediately involved belligerent parties, a stronger EU engagement is burdened with several difficult questions, only a few of which will be mentioned here in conclusion:

How can the EU succeed in postponing the status issue at the Geneva negotiations and other talks on Abkhazia, despite its fundamental support for Georgia’s territorial integrity, to the point where negotiated solutions supported by all sides become feasible? How to find common ground for practical cooperation?

How can the EU’s engagement and visibility in Abkhazia be intensified despite resistance from the Georgian and Abkhaz sides? How can the Georgian government be convinced to give up its policy of isolating Abkhazia, which only serves to further increase the already strong trend towards factual annexation by Russia? How can the ongoing interest in Europe and a “multivectoral foreign-policy alignment”, which is shared by many Abkhaz people, be leveraged positively? Which formal arrangements are feasible that would allow the EU to carry out and maybe even expand its projects in Abkhazia in the fields of human rights, civil society, the media, and confidence-building measures?

In view of the tense security situation and the lack of mutual trust, how can the Georgian and Abkhaz people agree on cooperative security management for the Georgian population in the regions of Gali and Kodori, which are located on the Abkhaz side? The importance of a possible transformation of these two regions from conflict hotspots into bridges between Georgia and Abkhazia cannot be overstated. Which flexible solutions are feasible concerning matters such as citizenship, identity cards, etc. for Georgians in Gali that would meet the security demands of both sides?

How can the “Eastern Partnership Initiative” be designed to allow Abkhazia to participate without the precondition of recognizing Georgia’s territorial integ-

riety? Which flexible arrangements are conceivable for the issuing of visas for Abkhaz holders of Georgian passports that would allow Abkhazia to be included in European education and exchange programs?

Which measures would allow the EU to enhance the efficiency of its necessary long-term engagement on behalf of political and legal reforms in Georgia? The success of these reforms is a precondition for the country's peaceful domestic consolidation and thus also for greater flexibility towards the secessionist republics.

Since the events of August 2008, the prospects of peaceful reconciliation between Georgia and Abkha-

zia, whether in the framework of a common state or as two cooperating independent states, have become even more distant. The same is true to an even greater extent for the possible integration of both into a "political Europe" expanded to include the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, that seems to be the only alternative to the development that currently seems to be the most likely one, namely a factual annexation of the small Abkhaz state by Russia in a Southern Caucasus that will likely be afflicted by geopolitical confrontation and instability for a long time to come.

Translated from German by Christopher Findlay

About the Author

Walter Kaufmann is an independent analyst and the former director (2002–2008) of the Heinrich Böll Foundation South Caucasus.

Opinion

Georgia's Relationship with Abkhazia

By Paata Zakareisvili, Tbilisi

Abstract

The August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia fundamentally changed the situation regarding the separatist territories in Georgia, fundamentally strengthening Russia's position. President Mikheil Saakashvili's government pursued contradictory policies on Abkhazia during 2004–2005, holding talks with the separatist government while also criticizing Russia's role. Georgia's decision to send troops into the Kodori Gorge in July 2006 put its relationship with the separatist region into an irreversible downward spiral. Between 2006 and 2008, the Georgian government could not offer a comprehensive plan for resolving the conflict. Russia played a provocative role at this time, but the Georgian government did its best to ensure that the Abkhaz separatist leadership adopted a pro-Russian position. Moving forward in the wake of the 2008 fighting, the most likely way to resolve the conflict is to reduce Abkhazia's isolation, which only increases Russia's control over it, and develop a more democratic Georgia that will attract Abkhazia away from the authoritarian Russia.

A New Reality on the Ground

The six-day armed conflict that took place from 7 to 12 August 2008 between Georgia and Russia was not unexpected, though the beginning was a surprise as were the inadequate and disproportional activities and reactions the two sides took. It was obvious that military preparations, including political components, had been underway for a long time. Nevertheless, this war could have been avoided. Unfortunately, the sides did their best to launch military attacks rather than try to prevent them.

The six-day blitzkrieg produced disastrous consequences. The fighting disrupted all the institutions working to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. Accordingly, the parties must redefine the types of conflict that are taking place, the various participants in these conflicts and their status. Russia is seeking to change fundamentally the institutions involved in the conflicts, creating a new reality on the ground. All of these changes present a new challenge for Georgia as new state entities are emerging on Georgian territory. We should take this new

reality into account and not pretend that nothing is happening.

The Mistakes of Previous Years

Understanding the current situation requires an analysis of mistakes made in previous years. By August 2008, military conflict had created two frozen conflicts on Georgian territory: Abkhazia, where military conflict ended in autumn 1993, and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, where fighting ended in summer 1992.

In 2004–2005 the overall social-political situation changed in Georgia as a whole and in Abkhazia. By holding relatively free elections, both societies replaced undemocratic and corrupt systems and brought new groups to power. The changes infused new dynamics into the process of conflict resolution. The impact on Georgian politics has been both negative and positive.

May 2004 marked a turning point when President Mikheil Saakashvili easily resolved the long-running political crisis in Adjara, which had represented a third crisis zone inside Georgia. He removed the tribalistic regime of Aslan Abashidze, the head of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, who had ruled for many years. After this first success, Saakashvili believed that the other frozen conflicts on Georgian territory could be resolved peacefully. The euphoric president decided to change the dynamics in South Ossetia. For this purpose, Saakashvili began to conduct a show of force, issuing commands to the Ossetian side. Unfortunately, in summer 2004 the efforts by Saakashvili and Minister of Internal Affairs Irakli Okruashvili to return South Ossetia to Georgia resulted in bloodshed. At that time, only Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania's intervention blocked a military attack and opened a process of negotiations.

The situation remained extremely fluid during the course of 2005. In addition to efforts to address the situation in South Ossetia, changes started to take place regarding Abkhazia. At that time, Irakli Alasania, President Saakashvili's personal representative to address the issue, stressed the importance of establishing direct contacts with the Abkhazian side. Georgia and Abkhazia began developing a joint project focusing on the "Nonrenewal of War". In December 2005 Saakashvili confirmed that he was going to meet de-facto Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh, who had been elected the year before against Moscow's will, and sign the agreement whose text had been approved by both sides. However, this initiative never bore fruit and was soon forgotten.

In October 2005 Saakashvili adopted a resolution which criticized the activity of Russia's peace-keeping

forces on Georgian territory. According to the resolution, if conditions on the ground deteriorated, the Georgian government was obliged to terminate peaceful operations and cancel relevant international agreements by July 2006.

The combination of these events resulted in a paradoxical situation: while there was an improvement in the Georgian-Abkhazian relationship, Georgia was implementing policies against Russia's influence which caused tension in the conflict zone. These contradictory moves highlight the uncoordinated working of Georgia's governing bodies, in particular between the parliament on one side and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Security Council on the other.

Abkhazia's "Key to the Future"

In May 2006 Abkhazia unexpectedly proposed a plan for resolving the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict called the "Key to the Future". By initiating this plan, Abkhazia seemed to be taking a leading role in defining relations with Georgia. Although many of the positions laid out in the document were unacceptable to Georgia (such as Georgia's recognition of Abkhazia's independence), there were a few potential points of agreement. While the document said nothing about Russia's role, it did mention Abkhazia's integration into Europe several times. The "Key to the Future" showed that at that time Abkhazia wanted to reduce Russian influence and to ascertain its possibilities for integrating into Europe. It is notable that when Abkhazia's de-facto Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba presented this document to Georgia, Saakashvili and the defense minister were in Senaki to inspect a newly constructed military base. This contrast highlights the situation that existed at that moment in Georgian-Abkhazian relations. While the Abkhazian side was ready for talks, Georgia sought to avoid such relations.

In replying to "Key to the Future" in June 2006, Georgia presented five general principles for a full-scale political plan to resolve the Abkhaz conflict:

- A comprehensive effort at conflict resolution should be based on Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within the framework of recognizing international cooperation. (...)
- A fundamental principle of conflict resolution was an organized and deserved return of refugees to Abkhazia (...)
- The Georgian government expressed readiness to meet its obligations regarding the ceasefire and in implementing a peaceful, political resolution to the conflict. (...)

- The Georgian side welcomed the participation of international organizations as well as regional unions in conflict resolution (...). The Georgian side was prepared to discuss the possibility of specific conditions for the economic development of Abkhazia (...)
- A comprehensive conflict resolution process should be implemented step-by-step, on the basis of a common working plan and continual effort.

The main difference between the Georgian road map and the “Key to the Future” was that the Abkhazians were offering implementation of their proposals step-by-step, while we were offering a comprehensive package. Restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia was the priority. The process of conflict resolution has not produced any results yet, therefore it significantly prevented peace processes.

Georgia Goes on the Offensive

After publication of the document, Saakashvili removed the main officials who were working to resolve the Abkhaz situation peacefully. Irakli Alasania was appointed as the Georgian ambassador to the United Nations. In fact, he departed from the day-to-day process of managing the Georgia-Abkhazia relationship and his main activity became to fight against Russian diplomacy in the UN. At that time, State Minister George Khaindrava resigned; he had been conducting successful negotiations to help resolve the Georgia-Ossetia conflict.

The end of July 2006 delivered a fatal blow to the Georgian-Russian peace processes. By the order of the Georgian defense minister, the Georgian armed forces implemented a large-scale anti-criminal operation in the Kodori Gorge. Kodori Gorge was a de-facto region of Abkhazia. With this operation, Georgia broke the Moscow agreement of April 1994, according to which no side was allowed to send armed forces into Kodori Gorge.

Since that period, there has been an irreversible decline in the Georgia-Abkhazia relationship. Georgia's strategy was to weaken Russia's influence in the conflict zones while simultaneously increasing the influence of friendly states. Thanks to Georgia's initiative, no direct informal dialogues were taking place between the two sides. It should be noted that the Georgian-Abkhazian direct relationship obviously had a future since the Abkhaz side supported this process. There were no objective circumstances forcing the Georgian-Abkhazian relationship into such a strange and counterproductive position, though it was evident that the Georgian government did not want to allow an informal, regular dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia.

In recent years, the Georgian government's objective was to expand the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-Ossetian conflicts into a conflict between Georgia and Russia. The August 2008 fighting successfully achieved this objective. Ironically, now there is no Georgian-Russian process to regulate the conflict. Russia categorized this confrontation as part of Russian-Western relations, and now seeks to dictate terms to the West. In fact, Georgian interests have become less relevant. Statements made about territorial integrity are mostly rhetorical and propagandistic.

Georgia's Inability to Define a Solution

Between July 2006 and August 2008, the Georgian government was unable to present a systematic and comprehensive concept for defining Georgian statehood or a mechanism providing sovereignty for Abkhazia. According to widely held beliefs (reflected in the Georgian constitution of 1995), the presence of the unregulated conflicts prevented Georgia from defining its administrative-territorial boundaries. The key to a resolution of the conflict lay in an agreement between the Georgian and Abkhazian sides. Such an agreement could not be reached until the central government decided what to offer the separatist society. The existing situation of unresolved conflict helped Russia protect Abkhazia from Georgian aggression on one hand, and to assure Western countries of Georgia's inability to democratically resolve the conflict on the other. If the Georgian government could present such a comprehensive solution, it would make it difficult for Russia to continue to take advantage of the situation inside of Georgia and create legal, political and moral grounds for the Western countries to strengthen their influence over both the Russians and Abkhazians.

The 2001 Boden Document laid out basic principles for international cooperation in resolving the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. It provided a basis for elaborating concrete, legal, political and democratic mechanisms and guarantees for both sides. The participants in the conflict had to take this action as neither the UN nor the OSCE could define a concrete level of sovereignty acceptable for protecting both sides.

On the basis of international experience, as well as the principles of regionalism and federalism, the Georgian side had an opportunity to offer the Abkhazian side a specific model for defining territorial boundaries, which would take into consideration the specific historical and legal features of Abkhazia, including its cultural, political, historical and geographic differences from other Georgian regions. A group of Georgian experts

published a “Concept on Abkhazia’s Special Status in Georgia” in June 2004, but unfortunately the Georgian government did not take up its recommendations. The concept sought the establishment of a Georgian-Abkhazian federal republic, thus offering the most progressive and realistic path toward conflict resolution.

Russia’s Provocative Role

The role of Russia in provoking and extending the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict deserves separate consideration. In 2004 Moscow practically provoked a civil conflict in Abkhazia. Elections for the de facto president of Abkhazia stretched for months, during which Russia clearly backed the candidacy of Raul Khajimba. However, at the last minute, Russia decided to support the Abkhazian people’s will in electing Sergey Bagapsh as president, on the condition that the opponents – Bagapsh and Khajimba – be presented in the second elections as candidates for the posts of president and vice-president.

The majority of Georgian politicians claimed that it was Russia’s exclusive responsibility to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Before February 2008, the Georgians focused their claims on the failure of the Russians to carry out their peacekeeping force obligations. In February when countries began to recognize the independence of Kosovo, Russia started the irreversible process of becoming directly and indirectly involved in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Putin declared that unilateral recognition of Kosovo’s independence would disturb the world order and territorial integrity of certain countries. He pointed directly to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On 6 March 2008 the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that it was withdrawing from the 19 January 1996 CIS agreement, which envisaged economic sanctions against Abkhazia. Then on 21 March the Russian Duma appealed to the Russian president to begin a discussion aimed at recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time Russia was conducting extensive diplomatic activities against Georgia’s and Ukraine’s inclusion in NATO. Accordingly, at the beginning of April the Bucharest NATO summit took a decision not to offer Georgia and Ukraine the immediate prospect of membership. This decision stimulated Russia to take further provocative steps. On 16 April Putin ordered the government and other state institutions to establish official relations with relevant Abkhazian structures. On 20 April Russian military aircraft shot down a drone belonging to the Georgian armed forces. This incident deepened tensions between Georgia and Russia. On 29 April Russia took a decision to maximally

increase the Russian peacekeeping contingent in the conflict zone of Abkhazia, expanding it by 545 military personnel, bringing the total to 2,542. This decision aroused anxiety in Georgia and many international organizations. On 31 May, 400 members of the Russian railway forces entered Abkhazian territory. These tensions lasted until August.

Georgia may have systematically opposed Russia’s policy, but it took no measures to satisfy Abkhazian interests in order to neutralize them. On the contrary, it was obvious that the Georgian government did its best to force Abkhazia to adopt a pro-Russian position. Only one conclusion is possible: escalation and constant tension suited Georgia. It seems that Georgia hoped to attract more attention from the West and neutralize the Russian aggression by means of international institutions.

Russia Ascendant

As a result of the six-day war, Russia now fully controls the territories of Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region. By violating international legal norms and shirking the peacekeeping obligations it had taken on, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, concluded agreements with them and stationed military bases and frontier soldiers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By means of this demarche, Russia strengthened its positions in the entire South Caucasus and put in doubt the ability of Western countries to realize their goals in this region. Russia controls considerable force, thus greatly reducing Georgia’s chances to join NATO.

International recognition of independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia is unlikely. It is obvious that Russia has refrained from persuading its allies to recognize their independence. It seems that Russia does not want international recognition of these territories. Russia apparently seeks to isolate these territories, making it possible to establish military infrastructure there without any outside interference. Belarus is the only country which Russia has forced to recognize the territories’ independence. Belarus is a member of the Russia-Belarus Alliance and by recognizing the territories’ independence, the next step could be Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s integration into this alliance.

Today deisolation seems to be the only way to alleviate the situation in Abkhazia. As far as possible, it should be released from Russia’s grip and encouraged to join international organizations and Western institutions. For this purpose, Georgia has to cancel the law on the occupied territories that it adopted in October 2008.

Georgia is currently fully isolating Abkhazia in compliance with this law. All countries and organizations consider it compulsory to follow this law except for Russia. This improvident law has helped Russia expand its uncontrolled influence on the territory of Abkhazia and nobody can prevent this expansion. Moreover, Georgia has to review its policy denying passports to Abkhaz citizens. If the Georgian government provides such passports, the owners will be given an opportunity to travel abroad without Russian documents.

The worst thing in Russia's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence is the issue of Kosovo's integration into the European Union. In this regard, debates on receiving Kosovo into the UN will start again. By that time, Russia may try to trade Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Kosovo and make Europeans recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia in exchange for Kosovo's integration into the UN.

Moving Forward

It seems that Georgia lost Abkhazia forever after the war in August. The present situation offers little hope. How-

ever, over the long term, it may be possible to provide a solution. Russia apparently is taking strict control over Abkhazia in the run-up to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. After the games are over, the Russian government will have to refocus its resources to develop the rest of its regions, and accordingly Russia's pressure on Sochi and the neighboring territory of Abkhazia should be weakened. During this time, Russia cannot become a country of steady democratic development; rather it will continue to be based on corruption and state repressive institutions. It is easily predictable that the situation of the Abkhazians will not be better compared to the other North Caucasus peoples. By that time Georgia should establish a safe and reliable state with a distinct European orientation based on democratic institutions and this orientation will help us involve Abkhazians in the construction of a state where identification and development will be protected by a constitutional agreement. Georgia should reach a level of democratic construction that will provide the population of Abkhazia and Ossetia the opportunity to make a real choice between democratic Georgia and authoritarian Russia.

About the Author

Paata Zakareisvili is a senior expert at the Center for Development and Cooperation.

Opinion

The Joint Border-Protection Agreement – Reactions from Abkhazia

The following articles, written by Abkhazian authors, were originally published in the Georgian bi-weekly journal “Liberal”. They discuss the latest developments between Moscow and Sukhumi after the Russian recognition of Abkhazian independence on 26 August 2008. They devote particular attention to the joint border-protection agreement that was signed by President Dmitry Medvedev and his de-facto counterpart Sergei Bagabsh on 30 April 2009. The agreement gives Russian border guards the right to patrol the frontier dividing the separatist region of Abkhazia from Georgian-controlled territory. A similar agreement was signed with the South Ossetian government. There are no exact figures about how many Russian border guards will be assigned to either region, or how long the agreement will stay in force. As always, any opinions expressed in the Caucasus Analytical Digest are exclusively those of the authors.

Successive Documents between Abkhazia and Russia Will Ultimately Breakup the Abkhazian Nationality

By Inal Khashig, Abkhazia

According to the Abkhazian constitution, an international or state agreement signed on behalf of Abkhazia is illegal if it contradicts laws adopted in the republic of Abkhazia. In fact, the constitution asserts the supremacy of domestic law over international treaties for specific historical reasons.

In 1994, during a difficult period for Abkhazia, Vladislav Arzinba, Abkhazia’s first president, knew well that the process of establishing an Abkhazian nationality would be a long and complicated process. He deliberately protected independent Abkhazia against future temptations and outside pressure. Accordingly, we should admit that the agreement on the joint protection of the border signed by Medvedev and Bagabsh in the Kremlin is illegal according to Abkhazian legislation.

The agreement transfers to the Russian border guard a 100 km section over which Russian jurisdiction will apply. However, the Abkhazian constitution makes clear that Abkhazian sovereignty is indivisible and this sovereignty applies to the entire territory of the republic. The agreement violates the central principle of the constitution. In this context, Bagabsh’s assertion that “the agreement has been verified many times and at the given moment is optimal” give rise to doubt. For Abkhazia, it is important to feel secure, however this is not our final objective. We seek to build an effective independent state and this objective cannot be achieved without respect for our legislation.

In addition to the agreement on joint protection of the border, there are several other Russian-Abkhazian agreements which contradict the Abkhazian constitution, including the agreement on cooperation between the Procurator General Offices of Russia and Abkhazia. The Abkhazian constitution prohibits an Abkhazian citizen’s extradition to another country. The existing situation resembles that of October 1917 when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian Empire and changed the existing laws through various decrees. Current agreements concluded with Russia look like those decrees.

Nobody is denying that Russia is the only partner and friend of Abkhazia. We should take Russia’s interest into account without harming our state system. We should not consider that Abkhazia is in debt to Russia for the assistance which Moscow is providing to us. As Russian political scientist Nikolai Zlobin said, Abkhazia owes Russia as much as Russia owes Abkhazia.

It is difficult not to agree with this conclusion. Regrettably, we never speak about it loudly. It seems that it is only in Abkhazia’s interest to deploy Russian border guards on the Georgian-Abkhazian border, locate Russian military bases on our territory, transfer railway management to Russia, etc. A magnified desire to thank Russia may ultimately turn into an anti-Russian attitude in the country, driven by the survival instinct of the Abkhazian nationality and Abkhaz ethnos as well.

Let's carefully review the border agreement concluded with Russia. There is a clause in it which says that Russian border guards are entitled to privatize the residential area they are temporarily allocated. This clause fundamentally contradicts the residence legislation of Abkhazia.

Since Russian border troops will be staffed by contractors, it means that about 1,300 families will be allowed to settle in Abkhazia. Over time this figure will increase by mathematical progression. We should not forget that the same rights will be given to those working on the Russian bases. According to the last initiative of Bagabsh, he is going to deprive Abkhazian citizens of the exclusive right to purchase real estate and extend it to Russian citizens as well. He made this statement at a press-conference.

If Bagabsh's initiative is enacted, 140 million Russian citizens will gain the right to purchase real estate in Abkhazia. If even five percent of the Russian population uses this opportunity, Abkhazians will have great difficulty finding each other. Such an outcome would finally put an end to the possibility of returning hun-

dreds of Abkhazian Diaspora living abroad. Moreover, the Russian citizens settled in Abkhazia will easily be able to obtain Abkhazian citizenship in the future. Consequently, a politician will propose that Abkhazia be included into Russia by all means.

The Abkhazian government calms the population by arguing that this agreement is temporary. On the one hand, nothing is as permanent as "temporary", especially for a small state like Abkhazia. On the other hand, considering the abnormal tempo of integration in the Russian-Abkhazian relationship, it is difficult to predict that in five or ten years there will be a governor in Abkhazia who would review the border agreement or reclaim the railway from the Russian railway ministry. This person will not be in Russia's good graces.

We have other big facilities which will require Russian governance, including the airport, ports, oil sector, Enguri hydroelectric plant, among others. In order to avoid deadlock, our attitude should be changed. Otherwise, Abkhazia will have no future as an independent state.

The article was originally published in Liberal, No. 2, 3-17 June 2009.

About the Author

Inal Khashig is the editor of *Chegemskaia Pravda*, an Abkhaz newspaper.

Elections with a Russian Accent

By Anton Kriveniuk, Sukhumi

Former Abkhazia vice-president Raul Khajimba, who resigned his office on 28 May, blamed the government for acting against national interests at a recent press-conference held at the office of the opposition movement Asatsa. This move was not surprising as Khajimba has never been a member of Bagabsh's team. "I frankly told the president and Prime Minister Alexander Ankvab about this," he said to journalists. Bagabsh made the same comment in regard to Khajimba's resignation.

The former vice-president agrees with the opposition that the economic projects supported by the president and the agreement on joint protection of the border contradict national interests. According to Khajimba, neither the parliament nor the Security Council discussed the important agreements which Abkhazia concluded with Russia. The economic agreements regarding the railway, airport and especially oil extraction were drafted with a lack of transparency. Opaque economic cooper-

ation with Russian companies first caused dissatisfaction among Abkhazian society in May.

The opposition first protested against the president of Abkhazia. The government met this challenge by accusing the opposition of rousing anti-Russian interests. The state TV channel broadcast a program in which citizens of various regions blamed opposition leaders for promoting the anti-Russian cause. Cooperation with Russia is a delicate issue in Abkhazia. The attitude of society towards the northern neighbor is constructive, especially after its recognition of Abkhazia. Nevertheless, the Abkhazian government's close relationship with Russia causes anxiety.

The government is actively promoting its accusations of anti-Russianism through state TV. The opposition used the Abaza channel, which broadcasts only in Sukhumi and belongs to one of the oppositionists.

The issue of Russia provokes diverse opinions. "I'll vote for Bagabsh. Separation from Russia is incompre-

hensible for me. I feel safer when I'm protected by Russia," 23 year-old Ana Zakhariani said.

Guram Azhiba from Sukhumi, who backs the opposition, said that the current Moscow-backed government is selling Abkhazia in parts. It is not true that the opposition is against Russia, he argues, on the contrary, "we stand for equal cooperation."

Oppositionist Gennadi Arzinba claims that supporters and opponents of the government are divided along ethnic lines. National minorities, who favor close relations with Russia, will support the government, which is pro-Russian, while Abkhazians will support the opposition, as economic sovereignty and safety are of paramount importance for them.

Despite the fact that protests against the economic agreements with Russia united the opposition, it remains unclear whether it can act as a united front. Consultations seeking to unify the opposition parties have had no positive results so far. There are three big opposition groups: the Economic Development Party, whose leader Beslan Butba declares that he will participate in the presidential elections; National Unity Forum, which brings together several ambitious and charismatic leaders and Aruaa, a movement of 1992–1993 war veterans. The parties are different. For instance, the Economic Development Party is distinguished by its intellectual membership. The National Unity Forum has so called "Khajimbists," who have never sought presidential election. Aruaa unites people who are ready to strike if the government plays dirty games.

Therefore, observers argue that the opposition lacks a strong chance of winning without unifying its ranks.

The article was originally published in Liberal, No. 3, 17-30 June 2009.

About the Author

Anton Kriveniuk works as a journalist for *Chegemaskaia Pravda*, an Abkhaz newspaper.

Agreement Between Strategic Partners

By Aslan Kobakhia, Abkhazia

On 30 April in Moscow Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Abkhazian President Sergei Bagabsh signed an "agreement on joint protection of the state border." The document distinctly defines the functions of Russia but does not say anything about Abkhazia's obligations. Despite the word "joint," the agreement is unilateral. President Bagabsh, who signed the document, has no right to inspect the border. Everything depends on the will of the Russian head of the bor-

der post. It is nonsense that the president of the country is not allowed to check the state border. It is a fact that this agreement does not answer the national interests of Abkhazia.

We Abkhazians have been protecting our borders for the last 15 years by ourselves. Nobody has granted us independence. Maybe somebody thinks that we gained it on 26 October last year. I'd like to point out that we gained independence on 30 September 1993

Genadi Arzinba says that Bagabsh's rating is not very high, though a significant part of the electorate will support him. That's why the opposition should unite in order to force the elections into a second round. It seems that it will be difficult to choose one candidate. Apart from Butba, Raul Khajimba and Zaur Arzinba are interested in fighting for the president's post.

Sergei Bagabsh officially expressed his will to be elected for a second term. He will be supported by the party Yedinaya Abkhazia, which wields powerful administrative resources. Members of the Abkhazian political establishment lead this party. Despite certain expectations, few anticipate that Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Shamba will run for the president's post. He is actively participating in Yedinaya Abkhazia's work and, if Bagabsh wins another term, he may become prime minister. Alexander Ankvab's future plans are not clear. Recently there was an attempt to restore his political movement Aitaira, but in vain. However, Ankvab has time. It is said that he will not be a member of the president's team.

According to reports, each candidate is trying to win support from Russia. Raul Khajimba is categorically denying it. "I'm a pro-Abkhazian politician and I've never been governed by Moscow. I'm holding no consultations outside Abkhazia," he says.

Beslan Butba notes that Moscow always follows the same tactic: they prefer working with the acting government. It makes no difference for the Kremlin who will become the head of Abkhazia, Moscow will cooperate with everybody.

through armed conflict in which thousands of our citizens died. Of course, it is very important that Russian military forces are on the territory of Abkhazia, however, they have their interests and furthermore, our interests should be taken into account as well. I think that protecting Abkhazia's state border is first of all the interest of Abkhazians. It is reasonable that there should be Abkhazian border guards at the border post as well, but it is not envisaged in the agreement.

At present we do not have problems with Russia, though there is no guarantee that new "Kozyrevs [the former Russian foreign minister who pursued a pro-Western policy, the Kozyrev doctrine]" will not appear in the future in Russia.

It would not be terrible if the agreement were prolonged for one hundred or even two hundred years instead of five, provided that the border is jointly protected. The contingent should be defined in a way that at least 15–20 percent of the border guards will be Abkhazians. Otherwise a question arises: what is the function of Abkhazian citizens in providing state security? If the situation changes, we will be as unready as in 1992.

There was an expectation that, after Russia recognized Abkhazia's independence, the State Security Service and the Ministry of Defense would unite into a Ministry of National Security, which would protect the state border together with Russia. With the agreement signed in Moscow, Abkhazia's border guards lost their function. Today Russia is the only strategic partner of Abkhazia. There is no other foreseeable option. Our relations with Russia should be well-organized.

Let's have a look at Chechnya. President Kadyrov somehow managed to put the republic in order. The number of federal army troops stationed there is dropping. Chechnya began a new peaceful life. Kadyrov has subunits which are implementing military missions on behalf of the Russian Federation. For instance, a Chechen battalion carried out complex operations in South Ossetia. Chechnya is a part of the Russian Federation while we have the status of an independent country. What prevents us from creating effective power structures? Abkhazia can have a special reaction battalion carrying out complex operations in any part of the world together with the Russian Federation.

Of course, if we had such efficient structures, we would not conclude such an agreement. Let's stop deceiving ourselves. Everybody is aware of our problems. Everybody knows how the Kodori operation evolved and how we obtained results.

To tell the truth, the agreement drawn up with Moscow is very bad. It would not be correct to accuse the author of this article of an anti-Russian attitude. To my mind, we should fight against anti-Russian attitudes in Abkhazia; "Russophobia" should be regarded as a criminal act. However, Russia should understand that it did not grant us independence, we gained it ourselves. In 1999, at the end of Yeltsin's term, Putin realized that nothing could prevent Abkhazians from gaining independence. A policy of tolerance towards Abkhazia finally resulted in recognizing its independence. It seems that after recognition, Putin's team stopped working on the issue of Abkhazia, otherwise we would not get such a document. The idea that Russia will benefit from this agreement is wrong. Only if it has reliable partners in Abkhazia will Moscow will be able to maintain strong positions there. By offering such agreements, Moscow will simply lose its position in Abkhazia. Despite our great respect towards Ossetians, it is not correct to discuss Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the same context. Yet, an identical agreement has been composed for both republics.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have different purposes and objectives. The Ossetian nation is divided into two parts and their aspiration for unification is quite clear. From the beginning, we declared that we are building a democratic state. Arzinba left us a lot of documents, including the constitution adopted in 1994. Any lawyer can find dozens of violations of the Abkhazian constitution in the document signed in Moscow. President Bagabsh has to understand that we should not sign a document which contradicts our laws. There will always be Zyuganovs and Zhirinovskys [leaders respectively of the Russian Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party] who will advocate holding referendums. We have already held a referendum in which the Abkhazian people made their choice. With regard to the signed document, there is a question whether Abkhazia needs presidential governance. It is not clear why the agreement was elaborated secretly. Nobody thought that such an important document should be discussed by the parliament and a general decision made? Today no changes can be entered into the document. In truth, we cannot build a state this way.

Under Medvedev and Putin, nothing threatens Abkhazia, but nobody knows what will happen in the future. Recently, Boris Nemtsov [a leader of the Russian liberal opposition] was nearly elected mayor of Sochi. Under Yeltsin, Nemtsov supported sanctions against Abkhazia. Do we have any guarantee that persons like Nemtsov

will not join the government of Russia? What should we do in such a situation?

The document signed in Moscow resembles a father's attitude towards his illegitimate child. We cannot call

this agreement strategic. Strategic partners do not conclude such agreements.

The article was originally printed in the newspaper "Chegemaskaia Pravda," which is published in Sukhumi, and in Liberal, No. 1, 20 May - 2 June 2009.

About the Author

Aslan Kobakhia commanded the Abkhazian artillery in the war of 1992–1993. Afterwards he was a chairman of State Customs Committee.

Chronicle

From 18 May to 24 June 2009

18 May 2009	Energy and Natural Resources Minister Armen Movsisian says Armenia will build a new nuclear power plant to replace the old Metsamor plant
20 May 2009	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliiev on an official visit to Azerbaijan
21 May 2009	The United States allocates \$53.3 million for Georgia as part of a \$1 billion assistance pledge made after the August war
22 May 2009	The Azerbaijani parliament ratifies the contract signed between Azerbaijan's State Oil Company SOCAR and the French Total company to explore the Absheron bloc in the Azerbaijani section of the Caspian Sea
26 May 2009	Abkhazia and the Russian Rosneft company sign an agreement that gives rights to the company to prospect for oil and natural gas off Abkhazia's Black Sea coast for a period of five years
28 May 2009	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini in Rome
28 May 2009	Vice-president of the breakaway republic of Abkhazia Raul Khajimba resigns
29 May 2009	Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin meets with UN special envoy Johan Verbeke in Moscow to discuss the future mandate of the UN observer mission at the administrative border between Georgia and Abkhazia that expires on 15 June
29 May 2009	US, Russian and French diplomats from the OSCE Minsk Group meet in Baku with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for talks
31 May 2009	Party of Unity supporting South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity leads in parliamentary elections in South Ossetia
1 June 2009	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party of Armenia wins the municipal elections in Armenia's capital Yerevan which opposition parties declare fraudulent
1 June 2009	Opposition party Armenian National Congress (HAK) vows to boycott Yerevan's newly elected municipal council, denouncing the elections' results as fraudulent
3 June 2009	Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says Iran should not interfere in Azerbaijan's affairs after Iranian officials say a planned visit by Israeli President Shimon Peres to Baku could impact bilateral ties
3 June 2009	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meets Syrian Foreign Minister Valid Al-Muallem in Baku
4 June 2009	The EU's special representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby meets with three opposition leaders, Irakli Alasania (Alliance for Georgia), Davit Usupashvili (Republican Party, part of the Alliance for Georgia) and Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way)

(continued overleaf)

5 June 2009	Bayram Safarov is elected as the head of the Azeri community in Nagorno-Karabakh at a congress of the community in Baku
6 June 2009	Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan criticises Armenia's economic dependence on Georgia's transit infrastructure and high transportation tariffs
6 June 2009	An activist from Nino Burjanadze's opposition party Democratic Movement-United Georgia (DMUG) is arrested on charges of illegal possession of arms in Georgia
8 June 2009	Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze and his Armenian counterpart Edward Nalbandian meet in Tbilisi to discuss the visit of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to Armenia scheduled for 24–25 June as well as the issue of the costs of cargo transportation via Georgia
9 June 2009	Opposition politician Levan Gachechiladze meets Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili at the president's residence
9 June 2009	Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet visits Georgia
10 June 2009	U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip H. Gordon visits Georgia
11 June 2009	The Russian Defense Ministry announces the conduct of the Kavkaz-2009 military exercises in the North Caucasus from 29 June to 6 July
11 June 2009	Head of Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government-in-exile Malkhaz Akishbaia resigns
11 June 2009	Three explosions in the western Georgian city of Zugdidi halt traffic on the Zugdidi-Tbilisi railway
12 June 2009	Opposition protesters scuffle with the parliament guard after the first Parliament session ends following two months of street protests in Georgia's capital Tbilisi
14 June 2009	Opposition politician and leader of Alliance for Georgia Irakli Alasania says he will establish his party "Our Georgia-Free Democrats" in July
15 June 2009	Georgian police officers beat dozens of opposition protesters demanding the release of opposition activists at Tbilisi's main police station
15 June 2009	Leader of opposition party Georgia's Way Salome Zourabichvili says she is ready to accept Georgian President Saakashvili's offer giving the post of Deputy Interior Minister to the opposition
16 June 2009	Russia vetoes the extension of the UN observer mission in Georgia
17 June 2009	Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Nikolai Makarov says Russia will reduce the number of its military staff in Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the initially planned 3,700 servicemen
18 June 2009	Lieutenant Alik Bzhania, a former Georgian coast guard, says on Russian television that he fled Georgia to request asylum in Russia
20 June 2009	A visit to Iran by an Armenian parliamentary delegation is cancelled by the Iranian side
21 June 2009	A mine explosion at the administrative border between Georgia and Abkhazia kills the driver of an ambulance and slightly damages a vehicle of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM)
22 June 2009	Head of the EU monitoring mission Hansjörg Haber says the blast of 21 June was a "deliberate attack" on the EU patrol
22 June 2009	Four leading Armenian opposition figures are freed in an amnesty after being arrested and sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment in the wake of the disputed presidential election in early 2008
22 June 2009	The United States and Georgia launch a joint council to work on the implementation of the Charter on Strategic Partnership signed between the two countries on 9 January 2009
22 June 2009	Opposition leader Levan Gachechiladze says he will set up a foundation to develop "freedom and democracy" in Georgia
23 June 2009	The Georgian Defense Ministry says Georgia will send a military battalion to contribute to the NATO-led operations in Afghanistan in 2010
24 June 2009	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili visits Armenia to discuss economic cooperation and regional issues
24 June 2009	Foreign Minister of the breakaway republic of Abkhazia Sergey Shamba and Foreign Minister of breakaway South Ossetia Murat Jioev meet with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin in Moscow

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Editors: Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Lili Di Puppò

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Research Centre for East European Studies • Publications Department • Klagenfurter Str. 3 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-7891 • Telefax: +49 421-218-3269 • e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de • Internet: www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/cad