RECENT FOA/FOI REPORTS ON RUSSIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

Hagström, Eva, Integration eller sönderfall? En studie av utvecklingen av samarbetet inom OSS 1991-1997 (Integration or Dissolution? A Study of the Development of CIS Cooperation in 1991-1997. FOA-R--97-00728-180--SE. Februari 1998.

Leijonhielm, Jan *et al.*, *Rysk militär förmåga i ett tioårsperspektiv – en förnyad bedömning 2000* (Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year-Perspective – a renewed appraisement). FOA-R--00-01758-170—SE. November 2000.

Moshes, Arkady, *The Baltic Sea Dimension in the Relations between Russia and Europe*. FOA-R--99-01055-180—SE. February 1999.

Oldberg, Ingmar, *Konflikter och samarbete: Ukrainas relationer med Ryssland under 1990-talet.* (Conflicts and Cooperation: Ukraine's Relations with Russia in the 1990s). FOA-R--98-00871-180--SE. September 1998.

Oldberg, Ingmar, *Kaliningrad: Russian exclave, European enclave*. FOI-R--0134--SE. June 2001.

Oldberg, Ingmar and Hedenskog, Jakob, *In Dire Straits: Russia's Western Regions between Moscow and the West*. FOA-R--01617-170--SE. October 2000.

Oldberg, Ingmar, Jarlsvik, Helén, Norberg, Johan, Vendil, Carolina, *At A Loss: Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990s*. FOA-R--99-01091-180--SE. March 1999.

Oldberg, Ingmar (editor) *Priorities in Russian Foreign Policy: West, South or East?* Proceedings of a conference in Stockholm, 3 June 1996. FOA-R--97-00391-180--SE. January 1997.

Troedsson, Anders, *Ryskt "fredsskapande" och mänskliga rättigheter – en utvärdering av effektiviteten hos ryska fredsbevarande operationer i Kaukasus* (Russian "peacemaking" and human rights – an evaluation of the effectiveness of Russian peacekeeping operations in the Caucasus). RH--00-00508-170--SE, April 2000.

Vendil, Carolina, *The Belovezha Accords and Beyond: Delineating the Russian State*. FOA-R--00-01504-170--SE, May 2000.

Vendil, Carolina, *Den innersta kretsen: Det ryska Säkerhetsrådets inflytande* (The inner circle: The influence of the Russian Security Council). FOA-R--00-01701--SE. December 2000.

Westerholm, Anna, *När cirklar inte bryts. En studie av den rysktalande befolkningens i Estland och Lettland syn på sin status, samt dess politiska orientering ur ett medborgarskapsperspektiv* When Circles Are Not Broken. A Study of the Views of the Russian-Speaking Population in Estonia and Latvia on Their Status and Political Orientation from A Citizenship Perspective) FOA-R--97-00493-180--SE, Mars 1997.

Copies can be ordered from FOI. Telephone: +46 (0)8 55 50 39 04, +46 (0)8 55 50 33 61
E-mail: christina.bergstrom@foi.se

FOI
SWEDISH DEFENCE
RESEARCH AGENCY

FOI-R--0168--SE
August 2001
ISSN 1650-1942
User report

Per Normark

Russia's policy vis-à-vis Georgia:
Continuity and Change

Defence Analysis
SE-172 90 Stockholm

SWEDISH DEFENCE RESEARCH AGENCY
Defence Analysis
SE-172 90 Stockholm

FOI-R--0168--SE
August 2001
ISSN 1650-1942
User report

Per Normark

Russia's policy vis-à-vis Georgia: Continuity and Change

Issuing organization FOI – Swedish Defence Research Agency Defence Analysis SE-172 90 Stockholm	**Report number,** FOI-R--0168--SE	**Report type** User report
	Research area code 1. Defence and Security Policy	
	Month year August 2001	**Project no.** A 1101
	Customers code 1. Research for the Government	
	Sub area code 11 Defence Research for the Government	
Author/s (editor/s) Per Normark	**Project manager**	
	Approved by	
	Scientifically and technically responsible	

Report title
Russia's policy vis-à-vis Georgia: Continuity and Change

Abstract
Russian policy towards Georgia at the turn of the century is compared to that of the first years of Georgian independence in three important aspects. With regard to Abkhazia, it is shown that the Russian policy has been characterised by continuity, both in the formal support of Georgian territorial integrity, and in the informal support of the Abkhazian separatists.

Concerning Russian armed units in Georgia, Russia initially promised to withdraw them. However, they remained and their presence was formalised in two agreements. Later, the border troops were withdrawn and an agreement was reached on pulling out the military units as well. Then Russia started to drag its feet, and in the summer of 2001 the prospects for a complete withdrawal looked uncertain.

Regarding the war in Chechnya, Russia was pleased that Georgia supported its attempt to crush separatism there in 1994-96. But when Russia resumed the war in 1999 and Georgia tried to stay neutral, the relations deteriorated and Russia introduced a visa regime, which became a hard blow to the Georgian economy.

Russian policy thus was inconsistent with a discrepancy between words and deeds.

Keywords
Russia, Georgia, Caucasus, Abkhazia, Chechnya, military bases, visas, oil

Further bibliographic information	**Language** English
ISSN 1650-1942	**Pages** 54 p.
	Price acc. to pricelist
	Security classification

Utgivare Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut - FOI Försvarsanalys 172 90 Stockholm	**Rapportnummer,** FOI-R--0168--SE	**Klassificering** Användarrapport
	Forskningsområde 1. Försvar- och säkerhetspolitik	
	Månad, år Augusti 2001	**Projektnummer** A 1101
	Verksamhetsgren 1. Forskning för regeringens behov	
	Delområde 11 Försvarsforskning för regeringens behov	
Författare/redaktör Per Normark	**Projektledare**	
	Godkänd av	
	Tekniskt och/eller vetenskapligt ansvarig	

Rapportens titel

Rysslands politik mot Georgien: Kontinuitet och förändring

Sammanfattning

Rysslands politik mot Georgien vid sekelskiftet jämförs med början av självständighetstiden i tre viktiga aspekter. Beträffande Abchasien kan konstateras att politiken kännetecknats av kontinuitet både genom det formella stödet för Georgiens territoriella integritet och det informella stödet för de abchasiska separatisterna.

I fråga om de ryska styrkorna i Georgien lovade Ryssland inledningsvis att dra tillbaka dem, men de stannade kvar och deras närvaro formaliserades genom två avtal. Senare drog Ryssland tillbaka sina gränstrupper från Georgien och ingick ett avtal att också ta hem de militära förbanden. Snart började Ryssland dock förhala tillbakadragandet, och sommaren 2001 syntes utsikterna för ett totalt uttåg osäkra.

Vad gäller kriget i Tjetjenien, kunde Ryssland glädja sig åt att Georgien stödde dess strävan att krossa separatismen där under 1994-1996. Men när Ryssland återupptog kriget 1999 och Georgien försökte ställa sig neutralt, försämrades relationerna, och Ryssland införde visumtvång, vilket hårt drabbade den georgiska ekonomin.

Den ryska politiken var alltså inkonsistent med ett gap mellan ord och handling.

Nyckelord

Ryssland, Georgien, Kaukasus, Abchasien, Tjetjenien, militärbaser, visum, olja

Övriga bibliografiska uppgifter	**Språk** Engelska
ISSN 1650-1942	**Antal sidor:** 54 s.
Distribution enligt missiv	**Pris: Enligt prislista** **Sekretess**

Foreword

Russian foreign policy has always been an important concern for Sweden, and its application to the crisis-ridden Caucasus region has attracted world attention since the late 1980s. This Russian policy affects not only the newly independent states in that region. It also has wider implications indicating general trends in Russian behaviour.

This FOI report forms part of my PhD project at the University of Kent at Canterbury, the theme of which is Russian security policy in the Caucasus, north and south. The report can be seen as an update and elaboration on earlier analyses at FOI on Caucasian problems (see back cover). It also fits into the framework of a larger research project on Russian foreign, defence and security policy at FOI.

As can be seen in the bibliography, the report builds on an extensive body of news material, partly accessible on the internet, and Western research. Besides, I have benefited from the experience that I gained when working as a military observer for the UN in Abkhazia and as an OSCE staff member, working with human rights questions in 1998-2000.

I am very grateful to FOI for the permission to use their "East Library", to Jan Leijonhielm for making this publication possible, and to Ingmar Oldberg and Carolina Vendil for practical advice and critical comments on the drafts. Thanks are also due to Patrick Jotun, at the time analyst at the Armed Forces Headquarters, who did a thorough job in examining the report for an FOI research seminar in June 2001. If there are any remaining mistakes, they are my own responsibility.

Nacka, 14 August 2001

Per Normark *pernormark@telia.com*

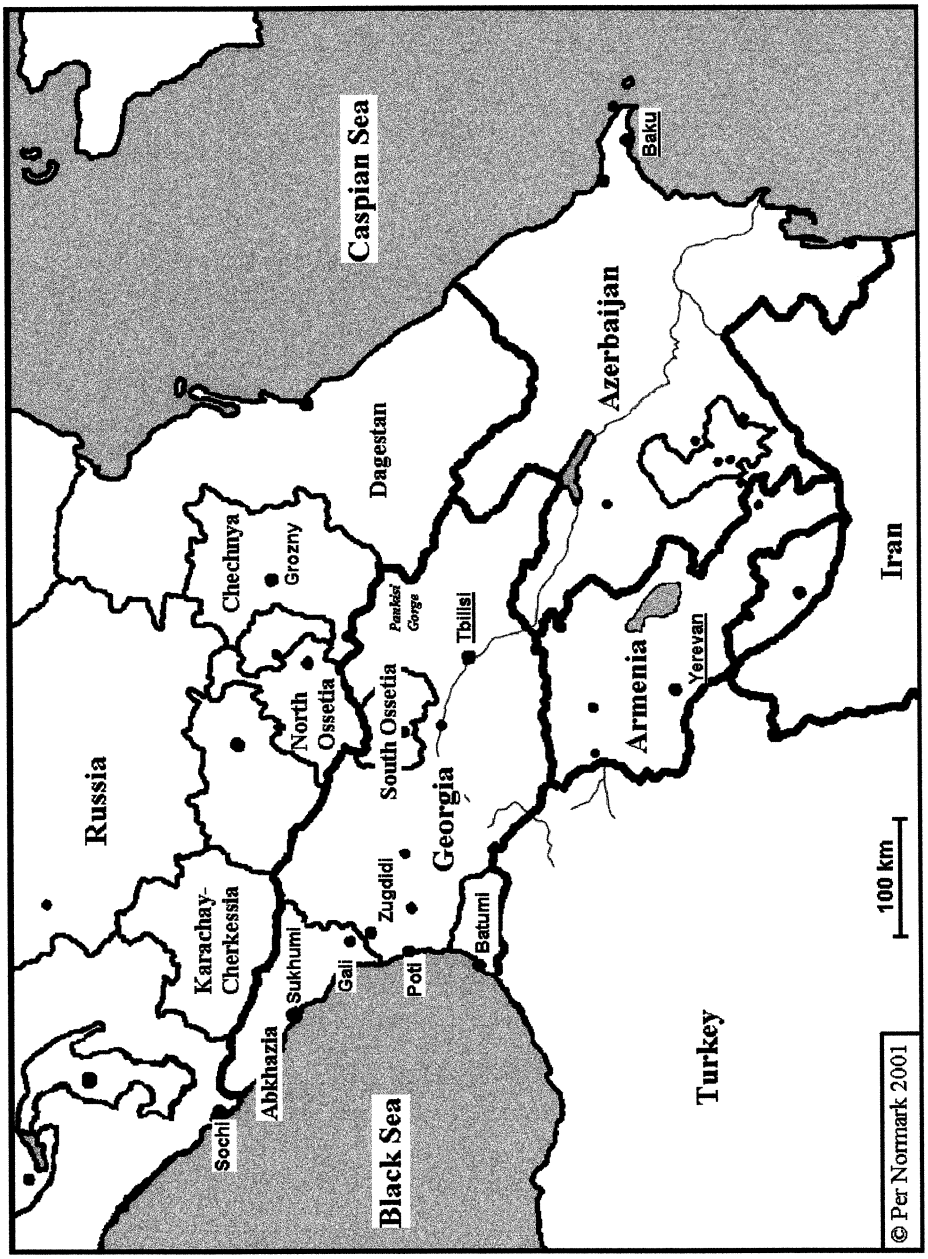
Contents

Maps and tables

List of abbreviations

BBC SWB	British Broadcasting Company Summary of World Broadcast
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CMPC	Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKF	Peacekeeping Force
UN	United Nations
USIA	United States Information Agency

Map over the Caucasus



Map 1. The Caucasus

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The relations between Tbilisi and Moscow have been complicated ever since Soviet interior troops quelled a demonstration in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989, causing the death of some twenty people. After the two countries later emerged out of the ruins of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was involved in the two armed conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[1] There are also allegations that Russia masterminded the coup in 1992 that pushed the independent Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, out of power. Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Soviet Union, took over the Georgian leadership after Gamsakhurdia and has been the Georgian leader since then. Before his days as Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was the Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and many fellow countrymen saw him as a saviour of Georgia. By others, especially among the die-hard Georgian nationalists, he was seen as too pro-Russian to conduct an independent Georgian policy. The interrelation between Georgian independence and de facto dependence on Russia has complicated the relations between the two countries ever since the independence in 1991. Russia was Georgia's largest trading partner, but has been overtaken by Turkey, and approximately 500 000 Georgians still work in Russia. Georgians also often use Russia as a scapegoat for problems in Georgia, something that even Georgians have been complaining about. Russia is also influential in other ways and the Georgian foreign policy focuses a lot on the relations with Russia.

1.2 Aim of the Study

With these complicated relations between Georgia and Russia as a background, this report will compare Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia at the turn of the century with the policy during the first years of Georgian independence. The first period covers the turbulent time in Georgia after the independence from the Soviet Union. The period starts with the Georgian independence in 1991 and ends when the armed confrontations in Georgia ended during the winter of 1993-94. At that moment, Georgian federal forces were thrown out of Abkhazia and the armed rebellion by the ousted president Gamsakhurdia was crushed in the autumn of 1993. The second period starts in 1997 as negotiations started on the withdrawal of the Russian border guards and military bases from Georgia,

[1] The use of the name Abkhazia is no recognition of Abkhazia as a de jure independent state, even if at present Abkhazia is de facto independent of Georgia. It is merely a convenient way of describing the area of Abkhazia in written text. The same reasoning is applicable for Chechnya and other disputed regions.

and covers events until the summer of 2001. These two periods have been the most turbulent in Georgian politics since independence, while the period in between was characterised by a certain stability.

To facilitate the search for answers and concretise the study, it will examine what the similarities and what the differences were in the Russian policy towards Georgia, in three different questions, where important events for Georgian-Russian relations have taken place: the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, the presence of Russian armed units in Georgia and the triangle relations Tbilisi-Moscow-Grozny (in Chechnya). The choice of the Abkhazian conflict was maybe the most obvious choice when deciding issues to be discussed. The Abkhazian conflict has had far-reaching consequences for the Georgian society and for the relations with Russia. It was the largest conflict in Georgia at the time of the study and created, apart from the dead and wounded, a severe displacement of people, with some 250 000 thousand people leaving Abkhazia at the end of the armed hostilities in 1993. This became a great strain on Georgia's resources and the conflict and its consequences influenced all sectors of the society.

The second issue is the armed forces that Russia has had stationed in Georgia since the days of the Soviet Union and includes both border guards and military units. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, Russia first wanted to withdraw the forces based in Georgia, but later, the two sides reached an agreement that parts of the Soviet troops were to be transferred to Georgian command, while some were to be withdrawn and others to remain based on Georgian soil for 25 years.

The third part of the study covers the changing relations between Tbilisi, Moscow and Grozny. Chechen armed units participated on the Abkhazian side in the war in 1992-93, and supported also the former Georgian president Gamsakhurdia during his exile in 1991-92. As a consequence, Tbilisi supported Moscow in its conflict with Grozny in 1994-96, but later relations between Tbilisi and Grozny improved. When the armed confrontation in Chechnya started in 1999, Georgia tried to stay out of it, but Russia accused Georgia of hosting armed Chechens on its territory. These accusations led to deteriorating relations between Tbilisi and Moscow, culminating with the Russian introduction of a visa regime in December 2000.

An issue that could have been analysed is the South Ossetian conflict, which in many ways resembled the Abkhazian, but also showed some great differences. The main difference and the reason that the conflict is not included here is that the conflict was far from as grave as the Abkhazian conflict. The contacts between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali were frequent and nothing prevented Georgians from visiting South Ossetia and vice versa. Even if the conflict was far from solved, the atmosphere in the talks between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali was much better than in the talks between Tbilisi and Sukhumi.

This is a comparative study, where Russian policy rhetoric and policy implementation during two periods are compared. This is done by examining the Russian rhetoric and policy implementation in three issues just mentioned. To identify both the rhetoric and developments, Russian and Georgian news medias are the main sources in this study. Some information is taken directly from newspapers, but some material is from western institutions that are using indigenous resources, such as BBC Summary of World Broadcast and Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty. For information of background character, material of a more academic nature has also been used.

1.3 Defining the Russian Actors

Formally, it is the president and the government that elaborate and implement Russia's foreign policy, and they are responsible for its consequences. They will therefore be seen as the main actors in the interplay with Georgia. But as Suzanne Crow, at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,[2] noted already in 1993, "too many people in Russia are involved in formulating and executing foreign policy" since there was a lack of constitutional order for working out and taking foreign policy decisions. She listed the three main problems as being the lack of standard procedures for formulating policy, open power struggle in the Russian government and disagreement on what should be Russia's place in the world and which direction the policy should take.[3] This was clearly visible in the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, where several Russian actors were influencing the events, before as well as during and after the war. This influenced the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow in a way that makes it impossible not to consider their activities in this study. The Russian armed forces are formally a part of the government, as the Russian President is the Commander-in-Chief, but different units of the military establishment may go its own ways and not follow the official line. The Russian armed forces deployed in Georgia and especially in Abkhazia will therefore be studied as actors when commenting on the activities during the armed conflict. In the case of Abkhazia, there is also an organisation that took active part in the events connected with the war, and also in the fighting per se: the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, CMPC.[4] Its major contribution was some political statements about the situation but, most importantly, it contributed with volunteers from the Northern

[2] The positions given are those at the time of publication of the article or paper referred to.
[3] Suzanne Crow (1993), pp. 47f.
[4] The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus is a loosely composed organisation based on ethnical affiliation mainly with peoples from the northern Caucasus participating together with Abkhazia since the Abkhazian people has its roots north of the mountain range.

Caucasus that fought on the Abkhazian side in the name of the Confederation. It will therefore be mentioned as a Russian actor even if it formally is not so.

1.4 The Strategic Importance of Caspian Oil

The Caspian area has large reserves of hydrocarbon resources and the countries in the region have been calculating with huge future incomes from these resources. There have, however, also been huge problems with transporting the resources from their present location under the ground or sea, to the lucrative world markets. The technical equipment was ancient, the countries are all landlocked and the political game for control over extraction and exportation caused instability, which made potential investors hesitate. The 'oil game' was also one of Russia's interests in the region and future influence and income would in different ways be connected with the Russian oil industry. Oil business has not been the main subject on the Tbilisi-Moscow agenda, but the subject is important for understanding other events that influenced the relations. Therefore, this section will make a brief overview of the situation, in order to present Tbilisi's and Moscow's interest in the region's hydrocarbon resources.[5]

Oil extraction in the Caspian region dates from the end of the nineteenth century when Baku was one of the big oil centres of the world. The discovery of new oil fields in the 1990s led to an increase in the strategic importance of the Caspian and the hydrocarbon reserves in the area were considered the second largest in the world after the Persian Gulf. The amount of reserves was disputed but calculations vary between 30 and 200 billion barrels of oil.[6] By the summer of 2001, most reserves were still untouched as money and political agreements for extraction were missing. Several countries in the region were interested in the extraction and exportation of the oil, such as Russia, Iran and Turkey, for strategic reasons, and smaller countries, like Azerbaijan and Georgia, mainly for economic reasons. The United States was also involved in what has once again been termed the 'Great Game', a term that originally described Russia's and Britain's struggle for control over the region in the nineteenth century.[7]

There have been two main controversies connected with the oil in the Caspian: the status of the sea *per se*, and thereby the rights to extract oil, and the routing of export pipelines. The break-up of the Soviet Union led to a dispute

---

[5] For a more comprehensive analysis of the influence of oil on the politics in the region, there is a wide range of literature available, for example: Stephen Blank (1995), Stephen Blank (1998), Douglas W. Blum (1998), Ariel Cohen (1996), Michael P. Croissant (1996) and Rosemarie Forsythe (1996).

[6] Estimations vary widely, reaching from 30 billion barrels as estimated by professor Gregory Gleason from the University of New Mexico to 178-192 billion barrels as estimated by the United States Department of Energy in October 1977.

[7] Douglas W. Blum (1998), pp. 138ff.

whether the Caspian Sea is a lake or a sea. If defined as a sea, the distribution of resources will have to follow international maritime law, meaning the establishment of exclusive economic zones for each bordering state. If defined as a lake on the other hand, the division of resources would be based on mutual understanding. The Russian stance was initially that the Caspian is a lake and that extraction could not start until agreements had been reach on how to share the resources. Later, the Russian view started to change and the Russian position became that the sea should be divided into exclusive sectors for extraction and Russia was instead striving for a greater participation in the extraction and transportation of the energy resources. The other littoral states have all the time promoted the position that the Caspian Sea is a sea and that extraction therefore accordingly could start immediately.[8]

The second controversy was about export routes as none of the extracting countries, Russia excluded, had direct access to the oceans. The routing of the pipelines would give the countries along the pipeline economic revenues in form of transit fees and political influence with the possibility to close the pipeline and thereby the revenues. In July 2001, there were three possible main routes from the Caucasus: through Iran, Russia and Turkey. However, so far, political and technical obstacles have complicated the extraction of oil. The poor state of the infrastructure in the region also aggravated the circumstances for a smooth export of the energy resources. There were two operational pipelines from the Caspian to the Black Sea: one through Georgia to the Georgian Black Sea coast,[9] and one newly completed going from Makhachkala, bypassing Chechnya, to Novorossiisk, at the Russian Black Sea coast, from where the oil was transported further by oil tankers.[10]

In the Georgian-Russian relations, the importance of the energy sources in the Caspian area was limited to the export routes. Georgia promoted a new pipeline through its territory to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey, while Russia preferred a pipeline going further north, from Baku through Russian territory to the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk. Even if Georgia would benefit economically from a single pipeline alternative, Georgia preferred a "variety of export routes". The Georgian Foreign Minister, Irakli Menaghar-ishvili said that the Georgian government supported the most economical projects. He also said that Georgia "supports any option that will make this system a basis for cooperation, not some kind of opposition".[11]

Some analysts claimed that Moscow's war in Chechnya 1994-1996 was about pipeline capacities and control over the export facilities in the Northern Caucasus, as the only operational pipeline at that time passed through

---

[8] Ibid. , pp. 138ff.
[9] Bahar Jalali (1999).
[10] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 20 April 2000.
[11] *Georgia Daily Digest*, 4 January 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org.

Chechnya.[12] In connection with the problems in northern Caucasus, Russia built a second pipeline, circumventing Chechnya. With the turbulence in Caucasian politics and with the complicated relations between Georgia and Russia, the accusations about destabilising the situation have been mutual. Georgia has accused Russia of destabilising Georgia in order to render the construction of a viable pipeline impossible and thereby making the Russian pipeline the only alternative. Russia on its hand has accused Georgia of supporting the Chechens with the purpose of destabilising the northern Caucasus in order to prevent export of oil via the Russian system.[13]

1.5 Thoughts on Russian Policy in the Caucasus

At the end of the nineties, there were two main understandings and predictions of Russian policy in the Caucasus today. They were not mutually excluding but more supplementing each other. One group of analysts talked about Russian neo-imperialism, arguing that Russia was conducting a policy with the aim of re-establishing Moscow's influence in the region in order to counter threats to Russian security and to gain access to the natural resources in the region. Professor Stephen Blank, at the Strategic Studies Institute, argued in an article from 1995, at the height of Russia's Chechen war, that Russia was trying to "create new spheres of political and economic influence within and beyond the CIS" and called this "a resurgent Russian neo-imperialism". His argument was built on what he saw as indications of an expansionist policy, mainly Russian activities in Chechnya and Russia's attempt to control the extraction and transport of the Caspian region's energy resources. Another reason for Russia's neo-imperialistic activities was the Russian fear of Muslim or Turkic self-assertion in the area, something that would diminish Moscow's influence and thereby threaten its security. Blank argued further that Russian engagement risked causing overextension of the limited resources for conducting a neo-imperialist policy. This was one reason why Russia was trying to get UN/OSCE blessing for its peacekeeping operations in the area.[14]

Another analyst who claimed that Russia had neo-imperialistic ambitions in the area was Ariel Cohen, Senior Analyst at the Heritage Foundation, who argued that a new 'Great Game' was developing in the Caucasus. He argued that the conflicts in Georgia, between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in Chechnya were all started or exacerbated by the Russian military in an attempt to control future pipeline routes in the area, and to ensure that the pipeline through Russia would be the major, or even only, operational route for export. One reason for the Russian ambitions to control the oil pipelines was to prevent the countries in

[12] Michael Lelyveld (2000).
[13] *BBC SWB* SU/4017 B/5, 7 December 2000.
[14] Stephen Blank (1995).

the region from developing strong economies thanks to oil revenues. Economically strong and viable countries would much more easily resist Russian ambitions to re-create an empire in the region.[15] He concluded that the "struggle for Eurasian oil is a multi-dimensional security, geopolitical and economic game", the outcome of which will influence the development of stable democracies in the region.[16]

A version of the above held Russia as neo-imperialistic and that it will try to regain influence in the region, but with less emphasis on military and more emphasis on economic and political tools. Igor Khripunov, associate director, and Mary Matthews, postgraduate student, both from the University of Georgia in Athens argued in 1996 that hydrocarbon resources and other economic interests were growing in importance in Russia's relations with the newly independent countries and that Russian companies were getting a greater say in Russian policy towards the region. With this shift in policy elaboration, a change from military to economic and political methods in the Russian policy was to be expected. Their conclusion was therefore that "the major tools of geopolitics are bound to shift from the use of military force to economic and trade pressures". They also concluded that Russia would try to be in control of the resources and their utilisation, even if they did not conclude that Russia would practise a neo-imperialistic policy.[17]

The main argument of the group that elaborated on a Russian strategic retreat from the Caucasus was the lack of military as well as political and economic resources for a continued Russian presence in the region. Notwithstanding this, the Caucasus played a major role in both Russia's foreign and domestic politics. Pavel Baev, researcher at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, argued in 1997, that "Russia's gradual strategic retreat from the Caucasus appears irreversible". From the mid-1994, oil became a major concern in Russia's relations with the Caucasian states, as extraction and transportation were growing ever more important. The major Russian tool for policy implementation in the Caucasus, however, has been military force. Baev argued that with a weak economy and with the Russian army in decline, especially after the debacle in Chechnya in 1994-1996, Moscow was left without tools for policy implementation and the retreat would therefore be inevitable.[18]

In a paper from 1998, on a more limited subject, the Russian peacekeeping policy in Abkhazia, Dov Lynch, Lecturer at the University of Reading, argued that the Russian influence in Georgia was based on a misconstrued bargain from 1994, under which the peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia was deployed. The differing perceptions of this bargain, and the peacekeeping operation, Lynch argued, were underlying reasons for the tension in the Georgian-Russian

[15] Ariel Cohen (1996), pp. 2f.
[16] Ibid. , p. 13.
[17] Igor Khripunov and Mary M. Matthews (1996).
[18] Pavel Baev (1997), pp. 57ff.

relations. Lynch concluded by auguring a "broader disengagement of Russia from the Caucasus states".[19] Both Baev and Lynch argued Russian retreat, even if this would be based more on the lack of resources than on the political will.

[19] Dov Lynch (1998), pp. 44.

2. Abkhazia

2.1 Background to the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

Abkhazia came under Russian protection in 1810, but continued to administer its own province until 1864 when it came under full control of the Russian Tsar. The control over Abkhazia was exercised from Tbilisi in the beginning of the twentieth century, but Gagra region, close to the Russian border, was also controlled from Sochi, in Russia, from 1904. In 1918, a Soviet commune was established in Abkhazia, but it lasted only for 40 days until the Menshevik regime in Tbilisi took control.[20] The Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic was established on 31 March 1921, and in December the same year, when the Soviet Union was created, Abkhazia together with the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic entered the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republic as equals. In 1931 Abkhazia was degraded to the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, as a part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.[21]

Under Russian rule in the nineteenth century and under Soviet and Georgian in the twentieth, the demographical situation in Abkhazia changed dramatically. When coming under Russian control in the nineteenth century, Abkhazia was mainly populated by Moslems after living under Turkish rule for almost four hundred years. Some 120 000 of these Moslems migrated to the Ottoman Empire, where they form an extensive diaspora today. The Abkhazian population can therefore hardly be called Moslem any more and the conflict between Tbilisi and Sukhumi was not a religious one, as some observers tended to claim.[22] During the Soviet rule, Abkhazia was, as so many other areas in the Caucasus, affected by Stalinist oppression, here executed by Tbilisi.[23] The repression and the movement of Georgians and Russians to Abkhazia led to drastic changes in the demographical situation (Table 2).

After Khrushchev's de-stalinisation of Soviet politics, the Abkhazian people petitioned repeatedly (in 1956, 1967 and 1978) to Moscow to be separated from Georgia and attached to Russia. These petitions were all rejected, but they led to several political and cultural concessions to the Abkhazians, to great dissatisfaction among the Georgians. Notwithstanding the concessions, the Abkhazian discontent with the situation led to demonstrations in March 1989, demanding a return to the constitutional status that had applied before 1931, i.e.

---

[20] B. G. Hewitt (1996), pp. 194f.
[21] Alexei Zverev (1996), p. 39.
[22] Ibid. , pp. 37f.
[23] Josef Stalin, born Dzhugashvili, was half Georgian, half Ossetian, and Lavrenti Beria was Mingrelian, a Georgian sub-ethnicity living on both sides of the Inguri River, the present cease-fire line between Georgia and Abkhazia. Their Georgian kinship contributed to the Abkhazian animosity towards the Georgians in general.

Abkhazia and Georgia as parts of a common republic, on equal terms.[24] The Georgians answered with counterdemonstrations, which took a nationalistic character and turned into manifestations of pro-independence. One of these demonstrations took place on 9 April 1989 in Tbilisi and was brutally dispersed by Soviet Interior Troops, leading to the deaths of twenty-one. From this moment, the hitherto Tbilisi-Sukhumi confrontation, turned the independence-minded Tbilisi, headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, ever more against Moscow in its search for independence.[25]

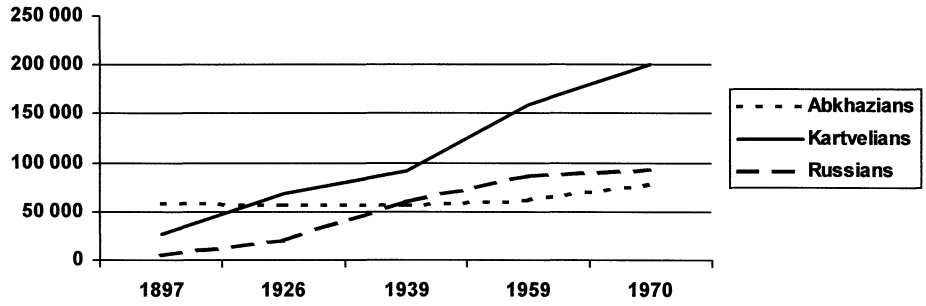


Table 2. Demographical changes in Abkhazia, 1897-1970.[26]

Clashes with lethal outcome between Georgians and Abkhazians occurred in the summer of 1989, when Abkhazian people took to the streets, protesting against a decision to establish a branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi. After this event, the situation grew steadily tenser during 1990 and 1991. The Georgian independence declaration in April 1991 and the nationalistic policies of the independent Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, against the background of heavy decrease of ethnic Abkhazians living in Abkhazia, led to a fear of ethnic and cultural extinction in Abkhazia. The situation became precarious when the Abkhazian side re-instated the 1925 Constitution in July 1992.[27]

[24] Alexei Zverev (1996), p. 39.
[25] Jonathan Cohen (1999), p. 81.
[26] As can be seen in the table, the number of Georgians in Abkhazia increased rapidly after Abkhazia became a part of the Georgian Republic. As a result, the number of Abkhazians in Abkhazia before the war in 1992-1993 was only 17 per cent. Kartvelians is the Georgian ethnical group (B. G. Hewitt (1996), p. 197).
[27] Jonathan Cohen (1999), pp. 81ff.

2.2 Russia's Policies during the War

On 14 August 1992, federal Georgian troops, the National Guard commanded by Tengiz Kitovani, entered Abkhazia in what was supposed to be a hostage-release operation in the Gali region. The troops, however, continued to Sukhumi in what was later claimed to be an unauthorised attack. The Abkhazian deputies in the parliament of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic in Sukhumi fled to Gudauta, from where they led the Abkhazian resistance throughout the armed conflict. The Georgian deputies remained in Sukhumi until they were driven out at the end of September 1993.[28]

As will be seen below, the Russian response to the conflict was mixed, the official policy always supporting the Georgian territorial integrity, and different groupings issuing their own statements and supporting the two conflicting sides. The main Russian actors during the armed conflict were: the Russian government with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence playing the most important roles, the Russian Parliament, the Con-federation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus and the Russian armed forces in the region.

2.2.1 Official Russian Actors

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement on 17 August in which it said that "whilst not intervening in Georgia's internal affairs, [we] will also not stand by if the lives of Russian citizens are put at risk".[29] As a response to the reactions of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus,[30] the Russian government made a statement the following day in which it called on the people of the northern Caucasus to remain neutral and refrain from taking actions that could further destabilise the situation in Abkhazia. The statement also contained a promise to do everything to suppress intervention in the internal affairs of Georgia and a call for the Georgian and Abkhazian sides to "proceed without delay to a civilized settlement of the conflict and not allow bloodshed to continue". The government further instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assist the sides in reaching a settlement to the conflict.[31]

One of the strongest statements in support of the Georgian territorial integrity during the initial phase of the armed conflict was made in a protocol between the Georgian and Russian Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs. In this protocol, Russia once again confirmed "the current border along the Psou River and the watershed of the main Caucasus range and [renounced] possible territorial claims against Georgia". This was another confirmation that the Russian

---

[28] Alexei Zverev (1996), pp. 48f.
[29] *BBC SWB* SU/1463 C1/2, 19 August 1992.
[30] For the activities of the Confederation, see page 19.
[31] *BBC SWB* SU/1464 C1/2, 20 August 1992.

government recognised Georgian sovereignty over Abkhazia and at the same time denied Abkhazia the possibility to be incorporated into the Russian Federation.[32]

After an initial silence, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin made his first official statement in connection with the conflict on 26 August, appealing to the two sides to "immediately stop military actions and begin a dialogue in order to achieve peace". In the same statement, Yeltsin confirmed his support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, but stressed also the need to stop military actions and withdraw the troops. Russia's readiness to support the peace-making efforts was once again reiterated.[33] This statement was followed a couple of days later by an appeal to the Georgian and Abkhazian leadership to "put an end immediately to combat actions and the use of military force on both sides". The statement further reiterated Russia's support for Georgia's unity and territorial integrity.[34] During the armed conflict, bilateral talks continued between Georgia and Russia on issues of a civilised separation after the break-up of the Soviet Union, even if arms transfer was temporarily suspended. When the Abkhazians used a cease-fire to attack Sukhumi in the end of September 1993, Russia introduced sanctions on Abkhazia.[35]

The Transcaucasus Military District declared at an early stage of the armed conflict that the Russian troops in the area would remain neutral. A Russian regiment was transferred to Abkhazia on 16 August 1992 to "protect Russian military installations as well as the sanatoria of the Ministry of Defence where, on the first day of the clashes, two officers on holiday died".[36] The Russian troops deployed in the region were, however, soon drawn into the combat operations. They warned several times that fire would be returned and that they had the right to defend themselves. This happened also at several occasions and the discussion ran high between Georgia and Russia on who opened fire first and whether the Russian combat actions were pro-active or an example of self-defence. This is not the place for an analysis of this, and for the content of this study it is sufficient to establish the fact that the Russian troops opened fire at several occasions and that the Georgian side perceived this as combat actions supporting the Abkhazian side in the conflict.[37]

Like other Russian authorities, the parliament reacted to the crisis in Abkhazia, but adopted a more pro-Abkhazian attitude than did the govern-

---

[32] *Kuranty*, Moscow 25 August 1992 reported in *BBC SWB* SU/1472 C1/1, 29 August 1992.
[33] *BBC SWB* SU/1470 C1/3, 27 August 1992.
[34] *Kraznaya Zvezda*, 28 August 1992 reported in *BBC SWB* SU 1472 C1/1, 29 August 1992.
[35] *RFE/RL* no. 188, 30 September 1993.
[36] *BBC SWB* SU/1461 C1/4-5, 17 August 1992.
[37] *BBC SWB* SU/1475 C1/3, 2 September 1992 and *BBC SWB* SU/1476 C1/5-6, 3 September 1992.

ment.[38] The Chairman of the [Soviet] of Nationalities of the Russian Parliament, Ramazan Abdulatipov, who later became Minister of Nationalities, sent a telegram to Shevardnadze in which he appealed for trying to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and he also expressed his worries about the spread of violence to the northern Caucasus. He eventually urged Shevardnadze to take appropriate actions to solve the conflict with peaceful means, and, referring to the Russian assistance provided in South Ossetia, declared readiness to assist in working out a treaty on divisions of power. In the message he said that a "compromise is necessary" and emphasised the need to work out "a treaty on division of powers".[39] Nowhere in the message was anything mentioned about support for the Georgian territorial integrity.

On 25 September 1992, the Russian Parliament held a discussion on the situation in Abkhazia and after this discussion the parliament issued a statement that denounced the "policy of the Georgian leadership ... and [demanded] that the government immediately stop combat operations". It also called for the introduction of peacekeeping forces and offered the service of the Russian Federation as a mediator.[40]

Following the end of the war in 1993 and Georgia's accession to the CIS, Georgia and Russia signed a Friendship Treaty in the beginning of 1994. In the treaty, Russia recognised Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty even if Yeltsin at the following press conference expressed the need to work out Abkhazia's status within a new constitution.

2.2.2 Other Russian Actors

The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was an organisation based on ethnic kinship between the peoples in the northern Caucasus, together with the Abkhazians, who are related to the Adygeyan people north of the mountain range.[41] The CMPC sided with the Abkhazians from the start of the armed conflict and issued a sharp protest already on the first day of the war. The Parliament of the CMPC stated "regarding the aggressive actions against sovereign Abkhazia [that it] laid full responsibility for the bloodshed ... on the dictatorial regime of Shevardnadze".[42] The participating republics in the CMPC issued also similar statements in support of the Abkhazian side separately. The

---

[38] Note that the Russian parliament at this time was the old conservative one that was dissolved by Yeltsin in 1993, approximately at the same time as the Georgian federal troops were being thrown out of Abkhazia and the civil war against Zviadist forces escalated.

[39] *BBC SWB* SU/1470 C1/2, 27 August 1992.

[40] *RFE/RL* no. 186, 28 September 1992.

[41] Suzanne Goldenberg (1994), p. 108.

[42] *BBC SWB* SU/1461 C1/3, 17 August 1992.

leaders of Adygey Republic denounced Georgia's policy in Abkhazia and called for an immediate cease-fire. The leaders of the Republics in the northern Caucasus Republics supported the Abkhazian side as being a party to the CMPC, but there was also a fear that the "northern Caucasus [would] get involved in the war".[43]

On the 18 August 1992, the Parliament of the CMPC met in the Chechen capital Grozny, to discuss the situation in Abkhazia. The Parliament adopted a resolution that demanded the Georgian troops to withdraw from Abkhazia within two days, and also threatened that "[i]f the occupation of Abkhazia continues, the confederation of mountain peoples will declare the beginning of military action against Georgia". The Chechen leader Dzokhar Dudayev commented on the activities of the CMPC, saying that he supported the volunteers' wish to go to Abkhazia and fight for the Abkhazian cause, but that issuing weapons to them would be to interfere in the internal affairs of Georgia.[44] Already on 20 August, some 300 fighters were believed to have crossed the Caucasus mountain range illegally to fight on the Abkhazian side against the federal Georgian forces.[45] Most republics in northern Caucasus supported Abkhazia in the armed conflict and a large number of volunteers came from the north to fight on the Abkhazian side.[46]

2.3 The Not-So Closed Russian-Abkhazian Border

As soon as the armed conflict in Abkhazia started, the Russian side tightened the border regime between Russia and the Abkhazian part of Georgia. Russia later reached an agreement with Georgia to completely close the border to stop incursions into Abkhazia by "guerrillas from the Northern Caucasus".[47] The border regime was implemented only sporadically, but when the Abkhazians broke the cease-fire in 1993 and launched the main attack on Sukhumi, and later took the city, Russia introduced economic sanctions as well.[48] As a part of the sanctions regime on behalf of the CIS, the Russian border at Psou[49] was supposed to be closed, something that not always was the case. The regime was more thoroughly implemented during the war in Chechnya in 1994-1996, in

[43] *BBC SWB* SU/1465 C2/2, 21 August 1992.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *BBC SWB* SU/1466 C2/2, 22 August 1992.
[46] See for instance *BBC SWB* SU/1482, 10 September 1992; SU/1494, 24 September 1992 and SU/1497, 28 September 1992.
[47] *BBC SWB* SU/1471 C1/2, 28 August 1992.
[48] *RFE/RL* no. 188, 30 September 1993.
[49] The River Psou marks the border between Russian and Abkhazia/Georgia. The road along the Black Sea coast that crosses Psou is the only legal crossing point going from Abkhazia to Russia. Taking the Abkhazian geography into consideration, it is also one of the few places where it is feasible to cross the border.

order to prevent Abkhazian mercenaries and others to travel to Chechnya and fight on the Chechen side as the Chechens had done on the Abkhazian side in 1992-1993.[50] Periodically Russia put extra pressure on Abkhazia by upholding and more strictly implementing the blockade[51] something that from time to time led to deteriorating Russian-Abkhazian relations.[52] In 1997, the Abkhazians threatened to insist on the withdrawal of the CIS Peacekeeping Force, PKF, and for western organisations to take over the mediation if Russia did not lift the economic blockade.[53]

At several occasions, the Russian authorities relaxed the sanctions regime on their own initiative, the latest occasion being when the hostilities started in Dagestan and Chechnya in the late summer of 1999. On 9 September 1999, the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a resolution on relaxing the border regime, but after the explosions in Moscow, Russian border guards once again closed the border on 17 September. The unilateral changes in the border regime did not contribute to a better climate between Tbilisi and Moscow, and the Abkhazian Parliament in Exile[54] in Tbilisi called for a total re-assessment of the Georgian-Russian relations.[55]

The economic blockade was supposed to function as a lever to force Abkhazia to accept Georgian sovereignty, by creating harsh living conditions for Abkhazia. The practical side of the blockade was that, up until the 30 August 1995, Russia allowed people travel to Turkey, which was the only country to accept Abkhazian passports.[56] However, travel to and from Turkey continued also after this date without major changes. In the summer of 1998, approximately two ships per week left Sukhumi for Turkey, with goods to be sold and on their way to Abkhazia bringing in consumer goods from Turkey. The extent of this business after 1998 is not known, but the practice continued.[57] The abundance of products, mainly from Turkey and Russia, on the Sukhumi market also indicated that the border regime worked poorly. Another example that indicated the hollowness of the border regime was Abkhazian export of timber and agricultural products to markets in Russia, thereby passing the, in theory, closed border at Psou, the only official crossing point between Abkhazia

---

[50] *BBC SWB* SU/2187 B/26, 28 December 1994.
[51] See for instance *OMRI Daily Digest* vol. 1, no. 207, 24 October 1995 and *OMRI Daily Digest* vol. 1, no. 222, 14 November 1995.
[52] *OMRI Daily Digest* 25 March 1996.
[53] *RFE/RL* no. 28, Part I, 12 May 1997.
[54] The Abkhazian Parliament in Exile consists of the Georgian deputies from the Parliament in Sukhumi, who were elected in 1991.
[55] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 20 September 1999 and *BBC SWB* SU/3649 F/5, 25 September 1999.
[56] *OMRI Daily Digest* vol. 1, no. 222, 14 November 1995.
[57] Talks with UNOMIG operations branch, September 1998.

and Russia.[58] A last example of the not functioning blockade regime was the amount of tourists, mainly from Russia, that populated the Abkhazian resorts along the Black Sea coast at the end of the nineties. These resorts were cheap alternatives for Russians that could not afford going to more popular places like Sochi, just some kilometres away on the Russian side of the border. The amount of tourists that arrived to Abkhazia can of course not be compared to the pre-war level, but for the few resorts that were operating, these tourists were an important source of income.[59]

2.4 Russian Involvement at the Turn of the Century

2.4.1 Passports and the Russian Visa Regime

Since the Abkhazians refused to accept Georgian citizenship, and consequently Georgian passports, they had no documents for travelling outside Abkhazia. During the first years of de facto Abkhazian independence, this caused no major practical problem since the old Soviet passports[60] were still valid. However, these passports later expired, so to make travel possible the Abkhazian population needed new documents. Russia still accepted the old Soviet passports. Thus Abkhazians could visit Russia without any problems. The Georgians would of course have been happy to issue Georgian passports to anyone in Abkhazia, since using them would be an act of recognising the Georgian statehood and its territorial integrity. There were also people in Abkhazia with new Georgian passports, even though they normally kept very quiet about that. Another way of getting proper documents was to accept Russian citizenship and receive a Russian passport. This was also a very common way in Abkhazia to solve the problem with travel documents. In practical terms, this was done by registering somewhere in Russia and then the Russian authorities issued the proper documentation needed to get a passport. This, however, had a legal implication that was seldom discussed, namely that the Abkhazian population was becoming Russian citizens. The number of 'Russians' in Abkhazia was still rather modest, but if the constitutional vacuum in Abkhazia would continue, an ever-increasing part of the population would become Russian citizens, thereby in the end making Abkhazia an area with a

---

[58] The facts in this part are rarely found in any publications and the reasoning is therefore based on the author's extensive travel and meetings with people in Abkhazia from September 1997 to May 2000.

[59] Ibid.

[60] The word "pasport" in Russian is used for what in the West is called ID-card. The western understanding of a passport, that is for foreign travel, is in Russian termed "zagranpasport"

majority of Russian citizens, something that hardly would facilitate a resolution of the conflict on Tbilisi's terms.[61]

On 5 December 2000, Russia introduced a visa regime for Georgians travelling to Russia. The background to this decision will be discussed in the third chapter, but one of the major consequences of the visa regime could be seen in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. When Russia introduced the visa regime, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were excluded for humanitarian reasons, a decision that has been heavily criticised both by Georgian and international observers as an infringement on the Georgian territorial integrity and an attempted annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[62] On 23 November 2000, the European Union adopted a statement criticising Russia for the de facto annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This statement was followed a couple of days later by a similar statement from the US Department of State, saying that

> "the international community is ill served when a country imposes requirements that directly challenge the fundamental basis on which a neighboring state is organized ... [this] runs directly counter to [Russia's] stated policy of support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."[63]

In January 2001, the European Parliament voted unanimously to call on Russia to lift the visa regime. The exceptions made for Abkhazia and South Ossetia were again called a "de facto annexation of Georgian territory".[64]

2.4.2 Russia in the Peace Process

In 1995, Georgia started to criticise the Russian peacekeepers in the zone of conflict, claiming that they acted in a pro-Abkhazian way.[65] This criticism was seriously aggravated in May 1998 following the hostilities in Gali region, when the Abkhazian side launched an operation that in the end drew about 30 000 returnees back over the Inguri River.[66] The Georgian side criticised the

---

[61] Confidential talks with both Georgian and Russian passport holders in Abkhazia between September 1997 and May 2000.

[62] *BBC SWB* SU/4012 B/4, 1 December 2000.

[63] U.S Department of State U.S (2000).

[64] European Parliament European (2001).

[65] Dov Lynch (2000), p. 142.

[66] The pre-war population in the Gali Region consisted of 90 per cents Mingrelians, a Georgian sub-ethnicity. Following the war in 1992-93, some 250 000 people fled Abkhazia. Most people living in Gali before the war stayed on the other side of Inguri, in the region of Zugdidi when leaving Abkhazia. As the Georgian authorities are providing a very poor compensation to the displaced persons, those displaced from Gali have taken the

peacekeeping forces for not protecting the population during this operation, and Shevardnadze claimed that the "Russian peacekeeping forces deployed in the conflict zone were unable to cope with their duties".[67] The Russian peacekeeping operation along the Inguri River and the Russian activities trying to resolve the conflict have also been criticised later, by both Georgia and the UN. In August 2000, Shevardnadze criticised the Russian failure to endorse a UN document in the Security Council, which have would defined Abkhazia's future within Georgia. The Russian delegation claimed that they had not received any instructions from Moscow to endorse the document.[68] In January 2001, the UN Special Representative, ambassador Dieter Boden, complained that Moscow was hindering a political solution to the conflict by not supporting the settlement plan drafted by the UN.[69]

2.5 Summary

The Russian policy towards Georgia, regarding Abkhazia, has been characterised by a duality throughout the two periods in this study. From the very beginning of the armed conflict, the Russian government supported the Georgian territorial integrity in statements and bilateral documents. Russia has also shown this support in the work of different international organisations. The Russian actions on the ground have on the other hand been more ambiguous. There were several indications that Russia, or at least actors within Russia were supporting the Abkhazian independence struggle in a way that was not consistent with the official Russian statements. Many Georgian observers went as far as saying that Russia was the key to the conflict resolution. One of those who most strongly claim that Russia's involvement has been crucial in causing the Abkhazian de facto independence was Tamas Nadareishvili, the deputy speaker of the Abkhazian Parliament and Ardzinba's deputy before the war. He argued that Russia was occupying Abkhazia and that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was more a conflict between Tbilisi and Moscow, than between Tbilisi and Sukhumi.[70] Though Russia was not directly fighting on the Abkhazian side

---

opportunity of the proximity to Georgia proper to move home, always being able to leave on short notice, or just moving home during the summer season to take care of their gardens. These people are called spontaneous returnees as they have moved back despite the lack of an agreement between Tbilisi and Sukhumi on their return. The only agreement that exists is from 1994 and it has been overrun by the events after being signed. The agreement "Quadripartite Agreement Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons Signed on 4 April 1994, is available on Internet thanks to Conciliation Resources in London, at http://www.c-r.org/accord7/keytext.htm#quadripartie,

[67] *BBC SWB* SU/3245 F/2, 5 June 1998.

[68] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 1 August 2000.

[69] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 26 January 2001.

[70] *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, vol. 2, no. 29, 22 July 1999.

in the war from 1992-93, it would be fair to conclude that the Abkhazians would not had been able to throw the Georgians out of Sukhumi without the weapons from Russian armed forces and the support they received from the peoples of the northern Caucasus that were fighting on the Abkhazian side. Even if Russia claimed that it supported the Georgian territorial integrity, its acts sometimes indicated something different. The most indicative facts for the Russian reluctance to translate words into deeds were the issuing of passports, the reluctance to support the UN in the peace process, and lately the exclusion of Abkhazia when introducing the visa regime on Georgia.

The Russian policy towards Georgia with regards to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict has shown continuity in both the rhetorical support and the measures taken by Russia. Russia has throughout the two periods endorsed the Georgian territorial integrity, while Russian measures in the conflict zone, such as the exclusion of Abkhazia from the visa regime and the weak blockade regime, have indicated a support for the Abkhazian independence in both the beginning and the end of the nineties.

3. Russian Armed Units in Georgia

3.1 Turbulence after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

On 6 September 1991, the Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, Akakiy Asatiani, told journalists that "Georgia is discontinuing all official relations with the USSR", since the State Council in Moscow "had not discussed the recognition of Georgian independence", although it had already "recognised the independence of the Baltic states". The statement further said that Soviet troops in Georgia should "acquire the status of foreign troops if not forces of occupation".[71] On 7 November 1991, the new Georgian President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, issued a decree in which he ordered the take-over of Soviet MIA property in the republic.[72] In a decree two days later, Gamsakhurdia followed up by taking command over Soviet military weapons and equipment in the republic.[73] The take-over was, however, only partly effected and negotiations with the authorities in Moscow started instead.

During the Tashkent meeting in May 1992, the Russian Deputy Defence Minister, General Pavel Grachev,[74] expressed the opinion that the status of the former Soviet troops in Georgia would be temporary and foresaw that Russia would withdraw the troops within a period of two years.[75] The Russian Parliament had recently adopted a law, forbidding Russian conscripts to serve outside Russia's borders, and this was one of the reasons for a considerable reduction in the number of troops.[76] Georgia, at this point involved in the fighting in South Ossetia and with the groups loyal to the now ousted President Gamsakhurdia,[77] preoccupied with the tensions mounting in Abkhazia, pleaded for the troops to remain. Grachev went to Tbilisi to negotiate a partial withdrawal, but was instead persuaded by Georgia to leave the forces in Georgia.[78]

September and October 1993 became two decisive months in the Georgian-Russian relations for a long time to come. First, the Abkhazian side launched a major attack on Sukhumi and drew out the Georgian forces first from the city, and a couple of days later from Abkhazia. This was followed by

---

[71] *BBC SWB* SU/1172 i, 9 September 1991.
[72] *BBC SWB* SU/1225 B/9, 9 November 1991.
[73] *BBC SWB* SU/1228 i, 13 November 1991.
[74] At this point Yeltsin was himself acting Defence Minister, a post that Grachev later took over.
[75] *Kraznaya Zvezda* 15 May 1992.
[76] *RFE/RL* no. 167, 1 September 1993.
[77] Zviad Gamsakhurdia was a Soviet-time dissident who became leader of the nationalist movement and later elected Georgia's first president in May 1990. He became unpopular after failing to oppose the coup in Moscow in August 1991, and was ousted from power by some of his former supporters in January 1992.
[78] *RFE/RL*, no. 167, 1 September 1993 and *RFE/RL*, no. 168, 2 September 1993.

Gamsakhurdia's return to western Georgia and new fighting between troops loyal to the ousted president and troops loyal to Shevardnadze. With the country threatened by total disintegration, Shevardnadze turned to Moscow for assistance and accepted in return CIS membership for Georgia. Many Georgians later criticised him heavily for this. In return, Russia sent troops to western Georgia to support the fight against the forces loyal to Gamsakhurdia and the Russian troops soon crushed the insurrection.[79] Georgia's accession to the CIS was followed by a Russian-Georgian 'Treaty on friendship, good neighbourliness and cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Georgia', signed by Shevardnadze and Yeltsin in Tbilisi on 3 February 1994. The agreement provided for military assistance in creating Georgia's armed forces and for temporary presence of Russian troops in Georgia. The intention to create three bases in Vaziani, Akhalkalaki and Batumi, with the Batumi base to have units in Poti, Sukhumi and Gudauta as well, was also mentioned. These parts of the agreement were, however, to be finalised in a separate document.[80] On 1 March the same year, Georgia ratified the CIS membership after an intense debate in the parliament.[81]

In March 1995, the Georgian and Russian Defence Ministers, Generals Vardiko Nadibaidze and Pavel Grachev, initialled an agreement on basing Russian troops in Georgia in Akhalkalaki, Batumi, Vaziani and Gudauta. Shevardnadze claimed at this point that the Russian bases would have major importance for stabilising the security situation in the whole Transcaucasus.[82] The timeframe for the Russian basing agreement was 25 years. After heavy criticism for signing a document like this, Shevardnadze answered that he would sign the agreement only "after the re-establishment of Georgian jurisdiction over the whole territory", meaning Abkhazia.[83] On 15 September 1995, the Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin visited Tbilisi and together with the Georgian President Shevardnadze, he signed a package of seven documents on bilateral co-operation. This was done without having solved the question of re-establishment of Georgian jurisdiction over Abkhazia. A treaty on Russian military bases in Georgia was included in the package and it provided for four Russian bases to be deployed in Georgia for a period of 25 years.[84]

---

[79] *RFE/RL*, no. 205, 25 October 1993.
[80] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 February 1994 and *BBC SWB* SU/1919 F/1, 11 February 1994.
[81] *RFE/RL*, no. 42, 2 March 1994.
[82] *Kraznaya Zvezda*, 24 March 1995.
[83] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 March 1995.
[84] *BBC SWB* SU/2412 F/2, 19 September 1995 and *Kraznaya Zvezda*, 19 September 1995.

3.2 Withdrawal of Border Guards

In 1992 Georgia and Russia signed an agreement that provided for joint control of the Georgian borders by the Russian and Georgian border troops. According to this agreement, Russian border guards would guard the Georgian-Turkish border including Georgia's maritime border.[85] In October 1996, the Georgian Parliament decided that Georgian border guards in the future would guard Georgia's borders, but for some time this was not an issue in the Georgian-Russian relations.[86] On 4 March 1998, Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the Georgian Parliamentary Commission for Defence and Security, informed journalists in Tbilisi that Georgia was setting up an International Council for Security that would be supported by representatives from the USA, Germany and Switzerland. The first priority for the Council was going to be "to establish an exclusively Georgian border force along Georgia's frontiers".[87] Negotiations started between the Georgian and Russian sides on issues related to the withdrawal of the Russian border guards from Georgia.[88] These initial initiatives resulted in an agreement on 27 June 1998, which stated that Georgia would take over the full responsibility for its 12 kilometres maritime border and the Akhalkalaki section of the border with Turkey from September 1998.[89] Later the same year, on 3 November, Georgia and Russia signed two documents on border issues between the two countries. One document covered border co-operation while the other covered the terms of transfer of property. According to the Russian delegation at the meeting, Russian troops would continue to guard the Georgian border for the time being, but the transfer of property was set out to be completed by July 1999.[90]

In 1999, the transfer itself of the duties and the property was accelerated. In July, Lt-Gen. Valery Chkheidze, Chairman of the Georgian State Department of Border Protection, reported that, according to plan, the last Russian border guards had left Abkhazia on 10 July. The installations had been photographed and recorded on video since the Georgian border guards were prevented from going there, as the Abkhazians controlled the area. Chkheidze also stated that the Abkhazian section of the Georgian maritime border would be patrolled from "neutral waters", and that the Georgian border guards would refrain from entering "so-called Abkhaz territorial waters".[91] At a news conference in Tbilisi on 13 August 1999, Chkheidze informed that the Russian border guards had

---

[85] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 3 July 1998.
[86] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1 November 1996.
[87] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 6 March 1998 and *BBC SWB* SU/3260 F/2, 23 June 1998.
[88] Personal communication with the Georgian State Department of Border Protection in Tbilisi, spring 1998.
[89] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 1 July 1998 and *BBC SWB* SU/3260 F/2, 23 June 1998.
[90] *BBC SWB* SU/3375 B/15, 4 November 1998 and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 4 November 1998.
[91] *BBC SWB* SU/3584 F/1, 12 July 1999 and *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 13 July 1999.

completed their withdrawal from the Georgian-Turkish land and maritime borders on 10 July, as envisaged by the 1998 agreement between Georgia and Russia. The news conference was held together with Alexander Manilov, the deputy director of the Russian Federal Border Guard Service, who was in Tbilisi to discuss the timetable for the Russian withdrawal. The deadline was now settled to 1 November 1999, for the Russian border guards to have left Sukhumi and Batumi.[92] This agreement also provided for a division of the weapons and facilities on a 50:50 basis.[93]

On 16 October 1999, the Interfax news agency reported that the withdrawal of the last Russian border guards had been completed on 15 October, when a convoy of the last 27 vehicles left Batumi for Russia. For the first time in 75 years, Georgia was again in control over its borders with neighbouring countries, except for the stretches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The last administrative units left Tbilisi after a ceremony on 27 October 1999. Chkheidze commented on the event by saying that he was "pleased that the process of the withdrawal of the Russian border guards from Georgia had proceeded painlessly". He stated this in spite of the fact that a mine was found in the offices that the Russian border guards had left earlier the same day. This incident he termed as masterminded by those Russian officials who cannot accept losing another "colony".[94]

3.3 Withdrawal of Military Units

3.3.1 Initial Discussions

As the Russian commitments on the territorial integrity in the agreement on bases from 1995 were never fulfilled, the Georgian opposition started to discuss the benefits of the agreement. This discussion intensified after the attempt on Shevardnadze's life on 9 February 1998 as suspicion was thrown upon the base in Vaziani, where a Russian aircraft was supposed to have departed only hours after the attack. This made the Georgian Parliament call for a blockade of the Russian bases in Georgia, and also initiated the debate on the future of Russian bases in Georgia and gave new fuel to the discussion about Georgia's future in the CIS.[95] During his heavily criticised participation in the CIS Summit in Moscow at the end of April 1998, Shevardnadze explained that there was still a possibility to save the Commonwealth and that Georgia was not preparing to withdraw from the co-operation. What he said, however, talking about the

---

[92] *BBC SWB* SU/3615 F/3, 17 August 1999.
[93] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 16 August 1999.
[94] *BBC SWB* SU/3668 F/2, 18 October 1999, *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 18 October 1999, *BBC SWB* SU/3678 F/7, 29 October 1999 and *Nezamisimaya Gazeta*, 4 November 1999.
[95] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 10 February 1998.

Russian military bases in Georgia, and as related to the newly initialled debate about the Russian bases was that "there are no 'pretensions' yet, but they will rise if Moscow will not recognise the Georgian territorial integrity".[96]

With the events in Gali region in Abkhazia in May 1998, when approximately 30 000 returnees were forced to flee Abkhazia once again, the Georgian side started to take a harder stance on the issue of Russian bases in Georgia and co-operation with Russia on the whole. Since the agreement on basing rights in Georgia was never ratified, and neither was the Friendship agreement, the Russian bases in Georgia were said to exist in a 'legal vacuum'. Tbilisi unilaterally denounced the basing agreement in October 1998, but without any reactions from Moscow.[97] In December the same year, the new Georgian Defence Minister, General Davit Tevzadze, called for the signing of a new military agreement between Georgia and Russia to resolve this 'legal vacuum'. The Georgian side claimed the restoration of Tbilisi's control over Abkhazia as a condition for ratifying the treaty.[98]

The year 1998, after the assassination attempt on Shevardnadze in February, May events in Gali and a coup attempt in October, marked an increase in Georgian distrust of Russia and Russians. In a public opinion survey conducted by the United States Information Agency, USIA, in Georgia at the end of 1998, a marked increase in negative attitudes towards Russia could be noticed. Fifty per cent of the people polled said they perceived Russia as the main threat to Georgian security, compared to thirty per cent in a similar survey 1996. Some sixty-four per cent of the respondents said they "strongly oppose[d]" the deployment of Russian troops in Georgia (forty-five per cent 1996). Eighty-four per cent of the respondents also declared that they had no confidence in the Russian (CIS) peacekeeping force along the Inguri River (seventy-six per cent 1996).[99]

The Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Irakli Menagharishvili, spoke out on the issue of the Russian bases in Georgia on 23 May 1999, when he stated that "it is unlikely that the treaty allowing Russia to maintain military bases in Georgia will ever be ratified in its present form". Menagharishvili refrained from mentioning any particular base to be closed first, but the Chairman of the Parliamentary Defence and Security Committee, Revaz Adamia, said that Georgia would prefer to have the bases in Vaziani and Gudauta closed first.[100]

---

[96] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 April 1998.
[97] *Moscow News*, 8-14 March 2000.
[98] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 28 December 1998.
[99] *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, vol. 2, no. 2, 12 January 1999.
[100] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 24 May 1999.

3.3.2 Agreement on Withdrawal

The debate on the bases continued during 1999, until the Russian surprise concession at the OSCE Istanbul Summit on 17 November 1999. Parallel to the OSCE meeting, Russian and Georgian delegations agreed that Moscow would close the two bases in Vaziani and Gudauta by 1 July 2001, and that all military personnel were to have left the bases no later than six months before that date. The date for leaving the two remaining bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi would be determined in talks starting during year 2000.[101]

Almost immediately after the OSCE summit in Istanbul, where the agreement on withdrawal was signed, an altercation broke out on what had been signed and what had not been signed as Moscow tried to reinterpret the agreement.[102] The Georgian side initially criticised Russia for delaying the start of concrete talks on practical issues of the removal of equipment, and Nino Burjanadze, the Chairwoman of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, said that Russia would probably not live up to its commitments. However, on 22 April 2000, Tbilisi and Moscow reached a preliminary agreement on the withdrawal and the following rounds of talks were concentrated on the fate of the two bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi.[103]

At the end of July 2000, Russia notified the OSCE of the intention to start the withdrawal in the beginning of August the same year.[104] On 1 August 2000, the Russian forces started to load their equipment in Vaziani and on 4 August the first train left for the port of Batumi for further transport to Novorossiisk by boat.[105] As part of the agreement reached in Istanbul, Russia also transferred a total of 76 armoured personnel carriers from the base in Akhalkalaki to a Russian base in neighbouring Armenia.[106] The Russian withdrawal from the base in Gudauta began in the beginning of December 2000, with observers from OSCE attending and following the equipment out of Abkhazia and confirming its arrival in Moscow by the end of December.[107] On 25 December ITAR-TASS reported that the Russian transfer of military equipment and weaponry from the two bases in Vaziani and Gudauta was completed ahead of schedule and that there only remained some questions of technical nature concerning these two bases. Some equipment remained at the base in Gudauta, but it was not clear if

---

[101] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 22 November 1999. See also *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* vol. 2, no. 47, 25 November 1999.

[102] The Jamestown Foundation, *Monitor* vol. VI, no. 28, 9 February 2000.

[103] *BBC SWB* SU/3744 F/3, 22 January 2000; SU/3753 F/2, 2 February 2000; SU/3758 F/4, 8 February 2000; SU/3820 B/7, 20 April 2000; and SU/3823 F/1 25 April 2000.

[104] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 2 August 2000.

[105] *BBC SWB* SU/3907 F/1, 1 August 2000 and *Moscow News*, 2-8 August 2000.

[106] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 6 November 2000 and *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, vol. 3, no. 45, 17 November 2000.

[107] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 8 December 2000 and *BBC SWB* SU/4031 B/8, 23 December 2000.

that equipment belonged to the base or the Russian PKF in Abkhazia. The bases were supposed to be completely emptied of personnel and closed down and handed over to the Georgian side by 1 July 2001.[108] The total withdrawal during 2000 amounted to some sixty tanks and more than four hundred armoured vehicles.[109]

3.3.3 Uncertain Future

Parallel to the withdrawals from the two bases in Vaziani and Gudauta, negotiations continued between Georgia and Russia on the finalisation of the withdrawal, meaning the two remaining bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi. The Georgian side took a firm position on the withdrawal plan and opted for a complete withdrawal of the Russian bases in Georgia by 2003. The Russian side, on the other hand, opted for a new basing agreement and proposed basing rights for a period of 15 years. Allegedly, Shevardnadze could agree on those conditions if Moscow would provide adequate support on the Abkhazian issue.[110] In June 2001, this question was not solved even if it should have been so during 2000 according to the Istanbul Agreement, but still, some components of the bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki were handed over to the Georgian side.[111] As of July 2001, the question of the bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki was not resolved,[112] and Russia pressed Georgia for a 15-year lease agreement and would in return be prepared to reduce Georgia's $179 million gas debt. The Georgians offered a three-year agreement.[113] At a meeting in Tbilisi on 15 May 2001, the Russian side once again offered to vacate the bases within 15 years, but added that the cost of doing so would amount to some $140 million. Ilya Klebanov, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, said also that the closure "could be expedited if the West would contribute toward that sum". The U.S. offered some $10 million in 2000 for facilitating the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. After the meeting, Shevardnadze said that the deadline for withdrawal will not be set until Tbilisi and Moscow have signed a new framework Russian-Georgian treaty, which was under discussion.[114]

As many observers suspected at an early stage, the Russian side failed to hand over the two bases in Vaziani and Gudauta by 1 July 2001, despite promises to do so just a couple of days before that date. Ilya Klebanov said on 22 June that

---

[108] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 29 December 2000.
[109] Anatol Lieven (2001).
[110] *BBC SWB* SU/4031 F/1, 23 December 2000 and *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 27 December 2000.
[111] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20 February 2001.
[112] Georgy Quilitaya (2001).
[113] Anatol Lieven (2001).
[114] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 16 May 2001.

Russia would leave the two bases on time. This statement was contradicted by Colonel General Shpak, Commander of Russia's Airborne Troops, the following day when he said that due to the blockade of the base, we will not be able to leave until later, "possibly by the end of the summer".[115] As the 1 July passed, Russia handed over the base in Vaziani to Georgia, but the fate of the base in Gudauta remained uncertain. According to Giorgi Baramidze, Chairman of the Georgian Parliament's Defence and Security Committee, the Russian officials claimed that they could not hand over the base "as Georgia cannot guarantee the security of military equipment still in Gudauta".[116] As a result of this, Georgia turned to the OSCE for consultations regarding Russia's violations of earlier commitments.[117] The Georgian reactions were rather strong, with the MFA condemning the Russian failure to vacate the base in Gudauta. Zurab Zhvania, the speaker in the Georgian parliament called Moscow's failure to comply with earlier agreements totally "unacceptable".[118] The mildest reactions came maybe from Shevardnadze, who said that "there are certain difficulties" and that Russia "on the whole has fulfilled the obligations ... to take excessive military equipment out of Georgia.[119]

To complicate things further, the two remaining bases were situated in areas that have complicated relations with Tbilisi. In Batumi, the base has good relations with the local leader, Aslan Abashidze, who in his turn has very complicated relations with Tbilisi. The base in Akhalkalaki is not much better off. The area is inhabited almost exclusively by Armenians and the base is almost the only employer in one of Georgia's poorest regions. The Armenian population's fear of Turkey makes them pro-Russian as they see it as the only country strong enough to ward off a potential threat. The leadership as well as the population in the region is therefore strongly for a continued Russian presence and against a handover of the base to Georgia.[120]

On 10 October 1997, Georgia manifested its interest in working with other states to reduce its dependence on Russia, by being one of the founding states of GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), representing the first letter. The explicit aim of the GUAM was to co-operate in the fields of combating separatism, seeking peaceful solution to conflicts and integrating into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures of security and co-operation.[121] GUAM became GUUAM in April 1999 when Uzbekistan joined the group. The participating states have, however, been unable to work out a strategic framework for its functioning and in May 2001 the participating countries

---

[115] *Georgian Daily Digest*, 25 June 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org.
[116] *Georgian Daily Digest*, 2 July 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org.
[117] Ibid.
[118] *Georgian Daily Digest*, 3 July 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Anatol Lieven (2001).
[121] Anatol Lieven (2000).

seemed to be slowly losing interest in the project. This was something that pleased Moscow that all the time saw the organisation as inimical to its interests and perceived it as a "potential political danger".[122] At the same time as Uzbekistan joined the GUUAM, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan, left the CIS Collective Security Treaty which expired on 2 May 1999, further weakening Moscow's position in Georgia.[123] A summit of GUUAM was eventually held at Yalta in the Ukraine on 7 June 2001. The Presidents from the five countries signed a charter while the Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed a consular convention.[124]

3.4 Summary

The Russian policy towards Georgia concerning Russian armed units based in Georgia shifted strongly at several occasions during the period of this study. Initially, Russia stated an interest in withdrawing all units from Georgia, as Georgia was not a member of the CIS and Russia saw it as a waste of resources to keep the forces there. This position soon changed and Russia and Georgia agreed to base Russian border guards as well as military units in Georgia for the foreseeable future. In the second period of this study both Russian and Georgian attitude towards this changed and in 1998, an agreement was reached on the withdrawal of the border guards, and they withdrew during 1999. The same year, Russia and Georgia reached an initial agreement about the Russian military bases in Georgia. According to this agreement, Russia was supposed to withdraw two bases before 1 July 2001. After the agreement was reached, a debate broke out between the Georgian and Russian sides on the terms and speed of the withdrawal. As the deadline passed, Russia handed over one base, while another one was still disputed. Russia claimed that there were problems with the security of the base in Abkhazia and that this might be solved only at the end of the summer.

---

[122] Igor Torbakov (2001).
[123] *BBC SWB* SU/3526 F/1, 5 May 1999.
[124] *Georgian Daily Digest*, 8 June 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org.

4. Visa Regime

4.1 The Chechen Influence on Georgian-Russian Relations

Chechnya was involved in the developments in Georgia on two occasions, opposing the politics of the central power in Tbilisi. After being ousted in 1992, Gamsakhurdia used the Chechen capital Grozny as a safe haven, from which he later returned and tried to regain power in Georgia. The second time Chechnya counteracted Tbilisi was when the field commander Shamil Basayev led a battalion of fighters from the northern Caucasus and fought on the Abkhazian side against the federal Georgian troops during the war in Abkhazia.[125] When the Chechen war started in 1994, it was hardly surprising that Tbilisi took a pro-Moscow stance, especially as Moscow was fighting 'separatists' and Georgia drew a parallel to its own separatist regions: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At an early stage of the armed conflict, Shevardnadze issued a statement on the situation in Chechnya, explaining that "no other form of action is available to Russia, and that the preservation of territorial integrity is of vital importance for the Russian state, as it is for other countries", alluding to Georgia's problems with its own territorial integrity.[126]

Notwithstanding the complicated relations between Georgia and Chechnya and also between Georgia and Russia, this Chechen war never reached the heat in the debate and actions as it did during the war which started in 1999. The tension lessened after Moscow and Grozny signed the Khasavyurt cease-fire agreement on 31 August 1996, brokered by Alexandr Lebed, then Security Council Secretary and Chechen Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov.[127] The Khasavyurt Agreement was followed by a Peace Agreement signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov in Moscow on 12 May 1997.[128]

With the cease-fire, Chechnya achieved a de facto independence from Russia, but remained dependent on Russia in many ways. The Chechen geopolitical situation demanded at that time a rapprochement with Georgia for access to the outer world, without passing through Russia proper. As mentioned above, Chechen relations with the present Georgian leadership had been strained after the events in 1992-93. The new Chechen leader, Aslan Maskhadov, therefore started a rapprochement campaign that culminated with his visit to Tbilisi on 30 August 1997. The meeting between Shevardnadze and Maskhadov touched upon several issues, important for developing relations between Tbilisi and Grozny. The two leaders said after the meeting that "now it is necessary to start a revival of the good-neighbourly relations ... that have united the Chechen and Georgian peoples through the centuries". A concrete result of the meeting was the signing

[125] *OMRI Daily Digest*, 21 June 1996.
[126] *BBC SWB* SU/2181 F/2, 17 December 1994.
[127] *RFE/RL* no. 170 Part I, 3 September 1996.
[128] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 12 May 1997.

of a document 'On Practical Steps for Developing Co-operation in the Fields of Economy, Culture and Science'.[129]

Although the Georgian side always was very careful about not putting too much weight on the relations with Chechnya, the meeting between Shevardnadze and Maskhadov was of significance. The Georgian side expressed cautiousness about the relations with Chechnya, saying that Georgia has Abkhazia, while Russia has Chechnya, and Georgia would therefore be careful not to harm the relations with Russia.[130] The Chechen leader, in his turn, expressed his satisfaction with the meeting and his conversation with Shevardnadze.[131]

The Russian side on the other hand was less pleased with the budding relations between Tbilisi and Grozny. The Russian Interior Minister Sergey Stepashin at one point warned the Georgian leadership against too close relations with the Chechens. He said that this would not worry Russia, but "it will soon start to worry Georgia". As a response from the Georgian side, Tbilisi once again reiterated its support for the territorial integrity of Russia, and said that Georgia's relations with Chechnya would always be "in compliance with the constitutions of Russia and Georgia".[132]

As the hostilities in Dagestan started in August 1999, the Russian MFA stated that Russia viewed the developments as "an armed action by terrorists aimed at imposing unconstitutional order in a constituent part of the Russian Federation".[133] The already strained Georgian-Russian relations deteriorated almost immediately when the war in Chechnya started in 1999, especially after Russian aircrafts dropped bombs allegedly aimed for Dagestan on the Georgian side of the border.[134] On 22 September 1999, Caucasus Press, a news agency in Tbilisi, reported that a note had been sent from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Tbilisi and Baku, the capital in neighbouring Azerbaijan, "warning of the 'inadmissibility' of either directly abetting the Chechen militants or allowing mercenaries and arms to transit Georgia and Azerbaijan en route for Chechnya".[135] The Russian accusations were repeated and intensified during the autumn with the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Igor Ivanov, arguing that it was "in the interests of both Georgia and Azerbaijan to cooperate with Russia to prevent Chechnya from becoming a hotbed of international terrorism". Claiming to have proofs that armed Chechen groups used Georgian and Azerbaijani

---

[129] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 2 September 1997.
[130] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 23 August 1997.
[131] *BBC SWB* SU/3013 B/3 and F/2, 2 September 1997 and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 2 September 1997.
[132] *BBC SWB* SU/3361 F/4, 19 October 1998.
[133] *BBC SWB* SU/3614 B/4, 16 August 1999 and *BBC SWB* SU/3662 B/2, 11 October 1999.
[134] *Keesing's Record of World Events*, News Digest for August 1999.
[135] *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* vol. 2, no. 38, 24 September 1999.

territory for their operations, Ivanov further suggested joint operations between the border services to "resolve the existing problems".[136]

Another thing that frustrated Moscow was the unofficial Chechen representation in the Georgian capital and the Georgians' refusal to close it. The representation consisted of a 'Representation Office' and an 'Information Centre' with a total of more than 100 people employed.[137] Replying to the Russian demand, Shevardnadze said that the mission had no legal basis for its existence in Georgia, but that contacts were maintained with the chief representative. Shevardnadze also said that "the Georgian leadership had got used to the fact that Abkhaz separatists have their own representative in Moscow", noting that the Abkhazian mission was lacking official status in Moscow.[138]

The discussion concerning armed Chechen formations took, however, a slightly unexpected turn in the beginning of the summer when Shevardnadze for the first time admitted that some Chechen fighters were residing in Georgia. The Georgian President told a news conference that some 200 Chechens who had undergone medical treatment in Georgia and other places were still residing in the country.[139] When the visa regime was introduced, the Georgian police established roadblocks in eastern Georgia and apprehended in this operation three heavily armed Chechen fighters.[140] After this first case of intervention against Chechens residing in Georgia, confirming Moscow's accusations, at least partly, Vakhtang Shamiladze, the Chairman of the Parliament's sub-committee for relations with peoples of the Caucasus, stated that "the Pankisi [gorge] is a haven for a large number of fighters, among whom there are not only Chechens but also Arabs, Afghans and Syrians". He also accused the Georgian leadership of "hiding its head in the sand" by not admitting the presence of Chechen fighters in Georgia.[141] Shevardnadze's statement in June was followed up by an even clearer statement on the lack of Georgian control in the Pankisi gorge, when admitting in his weekly radio-interview on 18 December 2000 that "I cannot rule out the possibility of ethnic Chechens citizen of Russia, that is so-called Chechen fighters, hiding in the Pankisi gorge".[142]

---

[136] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 5 October 1999.
[137] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 6 March 2000.
[138] *BBC SWB* SU/3724 F/2, 22 December 1999.
[139] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 27 June 2000.
[140] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 8 December 2000.
[141] *Prime-News* in Tbilisi, 25 December 2000, posted by BBC Monitoring on 25 December 2000.
[142] *BBC SWB* SU/4028 F/4, 20 December 2000.

4.2 Visa Regime

With the Russian border guards withdrawing from Georgia during 1999, Moscow saw a growing problem in controlling the borders with southern Caucasus.[143] As a result of this, on 4 November 1999, just a week after the last Russian border troops left Georgia, Putin raised the issue of a visa regime with Georgia and Azerbaijan. At that time, he instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to "begin, as a matter of urgency, negotiations with the Georgian and possibly with the Azerbaijani side on the introduction of a visa regime for individuals from those countries entering Russian territory". Putin made no secret that this was a direct reaction to Tbilisi's refusal to jointly patrol the Chechen part of the Georgian-Russian border.[144] The talks on a visa regime were heavily delayed and only on 5 December 2000 a visa regime was introduced between Georgia and Russia.[145] This was an unprecedented event in the visa free regime within the CIS and therefore of importance for the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow. The main Russian motive for implementing the regime was that the border between Georgia and Russia was not properly protected. According to Moscow, the Chechens used Georgian territory to recover from the fighting in Chechnya, but also as a transit area for weapons and mercenaries coming to Chechnya to fight the federal Russian forces. Moscow claimed that Georgia lacked the means, or the political will, to hinder armed Chechen formations from using the Georgian territory. The initial Georgian reactions to the suggestions of a visa regime were positive as Georgia saw this as a possibility to exercise pressure on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If Russia was to implement the visa regime on the whole stretch of the Georgian-Russian border, this would force the Abkhazians and Ossetians to go to Tbilisi for a visa, or they would be trapped inside their respective territories. The Georgian Border Guard Commander, Valery Chkheidze even saw the visa regime as a good reminder for Russia that Georgia was an independent state.[146] As the introduction date approached, the Georgian attitude towards the visa regime started to change and Shevardnadze even called it "discriminatory", saying that it contradicted the interests of Georgia and Russia, as it would render the comprehensive Russian-Georgian friendship treaty null and void.[147] When it became clear that Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be excluded from the visa regime, on humanitarian grounds, Revaz Adamia called it a de facto annexation of Georgian territory.[148] The world community took the Georgian side in this issue and both the

---

[143] *Moscow News*, no. 39, 13-19 October 1999.
[144] *Moscow News*, no. 43, 10-16 November 1999.
[145] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 30 November 1999 and *BBC SWB* SU/3655 F/3, 2 October 1999.
[146] *RFE/RL Newsline* Part I, 5 November 1999.
[147] *BBC SWB* SU/3997 F/1, 14 November 2000.
[148] *BBC SWB* SU/4007 F/2, 25 November 2000.

European Union and the United States issued statements in support of the Georgian territorial integrity.[149]

4.3 Georgian Economic Dependence

Another consequence of the introduction of a visa regime was the difficulties the Georgian guest workers in Russia would face. As of July 2001, Georgia was still heavily dependent on Russia for financial reasons even if Turkey had taken over the place as biggest foreign trading partner. Approximately some 500 000 to 700 000 Georgians work in Russia, many of them illegally. According to Russian figures, they remit some $1,5 billion, while the figure was limited to some $600-700 million according to Georgian sources. This sum being twice the Georgian annual budget, showed the importance of it for Georgia in economic terms.[150]

4.4 Summary

During the first period in this study, Chechnya was a problem for both Tbilisi and Moscow. Grozny acted against federal Georgian interests in two cases, when supporting the Abkhazians in the fight against Tbilisi and when supporting Gamsakhurdia against Shevardnadze. Grozny under Dudayev was also fighting against Russian rule over Chechnya, and Georgia was politically supporting Moscow's fight against Dudayev's separatism as they saw parallels for Georgia's fight for control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For both sides, Chechnya was a problem and they were therefore on good terms over the policy concerning Chechnya. As the first Chechen war ended and a rapprochement between Tbilisi and Grozny started, a controversy between Tbilisi and Moscow started. This controversy was rather mild until the hostilities in northern Caucasus erupted during the summer of 1999. As the fighting broke out in Chechnya, the controversy escalated and Russia started to discuss measures against Tbilisi. These discussions resulted in the introduction of a visa regime at the end of 2000.

---

[149] See page 23 for the statements.
[150] *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, vol. 3, no. 46, 30 November 2000.

5. Russian Policy

5.1 Continuity and Change

Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia has shown both continuity and change in the three issues in this study, and the findings will shortly be summarised here. Concerning Abkhazia, Russian policy has shown continuity in both rhetoric and implementation, even if rhetoric and implementation not always corresponded. Russian rhetoric supported Georgian territorial integrity both in the first and second of the two periods in this study. Russian policy implementation showed also continuity over the two periods, as there were strong indications for support of the Abkhazian independence in both periods. The problem in this case was that rhetoric and implementation did not correspond, as shown in table 5.1.

	1991-1994	1997-2001
Rhetoric	Supporting Georgian territorial integrity	Supporting Georgian territorial integrity
Implementation	Indications of support for Abkhazian independence	Indications of support for Abkhazian independence

Table 5.1 Rhetoric and implementation of Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia concerning the Abkhazian conflict.

When discussing the two other issues in this study, the picture becomes a bit more ambiguous. In these two cases, policy rhetoric and implementation corresponded better, but the policy changed between the two periods. Concerning armed units, Russia initially wanted to withdraw them from Georgia, but Georgia persuaded Russia to keep them in Georgia for a foreseeable future. In the second period, Georgia started to demand a Russian withdrawal of its armed units. Russia withdrew the border guards smoothly in 1998, but the military bases became more of a stumbling-block. Russia initially refused to withdraw the units, but at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999, Russia suddenly changed opinion and agreed to withdraw two units before 1 July 2001 and negotiate the withdrawal of the remaining units during 2000. As soon as this agreement was signed, Russia started to protract the talks on the implementation of the withdrawal. Notwithstanding this protraction, Russia withdrew considerable amounts of military equipment during 2000, but failed, however, to return one of the two based as agreed upon. By 1 July 2001, Russia had returned the base in Vaziani, but not the one in Gudauta, giving security concerns as reasons for not doing so on time. As of July 2001, the future schedule for the Russian withdrawal remained an open question.

	1991-1994	1997-2001
Rhetoric	Initially promoting withdrawal, later changing to basing rights	Initially bases in Georgia, later changing to withdrawal and then hesitation/protraction
Implementation	Bases in Georgia	Initially bases in Georgia, later beginning to withdraw, but not as agreed upon, future uncertain

Table 5.2 Rhetoric and implementation of Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia concerning Russian armed units in Georgia.

The Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia over Chechnya has also changed significantly between the two periods in the study. During the first period, Russia and Georgia agreed that Chechen separatism was a problem and Georgia politically supported the Russian policy in Chechnya. A softer Georgian policy towards Chechnya in general, and non-cooperation with Russia to apprehend armed Chechens in Georgia in particular, drastically deteriorated Georgian-Russian relations during the second period. As a response to the Georgian refusal to jointly patrol the Chechen part of the Georgian-Russian border, Russia imposed a visa regime on Georgia, starting on 5 December 2000.

	1991-1994	1997-2001
Rhetoric	Good relations, consensus about the "Chechen problem"	Deteriorating relations, Russia condemning Georgia for not intervening against armed Chechen units on Georgian territory
Implementation	Nothing specific concerning Chechnya	Introducing a visa regime to pressure Georgia for compliance with Russian demands for taking measures against armed Chechen units

Table 5.3 Rhetoric and implementation of Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia concerning the influence of the Chechen conflict.

5.2 Concluding Discussion

As shown in this study, we can find both continuity and change in the Russian policy vis-à-vis Georgia. In the Abkhazian case, we see continuity, but we also see a difference between the Russian rhetoric and policy implementation. Concerning the armed units in Georgia, we can identify several changes in the Russian policy. When analysing the Russian policy over the 'Chechen connection', we also find change.

The Russian policy towards Georgia showed an ambiguous pattern during the time of this study. If we refrain from looking at the Abkhazian case, where no changes occurred, the changes in Russian policy went in two different directions. The start of the withdrawal of armed units from Georgia supports the findings of Pavel Baev and Dov Lynch, that Russia will make a strategic retreat from Georgia, even if the uncertainties seemed to be considerable by the summer of 2001. Looking at the consequences of the conflict in Chechnya, the findings show a completely different result. Russia moved its position towards a more assertive policy towards Georgia with the introduction of the visa regime on the 5 December 2000. These findings support Stephen Blank's and Ariel Cohen's argument that Russia's strategic interests in the Caucasus will remain considerable in the foreseeable future.

A final finding supports the argument by Khripunov and Matthews, who argued that Russia will change tools for policy implementation in the Caucasus. The withdrawal of the armed units and the introduction of political tools in the relations between Georgia and Russia can clearly be seen in the cases with the armed units and the Chechen issue. Looking at Abkhazia, the picture becomes more ambiguous as we can see the use of military as well as economic and political tools in this issue.

As we can see three different trends in this study, continuity, change for the better and change for the worse for Georgia, it is very difficult to predict future Russian policy towards Georgia. One basic assumption is that Russia has a strategic interest in participating in the extraction and transportation of the Caspian energy sources and this might guide Russian policy on Georgia as well. The possibilities for Russia to participate in the 'oil game' will depend on the Russian capability to continue its change in policy tools from military to economic and political tools. A growing Russian economy will more easily support Russian interests in the region. Russia needs to act with economic tools, in support of the countries in the region to be able to play a role and to be accepted as a reliable partner. Georgia is at present very sceptical of all Russian activities. To improve the relations, Russia needs to contribute in a positive way to the developments in the Georgian society.

Bibliography

Printed media, compilation of CIS media and database media

BBC Monitoring
BBC Summary of World Broadcast
Eurasia Newsletter, International Institute for Caspian Studies
Georgia Daily Digest, Eurasianet.org
Keesing's Records of World Events
Kraznaya Zvezda, Moscow
Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation
Moscow News, Moscow
Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Moscow
OMRI Daily Digest
Prime-News, Tbilisi
RFE/RL Caucasus Report
RFE/RL Newsline

Books, articles and material from Internet

Baev, Pavel (1997) *Russia's Policies in the Caucasus*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Blank, Stephen (1995) "Russia's Real Drive to the South" in *Orbis*, vol. 39, no. 3, Summer.

Blank, Stephen (1998) "New Trends in Caucasian Security" in *Eurasian Studies*, vol. no. 3, Spring.

Blum, Douglas W. (1998) "Domestic Politics and Russia's Caspian Policy" in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2, April-June.

Cohen, Ariel (1996) "The 'New Great Game': Pipeline Politics in Eurasia" in *Eurasian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Spring.

Cohen, Jonathan, Ed. (1999) *A question of sovereignty: The Georgia-Abkhazia peace process*, London: Conciliation Resources.

Croissant, Michael P. (1996) "Oil and Russian Imperialism in the Transcaucasus" in *Eurasian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, Spring.

Crow, Suzanne (1993) "Processes and Policies" in *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 20, 14 May.

European Parliament (2001) *Visa requirements between Russia and Georgia*, downloaded on: 10 April 2001, last update: n.a, on Internet, http://www.europa.eu.net.

Forsythe, Rosemarie (1996) *The Politics of Oil in The Caucasus and Central Asia*, London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Goldenberg, Suzanne (1994) *Pride of Small Nations - The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.

Hewitt, B. G. (1996) "Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership" in Wright, J. F. R., et al., *Transcaucasian Boundaries*, London: UCL Press Limited.

Jalali, Bahar (1999) *Oil and Gas in the Caspian Sea: Economic and Political Ramifications*, IREX, downloaded on: 10 April 2001, last update: n.a, on Internet, http://www.irex.org/publications/policy-papers/oil-gas.htm.

Khripunov, Igor and Matthews, Mary M. (1996) "Russia's oil and gas interest group and its foreign policy agenda" in *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 43, no. 3, May/June.

Lelyveld, Michael (2000) *Russia: Some State Fear Putin's Vision*, RFE/RL, downloaded on: 10 April 2001, last update: 4 January 2000, on Internet, http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2000/01/f.ru.000104131859.html.

Lieven, Anatol (2000) *GUUAM: What Is It, and What Is It For?*, EurasiaNet, downloaded on: 31 May 2001, last update: 18 December 2000, on Internet, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav121800.shtml.

Lieven, Anatol (2001) *Imperial Outpost and Social Provider: The Russians and Akhalkalaki*, EurasiaNet, downloaded on: 5 April 2001, last update: n.a, on Internet, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022001.shtml.

Lynch, Dov (1998) *The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian 'Peacekeeping' Policy*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Lynch, Dov (2000) *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Houndmills, Basingstroke, Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press Ltd.

Norberg, Johan (1999) "Filling a 'Sacred Place' - Russia and the International Involvement in Caucasia" in Oldberg, Ingmar et al., *AT A LOSS - Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990s*, Stockholm: FOA.

Quilitaya, Georgy (2001) *Russia and Georgia: New Round of Negotiations - Moscow and Tbilisi in No Way Could Come to an Agreement*, Trans-Caspian Project, downloaded on: 12 April 2001, last update: n.a, on Internet, http://www.transcaspian.ru/cgi-bin/web.exe/eng/13883.html.

Torbakov, Igor (2001) *GUUAM'S LOSS IS RUSSIA'S GAIN*, EurasiaNet, downloaded on: 31 May 2001, last update: 18 April 2001, on Internet, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav041801.shtml.

U.S Department of State (2000) *Russian Imposition of Visa Regime on Georgia*, Press Statement, downloaded on: 18 February 2001, last update: n.a, on

Internet, http://www.secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/2000/ps001205c.html.

Zverev, Alexei (1996) "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994" in Coppieters, B., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS.

Index