

The Abkhazian Conflict 2004 – 08

BATNAs and Intensity

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this master thesis is to (i) describe the developments in the Abkhazian Conflict¹ from the Rose Revolution (November 2003 – January 2004) to the present day, and (ii) point out why the conflict is now more difficult to solve through negotiations than at the outset of the period under analysis, through (iii) mapping out the extent to which the parties can do without a negotiated agreement and (iv) the level of tensions between them. That the conflict is more "malign" now than at the time of the Rose Revolution was not as obvious at the time I started writing, but recent events have made it clear worldwide that this mainly forgotten issue is an increasingly "hot potato".

The condition of the Abkhazian Conflict is relevant not only for those who are directly involved, it also has global consequences: The latter years' increasing tension between Russia and the EU/NATO countries has a focal point in the relationship between the Post-Soviet republic of Georgia and its great northern neighbour. While Georgia is neither a member of NATO nor the EU, it has been very open about its "Western" orientation since the revolution that brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power, and has deepened its relationship with these IGOs. Hence, conflicts between Moscow and Tbilisi have a tendency to spill over into Russia's relationship with these two organizations. The Abkhazian Conflict has established itself as the most unstable of the disagreements between the two states, as seen in recent news, and events there may cause ripples spreading far away from the narrow strip of Black Sea coast that is Abkhazia.

However, this thesis is not an analysis of Georgian–Russian relations concerning Abkhazia; it is about the conflict between Georgia and the self–proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia. The regional great power games and the basic conflict affect each other in a mutually reinforcing way, and while the total picture emerges only after incorporating both "levels" of the conflict, there simply is no room for this within an MA thesis. Thus, my focus is limited to the local level, where we find the original core of the matter – not a conflict between resurgent Russia and an expanding NATO, but a conflict between a small state and one of its provincial minority populations. I will of course note the

¹ Defined here as the conflict between Georgia and the self–proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia over controlling Abkhazia.

opportunities and limitations imposed on these parties by the great powers involved, but not delve into the reasons for their actions.

While leaning on earlier works on the subject I have also thoroughly studied news reports; documents from IGOs, NGOs and educational/informational institutions; and spoken/written statements by important actors. The online news-sites Civil Georgia, *Kavkaskiy Uzel* and *Lenta* have been particularly important for mapping out interactions and finding key texts.² Such texts have also been found through analysis of books written by actors, e.g. Tamaz Nadareishvili's book on the Abkhazian War and the book by Taras Shamba/Aleksandr Neproshin on the foundations of Abkhazian statehood.³ Finally, I did field work in Abkhazia November 16–25 2007 - in Abkhazia's capital and in the region where most of the returned refugees from the war live. I interviewed representatives of different communities, NGOs and the authorities – and also got ample opportunities to meet and talk with people who knew much about the conflict. The interviews have been treated both as sources to facts, and for analysis of local attitudes to important issues. Due to the inherent risk in getting the facts from people involved in the conflict, I have found confirmation from second sources in such cases.

The approach to analysis applied in this thesis has made it necessary for me to gather data on demography, economy, military structures, formal rights and the internal political constitution of the actors. Throughout the information gathering process I have several times encountered the problem of contradictory sources. These five topics are highly political, and many see an interest in exaggerating or minimizing figures – or keeping them secret. For this reason I have on occasion been forced to list alternative figures (demography) or present data which is neither complete nor accurate (military power). Still, the data I have gathered give a correct enough impression that one may draw conclusions regarding the effects of these factors on the conflict.

Two other problems I have faced when writing about this conflict are *complexity* and *change*. Firstly, not only is this conflict highly complex, but my method of analysis in itself demands a lot of room. I originally wanted to incorporate some of the "upper level"

²Civil Georgia has English translations, while all texts from *Kavkaskiy Uzel* and *Lenta* have been translated from Russian by the author.

³Nadareishvili led the bloc *Democratic Abkhazia* up to the days of the war, and was later the leader of the Government of Abkhazia in Exile (GAE). Shamba originally campaigned for Abkhazia to secede from Georgia and join the USSR, and in the early 1990s wrote a famous proposal for a federation treaty between Abkhazia and Georgia. He is also an elder brother of former *Aidyglara* Party leader and current Min. of Foreign Affairs Sergey Shamba. Chervonnaya, Svetlana: *Conflict in the Caucasus. Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow*. (Gothic Image Publications 1994), p. 57–58, p. 109.

of the conflict by treating the Russian Federation (RF) as an object of study, but eventually had to treat it exclusively as an explanatory variable and not a dependent variable. Secondly, the conflict has recently reached an extremely high level of tension. When I started writing the situation was tense but still frozen. These days, outside observers fear war. I have tried to include recent developments, but due to time constraints data collection ended on May 6 2008.

Finally, *language* proved a puzzle since words are political, and I strive for neutrality. Abkhazia's capital is called *Akwa* in Abkhaz, *Sukhum* in Russian and *Sokhumi* in Georgian; the easternmost region of Abkhazia is *Gali* to the Georgians but *Gal* to the Abkhaz; and what the Republic of Abkhazia (RA) refer to as *Upper Kodori* was renamed *Upper Abkhazia* by Georgia (RG)⁴ in 2006. I will refer to these places by the names applied by the UN: Sokhumi, Gali and Upper Kodori. Regarding transcription, Abkhaz names are transcribed as one would usually transcribe Cyrillic instead of using the "Georgianized" forms that are sometimes applied. This is because the Abkhaz themselves use a modified version of the Cyrillic alphabet, and not the Georgian *Mkhedruli* alphabet.⁵

I will start off this thesis by giving an overview of my theoretical approach (Ch. 2), and then move on to define the desired utilities of the parties by mapping out historical interactions and discourses on history (Ch.3). Following this, I will give an overview of data relevant to the conflict regarding demography (Ch. 4), economy (Ch. 5), military capabilities (Ch. 6), recognition and rights (Ch. 7) and social cohesion (Ch. 8). I will then move on to describe interactions between the parties with a particular eye to patterns in conflict intensity (Ch. 9) before I conclude by determining what constellations of BATNAs and intensity have been seen in the period under analysis and pointing out some key factors causing the conflict to become more malign (Ch. 10).

2. Theoretical approach: Desires utilities, BATNAs and Intensity

2.1. Group formation

Identity is at the core of all conflicts, in the sense that there cannot be conflicts without groups that oppose each other, and all groups are identity-based – social constructs created through what Umberto Eco calls cultural agreement,⁶ i.e. the groups exist because

⁴ There is no conventional or formal long form of the country's name. Since "the Republic of" is sometimes used, my abbreviation for this party will be "RG."

⁵ E.g. "Gvindzhiya" and "Khadzhimba" for Гвинджия and Хаджимба, instead of "Gunjia" and "Khajimba."

⁶ Heradstveit, Daniel and Bjørge, Tore: *Politisk kommunikasjon*. (TANO AS 1996, 2nd edition), p. 33

the individuals that they consist of perceive them to be there. The groups in the Abkhazian conflict are *states* (de facto or de jure); organisations claiming a monopoly of violence and taxation on a certain territory, and run by elites that base themselves upon the (voluntary or forced) cooperation of a certain population. These populations contain *core nations* – ethnic groups that are somehow seen (and identify themselves) as the foundation of the state. The core nations of the RA and the RG, the Abkhaz and the Kartvelians,⁷ have in common that they have experienced a period of nationalism–fuelled war during the formative period of their contemporary nation–states. In the book *Modern Hatreds*, that concerns the construction of nations/ethnoses and causes for "ethnic wars", Stuart J. Kaufman accounts for three main theories about the formation of ethnoses and the rise of nationalism: Instrumentalism,⁸ primordialism and constructivism.⁹ The first one is associated with rationalist approaches to analysis, and argues that ethnic groups are formed on the basis of common interests, and often actively created by elites that wish to exploit them as instruments of power. Constructivism agrees with instrumentalism that nations are social constructs, but does not see rational pursuit of material interest as necessary for such groups to arise. Primordialism, on the other hand, claims that individuals' ethnic identities are given and rather unchangeable. However, Kaufman quotes primordialism's founder Clifford Geertz as agreeing that ethnic identity is socially constructed, but emphasizing that there is a limit to its "plasticity".

Kaufman promotes what he calls *the symbolist synthesis*, in which nations are seen as social constructs but the process of construction as limited by the need for "symbolic claims [to] seem credible and relevant": The individuals of the proposed group must *prior to construction* be anchored in common myth–symbol complexes that ethnic entrepreneurs utilize. "Myth" in Kaufman's vocabulary does not imply that the implicated view of history is *false*, only that it is a view of history that has a certain importance: For example giving group X ("us") the role of "perpetual victim," and the group Y ("them") the role of "perpetrator." Due to the connotations of falsehood, I will instead apply "historical

⁷"Abkhaz" here refers to the ethnic group, their culture and language; whereas people and matters concerning the geographical territory of Abkhazia will be referred to as "Abkhazian." "Kartvelian" refers to the groups speaking Kartvelian languages (see 3.1) as their mother tongue, whereas people and matters concerning the geographical territory of Georgia (including the breakaway republics) will be referred to as "Georgian." In matters concerning the political units, the abbreviations "RA" and "RG" will be used. Please note that direct quotes do not necessarily follow these rules, as these distinctions are not in common use – I only use them here for clarity.

⁸ Kaufman, Stuart J.: *Modern Hatreds. The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell University Press 2001), p. 17.

⁹ Kaufman 2001, p. 23.

discourse" for Kaufman's concept. A discourse is defined as a "web of meaning" where concepts are given certain values and placed in relation to each other. The sum of conflicting discourses on a certain subject is referred to as a "discursive order", while what is outside all discourses – that is, never brought into the debate – is said to be in the "field of discursivity." Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau refer to the "spinning" of such webs as "articulation",¹⁰ and text or speech that articulates the content of a certain discourse is often called a "representation". Thus, it is possible to say that *all nations are discursive groups* – they are constituted by acceptance of certain discourses. "Symbol" means an "emotionally charged shorthand reference to a myth",¹¹ and may be places (e.g. battlefields) objects (flags, relics, buildings) or even famous historical events where the content of the myth is concentrated. By mentioning or displaying symbols, a speaker invokes the myth/discourse associated with it, and may thus call forth certain behaviour from the listener. This is akin to what Louis Althusser's calls "interpellation" – a speaker addresses the audience with monikers that make them naturally assume certain roles ("subject positions") and proceed to behave in ways associated with this role.¹² Such "role behaviour" may entail treating other people not on the basis of their individual traits and actions, but based on the relation you see their group as having to your group. Such "collectivization of agency" may in extreme cases completely cancel out the perpetrator's idea of her/his own individuality and that of the victim – thus preventing feelings of pity or responsibility.

While accepting the symbolist synthesis, I wish to emphasise that *objective groups* do exist and matter: Economic classes, inhabitants of certain regions, users of certain languages, men and women etc. – all these groups exist objectively, and membership in them will constrain actors and/or give them certain opportunities – whether or not they realise that they are members of the group. If people ignore constraints imposed by objective group membership, their actions will simply be frustrated or punished. But *manifest conflict* does not occur until somebody perceives a distinction between themselves and others on the basis of myth–symbol complexes and draw certain conclusions from this perceived divide.

¹⁰Winther Jørgensen, Marianne and Phillips, Louise: *Diskursanalyse som teori og metode*. (Roskilde Universitetsforlag 1999), p. 36

¹¹ Kaufman 2001, p. 17

¹² Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, p. 25; Culler, Jonathan: *Literary Theory – A very short introduction*. (Oxford University Press 2000), p. 45.

2.2. *Desired utilities, rationalism and constructivism*

The division of goods between objectively existing groups may be glaringly unjust, but at least one party must *perceive* the situation as undesirable for manifest conflict to arise. The basic thing is, again, that people start perceiving that there are different groups in society: That "they" possess something you desire, or threaten it, is unthinkable until you perceive "them" to exist. Following this, you need to perceive it as impossible to control the desired utility (dU) to a level of satisfaction unless the other is forced to give up some control of it. The dUs will be defined by accounting for historical discourses and the parties' positions and actions throughout the conflict.

This approach to actor formation and defining desires is in line with the approach to analysis of international relations commonly known as *constructivism*. Actor preferences are seen as endogenous to social interaction (not exogenous) and there is an emphasis on the myth/discourse-driven construction of Selves and Others.¹³ However, *Fearon and Wendt* argue that such practices do not actually run counter to rationalism, the approach to analysis often presented as constructivism's opposite.¹⁴ Fearon and Wendt suggest that one should differ between *thick* and *thin* rationalism. The first assumes actors' desires to be material and egocentric, and oriented towards material security/gains.¹⁵ Thin rationalism, on the other hand, does not assume anything about the desired utilities of actors.¹⁶ This line of thought sees rationality as lying not in the nature of the actors' desires but in their *processes of reasoning* (see 2.3). Thin rationalism, then, does not run counter to the idea that groups and their desires are constituted through processes of social construction. Also, endogenizing may be *causal* or *constitutive*. Causal endogenizing seeks to answer the question "where does the actor come from, why does it have its qualities?" and is associated with rationalism, while constitutive endogenizing asks "what are the actors' socially conditioned possibilities at the moment?" and is associated with constructivism.¹⁷ What I do in Ch. 3 is to *causally* endogenize the parties in order to define

¹³ Wendt, Alexander and Fearon, James: *Ch. 3: Rationalism v. Constructivism. A Sceptical View*; in Carlsnaes, Walter; Risse, T. and Simmons, B. A: *Handbook of International Relations* (SAGE Publications 2002), p. 53.

¹⁴ Rationalism versus constructivism was claimed to be the "great debate" of contemporary IR theory in the 50th anniversary edition of *International Organization*, edited by Keohane, Krasner and Katzenstein. (Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons 2002, p. 52).

¹⁵ Fearon and Wendt in Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons 2002, p. 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Fearon and Wendt in Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons 2002, p. 62 – 63; Checkel, Jeffrey T: *3. Constructivist Approaches to European Integration* in Jørgensen, Knud Erik; Pollack, Mark and Rosamond, Ben J.: *Handbook of European Union Politics* (SAGE Publications 2007), p. 4 (of Ch. 3).

their desires in the conflicts, while my analysis seeks to map out what socially and materially conditioned possibilities and restraints form the basis for their actions

Constructivists who engage in causal endogenizing are often accused for sinning against the ontology of *mutual constitution*:¹⁸ The idea that actors shape their social reality by interacting with each other, but at the same time they are shaped by that social reality – everything and everyone are constantly "under construction." It is seen by many as incoherent to "freeze" the ideational structures, saying "these are the parties' desires", and proceed to account for parties' interactions and the consequences of these; because mutual constitution does not actually stop after the researcher has "frozen" the ideational structures – in reality the construction goes on while the researcher holds it constant. This "freezing" is an analytical simplification at best, an inexcusable meta-theoretical error at worst. Rationalism, on the other hand, adheres to *methodological individualism*. It focuses on an individual actor with certain desires, pursuing a goal rationally under certain constraints.¹⁹ This approach does not run counter to causal endogenizing, but it is not in line with the *holist* ideal of constructivism – that actors must not be emphasised on the behalf of the social structures they operate within.

I find myself having to agree with the constructivist ontology that actors and social structures are constantly constructing each other, but even so the basic narrative in this thesis is one of methodological individualism: There are certain actors, they have desires that I define by way of causal endogenizing, and they pursue them rationally in the light of certain constraints and opportunities. I find it necessary to approach the subject in this way simply because of the question I am asking in this thesis: *Why is the Abkhazian conflict more difficult to solve now than prior to the Rose Revolution?* To answer this I need to contrast the Control–Intensity Structure 2004 with that of 2008, and examine what events caused the situation to change. I am aware that I am ontologically speaking "mixing apples with oranges" in the words of Jeffrey T. Checkel,²⁰ but I am willing to make this trade-off between maintaining total ontological correctness on the one hand and answering my research question in the way I find most practical and rewarding on the other.

¹⁸ Fearon and Wendt in Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons 2002, p. 62 – 63

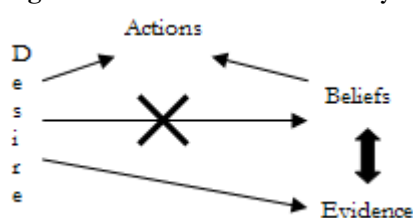
¹⁹ Note that "individual actor" may, and often does, mean anthropomorphic actors. Caporaso, James A.; Checkel, Jeffrey T. and Juphile, Joseph: *Integrating Institutions. Theory, Method and the Study of the European Union*. (SAGE Publications 2003), p. 12; Elster, Jon: *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge University Press 1989), p. 13

²⁰ Jørgensen, Pollack and Rosamond 2007, Ch. 3 p. 4

2.3. Rationality and actor behaviour

Jon Elster defines rationality in a way corresponding to thin rationalism, saying that it consists of "finding the best means to given ends," understanding "best means" as those based on beliefs that are "optimal, given the evidence available" and collecting evidence thoroughly, yet not so thoroughly that the chance to act disappears.²¹ Elster's core criterion for rationality is that *beliefs may not be directly influenced by desires*.²² He grants that it is impossible for your choice of action not to be affected by desires at all, but within rationality the force of desire cannot override your beliefs about what is the benefit-maximizing course of action (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Elster's model of rationality.²³



Rationality, then, is when actors follow the logic of *consequences*. Constructivists, on the other hand, often argue that actors apply the logic of *appropriateness*. If the first can be summarized in the formula [desired utility] + [rational belief about how to best pursue desired utility] = [action], the logic of appropriateness could be expressed as [situation] + [images;interpretations;norms] = [action]. A new situation (a change in the BATNA–Intensity structure and/or a move by the other party) is interpreted by an actor, and the ensuing action is governed by what is seen as *the right thing to do*.

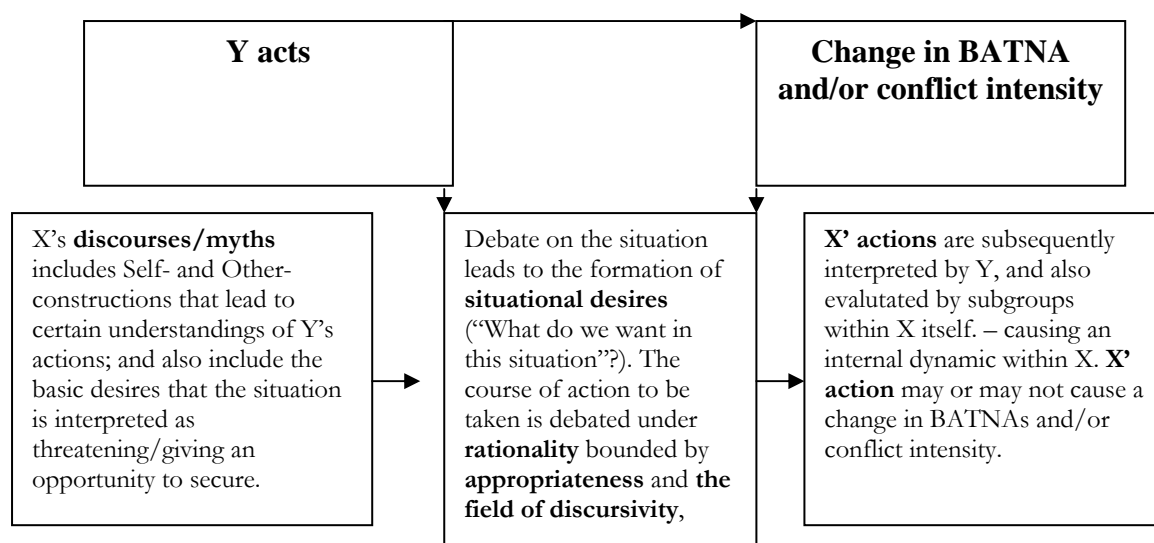
My take on what generally goes on when a party in conflict reacts to a given situation is a combination of the two logics: (i) In most situations when a group does not have to act *immediately and without discussion*, the proper course of action will be debated – if not in society at large, then at least among decision makers. (ii) The situation will be interpreted as threatening control over some desired utility and/or providing an opportunity to increase control over it (or, of course, be interpreted as irrelevant). During deliberation on the situation, rational means–ends calculation will occur, but (iii) certain courses of action that would objectively be possible may be outside the field of discursivity – or be seen as principally inappropriate or inappropriate in the situation. This results in a form of bounded rationality (see Fig. 2).

²¹ Elster 1989, p. 24 – 26

²² E.g. wishful thinking, ignoring evidence, or stopping research at a convenient point. (Op. Cit, p. 37)

²³ Adapted from Op. Cit, p. 31

Fig. 2: A model of bounded rationality



Elster argues that rationality may be hampered by the need to act rapidly, and frustrated by a number of other reasons: E.g. different courses of action may seem equally good/bad, or it may be difficult to predict outcomes for some reason. In these situations pure "coin-flipping" may kick in and decide what action is to be taken.²⁴ While acknowledging this, I will generally assume the bounded rationality described here to be the operating mechanism.

Naturally, X' discourses/images regarding Y may be glaringly wrong. It is not given that X correctly understands what Y^{dU} is, or what Y's situational desire is, or what Y finds to be "appropriate." This may cause X to react in a fashion that has completely unforeseen consequences, possibly only for X, if Y's situational desire was to have X walk into a "trap", but maybe also for both. This may very likely cause tensions to spin out of control, as Y may not have intended to provoke X and the parties end up in a situation where both believe that the other party is aggressive and can not be trusted.

Finally, one needs to ask the question "who are acting?" In a situation where X seems to be acting towards Y in ways you would not expect, it can turn out that a subunit of X (a ministry, paramilitaries etc) is acting unilaterally. This subunit may be acting to secure dUs other than X^{dU} , have different situational desires due to divergent discourses, or harbour other norms that cause them to act differently than X (i.e. the subunit of X that is supposed to have control over X' actions) would have done. If such a subunit is

²⁴ Elster 1989, p. 30–41.

seen to constantly have major effects on the situation, one should consider including them into analysis as both explanatory variable and dependent variable – in order to determine what drives them. Finally, it can be unclear who is acting because the parties point their fingers at each other. However, in such a situation the researcher is seldom able to do more than make a qualified guess at best – particularly if the conflict, like this one, is ongoing and not historical, so the actors whose lies must be uncovered still have power to prevent it.

2.4. BATNAs, Intensity and their sources

William Mark Habeeb divides power into behavioural power and structural power, where the last is subdivided into aggregate power and issue power. Behavioural power practice (rational, tactical behaviour) is defined as acts oriented towards altering "the issue power basis"²⁵ in favour of the acting party. Aggregate power is defined as military, economic and demographic resources, plus "the social cohesiveness, the stability of political processes and decision-making" and "national spirit".²⁶ Habeeb argues, however, that the analyst's focus should be on issue power since all depending on the concrete conflict, certain aggregate resources may be of less practical value than one may otherwise assume.²⁷ Aggregate power, then, is mostly relevant as a basis for issue power, by Habeeb defined as the *alternatives* X has to securing X^{dU} based on a "relationship other than with the opposing actor", the *control* X has over X^{dU} (i.e. the degree to which X can secure the X^{dU} unilaterally) and the *commitment* X has to securing X^{dU} without reaching a negotiated agreement (NA) with Y.²⁸ In this thesis I will somewhat reformulate Habeeb's concepts: Control and alternatives will be discussed under the common moniker "Control (over dU)," and I will specify when necessary if the actor's control is *unilateral* or *borrowed* – stemming from an alternative, which could be a third party (Z) or in the worst case Y. The current level of control over X^{dU} plus its potential for forcibly capturing X^{dU} , determines X's *best alternative to negotiated agreement* with Y – commonly abbreviated as BATNA.²⁹ X^{BATNA} will be seen as improving when the *status quo* control over X^{dU}

²⁵ Habeeb, William Mark: *Power and Tactics in International Negotiation. How Weak Nations Bargain With Strong Nations*. (John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 25–26

²⁶ Ray Cline quoted in Op. Cit, p. 17.

²⁷ Op. Cit, p. 18.

²⁸ Op. Cit, p. 21–22.

²⁹ The term was launched by Roger Fisher and William Ury. (Hopmann, P. Terrence: *The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts*. (University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p. 57).

increases despite absence of a negotiated agreement (NA), and/or when there is an increase in X' potential for securing control over X^{dU} through coercion. If X^{BATNA} is satisfactory, the likelihood that X will be interested in reaching NA drops – why negotiate when you have what you need? A bad X^{BATNA} , on the other hand, means that X may find it quite opportune to negotiate: The end result may quite possibly mean more control over X^{dU} than X presently possesses – particularly if X and Y find a way to increase control over their dUs jointly, through integrative bargaining.³⁰ When exactly a party will feel "satisfied" is of course a difficult question to answer. Arild Underdal defines satisfaction as completely subjective – "the actor's own notion of what he 'deserves' (...) 'needs' (...) or is 'entitled to'."³¹ In this thesis, X^{BATNA} will be defined as unsatisfactory if X has none or little control over X^{dU} and no or little capability to gain control through military means; and/or there is an obvious tendency of X losing status quo control or potential for seizing control over X^{dU} .

Commitment, which will be referred to as *intensity* in this thesis, stems from the ideational structures that shape the actor: High intensity is a product of fear and distrust of Y, impatience, and/or ideologically or religiously fuelled overconfidence in the abilities of one's own group. A high X^{int} results in lack of will to compromise or even communicate with Y. A conflict can have high intensity, low intensity or be imbalanced – if, e.g. X^{int} is very high but Y^{int} rather low. High intensity may frustrate attempts at agreement: If X believes itself to be under existential threat from Y, does not trust Y, or believes that Y can not win; it will probably be very difficult to make X concede much – or even show up in the first place. A high X^{int} can keep X from negotiating, even if X^{BATNA} is so low than one would assume any rational actor to willing.

Many factors may serve to raise/lower X^{int} or create better/worse X^{BATNA} . In this thesis I have analytically placed them in five groups: Demography, economy, military power, rights and recognition, social cohesion and interaction. The last factor is akin to what Habeeb refers to as behavioural power – "the exercise of power" through "a combination of verbal statements and non-verbal acts".³² Interactions are defined here as actions made by X and Y that affect the other five factors, and through that possibly

³⁰ Op. Cit, p. 59

³¹ Underdal, Arild: *Ch. 8: Designing Politically Feasible Solutions*; in Malnes, Raino et al & Underdal, Arild (Eds.): *Rationality and Institutions. Essay's in Honour of Knud Midgaard on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday, February 11, 1991.* (Universitetsforlaget 1992), p. 229).

³² Christer Jönsson quoted in Habeeb 1988, p. 23.

change X/Y^{BATNA} and X/Y^{int} . Note that contrary to the definition of behavioural power practice, interactions need not have been performed with the *intent* to change anything in the conflict at hand – indeed, their effect on X/Y^{BATNA} and X/Y^{int} may be unplanned.

Demographic constitution of the actors

The demographic constitution of X (X^{D}) have a deep and basic impact on both X/Y^{int} and X/Y 's potential for control as it has a strong effect on the other sources of power. Most notably it affects military and economic potential, but also X^{S} (social cohesion): Say, e.g. that the territory of X has a sizeable population of some group that for some reason do not support the state of X much. This element of X^{D} affects social cohesion negatively. Furthermore, the size of the population represented by (or at least controlled by) X may impact to what extent it is recognized: It will be more difficult to ignore a several millions strong region than one with 50.000 inhabitants.

Of course, a small population does not automatically translate into a low level of control, it may even be a source of strength: If the core nation of X has a very strong demographic position (i.e. they vastly outnumber that of Y), this may raise Y^{int} as it heightens their fears for X – and cause them to seek compensation for this, e.g. by allying with a strong third party or otherwise enhancing their military capabilities, with the result that Y eventually becomes stronger than X despite their demographic disadvantage.

Another way that demography may empower a party is through the phenomenon of *potential hostage populations*: If X has the possibility to punish a part of Y's core nation easily (e.g. because a minority of it lives on X-controlled territory), that lowers Y^{BATNA} – Y cannot attempt securing Y^{dU} by causing harm to X, without risking that punishment of their kin ensues. The existence of a potential hostage population on the territory of X may also raise Y^{int} by raising Y's desire to control the "Y-nation" minority's habitat.

I will see the following factors as weakening the X^{D} -related potential for control over X^{dU} : That the group around which the state or statelike entity X is based, is generally small in size; that this group is a minority within X's general population; and this group is outnumbered by the constituent group of Y. I will hold it to increase the X^{D} -related potential for control if the opposite is true, and if they have access to a potential hostage population.

Wealth and economic structures of dominance

Capital is probably the most flexible of the "factors": It can often be used as a direct means of obtaining dU; be directed towards increasing military capabilities; in a "loop" effect be invested in future economic gain; be thrown at social problems; and in some cases even provide an actor with increased recognition or rights – through corruption or through the mere fact that wealth is difficult to ignore). Both Marxist and Neoliberal scholars have emphasised the importance of economic structures in international relations. Marxist theorists such as Vladimir Lenin³³ and Immanuel Wallerstein have written extensively on the existence of centres and periphery in the international chain of production. There are several sources of conflict to be found in this "class system of states": Imperialist wars that are either simply "plunderous"³⁴ or for opening territories to dump residual capital, competing centre–periphery systems rivalling over territory, and periphery revolts.³⁵

Economic dependency of X on Y is a matter of *aggregate* structural power, but it naturally influences any specific conflict between them. Thus, economic dependency of X on its adversary Y will be seen as making X^{BATNA} worse, and economic dependency of X on Z will also be seen as lowering X^{BATNA} somewhat, as Z may itself become an opponent over time, or cut a deal with Y. Here, however, one should optimally analyse Z to find out how likely it is to do so. Economic dependency and available capital is referred to jointly as X^E .

Military capabilities

This factor that can hardly be ignored in conflict analysis, at least in situations where the parties see it as appropriate to apply military means – and in the Abkhazian conflict the parties have had such ample opportunity to learn that violence may prove decisive: The Kartvelians took Sokhumi. by sheer military force, holding it until the Abkhaz returned with Russian weaponry. If X^M (military power) is in a good state relative to Y^M , this gives them the upper hand in case negs (negotiations) break down and the use of military

³³ Baylis, John and Smith, Steve: *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*. (Oxford University Press 2006), p. 231.

³⁴ Doyle, Michael: *Ways of War and Peace*. (W.W. Norton 1997), p. 349.

³⁵ This is not a purely Marxist insight. *Joseph Schumpeter*, a main theorist of Commercial Peace, describes commercial imperialism ("*export monopolism*") as a situation where states, under the influence of wealthy groups, push for forceful opening of new markets so that residual capital may be invested there. Schumpeter, though, argues that this crude way of finding markets is due to states not being Capitalist enough, but he admits that throughout history "bourgeois commonwealths" have been "aggressive when it seemed to pay". (Doyle 1997), p. 245 – 246, 350–352).

means become possible. Even if X^M is not good enough that X can secure control over X^{dU} unilaterally, they have powerful means to punish Y.

Hence, if X^M is high relative to Y^M this raises X^{BATNA} and lowers Y^{BATNA} . If X' military power is borrowed from Z, this of course reduces the quality of X^M . However, if the latter is the case one should also map out the likelihood of Z seizing to borrow its strength to X.

Recognition and rights

This socially constructed source of control is highly relevant in many conflicts – not the least conflicts where one party is an unrecognized BR. Recognition and rights are per definition *borrowed power* – you can not give yourself recognition and rights, they must be bestowed upon you by actors whose doing this will be respected due to law or convention. If X' struggle to control X^{dU} is seen as legitimate by a majority of, or all, entities that can bestow such legitimacy upon them, the X^R situation will be seen as very good. But even lacking recognition to control X^{dU} ("aggregate" recognition), X may have other formal or conventional rights that in practice render X certain measure of control over X^{dU} ("issue" recognition). E.g. being recognized as a party in the conflict, and given a place at the relevant tables, gives possibilities for behavioural power practice that may weigh up somewhat for X' lack of formal rights to X^{dU} . X^R may heavily affect X' abilities to borrow power, as Z may face reactions if it bestows military or economic power upon an "outcast."

If recognition of X' right to X^{dU} is found to be low or non-existent at the "aggregate" level (in this case, the recognition bestowed upon the parties by other states) this quite clearly reduces X^{BATNA} in the case that reaching NA would provide them with such recognition. However, the "issue" recognition will also be mapped out through investigating the arrangements made around the conflict. Also, the extent to which formal rights have practical effects will be noted.

Social cohesion

The social cohesion of X (X^S) is a particularly important factor as it decides the extent to which X can effectively utilize its organization, claimed territory and population towards increasing/maintaining control over X^{dU} – and also determines to what extent X can

focus on the conflict instead of internal affairs. This is naturally relevant when determining X^{BATNA} : X^{S} problems may lead X to spend so much time and resources on maintaining its mere existence (or at least the existence of the elite currently controlling it) that it gets less free hands to pursue increased control over X^{dU} . Also, social cohesion affects X^{int} : X' ruling elite may whip up the popular mood against Y by utilizing pre-existing intensity (hostile discourses) in order to save their own necks, and internal oppositional groups may do the same – e.g. by accusing the ruling elite of being "soft on Y" or even co-opted by Y. Raised X^{int} may spawn behaviour that in turn causes Y^{int} to be raised, causing a downward spiral of interactions. But notably, X^{S} may also cause a conflict to disappear completely: Through extensive internal changes, an elite may come to power in X that does not consider X^{dU} to be desirable, thus removing the reason for conflict (high X^{dU} may cause general hostilities between the two to linger on, though). There is, however, an inherent instability in this kind of "solution": If internal events cause X' interest in X^{d} to return, and X now has weaker control over X^{dU} than prior to the détente, X may turn revisionist.

When mapping out X^{S} I will check the popularity enjoyed by the current leadership of X, and judge X^{S} to be improving if the popularity increasing – and vice versa. I will also look at to what extent X is having difficulties related to the demographic situation, and note such difficulties as having a negative impact on X^{S} . The general well-being of this sector will be seen as directly affecting X^{BATNA} , since major internal social problems tend to cause less capacity for dealing with external conflicts.

Interactions: Manifest conflict

Finally, we have the factor of interactions. All the preceding factors form a basis on which the parties *act*, and their actions again change the other factors. For that reason, it is rather difficult to analytically separate interrelations from the other five factors: To explain how and why f.ex X^{E} became worse during the period under analysis, we may have to bring in certain interactions between X and Y. I will spend one chapter on a general walkthrough of interactions between the parties since the Rose Revolution, with a particular eye to its effects on the conflict's intensity. Conflict intensity will be seen as increasing if the parties are seen to have problems negotiating, and/or if a party engages in actions (rhetoric, accusations, military moves) that are seen to provoke the other side. If the parties on the

other hand increasingly discuss relevant issues in a somewhat constructive manner, refrain from provocative actions and/or are seen trying to find joint solutions – this will be seen as lowering conflict intensity.

2.5. Evaluating the conflict

Several analysts focus on the nature of actors' desires when judging the extent to which a conflict is malign: P. Terrence Hopmann emphasises the extent to which parties' desires overlap or not;³⁶ and Bruno Coppeters refers to increasing divergence between "identities and interests" as "negative" transformation.³⁷ Identity divergence does have a role in this thesis (it is covered by the concept "increased conflict intensity") while interest divergence will not be as much focused upon – I do not find that the basic desires of the parties change substantively in the period. My main focus when evaluating the prospects for reaching an NA in the Abkhazian Conflict will be on BATNAs and intensity.

- A good X^{BATNA} will lower X's incentives to enter negs over X^{dU} . It also may lower Y's possibilities to concede during concession–convergence bargaining:³⁸ If Y does not control X^{dU} at all, it will have nothing to offer unless it proposes a trade–off.³⁹ A bad X^{BATNA} , on the other hand, means that X could possibly *gain* control from negs through trade–offs or by negotiating *integratively* – i.e. working jointly towards increasing control over dUs.⁴⁰
- Low conflict intensity increases chances that the parties are being willing to participate in negotiations and creates good conditions for compromising or even persuading. High conflict intensity moves the parties in the opposite direction, with possibilities of escalating the conflict into violence. Integrative negotiation may be impossible under high conflict intensity.

In the matrix below are some proposed properties and hypothetical scenarios that could occur under different BATNA-intensity constellations. These are of course generalizations, since "satisfaction" and "intensity" are not dummy variables – they are always present in degrees. Also, what *kind* of control the parties are in possession of is important – military or economic, borrowed or unilateral, etc?

³⁶ Hopmann 1996 p. 25

³⁷ Coppeters, Bruno: *The EU and Georgia: time perspectives in conflict resolution*. (Occasional paper Nr. 70, December 2007; EU Institute for Security Studies 2007), p. 28

³⁸ Distributive bargaining where the parties concede in turns until they step-by-step have "converged". (Hopmann 1996 p. 59)

³⁹ Y attempts to have X allow it more control over YdU by proposing to give X control over X^{dU2} (a different desire of X).

⁴⁰ Hopmann 1996 p. 47.

Fig. 3: Possible properties of BATNA-intensity constellations

	High intensity conflict	Intensity imbalance	Low intensity conflict
X^{BATNA} and Y^{BATNA} increasingly satisfactory	If both parties are content with the current level of dU-control (i.e. the high BATNA does not stem from military potential to capture the dU) the conflict of interests is in fact over. However, high intensity can be enough to keep general hostilities going until one party experiences a loss of satisfaction. If the parties' BATNAs are high due to military power, fear and overconfidence in own power may also lead the parties to attack instead of accept the status quo. However, if military power is equal this may lead rational parties to not enter full-scale war despite high intensity.	The less hostile party (X) would be more likely to take steps toward tension reduction. Y would be difficult to persuade, and its actions could rapidly heighten X^{int} . This is an unstable situation. Still, there are few incentives to act aggressively, except for preventive/preemptive reasons.	If both parties have fully satisfactory BATNAs and intensity is very low, there is little reason for conflict. But satisfaction is a matter of degrees, so the parties may still enter into integrative negs to maximize control over dU.
BATNA imbalance (X satisfied, Y unsatisfied)	X now has the self-confidence to negotiate, but may lack incentives – particularly since Y^{int} is high and Y therefore is difficult to deal with. The generally high conflict intensity means that Y may be quite unwilling to negotiate, and that X is inclined to force them to do so – possibly through an outright attack and military victory. If X^{BATNA} is satisfactory mainly due to military power, this and not actual control over the dU at the present time, this increases chances of a military strike. The CI-structure in any case causes a bad negotiation climate, and possibly a dictated NA that does not solve much. Also, Y may out of fear and frustration act aggressively to capture more control over Y^{dU} and/or weaken X' control over X^{dU} .	(A) A situation where X^{int} is high and Y^{int} low, is not likely to last long: Y^{int} will most probably be raised quickly due to X' behaviour – particularly if it constitutes a potential military threat. Y may play a constructive role in attempting to take the first step towards intensity reduction. (B) If Y^{int} is high and X^{int} low, X may be generous in negotiations – particularly if X somehow feel that Y have a <i>right</i> to what they are demanding, we could be looking at a conflict that will be solved easily. But X will not necessarily want to negotiate, and Y's actions could cause X^{int} to rise.	X may have self-confidence enough to enter negs, and low X^{int} may cause them to do this despite few incentives. The weaker party will have good reason to enter negs, and low Y^{int} will make it easier for them to do so. However, if the parties E- and/or S-levels are very low, the situation in the region may be volatile even if agreement is reached. Failure to deal with economic and social problems immediately following the reaching of NA may cause upheaval, in which intensity may rise again to rise again and renew the spiral of conflict.
X^{BATNA} and Y^{BATNA} at unsatisfactory levels.	This situation is unstable due to both parties being discontent with the status quo, and intensity being so high as to	The highly intensive party has an incentive to attack, while the less intensive party may play a constructive role	Unsatisfactory BATNAs mean that the parties have much to gain from entering negs, and the low intensity

	frustrate negotiations. The parties may choose violent means to "solve" the conflict. In a situation of low military capabilities, the chances for war are narrower — but such power could be borrowed. If the parties control each others dUs, a trade-off is possible. High intensity, however, may frustrate reaching such an arrangement. If the parties do not control neither their own nor the others' dU — there is little to negotiate about.	in attempting tension reductions. If the highly intensive party (X) is not seen as posing a real military threat to Y, it will be easier for Y to be steadfast in working for negotiations.	level makes constructive negotiations possible. However, if the parties are so weak that they can not give each other anything, there are little incentives to negotiate.
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While everything in practice is dependent on the concrete facts of the individual conflict, I will generally assume the following simplified values for different tendencies regarding BATNAs and intensities; where “unstable” is to imply that the tendency is destructive and “progressive” implies that it is constructive.

	Intensity rising	Imbalance	Intensity falling
Equally satisfied	Rather unstable	Somewhat unstable	Highly progressive.
Imbalance	Highly unstable.	Dependent on constellation: (B) is somewhat progressive and (A) is somewhat unstable.	Rather progressive.
Equally dissatisfied	Rather unstable	Somewhat unstable.	Rather progressive

3. Parties and interests

3.1. The groups and their historical interrelations

The Abkhaz are the largest of the *Northwest Caucasian*-speaking nations.⁴¹ All other such nations have their traditional homelands in the North Caucasus (NC), which is inside the RF today. The Georgian nation is a conglomerate of subgroups speaking *Kartvelian* or *South Caucasian* languages, which are unrelated to Northwest Caucasian. Most Georgians speak dialects of *Kartuli*, and it can be argued that Kartuli-speakers are the "real" core

⁴¹ Often collectively called *Circassians*, a term more correctly applied to the *Adyghe* peoples of the Russian republics Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachay-Cherkessiya and Adygeya. The Abkhaz-Abaza and the Ubykh are often also called "Circassians," though. (www.circassianworld.com/Circassians.html). The Abaza are close ethno-linguistic kin of the Abkhaz who inhabit Kabardino-Balkariya, and the Ubykhs originally lived in today's Sochi region. An example of the broader usage of the term can be found in Shenfield, Stephen D.: *The Circassians – A forgotten genocide?* in Levene, Mark and Roberts, Penny (Eds.): "The Massacre in History" (Berghahn Books 1999 and 2006).

nation of the RG. However, the northwest of de facto RG⁴² is dominated by *Mingrelians* and *Svan*; Kartvelian languages that are incomprehensible to Kartuli-speakers but still use the Georgian written standard.⁴³ The Abkhazian Kartvelians (AKs) predominantly belong to these groups — the Mingrelians concentrated in East Abkhazia,⁴⁴ the Svans in Upper Kodori.

The region today called Georgia has throughout the millennia seen many borders and many rulers, often being divided into a western and an eastern sphere.⁴⁵ Around 1000 CE⁴⁶ local forces threw off the rule of the Seljuks, and a state often referred to as "Medieval Georgia" was gathered by an Abkhazian dynasty.⁴⁷ The reign of *Queen Tamar* (1184 – 1212) is considered its Golden Age.⁴⁸ But this Abkhaz-Kartvelian state soon fell apart and was split between the Ottomans (West) and the Safavids (East).⁴⁹ The Russian Empire (RE) entered the region in the 1700s, and had absorbed it by the latter 1800s. The Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti signed a treaty with the Russian Empire in 1783,⁵⁰ but their "protector" abolished the state in 1801 and made it part of Russia as Tbilisi guberniya⁵¹ while Samegrelo⁵² and the Kingdom of Imeretia became Kutaisi guberniya.⁵³

In Abkhazia the RE's arrival split the nobles among those who wanted an Abkhazian autonomous principality under the RA, and those favouring the Ottomans. In 1810 the conflict ended with Abkhazia becoming a Russian protectorate.⁵⁴ But when the *Circassian Wars* ended in 1864, RE authorities removed the dynasty.⁵⁵ Two major rebellions followed, which were put down harshly: A large portion of the Abkhaz population (mainly the Moslems) was exiled to the Ottoman Empire along with other Northwest Caucasian nations — an event later called the *Mahadz̄hirstvo*. In 1883 Russia

⁴² De facto Georgia indicates Georgia minus the areas controlled by the Republic of South Ossetia (RSO) and the RA, and prior to the spring of 2004 also Ajara.

⁴³ Kaufmann 2001, p. 86 — 87

⁴⁴ Abkhazians refer to areas SE of Sokhumi as "the East", and NE as "the West".

⁴⁵ The west has been known as f. ex. Colchis, Egrisi and Imeretia; the east as Iberia, Kartli and Kartli-Kakheti.

⁴⁶ CE means Current Era, BCE means Before Current Era. The terms correspond to AD and BC.

⁴⁷ Kaufmann 2001 p. 88, 95.

⁴⁸ Op. Cit, p. 90-91

⁴⁹ Op. Cit, p. 88

⁵⁰ Svendsen, Inger Christine: Background paper. Prospects for return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia in Georgia. (NRC Internal document 2005), p. 31

⁵¹ A guberniya was a province ruled by gubernatory, envoys of the Czar.

⁵² The Mingrelians' core territory, bordering Abkhazia in the southeas.

⁵³ Coppieters, Bruno: *Ch. 5: The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*; in *JEMIE. Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, Issue 1/2004** (Asterisks mark that page numbers are unavailable due to the article having been found online, and that there is a URL to the article in the List of Literature).

⁵⁴ Svendsen 2005, p. 31

⁵⁵ Kolstø, Pål and Blakkisrud, Helge: *Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states in Europe-Asia Studies Vol. 60, No. 3, May 2008*, p. 489

discontinued the administrative entity Abkhazia, making it part of Kutaisi gubernija. Due to the Mahadzhirstvo, there is an Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey today that may very well outnumber the Abkhazian Abkhaz.⁵⁶ Areas left depopulated were occupied by Christian West Kartvelians. Though it is still a common idea that the Abkhaz are predominantly Moslem, the Mahadzhirstvo changed the balance and today 60% are Orthodox Christian, the rest Sunni Moslem.⁵⁷ However, *Monica Duffy Toft* claims that pre-monotheist sentiments still live on⁵⁸ and in any case the Abkhaz are rather secularist.⁵⁹ In stark contrast, many Kartvelians see Orthodox Christianity as an essential feature of "being Georgian." A founding father of Kartvelian nationalism, *Ilia Chavchavadze* (1837-1907) said that Georgia was united by "Land, Language, Religion."⁶⁰ These criteria exclude many groups with a long history in the region, f. ex. the *Ajars* who are Kartuli-speakers but Moslems – and thus seen by many as "a contradiction (...) an aberration that needs to be corrected".⁶¹

As the RE collapsed, chaos broke out in Abkhazia with a full pandemonium of Mensheviks vs. Bolsheviks, a short-lived Turkish invasion,⁶² rivalling state projects,⁶³ a local border war between German-supported Georgia and Bolshevik Russia, and Denikin's "White Army" operating throughout the general chaos of Georgia. For a while Abkhazia was an autonomous part of the Menshevik *Georgian Democratic Republic's* (GDR), but many Abkhaz wanted instead to be part of the *Union of North Caucasian Mountain Peoples*. Bolshevik Kartvelians in Moscow such as *Iosif Stalin* and *Sergo Orjonikidze* demanded military intervention, and in 1921 Bolshevik troops crossed the mountains. Two new Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) were declared: The Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian SSR, joined in a military, political and economic union.⁶⁴ But in 1931, possibly a price paid for a "soft" process of collectivisation,⁶⁵ Abkhazia was downgraded to an

⁵⁶ Estimates of Abkhaz in Turkey vary from 30.000 to 300.000. (UNHCR: The North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey)*

⁵⁷ Svendsen 2005, p.59

⁵⁸ Toft 2003, p. 92. There's also one Catholic and one Protestant church in Sokhumi (located wall-to-wall with each other and the Orthodox church), though from what I learned the patrons of "Western" churches are mainly expat IGO/NGO workers.

⁵⁹ The Abkhaz secularism is also commented upon in Chervonnaya 1996, p. 14 – 15, 188 – 189.

⁶⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

⁶¹ Monica Duffy Toft: *The Geography of Ethnic Violence. Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory.* (Princeton University Press 2003), p. 108.

⁶² Kaufmann 2001, p. 88

⁶³ Lakoba, Stanislav: *Ch. 7 Abkhazia, Georgia and the Caucasus Federation* in Anchabadze, Yuri; Coppieters, Bruno; Nodia, Ghia (Eds): *Georgians and Abkhazians. The Search for a Peace Settlement.* (Vrije Universiteit Brussel 1998); Shamba, Taras and Neprosin, Aleksandr: *Abkhaziya. Pravovye osnovy gosudarstvennosti i suvereniteta.* (M.: OOO "In-Oktavo" 2005), p. 81

⁶⁴ Svendsen 2005, full version, p. 32 -33

⁶⁵ Blauvelt, Timothy: *Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era* (Nationalities Papers, vol. 35, Number 2, May 2007) p. 212

Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the GSSR. In the 1920s and 1930s, two patron-client networks rivalled for power in ASSR Abkhazia (ASSRA): That of the Abkhaz *Nestor Lakoba* and the Mingrelian AK *Laurenti Beria*. The rivalry ended when Lakoba conveniently died on a visit to Beria in 1936,⁶⁶ and the subsequent Great Purge of 1937 took out most of Lakoba's Abkhaz network.⁶⁷ Beria's people took over leading positions in ASSRA, and large-scale "Georgianization" ensued: Kartvelian culture was promoted,⁶⁸ all Abkhaz schools were closed, the use of Abkhaz language banned,⁶⁹ standard Georgian became the official language, toponyms were made to sound Kartvelian,⁷⁰ Kartvelians took over the majority of public positions⁷¹ and once more Abkhazia suffered massive colonization — through forced resettlement of Mingrelians. Between 1939 and 1959 the AG population increased by 66.000 people.⁷² This local version of Stalinism is often called the *Beriyevshchina* after its Abkhazian-born enforcer.

After *Nikita Khrushchëv* had consolidated his power and denounced Stalin Abkhazia was host to several public displays of Abkhaz discontent, and in 1978 mass protests called for transfer of Abkhazia to Russia. The Kremlin answered by institutionalizing pro-Abkhaz favouritism on cultural budgets and pre-determining certain government posts in ASSRA to the Abkhaz minority,⁷³ who now became politically dominant.⁷⁴ However, Soviet rule had set its mark: In 1989 78.8% of the Abkhaz held Russian to be their second language while vanishingly few claimed that standard Georgian had such a position⁷⁵ - and according to International War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) up to 1/3 of the Abkhaz do not understand their national language.⁷⁶ Russian had become the necessary *lingua franca* of a linguistically complex region. Of contemporary Abkhazia's two TV channels one is Russian-language, and all the main newspapers are in Russian.⁷⁷

3.2. Rivalling constructions of history

⁶⁶ For different accounts about this event, see Blauvelt 2007.

⁶⁷ Blauvelt 2007, p. 216-217

⁶⁸ Toft 2003, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Kaufman 2001, p. 89

⁷⁰ Blauvelt 2007, p. 219, 221

⁷¹ Op. cit, p. 217.

⁷² Op. cit, p. 218

⁷³ Kaufman 2001, p. 89

⁷⁴ Svendsen 2005, p.64

⁷⁵ Toft 2003, p. 92.

⁷⁶ iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=341580&apc_state=henpcrs

⁷⁷ Much is said about the general language situation by the genuinely puzzled answer an Abkhaz newspaper salesman in Sokhumi gave when I asked if all their newspapers were in Russian: "What other language *could* they be in, young man"?

RG history writing claims the *Colchi Kingdom* (6th Century BCE) that encompassed modern Abkhazia to be "the first Georgian state".⁷⁸ According to Kaufman, there is an emphasis on struggles for liberation ever since the 7th Century's Arab conquest. Kartvelians and Abkhaz alike see "Medieval Georgia" as highly important.⁷⁹ Shamba and Neproshin refer it as "the Abkhaz-Imeretian Kingdom," denying that it was any kind of "Georgia," and articulate a *firstcomer discourse* that the "Georgians" (by which they seem to mean East Kartvelians) were not present in the SC until the 1200s CE, and did not become a nominal majority until RE bureaucrats erroneously applied the moniker *gruzinskiy* ("Georgian") to groups such as Svans and Imerets.⁸⁰ Likewise, they hold that the toponym *Gruzija* ("Georgia") was coined by the RE "for simplicity".⁸¹ Thus, the Abkhaz firstcomer discourse reduces the national identity that the RG is based on to a fake colonial construct. A Kartvelian discourse exists that constitutes a mirror image: The original Abkhazians were *Kartvelians* and today's "Abkhaz" nation immigrated from the north in the 1600s,⁸² destroying the original Abkhazian culture.⁸³ Nadareishvili articulates this construction, claiming that Kartvelian toponyms were altered or replaced when the NC tribes arrived.⁸⁴ Nadareishvili insists, though, that the Kartvelian genome still dominates the population.⁸⁵ In this discourse too, the Other's identity is seen as a false construct of Russian colonialism: "Had the Abkhazs [sic] known their true history, they (...) would have remained patriots of Georgia".⁸⁶ Thus, Abkhaz and Georgians base their origin myths on the same historical events, but construct them in ways that makes them mutually exclusive. The similarities between the Georgian construction of Abkhazia and the Serbian construction of Kosovo are interesting – the secessionist region is the cradle of the nation, occupied by foreigners.

The RE annexation is described by Nadareishvili as "eliminating [the] more than two millennia old statehood of Georgia"⁸⁷, and the treaty-breaking character of the

⁷⁸ Kholbaia, Vakhtang; Gelantia, Raphiel; Latsuzbaia, David; and Chakhrakia, Teimuraz: "Labyrinth of Abkhazia" (Parliament of Georgia, 2000), p. 5

⁷⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

⁸⁰ Shamba and Neproshin 2005, p. 28-29.

⁸¹ Shamba and Neproshin, p. 70

⁸² Hewitt, B. G: "Abkhazia. A problem of identity and ownership" in "Central Asian Survey (1993), 12(3), p. 273

⁸³ Kaufman 2001, p. 92.

⁸⁴ Nadareishvili 1999, p. 27-28.

⁸⁵ "Anthropologically the Abkhazs oppose Adigo-Abkhazian ethnic circle and maintain remarkable likeness to the West Georgian (...) anthropological type" (Op. cit, p. 22)

⁸⁶ Op. cit, p. 21

⁸⁷ Op. cit, p. 27

inclusion is emphasised both by him and in *Labyrinth of Abkhazia*.⁸⁸ As for the Abkhaz, they see the *Mahadzhestvo* as a cataclysmic event. It is invoked as a major grievance in many interviews, and often linked with the *Beriyevshchina*, e.g. by RA Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (Min. FA) Maksim Gvindzhiya:

We cannot recreate the situation artificially created by the USSR. Abkhaz were deported to Siberia by Stalin and Berija, and Georgians moved in. And also this that happened in the 1800s (...) Because of this, eight [sic] times more Abkhaz live in Turkey than in Abkhazia. These two tragedies have created the background for the violent conflict.⁸⁹

But the inclusion into the RE is not per se seen as negative by the Abkhaz. Svetlana Chervonnaya quotes Abkhaz politicians that emphasise the voluntary character of the event.⁹⁰ Shamba and Neproshin also do this,⁹¹ though they criticise the RE for discontinuing Abkhazian "statehood," the ensuing "colonial policy" of Mahadzhestvo and government-driven ethnic swamping by "loyal" Mingrelians, Gurians and Cossacks.⁹² Ghia Nodia claims that many Abkhaz see "Abkhazia as Russia"; though a majority probably agrees with the title of historian Stanislav Lakoba's text *Abkhazia is Abkhazia*. In any case it seems that virtually no Abkhaz claim their homeland to be a part of Georgia.⁹³ Gvindzhiya presents the same picture:

No movement in Abkhazia would promote joining Georgia. Some in [Gali district] , of course. Some people want to be part of Russia, those that don't understand... [Pause] ...but they are not numerous, not at all.⁹⁴

As for the events surrounding Abkhazia's inclusion into the USSR, Kaufman claims that Kartvelians see these events as the region voluntarily becoming a part of the GDR but subsequently being usurped by Bolsheviks — a construction also represented in *Labyrinth of Abkhazia*.⁹⁵ On the Abkhaz side, the Menshevik *Abkhaz People's Council* that decided on the unification is often seen as "occupiers from the South."⁹⁶ Shamba and Neproshin agree, saying that the GDR was guilty "occupation", causing "the interests of Moscow and the Abkhaz national liberation" to coincide.⁹⁷

⁸⁸Kholbaia et al. 2000, p. 7

⁸⁹ Interview at the RA MFA in Sokhumi, November 20 2007.

⁹⁰ Chervonnaya 1994, p. 15-16.

⁹¹ Shamba and Neproshin 2005, p. 65.

⁹² Op. cit, p. 70

⁹³ Lakoba, Stanislav: *Abkhazia is Abkhazia* (abridged version)*; Nodia, Ghia: "Ch. 2: The Conflict in Abkhazia. National Projects and Political Circumstances" in Coppieters, Bruno; Nodia, Ghia, Anchabadze, Yuri 998).

⁹⁴ Interview with Gvindzhiya, November 20 2007.

⁹⁵ Kholbaia et al. 2000, p. 9-10

⁹⁶ Kaufman 2001, p. 92, 95

⁹⁷ Shamba and Neproshin 2005, p. 125

Beriyevishchina is frequently cited in Abkhaz history books⁹⁸ and were also brought up in interviews. NGO activist Liliya Kvarcheliya explicitly invoked this and Mahadzirstvo as reasons for Abkhaz fears:

For many years their language was banned, they feel very worried. And the survival of the Abkhaz identity also. We were hoping that the Abkhaz would not feel so vulnerable [after the secession]. You know this entire story, you know it, about Stalin and Beria...? (...) But after the war we were isolated. We are given medicine and such, but nobody helps us preserve the culture. So Abkhaz still feel vulnerable. Liberals say we should have a citizen-based Abkhazia, but the nationalists say that if so we will lose everything. They are still afraid that if we don't have strong laws we will lose it all.⁹⁹

David Darbashvili writes that the Abkhaz saw Stalinism as "Georgian imperialism", and surprisingly seems to imply that the Abkhaz had a point:

Frankly speaking, for many Georgians, the alteration of the demographic balance in Abkhazia represented a proper national objective. For the generation of our fathers and grandfathers, this was perceived as historical justice. But it is beyond doubt, that the Abkhaz society, carrying its own national ideas perceived everything in a different light.¹⁰⁰

When the situation was reversed to positive discrimination of the Abkhaz, this was not well received by Georgians. As Zeyno Baran writes in an open correspondence with Thomas de Waal:

"The Abkhaz (...) experienced not oppression but disproportionate political power during the Soviet period – largely due to the communist regime's "divide and rule" policy. It was only natural for them to revolt after Georgia became independent – not to break out of their prison, but to protect their privileged position as the jailers."¹⁰¹

Georgian nationalism first became a matter of mass politics during Mikhail Gorbachëv's rule, but it was simmering under the surface. In 1978 the GSSR's leadership wanted to make Russian a co-official language, but faced so fierce protests that GSSR First-Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze backed down — something minorities saw as a dangerous concession.¹⁰² As Toft shows, the nationalist tendency was not only directed against Russian culture, but also against the minorities: A 1979 census caused great public alarm, as it showed certain minorities to have higher birth rates than those defined as "Georgians" – who had a 68.8%¹⁰³ share of the GSSR's population. One of the fast-growing groups was the Ajars, and several suggestions were made for planned secularisation of them — for had they not been Moslem, they would be "Georgians." This option was not available for several other minorities, such as the Abkhaz.

3.3. Defining the desired utilities

⁹⁸ Kaufman 2001, p. 96

⁹⁹ Interview with Liliya Kvarcheliya at the *Centre for Humanitarian Programmes'* office in Sokhumi, November 22 2007

¹⁰⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

¹⁰¹ Baran, Zeyno and de Waal, Thomas: *Abkhazia-Georgia, Kosovo-Serbia: Parallel worlds.**

¹⁰² Toft 2003, p. 94.

¹⁰³ Toft 2003, p. 91. Kaufmann points out that these fears were unfounded, as the percentage of "Georgians" in the GSSR actually increased from 60% to 70% in the period 1939-1989 (Kaufman 2001, p. 93). This serves to remind us that how things are perceived are – when push comes to shove – more important than actual facts.

Escalation and war 1988 — 94

With *Glasnost* came Georgian campaigns to end "discrimination" in the autonomies. These calls for simple majority rule in ethnically diverse regions coincided with a general pro-democracy mood and anti-Soviet desires for Georgian sovereignty. Abkhaz groups answered in 1988 by pleading with Moscow to restore Abkhazia's SSR status. After "Black Sunday" (the USSR's bloody and unsuccessful crackdown in Tbilisi) nationalist leaders such as *Zviad Gamsakhurdia* were released from prison, the popular movement gained momentum and Georgia declared secession from the USSR.¹⁰⁴ Also, the movement became more chauvinist – according to *Toft* only the Communist Party now abstained from attacking minorities.¹⁰⁵ In 1990 Gamsakhurdia's party came to power in Georgia¹⁰⁶ and *Vladislav Ardzinba* of the Abkhazian People's Front *Aidyglara* became chairman of the ASSRA Parl (Parliament). Despite rising tensions that already had caused bloodshed,¹⁰⁷ a power sharing agreement was reached on in 1991: 43% of the seats in the ASSRA Parl for the Abkhaz 18% of the population, 40% for the AK 46% and 17% for the remaining 36% — with a 66,6% majority needed to pass certain laws.¹⁰⁸ This agreement faced severe problems due to AK discontent. Later that year, 98% voted for Georgian secession from the USSR (of a 91% turnout) and Gamsakhurdia was elected President with 87% of the vote.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile in the AASSR, 98% of a 50% turnout voted to stay within a reformed USSR.¹¹⁰

By the end of the year, an increasingly authoritarian Gamsakhurdia had been thrown from power in a coup d'état helped by great popular discontent in Tbilisi. A *junta* made up by paramilitary leaders Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani of "the National Guard" and "the Knights" respectively, plus ex-Prime Minister (PM) Tengiz Sigua who now accused his old boss of being hired by the Russians to destabilize Georgia and

¹⁰⁴ Toft 2003, p. 94-95; Svendsen 2005, full version, p. 35

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit, p.95 — 96.

¹⁰⁶ 68% of the populace participated in elections – a number remarkably similar to the amount of ethnic Georgians (Toft 2003, p. 96.)

¹⁰⁷ Sergey Roy in Moscow News # 42, Oct. 23 – 29, 1997

¹⁰⁸ Nodia, Ghia in Anchabadze et al 1998.* This power sharing agreement would mean that while the Abkhaz and AK chamber could impose any arrangement on the other nations, neither the Abkhaz nor the AKs could disregard each other completely since a cooperation between one of them plus the entire block of "others" would still not make a quorum. Thus, while having a systemic risk for constant disregard of non-Kartvelians/ non-Abkhaz (and a risk of frequent deadlocks in case of high Abkhaz-AK intensity) this system rewards AK-Abkhaz cooperation and making fractions across ethnic blocks.

¹⁰⁹ Toft 2003, p. 98.

¹¹⁰ Op. cit, p. 97 – 98. Note that this figure necessitates a high support among non-Abkhaz for remaining within the union, but also seems worryingly close to the number of resident non-Kartvelians.

"letting Islam consolidate itself in the North Caucasus."¹¹¹ They called on Shevardnadze to lead and represent them.¹¹² A government was formed that included the abovementioned triumvirate, and presidential elections were with Shevardnadze running as the only candidate and winning with 96%. These new authorities did not accept the power sharing deal.¹¹³ Later that year, the RG reverted to its 1921 constitution and the Abkhaz leaders claimed that by default Abkhazia was now only "united with Georgia on the basis of a special treaty", and governed by its 1925 Constitution.¹¹⁴ Aidyglara's Chairman underlined that this did not mean secession, but becoming a federal republic within Georgia. Tbilisi did not accept the proclamation, stating that it lacked a quorum.¹¹⁵ War broke out later in 1992, when the National Guard entered Abkhazia to capture "Zviadists" — Mingrelians who had rebelled after the ouster of their kinsman Gamsakhurdia. Soon, however, they headed for Sokhumi, sacked it brutally¹¹⁶ and moved on to take most of Abkhazia. Famously, a National Guard spokesman told the Abkhaz through TV that they should surrender or face extinction.¹¹⁷ The secessionist leaders fled to the Russian air base in Gudauta but soon came back with Russian weaponry and aid. When the war ended most of Abkhazia had fallen under secessionist control, excluding only the Upper Kodori region which was held by Emzar Kvitsiani's paramilitary group "the Hunters". Negotiations resulted in the stationing of (mainly RF) CIS PKs¹¹⁸ in a "security zone" (SZ) around the Inguri river separating Abkhazia from Samegrelo. A modest UN contribution, the UNOMIG,¹¹⁹ was set to oversee the peacekeeping. The 1994 *Moscow Accords* spoke of "joint action" between Tbilisi and Abkhazia on a range of fields, but as Coppieters points out the practical distribution of powers was left open to the parties.¹²⁰ It was also agreed that Abkhazia should have its own Constitution, legislation and "appropriate state symbols."¹²¹ The RA's Constitution, made in the absence of the IDPs (see below) declared Abkhazia "a sovereign, democratic, legally

¹¹¹ Toft 2003, p. 99.

¹¹² Toft 2003, p. 100

¹¹³ Nodia 1998 in Anchabadze et al 1998

¹¹⁴ Nodia 1998 in Anchabadze et al 1998.

¹¹⁵ Toft 2003, p. 101 — 102

¹¹⁶ Kaufman 2001, p. 120

¹¹⁷ Toft 2003, p. 103

¹¹⁸ Commonwealth of Independent States. PKs is an abbreviation of "Peacekeepers".

¹¹⁹ United Nations' Observatory Mission in Georgia

¹²⁰ Coppieters in JEMIE 1/2004*

¹²¹ *Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict** speaks of "joint action" in foreign policy, economy, border guarding, customs, energy, infrastructure, ecology and the consequences of natural disasters, safeguarding human and civic rights and freedoms, and the rights of national minorities.

based state",¹²² but in 1995 the RG adopted a Constitution that included no specifics regarding territorial autonomy, but explicitly referred to ASSRA as part of the country, thereby not recognizing the RA's existence at all.¹²³

Most of the AKs, i.e. 50% of Abkhazia's population, had fled to the de facto RG after ethnic cleansing campaigns,¹²⁴ and the RA quickly announced that the Abkhaz would "not tolerate becoming a minority again in their own country,"¹²⁵ in effect committing to not letting all the IDPs (internally displaced persons) return despite their having committed to this in the Moscow Accords.¹²⁶ The Accords carried caveats, however: No right of return for confirmed war criminals and people participating in "armed formations, preparing to fight in Abkhazia," and "security and living conditions in the areas of return" should be guaranteed on beforehand.¹²⁷ This gave RA an opportunity to institutionalise a "slow return" policy, allowing 200 each year to enter and register as RA citizens.¹²⁸ They also prevented the re-entry of AKs who they suspected "intended to take up arms in the future" or had sent money out of Abkhazia.¹²⁹ Even so, tens of thousands returned spontaneously to the Gali district – which was specified in the Accords as the area to start "the repatriation operation". The RA refusal to start working towards fulfilment of these Accord commitments, served to keep RG^{int} high.

RA^{dU}- The desired utility of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz nationalist movement.

At first, the most prominent dU of the Abkhaz nationalists seems to have been remaining within the USSR contra the Kartvelian nationalists' desire to break with it. But other and more basic interests were at odds. Since the initial requests to become an SSR the secessionists/RA authorities have taken many different positions. Some of them are clearly Moscow-oriented, such as f. ex. the 2001 proclamation that that they wanted "associate status" with the RF – including common defence, foreign and economic policy

¹²² Svendsen 2005, p.60

¹²³ Op. cit, p. 53

¹²⁴ Also, approximately 75.000 Russians and 75.000 Armenians fled to Russia while 15.000 Greeks fled to Greece. Many Abkhaz were also temporarily displaced. Svendsen 2005, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Gachelichadze, Revaz: *Ch. 4: Geographical Background to a Settlement of the Conflict in Abkhazia*; in Anchabadze et al 1998.*

¹²⁶ The *Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons to Abkhazia**, signed by the parties, the RF and UNHCR, promised "voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their permanent places of residence in all regions of Abkhazia".

¹²⁷ Op. cit.*

¹²⁸ Dale, Catherine: *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Dynamics of the Conflicts* in "Conflicts in the Caucasus". Eds.: Baev, Pavel; and Berthelsen, Ole. (PRIO 1996), p. 18, 21

¹²⁹ Open Society Institute: *Forced Migration. Repatriation in Georgia*. (Open Society Institute 1995), p. 27.

plus shared currency, customs and border guarding.¹³⁰ The other and more consistent position is that of demanding sovereignty (though possibly accepting confederation with the RG). Already one month before reverting to the 1925 constitution, the newspaper *Abkhazia* printed Taras Shamba's "treaty principles" that suggested an arrangement with nominal respect for Georgia's territorial integrity, but autonomy up to and including a separate foreign policy.¹³¹ In 1999 the sovereignty position was confirmed by a referendum that endorsed the Constitution, thus making it "unconstitutional" to agree on anything short of symmetrical confederation or federation.¹³² Also, a third option once existed: Becoming part of "a sovereign federation of the mountain peoples within the USSR," such as Sergey Shamba originally wanted.¹³³ Inspired by events occurring last time a Russian empire fell, the *Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus* (CPMC) was founded in 1991¹³⁴ in Sokhumi¹³⁵ by Circassians, Vainakhs,¹³⁶ Dagestanis and Abkhaz. Several volunteers from these nations – and Cossacks – came to the Abkhazian cause, but the CPMC eventually seized to be as Abkhazia got de facto sovereignty and war engulfed Chechnya. As regards the IDPs, the RA has displayed a total lack of interest in repatriation to other areas than Gali district. Statements about the "impossibility" of full return have often been made, and more than ten years on RA-sanctioned return is limited to the Gali region — where the RA has limited control anyway, and which is seen by many Abkhaz as "historically Georgian".¹³⁷ Clearly, the non-return of the AK majority is a key desire.

I attribute much importance to the fact that the Abkhaz nationalist movement really gained momentum when nationalism engulfed the Kartvelians. Historical discourses caused fears to arise among the Abkhaz: What would happen if the political and cultural dominance that Moscow had ensured for the last ten years was lost – a new Mahadzhirstvo or Beriyeveshchina? While it would be naïve to totally exclude elements of cynical self-interest on the behalf of the secessionist elites — and even active cooperation

¹³⁰ www.rferl.org/reports/caucasus-report/2001/10/36-291001.asp The RA referred to the *Compact of Free Association of the Republic of the Marshall Islands with the United States* as a model.

¹³¹ Toft 2003, p. 101. The full treaty proposal can be found in Hewitt 1993, Appendix 5, p. 309 — 312

¹³² Svendsen 2005 (short version) p. 14

¹³³ Chervonnaya 1994, p. 73

¹³⁴ It had existed for some years already as the *Association of Mountain Peoples of the North Caucasus*. (Op. cit, p. 85)

¹³⁵ Op. cit, p. 74

¹³⁶ The Vainakhs are the Chechens, Ingush, Kists and Bats.

¹³⁷ V. Ardzinba quoted in Lynch, Dov: *The Conflict in Abkhazia. Dilemmas in Russian "Peacekeeping" Policy* (The Royal Institute of International Affairs 1998), p. 37.

with the KGB – they would not have been able to organize a secessionist movement without historically founded popular fears, and certain Kartvelian actions that caused them to increase. I also find it overly instrumentalist to not believe that slogans such as "Georgia for the Georgians"¹³⁸ and a discourses on non-Kartvelians and Kartvelians as "guests and hosts" respectively did not cause genuine fears among the Abkhaz elite as well. The fact that the Abkhaz secession bid came after the Kartvelian "anti-discrimination" campaign started; their initial acceptance of the power-sharing agreement; repeated commitments to not become a minority again; and actions aimed towards hindering full IDP return lead me to see the core desire of the Abkhaz as *Abkhaz (cultural) survival*, which is seen as *only possible through Abkhaz control over Abkhazia*. These two interests will here be defined as the basic desired utility of Abkhazia (RA^{dU}). In my view demands such as an own foreign policy are just means toward an end: The RA's experience from the 1992-94 war is that they need to involve a third party to have security from the RG, and in order to legitimately do this in the future they must be sovereign. RG enforcement of IDP repatriation, with subsequent removal of Abkhaz political dominance in Abkhazia, must be prevented. This definition of RA^{dU} is also promoted by Nodia and Kaufman: In Nodia's words "the national project of the Abkhaz was less about political independence than about survival as a distinct ethnic group", trying to avoid the "Ubykh scenario."¹³⁹ One should also recall the words of Gvindzhiya and Kvarcheliya above, and finally in a 2008 Q&A on Lenta the current RA Pres *Sergey Bagapsh* explicitly confirmed that this is indeed the nature of RA^{dU}:

"People often ask me: "Why are you leading such a hard battle for independence?" This is the one most important reason: We want to be independent, in order to preserve ourselves as a nation, as an ethnos, as a people. Nothing else. (...) We don't have to hide from anyone that the Abkhaz fight for independence for one reason – to preserve our ethnos and to freely decide our fate. All the ethnic groups who live in the republic understood us. They shared our bitter lot and support our project. Only the Georgians did not understand us. That's how it happened, and now it's very hard to change anything."¹⁴⁰

RG^{dU}- *The desired utility of Georgia*

The new elite of Georgia's desire was openly articulated from the start: To found an independent Kartvelian homeland¹⁴¹ on the territory of the GSSR. This campaign was made erratic by the low level of "stateness" characteristic of a country attempting to make

¹³⁸ Toft 2003, p. 94

¹³⁹ The Ubykhs inhabited the area of modern Russia adjacent to Abkhazia, and were ethnic kin of the Abkhaz. They more or less disappeared as an ethnic group because of the mahadzhirstvo. (Nodia 1998 in Anchabadze et al 1998).*

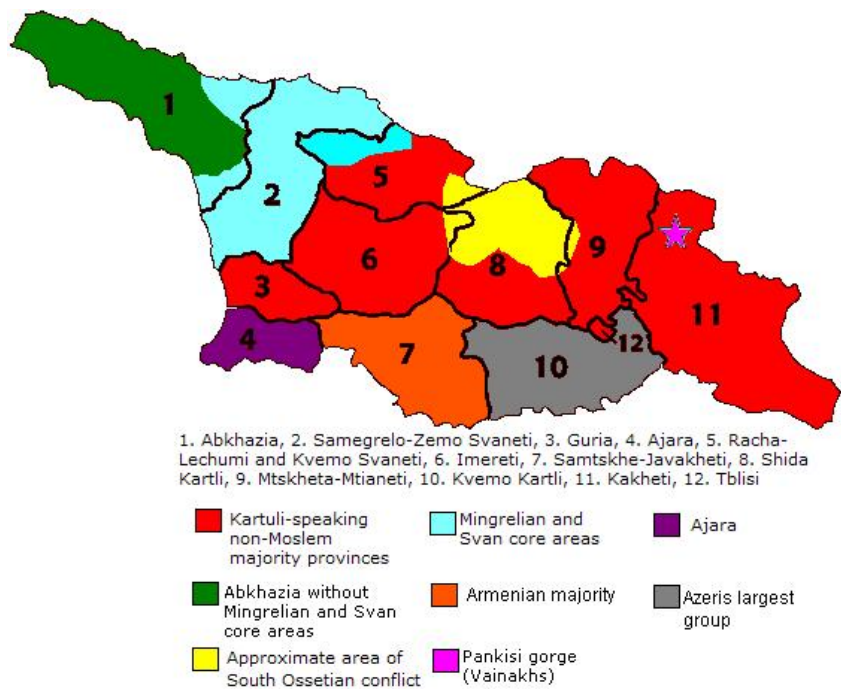
¹⁴⁰ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

¹⁴¹ The standard Georgian name for the RG, "*Sakartvelo*", literally means "Land of the Kartvelians"

the transition from authoritarianism to democracy — politicians turned to the core nation for support and thus alienated minorities, and the apparatus was not always willing to obey the centre. Hence, the National Guard wrecked havoc and vindicated all Abkhaz fears for own survival. Tbilisi accepted the National Guard's violent incorporation of Abkhazia seemingly after the fact, but were subsequently entrenched in warfare when the resistance came back with Russian weaponry and aid. There are, in my opinion, four main reasons that the RG refuses to accept the *uti possidetis*: (i) Historical discourses frame Abkhazia as an important and integral part of Georgia. (ii) While all nations are constructed, and may thus be deconstructed, the Georgian nation is perhaps particularly "deconstructable" as it consists of territorialized subethnoses.

Fig.4: Minorities and subethnoses in Georgia

As shown in Fig. 4, the provinces where Kartuli-speaking non-Moslems are in majority, is just a thin strip of land. Hence, the RG's campaign to claim¹⁴² Abkhazia may be identified as a struggle for the nation's survival in much the same way as the RA fears the "Ubykh scenario" if they do not



control RA^{dU}: If Abkhazia falls, the whole idea of "Georgisa" may subsequently collapse under pressure from competing nationalisms. (iii) There is also a widespread view that Abkhazia is withheld from the rightful rule of Tbilisi by *the Russians* — "the red-brown army of imperial revenge (..) waging a war with Georgia."¹⁴³ While having some virtue to it, the Imperial conspiracy approach risks upholding a *Mulholland Drive*-type state of denial: It keeps alive the erroneous idea that there never really were ethnic conflicts, but

¹⁴²While it is usual to say "reclaim" when talking about the RG and its breakaways, I find this verb somewhat biased considering actual historical circumstances: When the GSSR fell a new state was established in Tbilisi, that claimed and was recognized as having a right to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it never actually *controlled* these areas. Therefore, I will consistently apply "claim" and "incorporate" instead of "reclaim" and "reincorporate." This does not in any way imply disagreement with the RG's right to territorial integrity.

¹⁴³ Shevardnadze quoted in Chervonnaya 1994, p103

that all of Georgia's tragedies have their roots in the malicious activities of a third force. Coppieters comes to the same conclusion regarding Kartvelian discourse on South Ossetia:¹⁴⁴

The *de facto* statehood of South Ossetia is depicted as an instrument of economic privilege and the imperial interests of Russia. This discourse aims to delegitimise the enemy. It further reinforces the historical myth that identity conflicts never took place in Georgia, and that the Georgian majority nation has coexisted harmoniously with its minorities for centuries.¹⁴⁵

Darchiashvili agrees with this, when he criticises his own side of the conflict for overly focusing on "winning the hearts and minds of either Moscow or, sometimes, Washington" while "neglecting the Abkhazians themselves."¹⁴⁶ (iv) The RG strongly desire the fulfilment of the AK IDP's right to return – this demand is constantly articulated both in negotiations and rhetoric. Apart from socio-economic and legal issues, their presence is a constant reminder of lacking *de facto* territorial integrity. Furthermore, a reinstated AK majority in Abkhazia would be a forceful security net against future Abkhaz separatism. These interests all come down to one desire in the end: *To build a sovereign state with territorial integrity on the territory of the former GSSR*. This will be defined as RG^{dU}.

The Clash of Interests: How malign is the situation?

The relationship between RA^{dU} and RG^{dU} is not necessarily one of objective opposition: Through constitutionalized (and/or otherwise guaranteed) power sharing mechanisms and federal republic status the Abkhaz may have a comfortable dominance over their homeland and control over their culture's future. Despite the lacking inclusion of autonomy in the RG Constitution, Shevardnadze several times argued for "a federated state for Abkhazia within an asymmetric Georgian federation,"¹⁴⁷ and the *Boden Plan* presented in 2002 by the Group of Friends of the Secretary General (GF)¹⁴⁸ — proposing that Abkhazia should be more or less equal with the RG in a Tbilisi-based federated Georgia and the Federation should serve as the sovereign entity — was accepted by the Kartvelian side. But the document contained no proposals for Abkhaz ethnic dominance/influence, and Tbilisi never budged on the IDP issue — thus leaving the

¹⁴⁴ While South Ossetia was formally dissolved as an administrative entity under Gamsakhurdia, the UN still refers to the region as such. Kartvelians may refer to it as "Samachablo" and the RG formally calls it "Tskhinvali Region".

¹⁴⁵ Coppieters, Bruno: *The EU and Georgia: time perspectives in conflict resolution*. (Occasional paper Nr. 70, December 2007; EU Institute for Security Studies 2007), p. 24

¹⁴⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

¹⁴⁷ Coppieters in Jemie 1/2004

¹⁴⁸ The GF is the USA, UK, France, Germany and RF. The *Boden Plan (Main Principles of Separation of Competencies Between Tbilisi and Sokhumi)* has never been disclosed for the broader public, but Coppieters writes about it in Jemie1/2004.

fulfilment of RA^{du} in the blue. Moreover, even if power sharing mechanisms were promised by Tbilisi, the RA may still fear that the RG would betray them the moment the AK majority is reinstated – particularly if not somebody the Abkhaz trust are there to guarantee compliance.

4. Demography

The demographic situation is key when it comes to measuring RA^{BATNA}, as the RA's potential for unilaterally controlling RA^{du} gets stronger the higher the Abkhaz percentage of the population is. But demographic data on Abkhazia is so uncertain and so politicised that it makes the task of addressing RA^D very difficult. The 2003 census claimed Abkhazia to have a population of 215.972,¹⁴⁹ while according to NGO activist *Diana Kerseyan* the 2004 Presidential polls operated with 214.000 voters and a total population of 270.000.¹⁵⁰ The RA MFA, however, gives us the figure 340.000.¹⁵¹ But RA statistics are disputed by many: In 1998 the UNDP measured the population to be 180-220.000,¹⁵² while a 2002 estimate suggested 170-180.000,¹⁵³ and in 2006 the International Crisis Group (ICG) claimed there were 157 – 190.000 inhabitants.¹⁵⁴

There is also much disagreement and confusion about the ethnic makeup of Abkhazia. The 2003 RA census claimed that the Abkhaz were the largest group with 44%, AKs were 21%, Abkhazian Armenians (AAs) 21%, Russians 11% and 3% "others."¹⁵⁵ Later, however, RA Pres Bagapsh has contradicted this: In 2005 he stated there were ca. 70.000 Abkhaz in the RA,¹⁵⁶ while in 2008 he claimed the Abkhaz to be a 60% majority.¹⁵⁷ In any case, Svendsen noted in 2005 that the Abkhaz share of the population is decreasing.¹⁵⁸ RA attempts at "repatriating" Turkish Abkhaz have not had much

¹⁴⁹ www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html

¹⁵⁰ yandunts.blogspot.com/2007/06/abkhazia-and-its-armenians.html

¹⁵¹ mfaabkhazia.org/Useful%20Information.htm

¹⁵² Abkhazia Today (ICG 2006), p. 9.

¹⁵³ demoscope.ru/weekly/2003/097/panorm01.php

¹⁵⁴ Abkhazia Today 2006, p. 9

¹⁵⁵ According to the census, Greeks, Estonians and Ukrainians together make up 3.792 people. Also, there is a difference of 3.394 individuals between the total figure and the sum of all listed groups. This presumably indicate ethnic groups too minor to be listed separately. In this thesis the 2003 census' unmentioned groups and the three mentioned groups are jointly referred to as "Others" (7.123). The census lists "Georgians" and "Mingrelians" separately, but they are here under the common moniker "Kartvelians".

¹⁵⁶ ...whereas 44% of 215.972 would be 94.606 (www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10923)

¹⁵⁷ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

¹⁵⁸ Svendsen 2005, p. 57

success. Bagapsh admits that "it's not happening rapidly, as we would want,"¹⁵⁹ but has recently declared it a priority to make more of them move to the RA.¹⁶⁰ However, it would demand much enthusiasm to leave your quite stable country of birth for an ancestral homeland whose future is very uncertain.

In any case, Abkhazia has four major ethnic groups: The Abkhaz dominate the West, the Armenians are settled in enclaves¹⁶¹ and the AGs are concentrated in peripheral regions such as Upper Kodori and the Gali district. The Russians are spread evenly throughout the urban areas,¹⁶² and I do not find that their group's presence has much effect compared to that of the AAs and AKs. The exact number of AKs living in Abkhazia is also disputed, but there are probably ca. 60.000 in Gali district.¹⁶³ It should be mentioned, however, that Sokhumi also has a sizeable AK population: Some years after the war, 10.000 were still left¹⁶⁴. Incidentally, it is not uncommon to be of mixed heritage – though it is common to self-define as either Abkhaz or "Georgian". The AKs constitute a potential hostage population of the RA against the RG, and the RA has demonstrated that they are indeed willing and able to drive them across the "border" in case of violent clashes with RG agents. Since the RG gained control over the Svan area in 2006, virtually all Kartvelians on RA-controlled areas are Mingrelians. Whether or not they self-identify as "Georgians" is unclear. Todia's comments on the issue, and the name of her organization, points to an identity that has more to do with Samegrelo and Abkhazia than with Tbilisi:

The nation of "Mingrelians" is nowhere noted, so we call ourselves Georgians. (...). Samegrelo is the Mingrelian region, where the Mingrelians live. Samurzakano was [pauses, thinks] Well, Gali was in Abkhazia, but this is an old story. Zugdidi and Gali together make up the Mingrelian region of Samurzakano. Around Inguri, that is Samurzakano.¹⁶⁵

However, according to the 2003 RA census only 1.7% of Abkhazia's population registered as Mingrelians rather than "Georgians". Regarding the AAs, the great question is whether or not they actually constitute the RA majority. Already in 2002 Anna Matveeva claimed that they did,¹⁶⁶ and in 2006 an RG Ministry of Defence (MD) analyst told the

¹⁵⁹ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

¹⁶⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17776

¹⁶¹ Author's interview with Kvarchelia; Kerselyan at yandunts.blogspot.com/2007/06/abkhazia-and-its-armenians.html

¹⁶² Author's interview with Kvarchelia.

¹⁶³ Mzia Todia of the local HR organization Samurzakano in Gali claims that there are 60.-70.000 inhabitants in the district (Author's interview with Mzia Todia at the NRC's office in Gali, November 13 2007) while the NRC operates with 45.-55.000. (www.nrc.no/Default.aspx?did=9168164) and Bagapsh states 55.-60.000. (www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/).

¹⁶⁴ Open Society Institute 1995, p. 15. The total population of Sokhumi is 75.000 population (Svendson 2005, p.59).

¹⁶⁵ Author's interview with Todia.

¹⁶⁶ Matveeva, Anna: *The South Caucasus: Nationalism, conflict and minorities*. (Minority Rights Group 2002), p. 13.

ICG that there are about 40.000 Abkhaz and 70.000 Armenians in Abkhazia.¹⁶⁷ I met several people in Abkhazia who suspected the AAs were now the majority, or at least that the AAs, AKs and Abkhaz were equally numerous.¹⁶⁸ Kerselyan, on the other hand, claimed in a 2007 interview with the blog *Yandunts* that Abkhazia was home to 80.000 AAs and 100.000 Abkhaz.¹⁶⁹

According to RG statistics Georgia has a population of 4,394,000¹⁷⁰ of which Abkhazia would constitute 4-5%.¹⁷¹ Accepting the 2003 RA census' figures and holding constant the number of Abkhaz living in the de facto RG according to the 2002 RG census, the Abkhaz only constitute 2.2% of Georgia's total population.¹⁷² As for Kartvelians, RG statistics do not divide them into subgroups. They simply state that as of 2002 "Georgians" constitute 83,8%.¹⁷³ This makes it impossible to know the exact size of such major minorities as the Mingrelians, Svans and Ajars, but their "heartlands" have populations of 480.600 (11%) and 378.800 (8,6%) respectively.¹⁷⁴ While these data are not exact,¹⁷⁵ they illustrate the advantage the Mingrelians have over the Abkhaz.

The presence of IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the de facto RG creates a constant pressure on RG authorities. The NRC operates with 263.000 IDPs (6% of the total population) of which 240,000 are from Abkhazia,¹⁷⁶ but in 2004 the RG M of Refugees and Accommodation and the UNHCR adjusted the figure to 221.597¹⁷⁷ – of which 209,013 were AKs.¹⁷⁸ The IDPs constitute a problem for RG^E, and have a direct effect on RG^S through IDP pressure groups as well as through their situation's effect on

¹⁶⁷ Abkhazia Today 2006, p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ Author's interview with Kvarchelia.

¹⁶⁹ yandunts.blogspot.com/2007/06/abkhazia-and-its-armenians.html

¹⁷⁰ Statistical Yearbook of Georgia 2007 (Statistics Georgia 2007)* p. 18 This number is said to include the population of Abkhazia and "the Tskhinvali region". Officially, the largest minorities are the Armenians and Azeris who constitute 5-6% each (Statistical survey 2007 p. 22 - Note that the yearbook claims that data between 1997 and 2006 does *not* include Abkhazia and "the Tskhinvali region") and according to the 2002 census* are the major ethnic groups in Samtskhe-Javakheti (54,6%) and Kvemo Kartli (45,1%) respectively In addition there is a concentration of Vainakhs - Kists and Bats, but also 1.300-1.500 Chechen refugees (www.nrc.no/?aid=9168163) - in Kakheti's Pankisi Gorge.

¹⁷¹ First percentage based on 180.000 – the minimum of the UNDP 1998 estimation, the maximum of the RG's claim and within the ICG's estimation. Second percentage based on the 2003 RA census.

¹⁷² 3.527 individuals (2002 census)*

¹⁷³ Statistical Yearbook of Georgia 2007,* p. 22.

¹⁷⁴ Statistics Georgia: *Current population overview*,* see "Population by regions". The Mingrelians and Svans' core territories include Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, the Lentekhi municipality of Racha-Lekhumi – Kvemo Svaneti, and Upper Kodori. The latter's inclusion means that there will be a slight overlap between the population of Abkhazia and the population of "Ming./Svan core areas" in Fig. 3. The Ajars' core area is Ajara.

¹⁷⁵ Mingrelians, Svans and Ajars of course live elsewhere in Georgia as well – and non-Moslem Kartuli-speakers live in the core territories of beforementioned minorities.

¹⁷⁶ www.nrc.no/?aid=9168163

¹⁷⁷ www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/AMMF-6T8HWG?OpenDocument

¹⁷⁸ [www.internal-](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/234CB919545031A9C12571D2004E4F73?OpenDocument)

[displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(httpEnvelopes\)/234CB919545031A9C12571D2004E4F73?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/234CB919545031A9C12571D2004E4F73?OpenDocument)

domestic discourses on the Abkhazian Conflict. Also, the RA refusal to let them return affects RA^R negatively.

Summing it up, while the Abkhaz demographic situation is not very enviable they still constitute a larger portion of the population than prior to the war: RA^D has been improved from 18% against 46% AKs, to 21-44% in a region where they are either the major nation, or no other group dominates as much as the AKs did. The demographic potential for controlling RA^{DU} is better than before the war, which makes for a good RA^{BATNA} since any NA (or other scenario) where IDPs are allowed full/extensive return would would make the Abkhaz grossly outnumbered by Mingrelians. Under a one-state solution the Abkhaz would have little power to resist if Tbilisi decided to revoke Abkhazian autonomy or change/discard agreements empowering the Abkhaz. Such a scenario is not even unlikely: If the returning IDPs were to protest guaranteed Abkhaz political dominance, chances are that Tbilisi would prioritize not aggravating the Mingrelians – who are much more numerous, and also have proved capable of rebelling against Tbilisi in the past. Even under a two-state solution, full/extensive return of IDPs would result in two *Kartvelian-dominated* states where the majority could demand unification with the RG. The Abkhazian conflict is characterized by a profound demographic *weakness* on the Abkhaz' side that raises RA^{int}; while the RG's demographic complexity plus the IDP presence raise RG^{int}. RA^{BATNA} is raised by the probable RA^D-loss that would result from NA, while RG^{BATNA} is lowered by the AKs in two ways: The IDP presence makes non-NA less bearable, while the potential "hostages" in Abkhazia makes military intervention a less viable alternative to NA.

Fig. 5: The demographic position of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz in Georgia

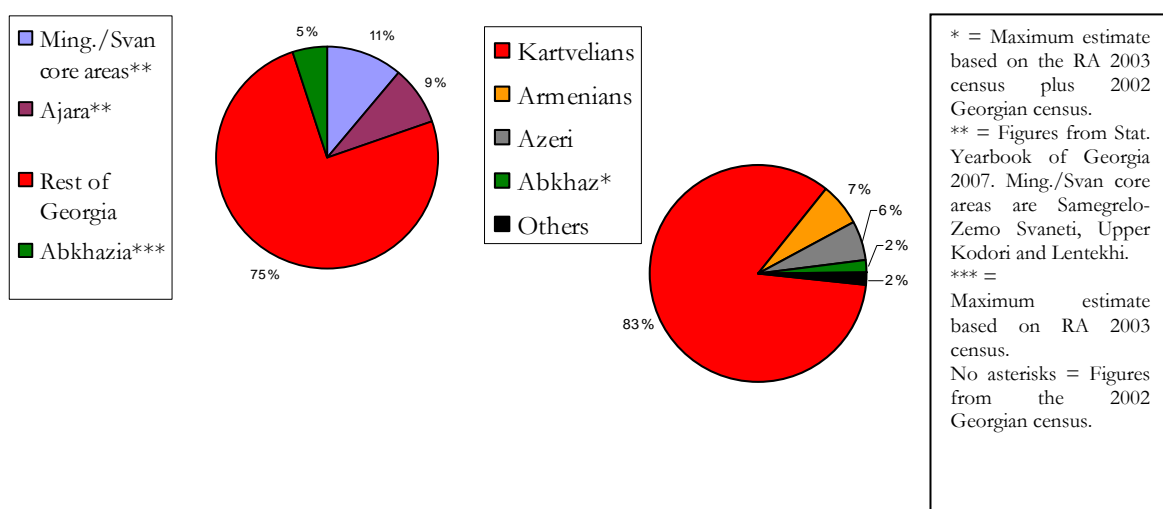
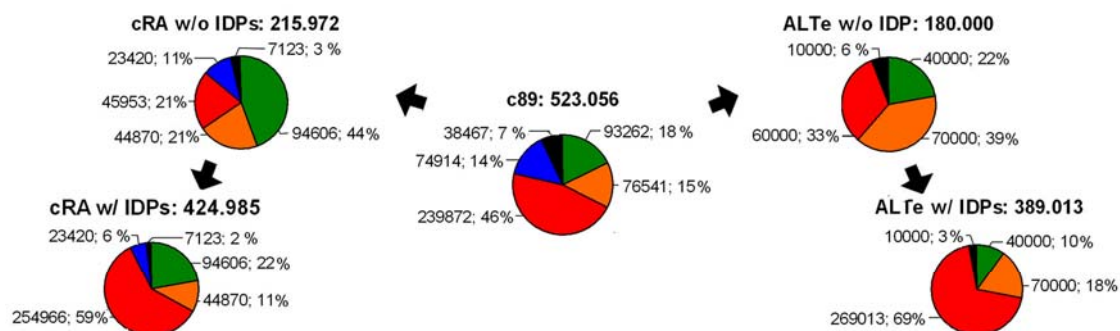


Fig.6: Developments in Abkhazian demography – two versions.



c89 is data from the last Soviet Census (1989), cRA is the '03 RA census. ALTe is an alternative estimate created to highlight the gap between different claims. ALTe assumes that the current population is ca. 180.000 (RG/UNHCR) that there are 70.000 AAs and 40.000 Abkhaz (RG MD), and that there are about 70.000 AKs (see above). The colour scheme is the same as in tables above, with Russians represented by the colour blue.

5. Economy

5.1. The Republic of Abkhazia: A protectorate under reconstruction.

When comparing Abkhazia before the war to the one immediately after, a bleak picture emerges. The war turned a major holiday resort and supplier of citrus fruit, tea and tobacco for the USSR/COMECON market¹⁷⁹ into an area with a deeply damaged infrastructure¹⁸⁰ — among other things the railway link between Tbilisi and Moscow, running through Abkhazia, was discontinued. The majority of the population had fallen victim to war and ethnic cleansing,¹⁸¹ the GDP was 14% of the pre-war level and exports reduced to 19%.¹⁸² Gas was more or less absent¹⁸³ and the only source of electricity was a hydro-electric plant located in the SZ.¹⁸⁴ The general economic situation was described as "desperate" in a 1996 Open Society Institute rapport.¹⁸⁵ Two years earlier, the RF had imposed a land- and sea-blockade, disconnected phone lines, refused to accept Soviet

¹⁷⁹Gachelichadze in Anchabadze et al. 1998.

¹⁸⁰Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya*

¹⁸¹Baev, Pavel: *Russia's policies in the Caucasus*. (The Royal Institute of International Affairs 1997), p. 48.

¹⁸²European Centre for Minority Issues: *Ethno-political map of Europe: Abkhazia: 2. Statistics*. *

¹⁸³Open Society Institute 1995, p. 15

¹⁸⁴Antonenko, Oksana: *Ch. 5: Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia*; in Coppieters, Bruno; and Legvold, Robert (Eds): *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005), p. 241

¹⁸⁵Open Society Institute 1995, p. 15.

passports with Abkhazian resident status and shut the border for all trade. A CIS economic and arms embargo followed in 1996.¹⁸⁶ In practice, though, the CIS boycott was increasingly broken by RF-based actors. According to *Gachelichadze* the RF coastal blockade was "more symbolic than real", economic contact with Turkey was "uninterrupted"¹⁸⁷ and the embargo never affected basic supplies such as medicine.¹⁸⁸ From 1997 the RF allowed a little import from Abkhazia,¹⁸⁹ and in 1999 the border was reopened. The RF now started facilitating trade and travel.¹⁹⁰ Still, Abkhazia at the outset of the period was marked by stark poverty. *Doctors Without Borders* (MSF) registered 10% of the population as indigent in 2002, 70% of whom lived under "unacceptable conditions."¹⁹¹

The RA Gov. began to depart from the centralized economic system of Ardzinba in 2005, and the economy is presently seen as "neither capitalism nor socialism"¹⁹² and "only just in the beginning of the tunnel called 'transitional economy'."¹⁹³ The ideological goal is not *laissez faire* capitalism, but rather an economy with "active support" from and close involvement with the state. RA Deputy PM Aleksandr Stranichkin notes that "modern Western theories" will not necessarily fit Abkhazia and cites post-war Germany and contemporary China as models. Not everyone are satisfied, however – NGO activist Tamaz Ketsba criticises the tax system, and also complains that credits are expensive and very short term.¹⁹⁴ The high micro crediting activity in the RA does indicate a shortage of loan availability – both *WorldVision*¹⁹⁵ and the *Danish Refugee Council* are active in at least Sokhumi and G. City. Economy professor Beslan Baratelia at the Abkhazian State University says that annual growth is at 12%,¹⁹⁶ and the state budget has indeed rocketed: At 44 mill. Russian roubles (RR)¹⁹⁷ in 2004, they had reached 1,6 billion RR in 2008.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁶ Antonenko in Coppieters and Legvold 2005, p. 222 — 223

¹⁸⁷ Svendsen 2005, p.69

¹⁸⁸ The RA got almost \$17.5 mill. in such assistance in 1997 alone. (Coppieters, Bruno: *Ch. 9: Shades of Grey. Intentions, Motives and Moral Responsibility in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict* in Anchabadze et al 1998).

¹⁸⁹ Antonenko in Coppieters and Legvold 2005, p. 226 — 227

¹⁹⁰ Op. cit, p. 223

¹⁹¹ Indigents are large families in economic dire straits, single mothers, chronically ill or bedridden, and invalids. 40% of these were Abkhaz, 30% Russians and 15% AKs. The figure 10% is based on an assumption of ca. 187.000 inhabitants.

Abkhazia. Old and frail in the shadow of the embargo (MSF 2002)*, p. 7

¹⁹² Ketsba Author's interview with Tamaz Ketsba in Sokhumi, November 22 2007

¹⁹³ Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya**

¹⁹⁴ Author's interview with

¹⁹⁵ abkhazdev.info/international/World%20Vision.htm

¹⁹⁶ AmCham News Issue 5 Oct-Nov 2007, p. 18 (American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia).

¹⁹⁷ Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, p. 497

¹⁹⁸ Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya*

Regarding infrastructure, the case of the defunct Tbilisi-Moscow railway is perhaps the most well known problem. One should first of all note that from Soviet times, most RA export and tourist industry has been north-oriented,¹⁹⁹ so the RA's interest in a deal opening the railway to Tbilisi is limited. In fact, it is rather the RG that is dependent on the RA and RF, as they are interested in reaching Russia and Europe while the RA is primarily interested in reaching Russia. The *elektrichka* between Sokhumi and Sochi was opened already in 2002 against RG protests²⁰⁰ (the RF claimed a private company had started this traffic without their involvement).²⁰¹ In 2004 a line between Sokhumi and Moscow was opened, once again under RG protests since there was already an agreement in place from 2003 linking the opening of the line to AG IDPs returns.²⁰² Upon my field work in Sokhumi November 2007, the railway was functioning. However, while links from Sokhumi to Russia flourish, internal RA railways are dying out: The *elektrichka* to Gudauta, f.ex. was closed at the end of 2007.²⁰³ From that perspective it would be favourable if a line to Georgia was opened, since it would boost East Abkhazia's infrastructure. Svendsen also points out it would be even more economically beneficial for the RA to host a general Caucasian-Russian railway link than just an RA-RF link.²⁰⁴ The RA's reemergence as a tourist hot spot has led to projected rehabilitation of the road between Psou and Gagra,²⁰⁵ but it must be said that this is a drop in the ocean: Roads are in a state that some places make it quite impossible for people to transport agricultural products to the cities.²⁰⁶ Regarding communication infrastructure, the RA is dependent on Russia: Both mobile networks and internet connections are provided by the RF. Internet access has exploded since 2004, and upon my arrival in Sokhumi I found several internet cafés with Russian standards were up and running. For those who can afford it, an ICT-revolution has taken place in Abkhazia. Developing the RA's infrastructure also benefits Russian tourists, who are the fuel of the RA's most "booming" economic sphere. The RA Min of Economy (MinE) claimed tourism had increased with 40% annually since 2004, and that in 2006 around 1.5 – 2 mill visitors came.²⁰⁷ AmCham News say that while

¹⁹⁹ Chirikba, Viacheslav: *Abkhazia: Economic and Political Situation and Perspectives*.*

²⁰⁰ www.chairman.parliament.ge/ge/visits/2003/20_01_ru.htm

²⁰¹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=3000

²⁰² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7801

²⁰³ zkvzhd.abkhazia.com/?p=news&id=66

²⁰⁴ Svendsen 2005, p. 59

²⁰⁵ Author's interview with Ketsba.

²⁰⁶ Author's interview with Ketsba

²⁰⁷ AmCham News #5 Oct-Nov 07, p.18

they are sceptical to the figures, "even cut in half" they mean that equally many or more tourists visit Abkhazia as the rest of de jure RG.²⁰⁸ The 2007 influx was in fact more than the country could handle: According to people who were present, shortages ensued and the hotel capacity was inadequate (which on the positive side gave local people an opportunity to rent out rooms).²⁰⁹ But recently Russians have had a particular interest in buying delapidated buildings (of which Abkhazia has many) and rebuilding them as hotels.²¹⁰ The upcoming Sochi Olympics could also result in the rehabilitation of the RA's airport.²¹¹

The strengthening of economic ties to the RF were both on a micro and macro level – from a joint confectionary manufacturing venture to a general agreement on economic cooperation between the RA and Moscow.²¹² The RA is so set on economic integration with the RF that the RA Parl. even sends delegations to the South Russian Parliaments' Association (SRPA).²¹³ The ties with the RF have also manifested in a certain inclusion of the RA in the Sochi 2014 Olympic infrastructure. The RA's economic integration into the RF was further developed after the Republic of Kosovo's (RK) declaration of independence, following which the RF formally revoked all sanctions, opened up for tax-free trade²¹⁴ and advised the RF Gov to increase economic cooperation.²¹⁵ In April 2008, Putin also said that the RF should recognize RA-based commercial companies and other organizations.²¹⁶

Gvindzhiya's words sum up the situation seen from the RA's perspective: "In each status quo there is internal dynamics, and the present one makes it possible for us to develop economically,"²¹⁷ "we slowly get rich because of stability."²¹⁸ Even Ketsba, who is fairly critical of the economic policy, says that "every year the economy is better, and our authorities have big plans."²¹⁹ There are two catches to the present internal dynamics,

²⁰⁸ Ibid. The author contrasts Abkhazia's tourist levels to those of "the entirety of de jure [sic] Georgia". I am assuming he means *the rest of de jure Georgia*.

²⁰⁹ Author's interview with Ketsba

²¹⁰ Op. cit.

²¹¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1156980.html

²¹² AmCham News #5 Oct-Nov 07, p. 21.

²¹³ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1199780.html

²¹⁴ lenta.ru/news/2008/03/13/duma/

²¹⁵ lenta.ru/news/2008/03/21/accept/

²¹⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17591; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17593

²¹⁷ Author's interview with Gvindzhiya.

²¹⁸ AmCham News #5 Oct-Nov 07, p. 20.

²¹⁹ Author's interview with Ketsba.

however: (i) Despite all progress the RA is still plagued by poverty and crime, and (ii) the massive economic dependency on the RF.

As the General Director of the *Sukhumi Babayevskiy Trade House* complains to AmChamNews, the embargo gives Abkhazia "only one vector of movement"²²⁰ and Ketsba states that "you know how they say the Russians bought all of Montenegro? Well, they'll buy our entire coast too. Our politicians don't say anything about that."²²¹ The dependency was illustrated quite well when from March 2006 to October 2007 the RA was hit by a general embargo on Georgia wines, nominally caused by health concerns.²²² It was discontinued after RA exporters passed an examination in Russia.²²³ But the fall saw more RF-related troubles: An outbreak of swine fever in East Abkhazia caused an embargo on all agricultural products²²⁴ in the middle of an important season for fruit export (particularly tangerines, the "specialty" of Abkhazia)²²⁵ that did not end until November 2,²²⁶ causing farmers to fear heavy losses.²²⁷ Not many days after the embargo ended, Abkhazia suffered a massive blackout²²⁸ and the RA state electricity company Chërnomorènergo's RF partner had to supply them until repairs had been made.²²⁹ Gvindzhiya tells AmCham News that they are attempting to diversify and that European private investors are involved in tourism.²³⁰ Ketsba, however, has experienced that non-Russian investors are "interested" but when push comes to shove will not invest.²³¹ Naturally, insecurities due to the RG claim on the RA plays a role here. Under a scenario where the RA is incorporated into the RG, investors will face problems – even if it happens without violence, houses important for business may be reclaimed by returning AKs.^{232,233} RG MinFA *Gela Bezuashvili* has warned that "the time will come when illegally purchased property will be returned to the legal owners."²³⁴ There is one other country,

²²⁰ AmCham #5 Oct-Nov 07, p. 20.

²²¹ Author's interview with Ketsba.

²²² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1109600.html

²²³ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1199578.html. According to the Director of "Wines and Beverages of Abkhazia" the RA had gotten around the boycott anyway, by exporting through Belarus. (AmCham #5 Oct-Nov 07, p. 21.)

²²⁴ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1199179.html

²²⁵ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1200337.html

²²⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200816.html

²²⁷ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1200466.html

²²⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1201306.html

²²⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1201551.html

²³⁰ AmCham News #5 Oct-Nov 07, p. 20.

²³¹ Author's interview with Ketsba.

²³² Svendsen 2005, p. 56

²³³ Gachelichadze in Anchabadze et al 1998.

²³⁴ AmCham News # 5. Oct-Nov 2007, p. 21

however, whose firms engage notably in transactions with the RA: Turkey.²³⁵ In 1999 62% of imports and 45% of RA exports went to Turkey,²³⁶ and the period under analysis saw the firm Tamsaş start open pit mining in Tkuarcheli. Ketsba says that "[in Tkuarcheli] everything was destroyed, there was no work. There was administration and bureaucracy [left] – and that's it". But the excavations and shipping out from Ochamchira made "living a bit better" for locals.²³⁷ The RA Pres' website reports that 75% of Tkvarcheli's 2006 budget came from Tamsaş tax payments.²³⁸ The firm also exports scrap metal²³⁹ and wood,²⁴⁰ but such transportations are often interfered with by the RG Coast Guard – they are, after all, illegal since Abkhazia de jure is RG territory.²⁴¹

Regarding the first problem, Blakkisrud and Koltsø claim that the "overall picture" is one of "gradual improvement."²⁴² The RA MinE claims that wages jumped 50% in 2005,²⁴³ but Deputy PM Stranichkin admits that "the medium wage, despite a considerable increase, still is very low"²⁴⁴ and Ketsba was particularly concerned for the countryside where subsistence economy prevails and infrastructure problems block trade. He also said that the bad wages cause a high level of corruption.²⁴⁵ Organized crime is also rampant. Gali is often cited as the worst example, though in Sokhumi many brought up Tkuarcheli (also in East Abkhazia) as an example of the ultimate misery. Bagapsh also insisted in a 2008 interview with Lenta that the Gali was better off than other places in Abkhazia, and also parts of the de facto RG.²⁴⁶ It may simply be a discursive "spinal reflex" that the mention of AGs' situation is countered by pointing out that the Gali is better off than other places – this most certainly was a reaction that came up quite often. Then again, the outside has definitely given the AGs status of "worthy victim" and forgotten about the fact that many Akhaz and Armenians are still internally displaced inside Abkhazia, having had their property destroyed during the ethnic cleansing and war. Despite this, I will pay particular attention to Gali since I have first hand experience.

²³⁵ Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya**

²³⁶ The rest of export went to Russia. (Chirikba*).

²³⁷ Author's interview with Tamaz Ketsba.

²³⁸ www.abkhaziagov.org/en/news/detail.php?ID=2963

²³⁹ Author's interview with Ketsba.

²⁴⁰ Op. cit; interview with RA Min. of Economy in AmCham News. Issue 5 Oct-Nov 2007, p. 20

²⁴¹ Author's interview with Ketsba; kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1200118.html

²⁴² Kolstø and Blakkisrud, p. 497

²⁴³ AmCham News #5 Oct-Nov 2007, p. 18

²⁴⁴ Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya**

²⁴⁵ Author's interview with Ketsba.

²⁴⁶ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

Infrastructure and houses there were devastated both under the war and again during the "May Events" of 1998 when RG paramilitaries and RA forces clashed, and the local population was driven out of Abkhazia again.²⁴⁷ There are only two medical assistance centres, some people live in burnt-down houses,²⁴⁸ the economy is mainly subsistence and economically productive families are hard to find, working age men to a large extent go to other places to earn money and in any case making a lot of money may simply mean that you will be robbed. A problem particular to the region is that of lacking "passportizatsiya" – many lack RA passports and therefore have problems dealing with the RA authorities. According to Bagapsh, the only passport you can hold in addition to the RA's is the Russian. The Gali AKs instead have *Formula #9*, a document that lets you live there, travel into de facto RG, and vote at RA elections.²⁴⁹ Though there is a lot of export to Samegrelo,²⁵⁰ criminal networks make sure that the profits stay on few hands. Also, since the tourist industry targets West Abkhazia and Sokhumi, East Abkhazia sees nothing of its positive effects. The current trend is causing an economic divide to rise between the West/Sokhumi and the East – with the old spa city of Gagra and the ruined refugee camp of Gali epitomizing each tendency. But as said above, neither AKs nor East Abkhazians monopolize suffering in the region: Consider that in 2002 MSF found twice as many indigent Russians as AKs, and 39% of the indigents lived in Sokhumi – where AKs are a minority.²⁵¹ A particularly frustrated group was the Abkhaz war veterans, whose unemployment rates were particularly high, leading many to subsist on pensions and suicide rates so high as to cause public debate.²⁵² However, the increasing amount of people holding RF passports has improved the pensioners' situation, as such passport-holders are entitled to Russian pensions in addition to RA pensions²⁵³ – constituting a difference between RR 100,- and RR 1.260,- per month.²⁵⁴

Conclusively, the RA economy has seen a boom in the period of analysis that heightens RA^{BATNA} enormously. The RF link gives the RA economic power to resist both the stick and the carrot from an economically resurgent RG, and gives them more capital

²⁴⁷ Svendsen 2005, p. 40

²⁴⁸ Author's interview with Todia.

²⁴⁹ Author's interview with Todia.

²⁵⁰ Author's interview with Todia.

²⁵¹ www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2003/abkhgb.pdf

²⁵² www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=160048&apc_state=heniers2002

²⁵³ Stranichkin, Aleksandr (RA Deputy PM): *Ékonomika Abkhazii: Put' razvitiya** The RA Gov states 25% of the population receive pensions and grants.

²⁵⁴ Kolstø and Blakkisrud in *Europe-Asia Studies* 3/2008, p. 498.

to invest in other projects that enhance their control over RA^{dU} (f.ex. military power). However if the East/West divide solidifies, this may lower social cohesion in the East. In general, the socio-economic situation is far from adequate. Also, one should problematize the extent to which the involvement with Russia is actually beneficial for controlling RA^{dU}. While this kind of dependency does not actually disqualify from being a state – e.g. Bhutan receives ca. 3/5 of its budget expenditures from India²⁵⁵ — but the ethnic Abkhaz control over Abkhazia (RA^{dU}) is being reduced by the increasing prominence of RF actors. More importantly: Should the RF abandon the RA, the current structure of RA^E becomes a major problem for them.

5.2. Georgia: Growing stronger and jerking the Russian chain

Before the Rose Revolution, the RG was not a country that seemed economically tempting to become part of. There had been a power shortage already before the 1990s,²⁵⁶ and after the civil wars this sector was devastated: In 1995 only 28,7% of the power plants were in working order and an energy crisis peaked.²⁵⁷ The gas infrastructure was in shambles, and in 1995-96 only two cities had gas supplies at all, not including Tbilisi.²⁵⁸ The situation was not much better in the sectors of oil, coal and alternative energy sources. In 2001 54% of the population lived below the poverty line and the year before Georgia received \$150 mill. in economic aid.²⁵⁹ The status of RG^E was a major cause of popular dissatisfaction, and thus also the Rose Revolution.

Saakashvili set out to reduce corruption and make the RG a better country to invest in. He argued the need to give "vast powers to a new elite, small, honest investigative unit that would really tackle high-level corruption" and that "every corrupt official (...) betrays the national interest." He also declared corruption to be un-Georgian:

Bribe-taking is not a Georgian tradition. Feudalism was Georgia's greatest enemy, but David the Builder [the Georgian king who united Georgia in the twelfth century] eradicated [it]. Neither corruption nor enmity is part of Georgian tradition. External forces are establishing such a way of life in our country, which is based on the principle of divide and rule.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ CIA World Factbook: Georgia.

²⁵⁶ Chomakidze, Valeri *Georgia's fuel and energy complex after independence*; in *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal of Social and Political Studies* No. 2 (44) 2007, p. 88

²⁵⁷ Op. cit, p. 90

²⁵⁸ Op. cit, p. 91

²⁵⁹ CIA World Factbook: Georgia.

²⁶⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17758

He followed up with arrests of high-profile businessmen, law enforcement officials and bureaucrats.²⁶¹ Salaries were raised, and reforms were made in the police and education sectors.²⁶² Transparency International noted a clear decrease in corruption following the Revolution,²⁶³ but ICG quotes sources saying that corruption is still rampant in the higher echelons — though now absent from "the streets."²⁶⁴ Large scale privatization was also on the agenda, evident from MinE *Kakha Bendukidze* Liberalist credo "everything can be sold, except conscience."²⁶⁵ But the ICG claims many privatizations have been "patently non-transparent."²⁶⁶ There is indeed a touch of "Wild East" in many RG economic dealings, with the state allegedly intimidating owners into selling their property cheaply and demanding "voluntary" gifts from the business community.²⁶⁷ Still, in the period the RG rose steadily on the *World Bank's Doing Business Report* from Nr. 112 in 2005²⁶⁸ to Nr. 18 in 2008.²⁶⁹

A particular problem the RG faced following the Rose Revolution was economic sanctions from its most important trading partner Russia,²⁷⁰ due to increasing resistance to RF^{dU}. It began with restrictions on agricultural exports in December 2005 and was followed by a general boycott of RG wine, harassment and forcible expulsion of Georgians living in Russia, increases in oil- and gas prices²⁷¹ and the closing of all land-, sea- and air-communication between the countries in 2006.²⁷² Estimates showed that 1/5²⁷³ of Georgian citizens (or even as many as 500.000)²⁷⁴ worked in Russia, sending remittances home. In the event, though, this had little effect on remittances according to economists at Tbilisi State University (TSU). Regarding the wine boycott, 87% of the RG's wine production was sent to Russia.²⁷⁵ While some Georgians voiced the opinion that getting around the sanctions would not be all that hard,²⁷⁶ TSU economists maintain that this sector of the economy did indeed notice the boycott: Wine, bottled mineral water and

²⁶¹ www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/pp122204.shtml

²⁶² *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 15

²⁶³ *Corruption Perception Index 2004 & 2007* (Transparency International)* The highest possible number is 10.0.)

²⁶⁴ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 15

²⁶⁵ Op. cit, p.

²⁶⁶ Op. cit, p. 16

²⁶⁷ Op. cit, p 15 — 16

²⁶⁸ Op. cit, p. ??

²⁶⁹ www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=74

²⁷⁰ Livny, Eric; Ott, Mark; Torosyan, Karine: *Impact of the Russian Embargo on the Georgian Economy*. (ISET 2007)*

²⁷¹ A full chronology of events can be found in op. cit,

²⁷² Op. cit

²⁷³ iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/06/europe/EU_GEN_Russia_Georgian_Crackdown.php

²⁷⁴ news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5403804.stm

²⁷⁵ Livny et al. 2007*

²⁷⁶ news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5403804.stm

agricultural product exports "declined sharply."²⁷⁷ The RG lost \$175.000 in exports to Russia,²⁷⁸ and suffered a total loss of around \$600.000²⁷⁹ Furthermore, inflation – that had been around 5% since 2000 – has been moving up and down around the 10% mark since 2005,²⁸⁰ and the embargoes have caused price increases.²⁸¹ However, despite the boycott, general economic growth was 8,5%-9%²⁸² in 2006 and 12,5% in the first six months of 2007 alone.²⁸³ The RG dealt with the RF sanctions by threatening to block their accession into the WTO²⁸⁴ and pursuing alternatives: For example, to replace the RF postal route (80% of mail sent from the RG passed through the RF) they closed a deal with Ukraine;²⁸⁵ and when explosions in RFR North Ossetia damaged the main transport infrastructure for oil, gas and electricity from the RF to the RG in the winter 2005/2006, they got emergency supplies from Azerbaijan and Iran. Saakashvili stated that this would be the last winter the RF could launch an "energy offensive" due to the creation of the *Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum* pipeline,²⁸⁶ and that the RG would seek energy independence.²⁸⁷ Though the RG Gov celebrated the "energy diversification" as a success,²⁸⁸ companies associated with the RF state structures have continued to eat their way into the RG energy market.²⁸⁹ A similar strategy of making Russia less relevant was taken regarding the railway through Abkhazia: In November 2007 Tbilisi signed an agreement with Turkey and Azerbaijan on building the *Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars* railroad that will constitute a new transportation route between Asia and Europe, bypassing Russia – something Saakashvili called a "geo-political revolution." Kazakhstan has already pledged to use this new "Silk road" for cargo transport.²⁹⁰ It should be noted of course that this does not address the problem of transporting goods to the RF, nor mend the RG's lacking infrastructure connection with Abkhazia. Rather, it solidifies the RG's and RA's economical disintegration from each other.

²⁷⁷Livny et al. 2007*

²⁷⁸Op. cit

²⁷⁹Op. cit

²⁸⁰Op. cit (The 2006 dollar course is used).

²⁸¹*Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 14

²⁸²Livny et al. 2007*

²⁸³*Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 14

²⁸⁴news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6168976.stm

²⁸⁵Livny et al 2007*

²⁸⁶The pipeline started working on 15.12.06

(www.oilvoice.com/n/Azerbaijans_Shah_Deniz_Field_On_Stream/6f7f7be8.aspx).

²⁸⁷www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav012706.shtml

²⁸⁸www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14464

²⁸⁹*Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 16-17

²⁹⁰www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16386

RG^E's growth, though impressive, is not without caveats: The ICG reports that official economic data are exaggerated, and that inflation is "significantly higher" than the reported annual 9%. Lacking job opportunities also pose a severe problem, and the RG PM has admitted that 25% of the population still live below the poverty line.²⁹¹ There have been certain economic improvements for common people: F.ex. by 2007 electricity was available 24 hours a day in Tbilisi and most of the day in the rural areas, and there had been great infrastructure repairs.²⁹² But expectations have clearly not been fulfilled. The state pensions may provide an example of the general situation: According to the ICG pensions are now 300% up from the Shevardnadze era but \$30 is still "too low to survive on."²⁹³ Also, for people with IDP status the economic situation has not improved. According to the NRC 43-45% of them live in "collective centres in sub-standard living conditions" and the rest are not too well off either.²⁹⁴

Conclusively, RG^E has boomed, and that potential has been translated, as we shall see below, on a grand scale into military power. They are attempting to become less dependent on the RA's "sponsor" Russia, which would also serve to raise their control over RG^{dU} since independence from Russia is part of that, but the RF is still so influential in particularly the energy sector that some fear they are "entrapping" the RG in a "liberal empire".²⁹⁵ The strong economic links to the RF can be a problem in scenario of open conflict with the RA without prior agreement with the RF. Still, the RG has attracted investors from "the West" and integrated more with its southern neighbours. But despite all this, the RG^E situation is still so undesirable for the general population that it affects RG^S negatively – particularly in the light of Saakashvili's initial promises.

6. Military capabilities

6.1. The RA's military power: Borrowed superiority.

The RA's de facto statehood was not won by unilateral military power, three RF-related factors were vital: (i) Access to weaponry from the local RF military base in Gudauta, (ii)

²⁹¹ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 14. It should be noted that if this is true there has been a 50% reduction since the Revolution, which seems exaggerated.

²⁹² *Op. cit.*, p. 13

²⁹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 14

²⁹⁴ www.nrc.no/?aid=9168163

²⁹⁵ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 18

an RF-based volunteer movement, and (iii) RF forces obstructing pro-RG forces.²⁹⁶ According to Pavel Baev, the 1992 National Guard offensive could have taken Abkhazia in "days if not hours"²⁹⁷ if it had not been for these RF-related factors. Nodia, however, claims that RF involvement alone would not have been enough, since the Abkhaz' fears for their nation's survival created a "drive"²⁹⁸ that was decisive. The RG could have been "quagmired" by guerrilla resistance, had not RF factors prevented their holding Abkhazia.²⁹⁹

According to current RA Minister of Defence (MinD) Mirab Kishmariya the RA military forces were founded on the basis of the 8th regiment of the USSR M. of the Interior (MI), that came under ASSRA's command in 1991. A year later the State Defence Committee, the RA MD and the General Staff was founded.³⁰⁰ Exact data about on RA military capabilities are hard to come by – the secessionists themselves are not very helpful, having classified the number of troops as "a secret."³⁰¹ There have, though, been attempts at measuring their military power. In their 2008 overview over the RG and RA forces, Lenta were unsure about the exact current numbers of aircrafts but their speculations lend little hope to the RA ("a few", "a couple", "possibly not usable anymore") and they do not mention the navy at all³⁰² – though In 2001 *David Darchiashvili* claimed the RA navy consisted of 2 patrol boats, 9 fishing vessels [sic], 1 motorboat, 8 civil boats, 2 Howitzers and 1 BRDM-2.³⁰³ Darchiashvili estimated the personnel to count 3,000 heads plus 45,000 reservists while the RF journal *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie* estimated 5,000 personnel and 50,000 reservists.³⁰⁴ In 2008 Lenta estimated 4,500 personnel and a maximum wartime capacity of 15-16,000 people.³⁰⁵ The amount of people who would show up to resist the RG is dependent on RA^{int}. During the October Events, the RA was able to call one of the most disgruntled groups, the war veterans,

²⁹⁶ The Soviet Union had an army base in Gudauta, Abkhazia, that was transferred RF authority following the USSR's fall: Also, USSR forces were sent to the ASSR when violent conflict started, officially to secure federal property.

²⁹⁷ Baev 1997, p. 44

²⁹⁸ Nodia in Anchabadze et al 1998.

²⁹⁹ If the RG had used their occupation of Sokhumi to demonstrate that Abkhaz fears were unfounded, RA^{int} would have dropped and made such resistance less likely.

³⁰⁰ Noviy Vzgl'yad. Informatsionno-Analiticheskiy Zhurnal No. 3/2007

³⁰¹ www.civil.ge/rus/print.php?id=6833

³⁰² lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/22/abhaz/

³⁰³ Darchiashvili, David: *October-November events in Georgia from the viewpoint of civil-military relations*. (2001)*. The two latter are land-based types of equipment, but Darchiashvili lists them as part of the navy.

³⁰⁴ Op. cit; www.ng.ru/cis/2001-10-13/1_gruziy.html.

³⁰⁵ lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/22/abhaz/

despite RA^S being worse then than now (see 8.1). Today RA^S is better, and RA^{int} (fears) is raised to a level where the reservist potential is high (see 9.)

The degree of RA military dependence on RF support is disputed. Gachelichadze attributed the existence of an RA army fully to a flow of "unofficial non-humanitarian aid,"³⁰⁶ and for educational purposes the RF still plays a large role – in 2005 RA Min. D Sultan Sosnaliyev said senior/middle ranking officers regularly attend 2-3 month training courses in Russia.³⁰⁷ The current RA Min. D though, recently said that a domestic military academy was to be founded.³⁰⁸ In any case the RF plays a substantial role through the PKs and its forces in South Russia. The PKs currently number 1.500-2.000 – and though the RG recently claimed there to be 4.000,³⁰⁹ UNOMIG says that they have not registered build-ups on either side³¹⁰ - but the RF have announced that they will boost the force to 3.000 people due to potential RG aggression (though in fact, the Duma advised the RF Gov to increase numbers already on March 21 2008).³¹¹ The RA Min. D. refuses all such claims of CISPК partiality,³¹² but neither he nor Gvindzhiya makes it a secret that they do not wish for any other PKs.³¹³

The RF has made it quite clear it will support the RA in case of an RG attack,³¹⁴ and there have been very tense moments between the CISPК and the RG. The "Ganumukhuri Incident" in 2007, where CISPК troops detained (and beat up, according to the IWPR) RG police officers inside the Ganmukhuri "patrotic youth camp" in the SZ, led the RG Parl. to demand the withdrawal of the CISPК and declare their commander Sergey Chaban *persona non grata*. This was not the first time the RG had demanded the withdrawal of the CISPК,³¹⁵ but the RA insists that they should stay and³¹⁶ and argue that only the CIS' Council of Heads of State can decide to withdraw the CISPК.³¹⁷ As for Chaban, the RF claimed he had a right to stay.³¹⁸

³⁰⁶ Gachelichadze in Anchabadze et al 1998.

³⁰⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=9423

³⁰⁸ Novyj Vzgljad No. 3/2007

³⁰⁹ Institute for War & Peace Reporting November 1, 2007/Johnson's Russia List 02.11.07 #39; www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav103107a.shtml.

³¹⁰ www.unomig.org/data/other/pr_2008_89_eng.pdf

³¹¹ lenta.ru/news/2008/03/21/accept/

³¹² Noviy Vzgljad No. 3/2007

³¹³ Op. Cit; Author's interview with Gvindzhiya.

³¹⁴ lenta.ru/news/2008/03/21/accept/

³¹⁵ Institute for War & Peace Reporting November 1, 2007/Johnson's Russia List 02.11.07 #39

³¹⁶ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1200798.html

³¹⁷ kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1200884.html

³¹⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200811.html

In a worst case scenario for the RG, they attack the RA and/or the Republic of South Ossetia (RSO) and end up at war with the RF – who state that they are obliged to protect RF citizens in the Georgian breakaway republics, which would mean most of their current inhabitants.³¹⁹ This scenario is less disastrous for the RG now than prior to the Rose Revolution: Until recently the RF had still had bases in Georgia, but the last ones were evacuated in 2007.³²⁰ The base in Gudauta was supposed to have been left for the CISPK in 2001, but the RG suspects foul play.³²¹ Tbilisi claims one of the RG drones shot down over Abkhazia in 2008 fell victim to an RF fighter plane from Gudauta.³²² But in any case, the RF have formidable forces on the other side of the mountains – that may enter Abkhazia without crossing the mountains from Maykop via Sochi, and the Black Sea Fleet on the Crimea. Also, the mountains between North- and South Ossetia host the Roki Tunnel that gives land forces the possibility to easily reach Tskhinvali, which again is only 100 km from Tbilisi.³²³ Most importantly, however, RF airplanes can cross the Caucasus and reach Tbilisi in no time at all – and as Jane's point out the RG air defence is incapable of stopping Russian aircrafts.³²⁴

The increasing coordination between the RSO, the RA and the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR) also has a measure of positive effect. Already before the founding of their common "IGO" *Community for Democracy and Peoples' Rights* (CDPR) in 2006, Bagapsh declared that the RA would support the RSO in case of war.³²⁵ The Min. FA confirmed in September 2007 also stated that the CDPR plans to form joint "peacekeeping" units that can be inserted if CISPK is removed.³²⁶ The PMR is quite useless in an RG-RA conflict, but the active involvement of the RSO is more valuable. While the RA unilaterally seems capable of little more than attacking Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti,³²⁷ the RSO has Tbilisi within its reach – though they are not much of a challenge for the RG themselves.

6.2. The RG's military power: A focal point of Saakashvili's administration.

³¹⁹ lenta.ru/news/2008/04/25/kenyaikin/

³²⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15342; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16321

³²¹ www.bbc.net.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3261059.stm; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12992

³²² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17672

³²³ Coppieters 2007, p. 11

³²⁴ JANEs Defence Review January 2 2008, p. 25

³²⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/904340.html

³²⁶ *Noviy Vzgljad* No. 3/2007

³²⁷ Darchiashvili claims the RA is likely and able to bombard Zugdidi in case of, and even in "peacetime" armed groups from Abkhazia have penetrated into Samegrelo (Darchiashvili 2001,*)

After reclaiming Gamsakhurdia's stronghold in Samegrelo and made arrangements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the RG faced the problem of lacking control over the National Guard and the Knights – an obstacle to planned strategic usage of military means, and in itself a factor weakening control over RG^{du}. During the 1990s, Kitovani and Ioseliani were arrested, the Knights dissolved and the National Guard brought under control. Certain paramilitary groups still operated in Georgia, though: The Forest Brethren and the White Legion in the Security Zone, and the Hunters in the Kodori area – the two first sometimes aided by RG security services in their onslaughts into Abkhazia.³²⁸ In 1998 such an attack started the May Events,³²⁹ and in 2001 paramilitaries mined areas in East Abkhazia.³³⁰ The October Events the same year, though, only demonstrated once more the RG's lack of power against an RF- supported RA. But Tbilisi's quest for "Western" military aid³³¹ and NATO involvement had rapidly gave results: The US stopped its arms embargo that very year, and launched a program of "piecemeal military assistance".³³² In 2002 the RG decided to seek military security through NATO and economic security through the EU, according to Hillingsø.³³³ While the NATO-orientation of the RG started under Shevardnadze, Saakashvili sped up the process. In 2004 the RG joined Partnership for Peace (PfP) and began implementing the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Intensified Dialogue began in 2006, and an IPAP-based Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was released in 2007. However, ISS claims that NATO countries were "alarmed" when the RG in 2007 decided to increase its army by a 2,500 strong brigade instead of reducing it to 13,000,³³⁴ and nor was the November 2007 crackdown on the opposition (see 8.2) popular abroad. The bad RG-RF relationship may in itself be an obstacle: The French Min. D have said that admittance to NATO could only happen if Russia does not see the RG as a threat.³³⁵ Finally, the fact that the RG has unresolved internal conflicts in itself hinders their entry into NATO.

The RG's unilateral military power is much larger now than prior to the Revolution. While in 2001 the RG had 16,000-20,000 personnel, 250,000 reservists, 90

³²⁸ Matveeva 2002, p. 13.

³²⁹ Antonenkoin Coppieters and Legvold 2005, p. 223 — 224

³³⁰ www.icbl.org/lm/2001/abkhazia/

³³¹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=1465

³³² Darchiashvili 2001*

³³³ Hillingsø, Kjeld G. H.: *Den militære situasjon i Georgien*. (Ch. 11 in Faurby, Ib and Magunsson, Märta-Lisa (Eds.) *Korsvej og Minefelt. Kultur og konflikt i Kaukasus*. (Systime Academic 2003), p. 239

³³⁴ ISS Strategic Commens Volume 14, Issue 01, January 2008, p. 2

³³⁵ Op. Cit, p. 2; www.dagsavisen.no/utenriks/article341043.ece

tanks, 72 artillery units, 7 planes and 3 helicopters – the corresponding numbers today are 28,700 – 33,000 personnel, 70,000 reservists, 100 tanks, 90 artillery units, 12 planes and 40 helicopters.³³⁶ In addition, Coppieters claims that the RG has built up a 100.000 personnel strong force for "protecting territorial integrity",³³⁷ there are plans to merge the navy with the coast guard into a Joint Maritime Defence Force³³⁸, according to Lenta the force of reservists and volunteers will be increased to 200.000³³⁹ and Jane's say that a 5th brigade of 3.300 men that will specialise in "peacekeeping or stabilisation" will be operational from 2009 — boosting the armed forces' numbers to 32.000.³⁴⁰ Parts of the build-up has been concentrated in the West: A new base was established in 2006 at Senaki and the 5th battalion is to be based in Khoni.³⁴¹ While the RG only has the right to 750 police officers inside the SZ, *Izvestiya* claims that "in reality on the Georgian side there are 2.500 military servicemen armed to the teeth" and "yet 2000 men in Upper Kodori" with "instructors" from the US and France in the camps³⁴² - but these data can not be accepted uncritically. Lacking accurate knowledge regarding forces in Upper Kodori has lead to many rumours. In September 2007 the RA Min. D claimed there to be 800 uniformed people there in addition to the police forces,³⁴³ but one month later Gvindzhiya claimed that the gorge held 3,000 RG soldiers (while the CISPK only numbered 1,000) and when recent tensions began the RF and RA claimed a presence of 1,500 RG soldiers³⁴⁴ but later an anonymous source from one of the RF "power ministries" used the figure 3,000.³⁴⁵ In addition, we have the paramilitaries. They were officially disbanded by RG Min. D Irakli Okruashvili soon after the Revolution, but after the Kodori Crisis (see 9.) there have been renewed paramilitary activity. Also, the RG has established two "patriotic youth camps" inside the SZ – one in Ganmukhuri village, the other near Zugdidi. Even UNOMIG seems a bit uncertain as to whether these

³³⁶ The data for 2002 is from Hillingsø in Faurby and Magunsson 2003, p. 237; most of the 2008 data is from lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/22/abhaz/. The minimum figure for personnel in 2008 is from JANEs January 2 2008, p. ?? . Note that the number of reservists in 2002 is defined as all citizens who had been enlisted the last 15 years. Lenta did not supply the criteria for their 2008 figure.

³³⁷ Coppieters 2007, p. 11

³³⁸ JANEs January 2 2008, p. 25 — 26

³³⁹ lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/22/abhaz/

³⁴⁰ JANEs January 2 2008, p. 24

³⁴¹ JANEs January 2 2008, p. 23

³⁴² *Izvestiya* 19.12.07

³⁴³ *Noviy Vzgljad* No. 3/2007

³⁴⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17713

³⁴⁵ lenta.ru/news/2008/05/03/plan/

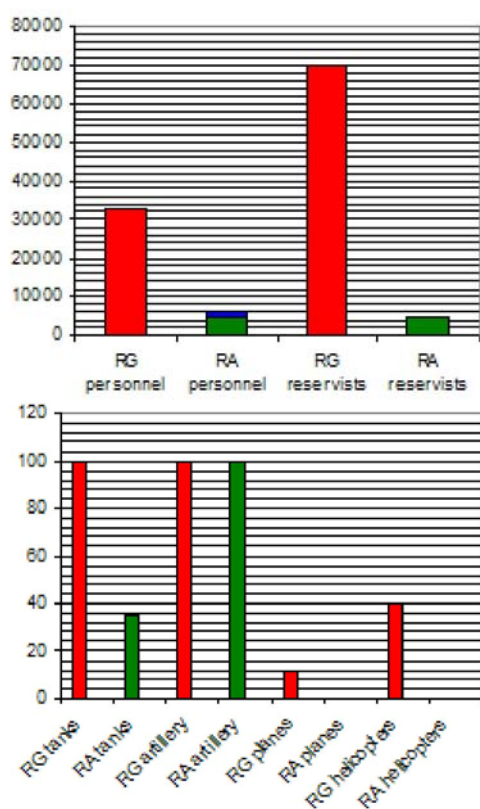
installations have a military value or not, as this statement from Gali CIMIC³⁴⁶ officer *Mark Bringedal* indicates:

MiB: Then what are [the youth camps] really?

MaB: That's a good question. We are allowed to go in there, usually. The CIS peacekeepers are not allowed. So there is some kind of transparency. There are many allegations of these camps housing military personnel. Some may also want it to seem like military camps. But we can come and see, and we don't find anything. It might have been a strategic place to put military installations, and call it something else. But we don't have observations that support this.³⁴⁷

In addition to all this, the RG has bought 40 drones from Israel, which are currently being used to monitor RA-controlled territory.³⁴⁸ Several of these have been shot down, and the latest three incidents in 2008 have contributed significantly to increased conflict intensity. The RG has asked NATO for help in case of armed clashes,³⁴⁹ while the RA said that they were ready to go under RF military control if this secured them from the RG.³⁵⁰

Fig. 7: The RA-RG military balance.³⁵¹



6.3. The military imbalance

The RG have large forces near Abkhazia and a potential for "squeezing" both the RA and CISPK by moving in from Upper Kodori (less than 30 km NE of Sokhumi),³⁵² the Zugdidi area (little more than 100 km SE of Sokhumi)³⁵³ and the sea — the invasion plan of the RG, according to the abovementioned anonymous RF source includes "capturing the most important objects on the coastline."

If the RG's surveillance flights over RA-held territory recently has produced anything more than scrap metal floating around in the Black Sea and tense diplomatic relations, they may also have mapped out RA military

³⁴⁶ Civil-Military Co-operation.

³⁴⁷ Author's interview with Mark Bringedal at the Gali UNOMIG base, November 13 2007

³⁴⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17657; lenta.ru/news/2008/04/22/forty/

³⁴⁹ lenta.ru/news/2008/04/28/nato/

³⁵⁰ lenta.ru/news/2008/05/06/control/

³⁵¹ Based on data presented earlier in this chapter.

³⁵² Abkhazia Today (ICG 2006)*, p. 21

³⁵³ Izvestiya 19.12.07, p. 9

infrastructure well enough to take out important parts of it quickly. Evidently from Fig. 7³⁵⁴ the RA has little chances if alone against the RG.

Since the RA's military control is defined by its forces relative to that of the RG, RA^M is now even worse than prior to the Rose Revolution – despite the fact that RA resistance will most probably be fierce, as they will (believe themselves to) be fighting for survival. A factor not shown in these tables is that of equipment *quality*: Lenta tells of a world of difference between the two on that level also.³⁵⁵ But the RA's military control is and has always mostly been borrowed from the RF, and while this is a source of RA^M instability it does not currently look like the RF is close to "ditching# the secessionists for Tbilisi. Since conflict intensity exploded in the early spring of 2008, the RA have proposed to sign an agreement of military cooperation with Russia,³⁵⁶ who is of course is vastly superior to the RG in military terms: In the period 2005 – 06 they had a total of 1,037,000 soldiers; 22,950 tanks and 2,188 combat aircrafts.³⁵⁷

Presently, the RG is perfectly able to launch a "blitzkrieg" and take Abkhazia, but if the RF honours its promises they face an overwhelming adversary. Sergey Markedonov deems the RG's trust that "the West" will come to their aid as faulty, arguing that the US/NATO would not want to get stuck in the Caucasus as well as Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the EU would not want to "help Serbia" by taking a tough stance on Georgian secessionism.³⁵⁸ This presupposes that the US/NATO do not launch operations that entrap them in wars; and that the EU will not find reasons to treat the Kosovo Conflict and the Abkhazian Conflict differently. While neither of these presuppositions are obviously correct, Markedonov has a good point: It is in no way given that NATO would support Georgia with direct military means in a conflict with the RF.

A more fundamental question is whether military build-ups, captures of strategic territories and bouts of semi-bellucose rhetoric (see 9.) are really fruitful approaches to secure RG^{dU}. Tbilisi's NATO orientation has only served to aggravate the RF further, as Jane's point out,³⁵⁹ leading to a vicious circle: The RG seeks NATO integration, which raises RF^{int} against Tbilisi and causes them to sponsor the RA and RSO more and more;

³⁵⁴ The diagram is based on the maximum figures cited above.

³⁵⁵ lenta.ru/articles/2008/04/22/abhaz/

³⁵⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1214403.html

³⁵⁷ Cordesman, Anthony and Kleiber Martin: *The Asian Conventional Military Balance in 2006* (CSIS 2006)

* p. 31

³⁵⁸ Sergej Markedonov: *The Paradoxes of Russia's Georgia Policy* (2007)*

³⁵⁹ Jane's Defense Weekly January 2 2008, p. 22

again causing RG^{int} to rise against all three units – who increasingly are seen as one Moscow-controlled whole. Thus, we get a dangerous intensity build-up that threatens to cause all-out war.

7. Recognition and rights

7.1. The Aggregate Level: Tbilisi' supreme advantage.

In its struggle to secure RA^{dU} , the RA has taken the path of demanding sovereign statehood. The fulfilment of this desire is dependent on the degree to which other states bestow it upon them. Though the RA does have a more stable internal political constitution than certain recognized states (e.g. Somalia), it has not received recognition from anyone. Hence, this source of power over RA^{dU} is in principle inaccessible for the RA and instead is a source of RG control over RA^{dU} : RA^{BAITNA} can *never* include formal sovereign statehood, lest other states begin to deny the RG territorial integrity within the GSSR's borders. At the moment of writing, the only entities relating to the RA as if it was a sovereign state are other CDPR states. Recently, the RSO even opened an "embassy" in the RA,³⁶⁰ but these live role-playing games of statehood do not actually give anyone legal recognition.

RG^R on the other hand is principally at the 100% mark – there is no state in the world that does not recognize Tbilisi's legal right to RG^{dU} . But their lacking recognition from the RA is in practice much more important than the recognition they receive from most other states: E.g. Chile's recognition does not change much for the RG's situation,³⁶¹ while Sokhumi's denial of recognition does - imagine if at some point Sokhumi had decided that instead of categorically denying to respect RG territorial integrity, they would consider doing just that under certain preconditions.

Also, the RF's formal recognition of the RG's right to control RG^{dU} is tainted by Russia's actions. Already before the Rose Revolution they ignored criticism of the CISP, and allegedly bombed the Pankisi gorge several times.³⁶² After the Revolution, the RF has been accused of violating RG airspace and bombing RG territory on several occasions, and Tbilisi's desires to have the CISP removed have been ignored. Following the RK

³⁶⁰ www.tiraspoltimes.com/news/south_ossetia_opens_embassy_in_abkhazia.html

³⁶¹ Of course, the gross result of such "irrelevant" de jure states' recognition matters — without them the RG would not possess unanimous or even majority recognition.

³⁶² www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/10478b69a5865a8b85256ca7007c7816

declaration of independence on February 17, this tendency got even more pronounced. The RA has long pinned its highest hopes on the RF's reactions to RK secession – and Russia can easily be accused of contributing to these high hopes. Already in early 2006 Putin warned that

If some one thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence, than [sic] why should we refuse this to Abkhazians, or South Ossetians?. We know, for example, that Turkey has recognized the Republic of North Cyprus. I do not want to say that Russia will immediately recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia as independent and sovereign states, but precedents (...) already exist...³⁶³

In late 2007 then-leader of the dominant United Russia party Boris Gryzlov stated that the newly elected RF Parl. Would "watch carefully how Russian citizens have cast their ballots in Abkhazia and South Ossetia" and debate recognition.³⁶⁴ On February 12 2008 RA Min. FA Sergey Shamba said that "a former autonomy within Yugoslavia" getting recognized would be "a direct analogy" though the Abkhaz were more entitled to sovereignty than the RK since "we [Abkhaz] live in our age-old native land, we have no second motherland and we have had statehood throughout the centuries."³⁶⁵ On the day of the RK's secession, the RA and RSO asked the world to recognize them, and the RF responded with a number of beneficial initiatives. The Duma even asked the RF Gov to "look into the possibilities for quickening the objective process of 'sovereignization' [sic],"³⁶⁶ and SRPA unanimously recommended the RF Gov. to recognize them.³⁶⁷ According to the New York Times RF officials said that future RF-RA relations should resemble those of Taiwan and the USA.³⁶⁸ Gvindzhiya commented that he had not expected formal recognition as it would "bring a diplomatic burden" on Moscow, and that "the political attitude is less important to us than the practical and economic."³⁶⁹ In April the RF Pres. Himself said that the RF should establish direct, formal ties with the Georgian statelets, recognize all companies and organizations based in them, and repeated that Russia would provide security for their citizens there.³⁷⁰ Shamba called this "de facto recognition",³⁷¹ while the RG called it de facto *annexation*.³⁷²

³⁶³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11688

³⁶⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16479

³⁶⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207586.html

³⁶⁶ lenta.ru/news/2008/03/21/accept/

³⁶⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1211042.html

³⁶⁸ www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/world/europe/17georgia.html?_r=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&oref=slogin

³⁶⁹ Interviewed by the New York Times, Op. Cit

³⁷⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17591

³⁷¹ izvestia.ru/world/article3115930/

³⁷² news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7350442.stm

In the wake of this diplomatic crisis and the ensuing military tension; NATO and the EU reaffirmed their support for Tbilisi.³⁷³ Coppieters claims that the RA refusal to let the IDPs exercise their right of return guarantees non-recognition from EU members.³⁷⁴ While there are also many Serb IDPs, victims of Kosovar Albanian ethnic cleansing, a major difference pointed out by Thomas de Waal is that should the Serbs return there would still be a Kosovar Albanian majority³⁷⁵ and thus a majority for RK sovereignty. This fact punches a hole in the RA's complaints that a people's right to self-determination is being sacrificed on the altar of territorial integrity: If one defines "the people" as the current inhabitants plus the IDPs, the majority of the people are unlikely to support secession. Other and less moral reasons for the differences in treatment of the RK and RA include the former's strong connection to a block of states versus the RA's dependence on one state; Tbilisi's latter-day favourite status with NATO versus Serbia's anti-NATO climate; the RK's status as a general *cause celebre* in many "Western" countries (as pointed out by Coppieters)³⁷⁶; and the fact that Kosovo-Metohija's population is about five times bigger than Abkhazia's.

But we are now talking about the RA's right to *sovereignty*, while in this thesis I define RA^{dU} as Abkhaz cultural survival through control over Abkhazia. Considering that the RA Abkhaz are formally subjects of the RG, how are their rights to RA^{dU} within the RG legal framework? What seems clear is that the RG considers the Abkhaz to be ranked above the national minorities – who are to be integrated³⁷⁷ into the general "demos" through "institutionalized protection of their rights"³⁷⁸ but not given autonomy.³⁷⁹ The 2005 draft *Concept on Protection of National Minorities and Integration Policy* that predated ratification of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* stated that national minority members were "obliged to respect [the] Georgian and Abkhaz nations, their history and traditions."³⁸⁰ It is probably quite constructive for the Abkhazian Conflict that the RG considers the Abkhaz as something other than the national minorities, as they would never settle with rights as modest as those bestowed

³⁷³ news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7350442.stm; www.civil.ge/eng/detail.php?id=17617

³⁷⁴ Coppieters 2007, p. 9

³⁷⁵ www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-caucasus/abkhazia_serbia_3787.jsp

³⁷⁶ Coppieters 2007, p. 9

³⁷⁷ ecmi.de/40/2005/09/21/GEORGIA-PREPARING-FOR-RATIFICATION-OF-FRAMEWORK-CONVENTION-ON-MINORITIES.php;

³⁷⁸ *Georgia's Democratic Transformation: An update since the Rose Revolution*. (Government of Georgia 2007)*

³⁷⁹ Kartvelian subgroups are not included as national minorities, of course.

³⁸⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10029,

upon such nations. But what kind of rights *do* the Abkhaz have? The RG Constitution refers to the RG as "independent, unified and indivisible" and specifies that it encompasses "the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia"³⁸¹ which has the right to Senate representation.³⁸² Abkhazia's "higher representative body" has the right to legislative initiative³⁸³ and to submit claims to the Constitutional Court³⁸⁴ Also, the RG Parl

for the term of its authority (...) shall elect the President and the Vice-Presidents of the Parliament by a secret ballot, *inter alia*, one from the members of the Parliament elected respectively in Abkhazia and the Autonomous Republic of Ajara upon the submission of the latter³⁸⁵

But in fact, none of these articles say anything about RA^{dU}. For one thing, the entity made reference to is the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (ARA) and not the RA. Secondly, the Constitution only talks about ARA's rights to affect decision making in Tblisi – not autonomy. Finally, nothing is said about the rights of the Abkhaz ethnic group, and this is quite important since post-IDP return Abkhazia will be demographically Kartvelian dominated. The only place in the Constitution where something is specified about the Abkhaz ethnos and/or culture, is Art. 8, that proclaims Abkhaz and Georgian to be Abkhazia's official languages.³⁸⁶ This is the only article that comes close to guaranteeing RA^{dU}.

The RG has on a few occasions proposed solutions that entail quite a high level of desire fulfilment for the Abkhaz, most recently on March 28 2008. That proposal involved "wide federalism"; joint free economic zones in East Abkhazia; ethnic Abkhaz representation in the RG Parl. with veto power over Abkhazian affairs; an Abkhaz Vice Pres. at the Federate level (earlier, the South Ossetians had been offered the same); Federal assistance in preserving RA culture; and a gradual merging of the two entities' security structures.³⁸⁷ This combination of central representation, federalism and ethnic power-sharing was RA refused by the RA as propaganda prior to the Bucharest NATO meeting, and they declined to discuss anything else than a "peace treaty."³⁸⁸ Subsequently, RG Parl. Speaker Nino Burjanadze declared that this refusal did not represent "the real

³⁸¹ Art. 1 of the RG Constitution*, p. 2.

³⁸² Art. 4.3 of the RC Constitution*, p. 2-3. The RG Parl consists of the Senate (reps from single-mandate constituencies and five RG Pres appointees) and the Council of [the] Republic (chosen by proportional representation).

³⁸³ Art. 67.1 of the RG Constitution*, p. 2

³⁸⁴ Art. 89 of the RC Constitution*, p. 29

³⁸⁵ Art. 55.1 of the RG Constitution*, p. 15

³⁸⁶ The RG Constitution*, p. 18

³⁸⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17475; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1210741.html

³⁸⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17476

mood of the Abkhaz people," but RF pressure.³⁸⁹ The quick demise of Tbilisi's proposal illustrates the basic distrust of the RA towards the current RG Gov.

7.2. The Issue Level: The rights of the parties

Though the RA's recognition is marginal/non-existent, it does have a certain degree of "issue level" recognition: Their recognition as a party in the conflict gives them considerable rights to control RA^{dU}. In addition to the Moscow Accords, that give Abkhazia the right to an own Constitution and state symbols,³⁹⁰ they have a place at the relevant tables – giving them possibilities to practice behavioural power. One such power available to them is "the walkout option": They can punish the RG by freezing negotiations.³⁹¹ Furthermore, the RA may refuse to accept certain frameworks for negotiations: This was what happened when the GF in 2001 proposed the Boden Plan.³⁹² When pressed again in 2003 they still refused,³⁹³ and in 2008 they told the GF that if they did not stop insisting on the Boden Plan it could spell the end of all negotiations,³⁹⁴ and questioned their neutrality.³⁹⁵

The main framework for negotiations is the so-called "Geneva Process" that started in 1997. An important element in point of this process is the Coordinating Council (CC), which is led by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRUNSG), facilitated by the RF and has the OSCE and GF as observers.³⁹⁶ The parties are defined as the RG and the RA, constructing an equality between them that is absent in "aggregate" terms. On the other hand, the "Sochi Process" that started in 2003, seems at face value to threaten the RA's place at the table – the main parties here are the RF and the RG, with the RA participating only in parts of the talks and in working group activities.³⁹⁷ The Pro-RG critic Vladimir Socor, however, accuses the Sochi Process of

³⁸⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17477. At this stage the RG increasingly framed the RA as having little agency in the conflict, instead seeing the Russian hand as omnipresent (see 9).

³⁹⁰ The current RA Constitution is not legitimate, since the majority was absent when it was voted over (1999).

³⁹¹ This strategy is of course only available to a party whose status quo is endurable.

³⁹² At a GF meeting on February 18 2008, Shamba suggested that future negotiations should be based on the RA's framework proposal (the "Key", see below) and not the BodenPlan, saying that "if even the international participants adhere to the Boden Plan, there is no point in continuing the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue." (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207916.html; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207062.html, www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207401.html; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207395.html).

³⁹³ *Abkhazia Briefing Note January 2005* (UNDP Georgia)*, p. 2

³⁹⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207395.html

³⁹⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207916.html

³⁹⁶ *Abkhazia Briefing Note Jan 2004* (UN OCHA Georgia)*

³⁹⁷ *Abkhazia Briefing Note January 2005* (UNDP Georgia)*, p. 2

presenting Tbilisi with a "united front" of the RF and the RA³⁹⁸ According to European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) the RG was disappointed with the Sochi Process as it in practice dealt much with the railway and little with the IDPs.³⁹⁹ The RA seem to be – normally, they react vocally whenever they feel they are being "nudged" out of an opportunity to affect the conflict. E.g. Gvindzhiya attacked a 2007 conference in Berlin that involved all the SC's de jure states but no unrecognized ones as "a waste of time":

Any [discussion on settlement in the Abkhazian Conflict] without the participation of Abkhazia is absolutely meaningless. First, the picture of the situation which is created in this case for the Council of Europe is completely partial, as the Georgian interpretation, as a rule, is far from the reality of the situation. Secondly, any decision or recommendation adopted without regard to the Abkhaz side is unviable because their implementation is not possible if there is no agreement of both sides⁴⁰⁰

Finally, there used to be a less formal process called the "Schleining Process" which consisted of meetings between politicians as private individuals.⁴⁰¹ This process was discontinued during the period, according to Kvarcheliya.⁴⁰²

At the beginning of the period under analysis, all negotiations were "down" due to the October Events. After the Rose Revolution the parties met within the Sochi Process frames, and the Geneva process was also reanimated⁴⁰³ - but this did not last long: The RA walked out after the RG fired on a freight vessel outside Sokhumi on July 30 2004. Only weekly quadripartite meetings⁴⁰⁴ in Gali still went on. Also, the parties' Joint fact-finding group was operative again already in December 2004.⁴⁰⁵ After *Sergey Bagapsh*' RA Gov. came to power in 2005, negotiations resumed - but Sokhumi withdrew again after six months, this time due to Tbilisi arresting a Turkish ship headed for the RA on July 3 2005⁴⁰⁶ despite RA warnings that all talks would be broken off if RG vessels kept "intruding" into "their" seas.⁴⁰⁷ Negotiations were up again already in August, but once more a crisis during the summer broke off all meetings. After the Kodori Crisis of 2006, the RA has consistently refused to talk with the RG until the resulting grievances are addressed.

³⁹⁸ www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370078

³⁹⁹ *Background Document on Abkhazia* (ECMI)*, p. 9

⁴⁰⁰ www.abkhaziagov.org/en/news/detail.php?ID=9035

⁴⁰¹ www.unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=261&y=2003&m=12&d=26

⁴⁰² The last meeting I can find anything on took place on June 16 2006 (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1016880.html). I.e. there is nothing to be found after the Kodori Crisis. Kvarcheliya accused Tbilisi of closing the talks because "they would prefer to keep Abkhazia isolated" and not be given chances to speak with "Western representatives." (Author's interview with Kvarcheliya).

⁴⁰³ Abkhazia Briefing Note Jul 2004 (UN OCHA Georgia)*

⁴⁰⁴ Between the RG, RA, CISPK and UNOMIG.

⁴⁰⁵ Abkhazia Briefing Note January 2005 (UNDP Georgia)*, p. 2-3

⁴⁰⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/833420.html

⁴⁰⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/781660.html

Just as the issue level rights boost the RA's power over RA^{dU}, it reduces the RG's control over RG^{dU} stemming from the aggregate level. Like the RA, the RG has troop limitations in the SZ and RAZ, obligations not to attack RA-controlled areas⁴⁰⁸ and responsibility to prevent paramilitary activity.⁴⁰⁹ But if limitations and obligations were followed, the Abkhazian Conflict would look rather different. For one thing, the RG's 2006 operation in Upper Kodori and subsequent stationing of forces was not in line with the Moscow Accords.⁴¹⁰ Likewise, the use of drones has been labelled as a breach of the Accords by the RA and RF – though Tbilisi claims that the drones are not armed and therefore do not violate any agreements.⁴¹¹ And of course, if the RA followed the Accords, the Kartvelian majority would have been reinstated a long time ago.

8. Social cohesion

8.1. *The Republic of Abkhazia: A democratizing ethnocracy*

At the outset of the period under analysis, the RA^S was very weak. Parts of Abkhazia were totally outside RA control (Upper Kodori), others only to a minimal extent (Gali) and everywhere else crime was rampant. Power abuse and corruption were also major problems, and press freedom was marred by repeated attacks on e.g. the critical newspaper *Nuzhnyaya*.⁴¹² Several opposition parties were founded, among those the war veterans' party *Amtsakhara*. This movement drew broad support, and in 2002 called on voters to boycott Parl. elections, stating that this was just a "façade" masking total RA Gov. control.⁴¹³ But the opposition was not united: Other important parties included businessman Aleksandr Ankvab's *Aytayra* and United Akhazia. Kvarcheliya claimed that some of the disagreements had to do with respect for the political "rules of the game":

When [Amtsakhara] established themselves, you know, they (...) were not speaking about elections, they demanded [Ardzinba's] resignation at a mass rally. Aytayra and also the NGOs did not support it. The NGOs agreed with Amtsakhara that Ardzinba was too ill to rule, and we disagreed with things he did, but we wanted Parliament to start a process of impeachment or wait until his term expired. We were allies in not supporting Ardzinba, but did not support their tactics.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces (1994)*

⁴⁰⁹ PROTOCOL: The Sukhumi Meeting. (1998)*

⁴¹⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13159; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1034641.html

⁴¹¹ lenta.ru/news/2008/04/23/fly/

⁴¹² www.cpj.org/attacks01/europe01/georgia.html

⁴¹³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=1465

⁴¹⁴ Author's interview with Kvarcheliya

Despite discontent with the regime, the RA sovereignty project in itself did not come under attack, not from opposition movements nor the critical media.⁴¹⁵ The RF, among others, claims that the 1990s' embargo did not at all erode loyalty, but strengthened it by creating a "siege mentality".⁴¹⁶ Sokhumi claims that in their 1999 Constitutional referendum, an 87.6% turnout voted near unanimously for sovereignty⁴¹⁷ and when the October Events caused forced integration into the RG to seem a real threat, even one of the most disgruntled groups - the war veterans - agreed to be mobilized.⁴¹⁸

In the 2004 Pres elections, the candidature of PM Raul' Khadzhimba was endorsed by both Ardzinba and Moscow. Khadzhimba, known to be pro-RF and a former KGB employee, had a widely publicized meeting with Putin before the elections⁴¹⁹ and posters of the two were omnipresent in Abkhazia.⁴²⁰ But a consolidating opposition caused trouble for the would-be Pres: In July, United Abkhazia and Amsakhara agreed to launch Bagapsh (former PM and then CEO of the RA national energy company)⁴²¹ as their joint Pres. candidate and Stanislav Lakoba as Vice Pres. candidate.⁴²² Ankvab was disqualified from running after he refused to take a language test (though the authorities admitted he spoke Abkhaz fluently) and for having lived insufficiently long in the RA.⁴²³ Aytayra criticised the regime for "dirty tricks" and flagged support for Bagapsh, whose bloc offered Ankvab the post of PM in a future government. Thus, the regime's repressive methods helped unite the opposition.⁴²⁴ Bagapsh' program and rhetoric was to a large extent focused on economic issues and democratization:

In case we win the elections, we will not rule Abkhazia but govern the state and serve the people (...) a transparent, open and accessible authority (...) the decisive word will be with the people.⁴²⁵

Errors and omissions in the development of people power, civil society and democracy, inefficient economic leadership in the years that have gone by keep stimulating the processes of degradation, spiritual and material impoverishment of the republic's citizens.⁴²⁶

⁴¹⁵ Nodia in Anchabadze et al 1998. *Civil Georgia* at one point claimed Amsakhara was inclined towards a federative solution (www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=1465) but I have found no other source indicating this.

⁴¹⁶ Chirikba, Viacheslav: *Abkhazia: Economic and Political Situation and Perspectives*.*; Antonenko in Coppieters/Legvold 2005 p. 246.

⁴¹⁷ Act of State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia (1999)*

⁴¹⁸ www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=160048&apc_state=heniers2002

⁴¹⁹ www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=159701&apc_state=heniers2004

⁴²⁰ Izvestiya December 19 2007, p. 9

⁴²¹ lenta.ru/lib/14159614/

⁴²² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/685373.html

⁴²³ www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=159701&apc_state=heniers2004

⁴²⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/702980.html

⁴²⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/708900.html

⁴²⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/pop/interview/id/707960.html

Bagapsh said a choice had to be made between "market conditions or a planned economy", and rule of law was a precondition for the first of these.⁴²⁷ He also linked lacking recognition and military weakness to the bad RA^E situation.⁴²⁸ Though Bagapsh' voters are often portrayed as RF-sceptics,⁴²⁹ Bagapsh never advocated weakening these ties: He openly argued for associated membership in the Russian Federation "at the present stage," and desired an "integration of the Russian economy into ours, and ours into the Russian". He cited the relationship between Lichtenstein and Switzerland as an ideal,⁴³⁰ and defined the RA as "an independent state under Russia's patronage".⁴³¹ His more radical running mate Lakoba emphasised the need to focus on Europe and not only the RF.⁴³² Regarding the non-Abkhaz population, Bagapsh' program said little, but it did state that "Abkhazia is a multinational country"⁴³³ and argued for "equality in rights, freedoms and opportunities".⁴³⁴ Again, Lakoba was more explicit, desiring increased representation of other ethnic groups in the administration.⁴³⁵ Still, Kvarcheliya says that "[Bagapsh' bloc] made a point about being oriented towards the minorities, and were more popular among them. [Khadzhimba's bloc] is more nationalist".

When the results were presented in October the authorities claimed Khadzhimba had won with 52,8% over Bagapsh' 33,6% and that Shamba, who ran independently, had garnered 10%;⁴³⁶ while the opposition claimed Bagapsh had won with more than half the total vote.⁴³⁷ Both sides accused each other of fraud⁴³⁸ (Khadzhimba stating that in Gali, Kartvelians had voted without being entitled to)⁴³⁹ and the volcano erupted: Armed groupings rushed to the capital⁴⁴⁰ and official buildings were seized by Bagapsh' supporters.⁴⁴¹ The situation grew so tense as to resemble a brewing civil war, but the candidates and Ardzinba eventually sat down to bargain - with RF representatives present - and in December they had reached an agreement: A joint ticket with Bagapsh running

⁴²⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/709252.html

⁴²⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/pop/interview/id/707960.html

⁴²⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7963

⁴³⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/709252.html

⁴³¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/pop/interview/id/707960.html

⁴³² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/690780.html

⁴³³ It should be noted that the incumbents also had referred to the Abkhazians as "a multinational people", so this was not all that radical (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/667378.html)

⁴³⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/pop/interview/id/707960.html

⁴³⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/690780.html

⁴³⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/710773.html

⁴³⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/710855.html

⁴³⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/711528.html

⁴³⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/detail.php?id=8000

⁴⁴⁰ www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=158675&apc_state=henicrs2004

⁴⁴¹ iwpr.net/pdf/100crs_eng.pdf p. 107

for Pres. and Khadzhimba as Vice Pres, while Lakoba was promised "a prominent position" and ended up as leader of the RA SC⁴⁴² when the new team won a 90,1% victory.⁴⁴³ Though the opposition came out on top, there are allegations that the RF imposed the compromise - e.g. from Coppieters, who also claims that Russia "retains the power to veto crucial political decisions".⁴⁴⁴ Still, there are widespread claims that in fact it is PM Ankvab and not Khadzhimba who is the real second in command. E.g. Kvarcheliya says that "[Khadzhimba] is not very much a political figure anymore, very weak and dependable."⁴⁴⁵ When confronted with this on a 2008 Lenta Q&A, Bagapsh strongly denied it.⁴⁴⁶

The events described here can be seen as the second "colour revolution"⁴⁴⁷ to occur in the Post-Soviet area if we apply the following criteria: (i) An authoritarian elite is replaced by a group promising democratization, after (ii) basically non-violent popular protests against (iii) allegedly falsified elections benefiting (iv) a candidate supported by the RF. Being smaller in scope than the simultaneously occurring Orange Revolution, but definitely a "relative" of it, one may refer to Abkhazia's colour revolution as the "Tangerine Revolution". Kvarcheliya described it as a democratic victory over RF influence:

The incumbents and Russia used enormous resources, but they lost. People voted for Bagapsh, not necessarily because they liked him so much, but because they wanted change. They even went against Russia, which was risky. This is our only semi-ally. They risked their only ally, to keep them from interfering to such an extent. I think that was an important step in political participation. So, there is a process of democratization.⁴⁴⁸

But while feeling that Abkhazia is democratizing, both Kvarcheliya and Ketsba underlined that not all is rosy in the Abkhazian democracy. For one thing, the party system has great flaws:

You know, we do not have parties here in the sense that you do in the West. They don't really exist. Two or three months after elections, they fall apart. (...) I was one of the leaders of [Aytayra] That's the party that supported Bagapsh'. It died after the president was elected.⁴⁴⁹

It's difficult to talk about political parties in Abkhazia. Most parties are created for elections (...) The politicians are themselves saying now that we need laws on parties and proportional representation. Once the block of two parties – Bagapsh' and the prime minister's – won, the parties died. (...) The

⁴⁴² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1033660.html

⁴⁴³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/753760.html

⁴⁴⁴ Coppieters 2007, p. 18

⁴⁴⁵ Author's interview with Kvarcheliya.

⁴⁴⁶ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

⁴⁴⁷ The third colour revolution, if you count what happened in Ajara in 2004 (see 8.2).

⁴⁴⁸ Author's interview with Kvarcheliya.

⁴⁴⁹ Author's interview with Ketsba.

party of the former elite was a fiction. Now that they are the opposition, they are better organized, they want to get back in power.⁴⁵⁰

The opposition — that is, groups supporting the Vice Pres. instead of Bagapsh — only got 20% of the RA Parl. seats in the 2007 elections, and subsequently accused the ruling bloc of cheating by letting people who "left their villages 10-20 years ago" vote and handing out Formula #9 documents to people with instructions to vote for them⁴⁵¹ - once more attacking the AKs and IDPs. The Editor-in-Chief of *Chegemskaya Pravda* predicted this loss – saying that while people were somewhat disappointed in Bagapsh, "no one wants a return to the past."⁴⁵²

In addition to the somewhat dysfunctional parties there are many NGOs active in Abkhazia, cooperating with each other and actively trying to influence the agenda. Particularly interesting is that both NGO activists I interviewed in Sokhumi were involved in cooperation with NGOs in Gali, and Kvarcheliya also had ties to Armenian activists. While Abkhazia is a small "country," such inter-ethnic co-operations are not given after an ethnic war. Regarding the media situation there are four newspapers and two TV channels in today's RA – a private channel having been started in 2007 by tourist industry businessman and "centrist" politician Beslan Budba. Kvarcheliya sees independent media's and civil society's role in the RA as important, since she holds the opposition to be undemocratic and incapable of "constructive criticism." She claims that "freedom of speech and media is the strongest part of our democracy" but even so indicated that media debate had little effect on the politicians' agenda. Both Kvarcheliya and Ketsba also complained that courts are "under heavy influence from the executive and also the Parliament".⁴⁵³

The highest potential for instability, however, lies neither in the party system nor the media situation – but in ethnic discrimination. The constitution of the current RA Parl. makes the RA a glaring example of ethnocracy: Out of the 35 representatives, 74,3% are Abkhaz.⁴⁵⁴ *Nuzhnaya* said that this is "almost exactly the same ethnic breakdown as the last [RA Parl]" and expressed worry that the representatives would not "stand up for the interests of their respective

⁴⁵⁰ Author's interviews with Kvarcheliya

⁴⁵¹ kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1182186.html

⁴⁵² ww.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14481

⁴⁵³ Author's interviews with Kvarcheliya and Ketsba

⁴⁵⁴ The remaining 9 are 3 Russians, 3 AAs, 2 AGs and 1 Turk. The "Turk", Vladimir Nachach-Ogly (see 9), is in some reports counted as Abkhaz (www.regnum.ru/english/polit/798212.html republics)

communities."⁴⁵⁵ The system may be particularly difficult to change through reform since it is informal – "certain electoral districts have been traditionally represented by individuals of a certain ethnicity" according to Kerselyan.⁴⁵⁶ While the non-Abkhaz seem to accept the situation, Kvarcheliya thinks that the Armenians may "go in[to politics] if they feel their business interests are jeopardized." Worryingly, there are also issues between Abkhaz and AAs apart from the systematic discrimination: In January 2006 the *Council of Armenian Community* was so concerned over anti-Armenian leaflets and "sabotage" (a primitive bomb, reportedly)⁴⁵⁷ against an Armenian school in Sokhumi that they confronted Bagapsh.⁴⁵⁸ He admitted that the RA Gov. had not paid enough attention to the AAs' situation and promised increased focus. Khadzhimba, on the other hand, denied that there were Abkhaz-Armenian conflicts.⁴⁵⁹ In 2008, when Bagapsh was asked in a Q&A about "the growing tension between Abkhaz and Armenians," Bagapsh insisted that there was "no tension" and blamed the "PR-structures of Georgia."⁴⁶⁰

In the course of this Q&A, Bagapsh constructs a highly interesting ethnic hierarchy where those who are neither Abkhaz nor Kartvelians form a middle class: He keeps emphasizing their Kartvelian-induced suffering, that they acknowledge the Abkhaz right to rule Abkhazia and he praises some of them for having "laid their children on the altar of our victory" during the war. When Bagapsh talks about Kartvelians, his speech is borderline orientalizing at times ("[Georgia] is a country of very emotional people, sometimes their emotions run counter to a thoughtful approach to certain questions")⁴⁶¹ though he bestows a certain accept upon the Gali AKs: They "take part in the political life of the republic" and are "our citizens like all other inhabitants of Abkhazia".⁴⁶² Also, Gvindzhiya states that "a lot of the people in Gali didn't fight during the war. They did not want to be involved on Shevardnadze's side, they supported Gamsakhurdia."⁴⁶³

Still, the Gali AKs are by far the most disenfranchised group in the country, in addition to being at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Their region is controlled

⁴⁵⁵ www.armeniandiaspora.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-85598.html

⁴⁵⁶ yandunts.blogspot.com/2007/06/abkhazia-and-its-armenians.html

⁴⁵⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11501

⁴⁵⁸ www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=16008&date=2006-01-16

⁴⁵⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14498

⁴⁶⁰ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

⁴⁶¹ He does, though, also state that the Abkhaz and the Kartvelians are quite "similar concerning character and mentality" (Op. cit).

⁴⁶² Op. cit.

⁴⁶³ Author's interview with Gvindzhiya.

by Abkhaz police forces and CISPK, and run by a representative of the RA Gov (currently Ruslan Khismariya). Due to infrastructure problems this police force never actually prevents crime, as they always get to the scene too late according to Todia. Particularly Lower Gali is dangerous: "If you go there, you do not know what will happen. Maybe you will be all right, but..."⁴⁶⁴ Todia and others claim that while particularly the harvest sees a lot of crime — armed raids on houses — kidnappings for ransom occur around the year, to the extent that a common problem for the UNOMIG is finding out whether kidnappings or murders are related to the conflict or just crime.⁴⁶⁵ On a positive note; several sources claim that Gali's crime rates have fallen in the latter years.⁴⁶⁶ But as if ethnocracy, crime and stark poverty were not enough, the Gali Kartvelians also have to live with sanctions from the RG: During the 2007 Parl. elections locals were harassed by paramilitaries:

The head of the village administration in Lower Gali, Fridon Chakaberia, a Mingrelian (...) 65 or 70 years old (...) was arrested on the Georgian side for carrying drugs (...). It's outrageous. He's not that kind of person. He was very clearly being punished for collaborating. A lot of NGOs monitored his situation (...) so they had to release him (...). David Sigua, the head of the district election committee, was abducted and reportedly killed by Georgian interior police. (...) So after this, people in Gali were terrified to vote. They were urged by Abkhazian authorities to vote anyway. In a way, that was pressure too (...). But they also received more pressure from Georgia. They have Georgian phone connections in Gali — it works better than ours — and people in line to vote received phone calls from Georgia, people calling them and threatening them. "We see you through our binoculars, we see you at the voting station. You are a traitor. We will kill your son who studies in Tbilisi". People were scared and also angry they called them traitors. They want peace and stability to live normal lives, but they are squeezed between the two sides.⁴⁶⁷

A final note on RA^S is that as of 2008 Upper Kodori is even more definitely outside RA control, while the measure of control the RA has over the rest of Abkhazia is the same: Gali is still more quiescent than it is actively controlled, and organized crime/corruption is still rampant throughout the "country". The police are so defunct that many rely on criminal groupings instead, according to Ketsba: "If you go to the police first, the [mafia] won't help you. If you go directly to them and give them money, \$1000 for a car, they'll get it back for you." The PM himself has experienced four attempts on his life since 2005 — organized crime is blamed - and still nobody has been caught.⁴⁶⁸ Thus, while the democratization leads RA^S to be clearly better than under Ardzinba's reign, the situation is far from good and there is a plethora of sources for instability.

⁴⁶⁴ Author's interview with Todia

⁴⁶⁵ Author's interview with Bringedal

⁴⁶⁶ Author's interviews with Kvarcheliya and Todia; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1102300.html

⁴⁶⁷ Author's interview with Kvarcheliya

⁴⁶⁸ www.kommersant.com/p781327/assassination_breakaway_republics

8.2. Georgia: A Rose with many Thorns

Social cohesion says a lot about the extent to which they RG controls RG^{dU}, as RG^{dU} defined as building a stable state within the GSSR's borders. Thus, Tbilisi's desired utility is for RG^S to be as good as possible. The other variables simply relate to RG^{dU} by way of affecting the RG's possibilities for capturing more control of it.

Prior to the Rose Revolution, a number of opposition groups had gathered against Shevardnadze's increasingly unpopular rule. The largest of them were ex-Min. of Justice (Min. J) Mikheil Saakashvili's *United National Movement* (UNM) and the three-party bloc *Burjanadze-Democrats* (BD) led by Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania. The Rose Revolution started in November 2003 when the Central Election Committee (CEC) declared that in the first round of the Parl. elections, Shevardnadze's bloc *For a New Georgia* (FNG)⁴⁶⁹ had won; and the runner-ups were the *Revival Party* (RP) of Ajara's dictator and Presidential envoy to Abkhazia *Aslan Abashidze*.⁴⁷⁰ UNM's bloc⁴⁷¹ came in 3rd and the BD 5th⁴⁷², after the pro-Western socialist *Labour Party* (LP).⁴⁷³ The TV-channels Imedi and Rustavi-2 reported irregularities, and OSCE stated that elections "fell short of a number of international standards."⁴⁷⁴ After much civil unrest, CEC announced the final results on November 20: FNG was still on top, but now followed by the UNM bloc. *Fair Elections*, the RGs largest independent monitoring group claimed that the UNM bloc won and the BD defeated the RP and the LP. Saakashvili claimed victory for himself and "the opposition in general", promising "a completely new life with a new parliament".⁴⁷⁵ When Shevardnadze tried to convene the new RG Parl, massive demonstrations ensued. The military and police showed a clear lack of support for the incumbent Pres, who eventually resigned on November 23.⁴⁷⁶ When new Pres. elections were held in January 2004, Saakashvili won these with 96%.⁴⁷⁷ The UNM united with Zhvania's forces and the bloc won a landslide in the March 2004 Parl. election, getting 152 of 224 seats.⁴⁷⁸ The Rose Revolution fundamentally changed the RG political landscape – providing a whole new

⁴⁶⁹ *Georgia: Parliamentary Elections November 2003 (NORDEM 2004)**, p. 2. The bloc included Nadareishvili's *Abkhazia's Liberation Party*.

⁴⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 3, 16. Abashidze won with a suspicious 95% success in Ajara.

⁴⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 3

⁴⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 16

⁴⁷³ *Op. cit.*, p. 4

⁴⁷⁴ www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav110303.shtml.

⁴⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*

⁴⁷⁶ www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/112403a.shtml

⁴⁷⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6137; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=5957

⁴⁷⁸ www.civil.ge/block_2004_4.html; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6594

legitimacy and popularity to the regime, thus boosting RG^S. Saakashvili claimed that the Rose Revolution had "at its core one simple demand – the creation of a stable, equitable, and functional democracy" and already in 2004 told the UN General Assembly (UNGA) that "we have accomplished that demand, in ways that few abroad or at home ever imagined possible". He said the rule of law was re-instated, lasting systemic change had occurred and that his Gov. would build "bridges, not bases (...) roads, and not rockets".⁴⁷⁹

Despite Saakashvili's initially high popular support, by 2007 Georgia was a deeply unstable country where the ruling elite's popular legitimacy was low. Saakashvili had done much to fight lower level corruption and created more wealth. He had not, however, incorporated all of the RG's claimed areas, returned the IDPs, gone after top level corruption or prioritized the social sphere.⁴⁸⁰ The ICG's 2008 report *Georgia: Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* claims that discontent had been growing steadily for years⁴⁸¹ before it exploded in 2007. The catalyst was Irakli Okruashvili, who had left the RG Gov in November 2006 after being reassigned from Min. D to Min. of Economy after stating that he would resign if he did not celebrate New Years Eve 2006 in his hometown Tskhinvali.⁴⁸² Now he was back with his own opposition party, *Movement for a United Georgia*,⁴⁸³ and accused Saakashvili of "fascist tendencies":

The style of Saakashvili's governance (...) has made dishonesty, injustice and oppression a way of life. Everyday repression, demolition of houses and churches, robbery, 'kulakization', and murders, I would stress, murders, have become common practice for the authorities.⁴⁸⁴

He accused the RG Pres. of selectiveness in the battle against corruption; continuing Shevardnadze's "Apartheid-type mentality" against IDPs from Abkhazia and "Samachablo"; undermining the Orthodox Church; and failing to incorporate South Ossetia: He claimed the RG was "only a step away from reclaiming one of our lost territories," but it was frustrated by Saakashvili's "incapability, weakness and inability to take a political and historical decision"⁴⁸⁵ He said there had been a plan to launch a "small scale operation" with "a minimum of casualties,"⁴⁸⁶ but this plan had been replaced by the

⁴⁷⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7894. Regarding bases and rockets, one should note that since 2004 the RG defence budget has increased with 3.000%. (Jane's Defense Weekly Vol. 45, issue no 1, January 2 2008, p. 21-22)

⁴⁸⁰ "A significant segment of the population has not benefited from the reforms, and social disenfranchisement threatens cohesion. Indeed, the government has largely ignored social policies. There is next to no safety net or welfare system, and there have been few state interventions to address the needs of displaced persons, the elderly or the unemployed." (*Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 14)

⁴⁸¹ Op. Cit, p. 2

⁴⁸² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14113

⁴⁸³ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 2

⁴⁸⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15862.

⁴⁸⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15862

⁴⁸⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15869

creation of the Sanakoev Administration.⁴⁸⁷ Finally, he claimed that Saakashvili had told him to have businessman and Imedi owner Badri Patarkatsishvili murdered.⁴⁸⁸ Two days later Okruashvili was arrested on a number of charges, and later exiled,⁴⁸⁹ but his words had struck a chord: Massive demonstrations ensued⁴⁹⁰ and ten opposition parties united in a campaign for reforms and new elections.⁴⁹¹ Patarkatsishvili's flagging of support for the opposition caused sanctions against Imedi,⁴⁹² and after coverage of opposition activities the station was shut down brutally on accusations of spreading messages to overthrow the government. The RG Gov. labelled the opposition a "black, dark force" funded by "a concrete oligarch Russian source"⁴⁹³ — rather unlikely, considering Okruashvili's "hawkish" policies and that Patrikatsishvili was a former Berezovskiy ally.⁴⁹⁴ On November 7 non-violent protestors were treated with truncheons and tear gas, opposition leaders beaten up and a state of emergency declared.⁴⁹⁵ After much international pressure, Saakashvili gave in:⁴⁹⁶ The state of emergency was cancelled, new Pres. elections were promised for January 2008 and Imedi returned to the air⁴⁹⁷ - briefly, as in January 2008 the RG once again seized control.⁴⁹⁸ When Patarkatsishvili died not much later, 70% of Imedi fell into the hands of his US-American cousin Joseph Kay who was accused of being an RG Gov. ally.⁴⁹⁹ As for the snap elections, the opposition failed to unite: Okruashvili was exiled and Patarkatsishvili fell out with other opposition leaders but ran anyway,⁵⁰⁰ and though a "united opposition" candidate was found in centre-right Levan Gachechiladze, the LP and three other parties launched their own candidates. Saakashvili won with a clear majority, but voter turnout was low (see Fig. 5). The opposition called the elections unfair, and there were claims that Gachechiladze in reality won, or at least earned a second round against Saakashvili.⁵⁰¹ In addition to a general

⁴⁸⁷ The Sanakoev administration is a "paralell government" in the RG-controlled parts of South Ossetia. (www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15862)

⁴⁸⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15869

⁴⁸⁹ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁰ lenta.ru/news/2007/09/28/meeting/

⁴⁹¹ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 3

⁴⁹² lenta.ru/articles/2008/03/27/imedi/

⁴⁹³ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 4

⁴⁹⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 6

⁴⁹⁵ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 4

⁴⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 5

⁴⁹⁷ lenta.ru/articles/2008/03/27/imedi/

⁴⁹⁸ lenta.ru/articles/2008/03/27/imedi/; lenta.ru/news/2008/04/23/okruashvili/

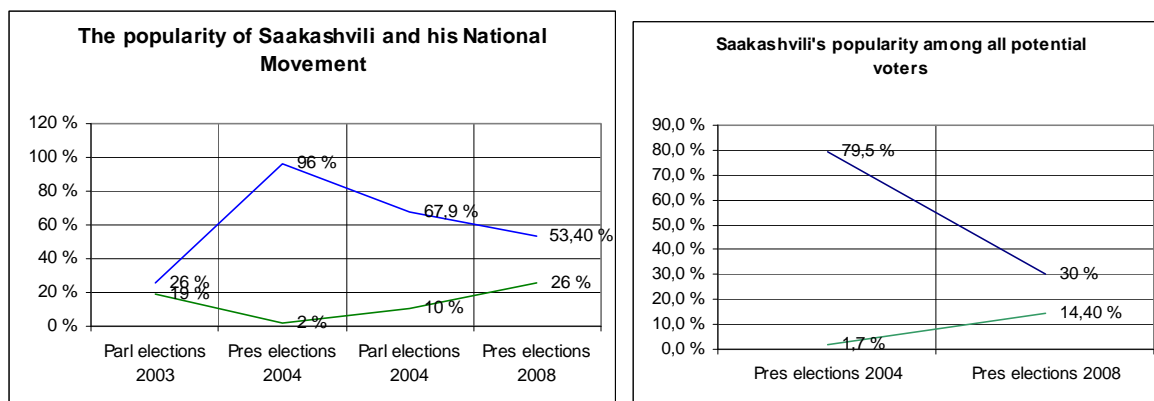
⁴⁹⁹ lenta.ru/articles/2008/03/27/imedi/; lenta.ru/news/2008/03/24/imedi/; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17760. At the moment of writing Imedi has recently returned to the air, but does not broadcast news.

⁵⁰⁰ lenta.ru/articles/2008/03/27/imedi/

⁵⁰¹ lenta.ru/news/2008/01/20/meeting1/

marked drop in regime popularity, one should not overlook the fact that Saakashvili lost Tblisi to Gachechiladze⁵⁰² — a dangerous fact in a country where regimes have never once changed without the active involvement of masses gathering in the capital. Since the election, Saakashvili has been in sharp conflict with the opposition, to the point where opposition members refuse to negotiate with him and only agree to meet with Burjanadze.⁵⁰³

Fig. 8: The rise and fall of Saakashvili's popularity. ⁵⁰⁴



9. Interactions and Conflict Intensity

9.1. Fall 2003 – Fall 2004: Georgian revolutions, Abkhaz suspicions

At the time of the Rose Revolution the RA initially claimed "no interest" in who won the elections in "another state",⁵⁰⁵ but following Saakashvili's victory they signalled readiness to start discussions again.⁵⁰⁶ They did attempt to set a few preconditions, though, which included abolishing the Government of Abkhazia in Exile (GAE, the leadership of ARA) and the paramilitary groups, and signing a treaty excluding military means of conflict solution.⁵⁰⁷ While these preconditions were later dropped,⁵⁰⁸ several items on the list were addressed by the RG: Saakashvili committed to peaceful solutions several times during 2004,⁵⁰⁹ paramilitary activity in East Abkhazia was largely discontinued,⁵¹⁰ Nadareishvili

⁵⁰² www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/g/georgia/georgia-presidential-election-2008.html

⁵⁰³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17367

⁵⁰⁴ Fig. 5 is based on data from *Georgia: Parliamentary Elections November 2003* (NORDEM 2004)*, p. 16; www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav110303.shtml; www.civil.ge/block_2004_4.html; lenta.ru/lib/14185446/; lenta.ru/lib/14185330/; lenta.ru/lib/14185679/; lenta.ru/lib/14185937/; *Georgia: Extraordinary Presidential Election 5 January 2008* (OSCE/ODHIR)*. The blue line indicates the popularity of Saakashvili and his bloc, the green line that of the most popular opposition candidate or –bloc.

⁵⁰⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/621924.html

⁵⁰⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/623929.html; Antonenko in Coppieters/Legvold 2005 p. 238

⁵⁰⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/624154.html

⁵⁰⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/624130.html

⁵⁰⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6006; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6973

(who favoured a military solution to the conflict) resigned from the GAE,⁵¹¹ and the 12 "Abkhazian delegates" to the RG Parl. lost their seats.^{512,513} In May 2004 a group led by former deputy Min. J. Kote Kublashvili handed a proposal on Abkhazia to the RG National SC that envisioned a Boden-type⁵¹⁴ federation and full IDP return, but ensured effective Abkhaz influence at the central and local level: The Abkhaz would get the majority of Parl. seats in Abkhazia, and representation at the Federal level with veto power over Abkhazian issues. The Abkhazian Pres. would have to speak Abkhaz (and standard Georgian), Abkhazia would be sovereign in all issues not related to foreign policy and security, and retain their police force.⁵¹⁵ While Shamba found this too little,⁵¹⁶ Saakashvili found it too much: His offer on September 21 2004 was limited to "the fullest and broadest form of autonomy" within the RG.⁵¹⁷

May also saw the culmination of the RG's conflict with Ajara. During the Rose Revolution Abashidze had made steps for Ajara to secede, and declared a local state of emergency. Following military movements close to their "borders", Abashidze now ordered the destruction of all bridges into the rest of Georgia but was taken aback by massive local pro-Saakashvili demonstrations. Saakashvili imposed direct rule, while Abashidze was offered exile in Russia and left. The peaceful and popularly supported incorporation of Ajara is seen as a "Second Rose Revolution" by some,⁵¹⁸ while in Abkhazia the RA Parl. saw the hands of "the radical wing of Georgian aggressive nationalism" and expressed worry that an "illusion" would arise in Tbilisi that the scenario could be repeated. It stated that while the Ajars were Kartvelians and Ajara "part of Georgia" — the Abkhaz and Abkhazia were not. They emphasised that in contrast to the Ajars they had led an "anti-colonial struggle".⁵¹⁹ On July 1 2004 "all strategic areas of

⁵¹⁰ Author's interviews with Kvarchelia and Todia

⁵¹¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/624317.html

⁵¹² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7721

⁵¹³ Note that the curbing of GAE can also be seen as a way of improving RG^S — catering to Saakashvili's constituency (the Rose Revolution had seen a war veterans' hunger strike for Nadareishvili's removal); plus centralising power and purging the old elite: The GAE was a big lobby group based in the capital, with a staff of 5,000 people including armed units, and alleged ties to paramilitary groups. The new GAE leader instated by Saakashvili's Gov, Irakli Alasania, cut the staff to less than 2,000. (*Abkhazia Today* (ICG 2006)*, p. 22) In essence, Saakashvili's Gov cut GAE's staff with 60%, deprived it of direct influence in the RG Parl. and eventually moved the administration from Tbilisi to a region only reachable by helicopter most of the year (Upper Kodori).

⁵¹⁴ www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/06/9581ba62-b615-4a87-a792-22601a7e9c2d.html

⁵¹⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6979

⁵¹⁶ www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/06/9581ba62-b615-4a87-a792-22601a7e9c2d.html

⁵¹⁷ www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=09&y=2004&id=5BC55D8C-01C9-4E76-A860-E146EE7F4EFA

⁵¹⁸ www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=56&NrSection=6&NrArticle=11751&ST1=body&ST_T1=wir&ST_PS1=2&ST_AS1=0&ST_max=1

⁵¹⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/667378.html

governance" in Ajara were transferred to Tbilisi despite promises of retained autonomy.⁵²⁰ Coppieters summed up the centre's new power over the old autonomy as "excessive", and the arrangement was also criticised by the Council of Europe.⁵²¹ Internal opposition was also heard: MP Davit Gamkrelidze claimed that "a nominal autonomy, which is a direct presidential rule and in reality [sic] is an even worse sign for both Abkhazia and South Ossetia."⁵²² The incident left the RA with a bad impression of Tbilisi's willingness to share power – or indeed keep promises at all. The South Ossetian conflict also erupted in May, but no success for the RG. This seeming attempt to "repeat the Ajarian scenario" caused heightened RA^{int}, as demonstrated by Khadzhimba's promise of military aid to the RSO in case of full scale war.⁵²³ By then, however, RA-RG negotiations had already been broken off due to RG sanctions against naval traffic headed for Sokhumi.

By September, conflict intensions were again at a level where Saakashvili deemed it appropriate to launch a full condemnation of the RA in a speech to the UNGA. He derided the RA as downright dangerous, linking Sokhumi to international terrorism:

uncontrolled zones breed crime, drug trafficking, arms trading and most notable, terrorism. (...) And in places like Abkhazia (...) these lawless zones have the potential to affect European security as long as they remain unresolved. The lawless territories (...) are not only safe havens for mini-dictatorships (...) tightly controlled by elite groups that seek to profit from the criminal status quo. In these extremely closed societies – by in large cut off from the rest of the world – it causes me great pain that children there grow up with guns instead of books in their hands and that their heads are filled with hatred and intolerance, instead of respect for difference and appreciation for cultural diversity. We must put an end to this cycle of destruction.⁵²⁴

Contrary to later rhetoric, the RF is in this speech constructed as a potential *partner* of the RG – they have "common enemies" in the NC terrorists, the same people who unleashed "bloodshed in the name of Abkhaz separatism". He mentions Tskhinvali, Grozniy and Sokhumi as a joint problem complex, and lauds Putin for resolving to "do away with the Basayevs of the world."⁵²⁵ Despite clashes over alleged Russian violations of RG airspace⁵²⁶ and the RF decision to open railways Sochi-Sokhumi,⁵²⁷ the RG was still not quite framing Russia as a *party* in the conflict.

9.2. Fall 2004: The "Tangerine Revolution"

⁵²⁰Nodia, Ghia: *Ch. 1: Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity* in Coppieters and Legvold 2005, p. 56

⁵²¹Coppieters 2007, p. 23

⁵²²www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7211

⁵²³www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/671652.html

⁵²⁴www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7888

⁵²⁵Op.Cit. Saakashvili is referring to the RF's assassination of Shamil Basayev, an Islamist Chechen rebel involved in terrorist attacks, who had also been a volunteer during the Abkhazian War

⁵²⁶www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7593

⁵²⁷www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7806

Civil Georgia reported that the RG had high hopes for a new Abkhaz leader – though the elections were of course denounced.⁵²⁸ As the events began to resemble the Rose Revolution, Min. of Conflict Resolution (Min. CR) Georgi Khaindrava said he had hopes that a Bagapsh victory could soften pressure on Gali, claiming that Bagapsh had much of his base there.⁵²⁹ He did however see a hypothetical Khadzhimba victory as useful also: Tbilisi and Moscow would eventually "get closer", he believed, and then it would be very advantageous to have an RA Pres. that would "follow all of Moscow's instructions."⁵³⁰ As the situation in Abkhazia deteriorated, the impact of popular attitudes to the RG and the RF became increasingly pronounced: Ardzinba claimed a "Tbilisi scenario" was being enacted – a "crawling coup" with an "experienced puppet-master" – and said he would do "everything possible" to protect "our independence".⁵³¹ Bagapsh, on his side, openly criticised the RF for "meddling" with the elections.⁵³² The final compromise was badly received by both camps, according to International War and Peace Reporting (IWPR): Amsakhara's co-chair Vladimir Nachach-Ogly accused Bagapsh of being "fooled by the Russian security agencies and Ardzinba. (...) They won't let him be president"⁵³³ while Khadzhimba supporters were baffled that their man would cooperate with "stooges of the West and Tbilisi".⁵³⁴ Khaindrava stated as the most important thing that "the Abkhaz people did not allow for an appointment of [their] President from Moscow"⁵³⁵ while RG Min. FA Salome Zourabichvili praised the events as a small victory for democracy that the Abkhaz did not "hand over their future and fate to Moscow".⁵³⁶ Already in December, Saakashvili stated that the majority of Abkhazia's current residents had voted for Bagapsh and that the RG would hence meet with no other leader of the Abkhaz.⁵³⁷

9.3. Spring 2005 – Spring 2006: The long détente

⁵²⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7721

⁵²⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8214

⁵³⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7974; Lenta commentator *Yelena Lyubarskaya* considered Khaindrava's statement to be an RGs attempt at making Khadzhimba less popular in Abkhazia (lenta.ru/articles/2004/10/04/abhaz/).

⁵³¹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8055

⁵³² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8461. RF politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy f.ex. reportedly announced at a speech in Sokhumi that the RF would launch a blockade if Khadzhimba was not elected (Abkhazia Today (ICG 2007)*, p. 13).

⁵³³ www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=158675&apc_state=henicrs2004

⁵³⁴ Op. Cit.

⁵³⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8055

⁵³⁶ Op. Cit.

⁵³⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8479

The Bagapsh Gov. started its relationship with the RG by clarifying that federalism was still not an option⁵³⁸ and independence "not negotiable,"⁵³⁹ but also signalled readiness to resume negotiations⁵⁴⁰ and called for meetings between the leaders – though setting as a precondition for the latter that the parties sign the declaration on non-violence,⁵⁴¹ and that talks should be on the basis of the Sochi Process.⁵⁴² RG PM Zhvania attempted to link negotiation resumptons with the RA admitting ethnic cleansing.⁵⁴³ This position has been left, however – perhaps due to Zhvania's death under disputed circumstances a week or so later.⁵⁴⁴ Meetings took place in Geneva on April 07-08 2005 and the RG Pres. envoy to the conflict Irakli Alasania was "very positive" to the RA's agreement on issues involving Gali, the IDPs and economic questions. Khaindrava, however, expressed scepticism to whether the RA and RF were "sincere".⁵⁴⁵ The RG suggested opening a railway line between Sokhumi and the de facto RG⁵⁴⁶, but linked this to full return of IDPs, which was unacceptable to the RA. In the summer, all negotiations stopped up again due to another instance of maritime disagreements; to which the RG reacted very harshly: Khaindrava labelled as "absurd" the RA's position that no meetings would be held until confiscated cargo had been returned, and accused them of deliberately thwarting the Geneva Process. Another RG Gov. official commented that the cargo issue had not prevented the RA from participating in Sochi Process-meetings over the railways.⁵⁴⁷

In August the parties had a couple of meetings involving Shamba and Khaindrava that were seen as positive,⁵⁴⁸ and the same month two low points of conflict intensity occurred: Lakoba claimed that "some kind of confederation" was not totally out of the question, and on the anniversary of the conflict's beginning (August 14) Alasania stated that sending troops into Abkhazia had been "a big mistake which led to a huge tragedy."⁵⁴⁹ This is the closest the RG has ever come to formally apologizing for the

⁵³⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/758363.html

⁵³⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/801040.html

⁵⁴⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/762016.html

⁵⁴¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/780260.html

⁵⁴² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/784904.html

⁵⁴³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8920

⁵⁴⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14269

⁵⁴⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=9567

⁵⁴⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10138

⁵⁴⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10411

⁵⁴⁸ www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/4BABF231-A1E4-4DA8-81F0-337461A28AC3.html;

www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10488

⁵⁴⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10706

attack on Abkhazia in 1992. On the whole, however, the the fall saw a *raise* in conflict intensity: The RG protested vehemently to the RA's major military exercise on August 15-19, accusing them of illegally utilizing their ZRA. The CISPK actually confirmed this, but said they turned a blind eye since the RG did the same thing in their ZRA.⁵⁵⁰ Also, Bagapsh sharpened his rhetoric on the need for Gali AKs to accept RA and/or RF passports, and the control of RG passport holders was strengthened - also drawing reactions from Tbilisi.⁵⁵¹ Another thing that served to sour relations was that the RA refused admittance to the RG's members of the three-party expert group that was to assess the condition of the Abkhazian railway — on the grounds that they were AK IDPs. The RG refused to accept such discrimination, and the work went on without them. Civil Georgia claims that this turn of events was particularly negative, since the RG had dropped its demand of linking the railway to the IDP question in order to participate — but now they were prevented anyway.⁵⁵² The replacement of Kartvelian-language education in Gali with Russian was also condemned, and when the RA Gov. made statements about selling property left behind by the IDPs, Khaindrava reacted by referring to the RA as an "Apartheid regime."⁵⁵³ The latter issue was particularly highlighted by Saakashvili in his September 2005 speech to the UNGA,⁵⁵⁴ though it must be said that the most interesting change in Saakashvili's rhetoric from last year was his new framing of Russia: No longer a partner against global terrorism, Moscow was instead accused of leading a "forcible, lawless and immoral annexation" of RG territory, caused by a "19th century logic of territorial seizure."⁵⁵⁵ That very month Burjanadze presented a draft resolution on a statement demanding the withdrawal of the CISPK unless they showed signs of "improved" performance before July 15 2006.

In October 2005 the parties, with the RF and the UN, met in Sochi for discussions on the general SZ situation and IDP return to Gali.⁵⁵⁶ Two-party UN-led talks were planned⁵⁵⁷ but Bagapsh still insisted on a treaty of non-violence before meeting Saakashvili.⁵⁵⁸ By 2006 things had started to improve again: A four-party

⁵⁵⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10579

⁵⁵¹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10706

⁵⁵² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11096

⁵⁵³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10446

⁵⁵⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=10758

⁵⁵⁵ Op. Cit.

⁵⁵⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/867301.html

⁵⁵⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/903001.html

⁵⁵⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/903820.html

meeting met to discuss the SZ, and agreed to establish a "hotline" between Sokhumi and Tbilisi.⁵⁵⁹ On March 20 2006 an obstacle was removed as Tbilisi relieved Alasania from his position as GAE leader, and he now functioned only as the RG Pres. advisor on and envoy to Abkhazia. Prior to this the RA authorities had never formally met with Alasania, stating that they did not want to "legitimize" GAE.⁵⁶⁰ There had been informal meetings however, and Shamba said Alasania had always made a "positive impression".⁵⁶¹ The first official meeting between them had been "extraordinarily fruitful" according to Shamba, and the sides decided to revive the CC. Alasania announced that the RG side had started sketching out a "Road Map" – a new general approach to the Abkhazian Conflict — which was to be ready by May 1. Alasania stated that "the previously existing policy, [envisaging] the isolation of the Abkhaz society [was] completely counterproductive."⁵⁶²

The CC met for the first time since the October Events on May 15, with Shamba and Khaindrava present. Both sides were satisfied, and SRUNSG Heidi Taglavini said that the parties now "demonstrated readiness for regular meetings".⁵⁶³ They agreed that the CC's working groups would meet in May and June in Gali, Sokhumi and Zugdidi.⁵⁶⁴ The joint declaration on non-resumption of violence still faced problems, however: The RG would not sign the document, as it specified that the PKs should be Russian. This was an issue Alasania refused to link with the general conflict: "On the one hand this is a bilateral [Georgian-Abkhaz] agreement and on the other hand discussions will take place in the near future about how appropriate this peacekeeping operation is".⁵⁶⁵ Not waiting idly for the delayed Road Map, the RA now presented an Abkhaz peace plan: The "Key to the Future", which offered to let IDPs return and become RA citizens if the RG apologized for their "war policy" and isolation of Abkhazia; stopped all economic and political pressure; and guaranteed the security of the RA's land, water and airspace. It also suggested that the UNSC should guarantee RA security,⁵⁶⁶ and of course advocated a

⁵⁵⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/924961.html

⁵⁶⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/767786.html

⁵⁶¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/962321.html

⁵⁶² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12145

⁵⁶³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/999340.html

⁵⁶⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12568; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/999820.html

⁵⁶⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12145

⁵⁶⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/997800.html

two-state solution. The RA Parl. reacted positively to all points in the "Key," except the IDPs returning.⁵⁶⁷ Khaindrava welcomed the initiative:

Of course, at this stage we do not expect any sensational decisions (...), but the fact that Mr. Shamba has brought the document to Tbilisi [should be welcomed]. (...) there are issues [in the "Key"] which can be regarded as a basis for mutual understanding.⁵⁶⁸

In the end of May, Saakashvili presented a set of principles that involved broad autonomy, the return of all IDPs and "guarantees for the Abkhaz ethnos." Khaindrava added RG territorial integrity and observance of human rights to the list, while not mentioning guarantees for the Abkhaz.⁵⁶⁹ Shamba now warned that "serious differences on many key issues" were emerging, but underlined that they wanted to continue the process.⁵⁷⁰ On June 1 he went public with the RA's concerns: They desired IDP returns exclusively to Gali, due to security concerns – warning that the war "had not yet vanished from people's memories" and "undesirable events" could occur if the IDPs returned to the rest of Abkhazia. The RG's "principles" were criticised for not containing "foundations for basic trust", and they suggested that the Key should serve as foundation for a common document on the conflict. He reaffirmed the RA's readiness for "lengthy negotiations."⁵⁷¹ Eight days later Alasania finally presented "the Map": It entailed step-by-step reforms aimed at a federative system, unconditional IDP return and protection of their rights, joint UN-OSCE offices in Sokhumi and Gali, ceasefire and a project to rehabilitate infrastructure and economy.⁵⁷² Alasania recognized that the RA had earlier voiced discontent with many of these points, and ensured that the RG was "ready for consultations" and would "accept and consider any rational and constructive proposal."⁵⁷³ He was not very enthusiastic about "the Key", but saw some virtue in it:

This key will fail to open any doors (...) the document has the systemized goals of secessionists. [But] there is no mention of Russia in the document [and] Abkhazia's willingness to participate in Euro integration, as well as in [the] Black Sea regional cooperation is voiced⁵⁷⁴

In the following days an extremely counterproductive rhetorical battle took place between Burjanadze and Shamba, the former stating that Abkhazia would not get independence as long as one Georgian remained alive, and the latter replying that Abkhazia would not stop fighting for independence as long as one Abkhaz remained

⁵⁶⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/997800.html

⁵⁶⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12568

⁵⁶⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1010760.html

⁵⁷⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1006960.html

⁵⁷¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1009721.html; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1010760.html

⁵⁷² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1013482.html

⁵⁷³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12789

⁵⁷⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12789

alive.⁵⁷⁵ Deputy Assistant to the US Secretary of State, Matthew Bryza, suggested that ideas from the Key and the Map could be combined into a common document,⁵⁷⁶ but to no avail.

The CISPK was becoming a major block to reach NA, as the RG increasingly saw their presence as destructive but the RA still did not seem to trust any other force than the RF. Alasania said he understood that the Abkhaz side "does not trust Tbilisi's or other international guarantees" – but underscored that if the RG withdrew from the CIS, the CISPK's presence would be a problem;⁵⁷⁷ and that the CISPK "fails to meet its major mandate, which is the return of [IDPs] safely and in dignity".⁵⁷⁸ Little more than one year later, Gvindzhiya explained in an interview that he suspected the RG to harbour a more sinister long-term plan connected to the removal of CISPK:

The final goal of Georgia, I think, is linked to the fact that if the Russian peacekeepers withdraw, the UN observers' presence will be reviewed. Georgia will then insist that there is no need for UN observers, and insist on the OSCE to replace them. (...) They want Moldavians and Ukrainians to replace the UN. Georgia doesn't say that openly, but these countries have said that they are ready to contribute – unlike any other country. [They] have very little experience, that's one thing, and also they are open friends of Georgia and export arms to Georgia. It is understandable that Georgia wants this, but the positive role of Russian peacekeepers has been confirmed by numerous reports to the Secretary-General.⁵⁷⁹

That summer, the RG accused the RF of reinforcing their military presence at the Gudauta base, something RA Min. D. Sosnaliev refuted.⁵⁸⁰ Bagapsh now threatened RA withdrawal from negotiations if the RG kept demanding CISPK withdrawal.⁵⁸¹ He also said that should the CISPK leave, the RA would mine and fortify the "border", and invite "peacekeepers" from the CDPR.⁵⁸² Khaindrava claimed such words, in themselves, amounted to withdrawing from the negotiations.⁵⁸³ Not much later, Khaindrava was sacked and replaced with Merab Antadze after having criticised Okruashvili publicly for his aggressive style that created "very serious problems" the RG,⁵⁸⁴ and for criticising central political figures over their involvement in a murder scandal.⁵⁸⁵ Alasania also left the scene to become RG ambassador to the UN, seen by some as a concession to

⁵⁷⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1014363.html

⁵⁷⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1017700.html

⁵⁷⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12572

⁵⁷⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12789

⁵⁷⁹ Author's interview with Gvindzhiya.

⁵⁸⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12992

⁵⁸¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1018880.html

⁵⁸² Op. Cit.

⁵⁸³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1020780.html

⁵⁸⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13120

⁵⁸⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12990

hardliners.⁵⁸⁶ De Waal expressed worry that "the two moderate voices" in RA-RG negotiations were out, and worried about Okruashvili's increased influence.⁵⁸⁷

9.4. Fall 2006: The Kodori Crisis

On July 22 Emzar Kvitsiani's "Hunters" announced their defiance to Okruashvili's decision to dissolve and disarm them, and Kvitsiani demanded to be reinstated as local representative of the RG Pres. Tbilisi stated that this was a Russian provocation caused by the conflict over continued CISPK presence, and Burjandze accused Chaban and Sosnaliev of having recently met with Kvitsiani. These allegations were denied.⁵⁸⁸ Kvitsiani was framed as a "traitor" one could not negotiate with by Saakashvili:

The only issue I can negotiate with Kvitsiani and his gang – and this will happen only if they surrender arms – is about what kind of cells they will have in prison number five in Tbilisi. (...) Everyone who will betray Georgia, who (...) create problems for the country, will be defeated. I want our citizens to know that the President and his team will 'make their mothers cry' [a Georgian swearing expression] (...) These are the criminals who, when our people were fleeing Abkhazia in 1993, were robbing and killing our [IDPs]. We have not demolished those people entirely and that is why they have emerged again.⁵⁸⁹

Okruashvili later admitted to having given Kvitsiani an ultimatum prior to his announcement: Leave Upper Kodori or face armed intervention.⁵⁹⁰

Shamba advised the RG to follow their example — claiming that after the October Events, the RA could have taken and held the area themselves. They warned the RG that if they "lit a big fire," the RA would have to "react adequately",⁵⁹¹ and as RG "police forces" moved towards Upper Kodori the RA moved armed forces into Lower Kodori.⁵⁹² Certain RA NGOs' demanded that negotiations should be broken off, but Bagapsh and Shamba insisted that this would be "premature," since the RA was achieving "good results" through current talks.⁵⁹³ When the "police operation" in Upper Kodori was over on July 27, they RG accused the RA of hiding Kvitsiani, something they denied.⁵⁹⁴ Saakashvili described the operation as a success, emphasising the strategic value of the "reclaimed" area "in the middle of Abkhazia (...) so close to Sokhumi." He underlined that the RG had no "aggressive intentions" and called for resumption of four-

⁵⁸⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12813

⁵⁸⁷ www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-caucasus/abkhazia_serbia_3787.jsp

⁵⁸⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13141

⁵⁸⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13147

⁵⁹⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13212

⁵⁹¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1033282.html

⁵⁹² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1033901.html

⁵⁹³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1034641.html

⁵⁹⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13190

party meetings in Gali, but also underscored that the only acceptable result of negotiations was

the restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia, with the protection of all sides' legitimate interests, with the protection of the interests of the Abkhaz nation and all the people living in Abkhazia (...) We should create a new, joint state model of ethnic, civil cooperation. There will be no compromises in this respect⁵⁹⁵

Okruashvili, too, said that Upper Kodori was "a very important foothold on the territory of Abkhazia" and that the RG Gov. "constantly thinks about how to regain Abkhazia". In interview, Kvarcheliya claimed that at some point Saakashvili had also emphasised how Sokhumi was only five minutes' flight from Upper Kodori. Correct or not, this was cited by other people in Sokhumi, who first and foremost see a terrible threat to their security in the RG's presence up in the mountains. Kolstø and Blakkisrud claim that a "siege mentality" arose as people feared this could be a "test balloon" for a subsequent invasion.⁵⁹⁶ Several NGOs condemned the "invasion" and accused the Saakashvili Gov. of revanchism, destroying the negotiation process, refusing to sign the non-violence treaty, building up forces and alliances, and using rhetoric that threatened the entire Caucasus' stability.⁵⁹⁷ NGOs and the opposition again asked the RA Gov. to withdraw from negotiations, expressing concern over similarities between the Kodori Crisis and the beginning of 1992's "military intrusion into Abkhazian territory".⁵⁹⁸ Saakashvili's suggestion in the same speech that GAE should be moved out of exile and into the "reclaimed" area prompted the RA to say that they now did consider cutting out negotiations, and would use all diplomatic and military means to prevent a "marionette government" on their territory.⁵⁹⁹ The very next day Bagapsh appeared on Abkhazian television, condemning

the so-called "police operation" (...) actually a large-scale military action on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia, the main goal of which is "seizing strategically important bridgeheads" for future enlargement of Georgia's military presence. Georgian officials have stated this. (...) in his statement [Saakashvili] clearly indicated the desire to transfer the structures of the so-called government in exile of the non-existent Autonomous Abkhazia. (...) such a development in the situation bears witness to the aggressive intentions of Georgia. And (...) has led to the discontinuing of the negotiation process. (...) If such a so-called government is set up in the Kodori Gorge, we will free ourselves from all responsibilities stemming from former agreements, and the Republic of Abkhazia will take all necessary steps to defend its sovereignty and the security of its society.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13198

⁵⁹⁶ Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, p. 493

⁵⁹⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1084520.html

⁵⁹⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1034964.html. Kvarcheliya also brought the events up when discussing enemy imaging of AKs, saying that "suspicions" arise every time "the Georgians do something in Kodori." (Author's interview with Kvarcheliya).

⁵⁹⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1034862.html

⁶⁰⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1035120.html

Bagapsh threatened that they had difficulties "holding back" the RA army reservists, that NC "brothers" and "Abkhaz-Cherkess diasporas" had already volunteered, and that war would mean "a new stream of refugees" — i.e. he threatened to make use of the hostage population.⁶⁰¹ An influential RG MP termed the RA reactions "hysterical", saying that should they try any form of military operation a "devastating strike" would be launched.⁶⁰² An attempted meeting to discuss the Kodori Crisis stranded when Kishmariya refused to participate due to the RG "intentionally disrupting" the meeting by including in their delegation a GAE representative.⁶⁰³ Shamba and Antadze met on the initiative of SRUNSG *Jean Arno*, but no progress was made: The RA insisted on full withdrawal of RG troops and insertion of RF PKs, whereas the RG insisted on no RF presence.⁶⁰⁴

On September 27⁶⁰⁵ Saakashvili and a host of VIPs such as Burjanadze, Okruashvili and the Patriarch, inaugurated the new seat of the alternative government formerly in exile - in the village of Chkhalta, Upper Kodori. In his speech about returning to "holy Abkhazia" Saakashvili framed the capture of Upper Kodori – which Tbilisi now renamed "Upper Abkhazia" as the beginning of Abkhazia's return to its "owners":

[This is] the he first real example of reconstruction which has taken place on the Abkhaz land in the past 13 years (...) More has been done than in the past 13 years in devastated [lists other Abkhazian cities] (...) because it has been done by the Georgian state (...) by those to whom this land belongs. We are in Abkhazia and no one will ever be able to force us from here. We are in Abkhazia and Abkhazia belongs to Georgia. From here we are overlooking our holy land of Sokhumi (...) and our ancestors' graves and no one will ever force us from here. (...) we want to say that we have peaceful intentions; we do not want war and bloodshed, but (...) our homes should be returned back to (...) those who have been forced to go from there 13 years ago (...) deprived of the right to go back only because their ethnic background does not correspond to the taste of those people who have occupied their homes and who have occupied the Abkhaz land. (...) We will come back to our homes very soon, we will come back from every direction: from the mountains, from the sea, we will cross the rivers and we will overcome all the obstacles and we will definitely come back. And even the most formidable armed forces will never be able to obstruct our aspiration towards our homes, towards our better future.⁶⁰⁶

The specific mentioning of coming from the mountains, the sea and crossing rivers must have been particularly unsettling for the RA, as it is quite easy to interpret this as threatening a concrete attack from three sides - the "border" between the Gali and

⁶⁰¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1035120.html

⁶⁰² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13212

⁶⁰³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1034942.html

⁶⁰⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1054080.html

⁶⁰⁵ The day of the RA's celebration of reclaiming Sokhumi, which is marked as a tragic day in most of Georgia due to the ensuing ethnic cleansing.

⁶⁰⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13667

Zugdidi districts follows the Inguri river. Saakashvili also emphasised the strategic value of Abkhazia:

for the first time since 1993 the government is entering into the middle of (...) our Abkhazia, to exercise Georgian jurisdiction and the Georgian constitutional order. (...) From now on Georgia exercises direct control over a very important, strategic part of Abkhaz territory...⁶⁰⁷

Some days later, he launched a campaign to include ARA in all discussions around the Abkhazian Conflict,⁶⁰⁸ something Bagapsh dismissed as "idiocy" aimed at provoking the RA.⁶⁰⁹ He dismissed the RA Pres. as a "showman" and "dreamer."⁶¹⁰ Shamba reacted by calling the RG Gov. "Stalinist"⁶¹¹ and accusing them of escalation.⁶¹² They proclaimed that they would not meet with diplomats who had met with the ARA structures,⁶¹³ and when the RG inserted ARA into the CC this forum predictably collapsed due to RA boycotts.⁶¹⁴ Tbilisi's calls for renewed negotiations were ignored,⁶¹⁵ Bagapsh demanding withdrawal and accusing them of "throwing their relationship with us back to 1993".⁶¹⁶ On October 2 Sokhumi officially discontinued all negotiations until the RG "returns to fulfilling all parts of earlier agreements". This position has remained adamant.⁶¹⁷ Four-party meetings occurred,⁶¹⁸ but according to Kavkazkiy Uzel these were fruitless "sessions of mutual accusation"⁶¹⁹ and eventually the RG stopped appointing new representatives.^{620, 621}

RG-RF conflict intensity also rose due to the Kodori Crisis: Okruashvili accused the CISPK of involvement in fights in Kodori⁶²² and RG rhetoric increasingly constructed both the conflicts with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali as essentially between Moscow and Tbilisi: According to RG Min. FA Gela Bezhuashvili Georgia's conflicts

⁶⁰⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13198

⁶⁰⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1059463.html; www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13654

⁶⁰⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1059444.html

⁶¹⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1059447.html

⁶¹¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1059463.html

⁶¹² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1059520.html

⁶¹³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1197854.html

⁶¹⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1037060.html

⁶¹⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1039660.html

⁶¹⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1049785.html

⁶¹⁷ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1063000.html. In November 2007 Gvindzhiya reaffirmed the RA's position: "if they violate agreements, what's the use of having discussions? We will not meet until they withdraw." (Author's interview with Gvindzhiya).

⁶¹⁸ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1064960.html

⁶¹⁹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1095200.html

⁶²⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1124620.html

⁶²¹ The only institutionalized RG-RA cooperation still active after the Kodori Crisis is the Joint fact-finding commission that does not have anything to do with negotiations. Bringedal said that even in this forum "nobody will agree, most often. They just point fingers at each other. It's difficult." (Author's interview with Bringedal).

⁶²² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13228

with the breakaway republics were "territorial disputes and not ethnic (...) conflicts"⁶²³ and in his September 22 speech to the UNGA, Saakashvili's main focus was on the RF – saying that "the painful but factual truth is that these regions are being annexed by our neighbour to the north", and that the CISPK makes "a farce of the time-honoured principles of neutrality, impartiality, and trust" by upholding a "gangster occupation" of RG territory. Despite this, Saakashvili said that Russia was not a party in the conflicts and called for demilitarization, internationalization and dialogue with the RSO and RA.⁶²⁴ Next year, however, in his state of the nation address in 2007, the RG Pres. framed the Abkhaz as completely lacking agency in the conflict, saying the idea that this was a "Georgian-Akhazian" conflict was as a "fabrication by imperial ideologists".⁶²⁵

Tblisi's calls for demilitarization after investing heavily in the RG^M sector and invading Upper Kodori were not taken very seriously in Sokhumi. By the end of the year a rally of thousands in Sokhumi demonstrated for independence, an event Civil Georgia claimed was timed to coincide with the RF Duma's debate on Georgia's breakaway republics. Addressing the crowd, Bagapsh said that Abkhazia and the RG would never be able to coexist in a united state.⁶²⁶

9.5. 2007: Kidnappings, killings and parliamentary elections

2007 kicked off with Saakashvili first giving a "peace message" underscoring the need for constructive dialogue⁶²⁷ and a few days later invoking historical battlefields in connection with Abkhazia

Our Abkhazia is now ruled by the people who outrageously state that they will never let those people, whose ancestors are buried in Abkhazia, to return. Georgia will never tolerate to this fact (...) we are now (...) standing on the ground; so firmly that it is almost impossible to tumble us. We have gained the strength and it is now time to move forward towards final reunification. (...) We should become the generation of the new Didgori (...) a generation that will be remembered for many centuries, and nothing will hinder us⁶²⁸

And Upper Kodori was already a battlefield. In October 2007 missiles were fired against the village of Azhara. The RG accused the RA, but UNOMIG claimed the missiles had come from hillsides inside RG-controlled territory,⁶²⁹ and according to Civil Georgia

⁶²³ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13610

⁶²⁴ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13622

⁶²⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14796

⁶²⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14254

⁶²⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14434

⁶²⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14505. The Digori field is associated with the reunification of Medieval Georgia and a highly potent symbol of this historical discourse.

⁶²⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13998

Kvitsiani later assumed responsibility.⁶³⁰ The troubles in the gorge continued throughout the winter, and on March 12 2007 the RF was accused of involvement in shelling Chkhalta. The RA kept claiming that all violence stemmed from conflicts between the local Svans and the RG authorities,⁶³¹ though Kvitsiani denied all involvement this time.⁶³² This was also the winter that Chakaberia and Sigua (see 8.1) were kidnapped, causing yet another problem to be solved before negotiations could resume.⁶³³ When Chakaberia was freed in April, the RA said the four-party talks could now be resumed but still linked higher level meetings to the RG demilitarizing Upper Kodori in accordance with UN Resolution 1716⁶³⁴ and telling them what had become of Sigua.⁶³⁵

The RA Parl. elections in March provided yet another opportunity for escalation. The RG was accused of being behind the paramilitaries who had harassed AG voters⁶³⁶ and there were disagreements over whether citizens of Gali had voted or not: Saakashvili claimed they had showed "heroism" and boycotted the elections, whereas the RA said the local turnout had been great.⁶³⁷ Civil Georgia claims that only 15.000 of 60.000 inhabitants were allowed to vote,⁶³⁸ while Todia said that 80% voted.⁶³⁹ She claimed that Gali AKs "participate in the local system. But they don't want politics. They want to live in peace and have proper documents."⁶⁴⁰ During the elections, a group of students from Zugdidi were caught on RA-controlled territory and arrested, causing a hunger strike in their hometown.⁶⁴¹ Antadze was sent to negotiate for their release, and though they at first demanded Sigua's return in exchange, they eventually released the students on May 3. The students were awarded "the Order of Courage" by Saakashvili in person.⁶⁴² One year later a similar incident, involving a group of journalists, occurred. This time, Saakashvili went straight for the big guns instead of sending diplomats, telling the RA that they should release the journalists or face a police action. The RA Pres' spokesman said that Bagapsh did not find such "self-control lacking outcries" worthy of

⁶³⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14761

⁶³¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1181263.html

⁶³² www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14761

⁶³³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1179097.html; The RA did participate in a meeting with the GF in this period, emphasising that this was a meeting with the UN and not the RG (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1176048.html).

⁶³⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1185950.html

⁶³⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1209785.html

⁶³⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14706

⁶³⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14608

⁶³⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7974

⁶³⁹ Todia may be talking about Gali *city*, while Civil Georgia talk about Gali *district*.

⁶⁴⁰ Author's interview with Todia.

⁶⁴¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1179920.html

⁶⁴² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1185621.html

comment.⁶⁴³ In the end, RG mass media published a joint denunciation of violent means of conflict solution and implored their RA colleagues to intervene. The RG journalists were released not much later, expressing gratitude to RA journalists.⁶⁴⁴

On August 22 2007 the so-called "Kodori UFO" incident occurred: An unidentified object got shot down and crashed in Upper Kodori, causing a forest fire. The RG claimed it was an RF aircraft that had opened fire against their soldiers,⁶⁴⁵ one RA official claimed it was space debris,⁶⁴⁶ the leader of the RA's armed forces first claimed it was a US spy plane but later denied having said this,⁶⁴⁷ Shamba said he assumed it to be an RG spy plane, and the RF denounced it all as RG propaganda.⁶⁴⁸ Interestingly, so did the RG Labour Party – saying it was Saakashvili's attempt to unite people against an outside enemy.⁶⁴⁹ A mere month later there was a gunfight between RG and RA forces in the RA side of the SZ, that saw two RA personnel killed and seven taken as captives to Zugdidi.⁶⁵⁰ On October 25 Shamba met with new Min. CR David Bakradze, and the prisoners were released.⁶⁵¹ The RA called the incident a "terrorist attack"⁶⁵² and claimed the soldiers had been tortured.⁶⁵³

9.6. Fall 2007: The Anti-Saakashvili Rallies

The opposition rallies of 2007 saw an increasingly hostile RG Gov. rhetoric against the RA. Already the day after Okruashvili's speech Saakashvili paid a visit to Upper Kodori where he promised to "unite Georgia" by 2009.⁶⁵⁴ In November, he said that IDPs would be able to return safely to Abkhazia within months.⁶⁵⁵ At the height of tensions, the RG Gov. began a "war scare" claiming that the RF had sent heavy military material into East Abkhazia - later refuted by SRUNSG).⁶⁵⁶ In December, faced with complaints over the RG's socio-economic problems, Saakashvili even attempted to link these issues with the

⁶⁴³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1208472.html

⁶⁴⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1209022.html

⁶⁴⁵ lenta.ru/news/2007/08/24/plane/

⁶⁴⁶ lenta.ru/news/2007/08/27/trash/

⁶⁴⁷ lenta.ru/news/2007/08/25/new1/

⁶⁴⁸ lenta.ru/news/2007/08/25/shamba/

⁶⁴⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15573

⁶⁵⁰ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1197882.html; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1197876.html

⁶⁵¹ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200400.html

⁶⁵² www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200400.html

⁶⁵³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200571.html

⁶⁵⁴ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008)*, p. 11

⁶⁵⁵ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16450>

⁶⁵⁶ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1201424.html; www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1201802.html

Abkhazian Conflict — saying that "reintegration" of Abkhazia would mean "the doubling of all families' income, much more security and much greater prospects."⁶⁵⁷

My general impression from being in Abkhazia during the unrest in Tbilisi is that the events served to confirm long held beliefs about Saakashvili's democracy, and some took the opportunity to contrast it with the RA's assumed more favourable democratic situation. One of these was Kvarcheliya, though not without one caveat: "Generally, there is more freedom here, I think, than under Saakashvili. But I think there is less corruption in Georgia – on the low and middle level, not on the top level."⁶⁵⁸ Interestingly, this admiration for Saakashvili's efforts against corruption was also volunteered by Gvindzhiya – despite this interview being done in a period of high tensions:

It's almost impossible in Georgia [to eradicate corruption] but [Saakashvili] did manage to do it on the lower level. In the police. That's good. But when he starts creating problems with his neighbours, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, making patriotic military camps in the conflict zone, spends a lot of money on the military [pauses] He is openly saying that he will come and kill all of us.

In a later interview, Bagapsh used these events to exemplify what he claimed to be a general hypocrisy from Tbilisi's side:

Do you remember the incident where two Georgian journalists were arrested in Abkhazia? (...) It was tearfully amusing to hear these speeches about [his] concern for his own citizens, particularly after the crushing of a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi and the special forces' armed seizing of [Imedi] (...) With them, it's always double standards – one for themselves and one for external use.⁶⁵⁹

Bagapsh also accused the RG Gov. of a "tendency to solve internal problems (...) by uniting society around confrontation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia",⁶⁶⁰ an interpretation also articulated by Gvindzhiya:

Journalists from Georgia called me about [RF troops being moved into East Abkhazia] and I told them that before the Iraq War, Georgian politicians said that they had solid evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (...) President Saakashvili now only wants to turn the blame on anyone else (...) Abkhazia and Russia. This is a good move to shift the attention from internal to external problems. People in Georgia must be united by external enemies, Saakashvili thinks.⁶⁶¹

The events also created ample opportunity to articulate the discourse on *inherently unstable Georgia*: Bagapsh said that the "political system in Georgia is extremely volatile. The basis of the system is permanent revolutions. It is very difficult to deal with such a partner".⁶⁶² Gvindzhiya also invoked this discourse: "Unfortunately, they have never elected a President. Always these coup d'états. Gamsakhurdia (...), Shevardnadze and now

⁶⁵⁷ *Georgia – Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?* (ICG 2008), p. 12

⁶⁵⁸ Author's interview with Kvarcheliya.

⁶⁵⁹ www.lenta.ru/conf/abkhazia/

⁶⁶⁰ Op. cit.

⁶⁶¹ Author's interview with Gvindzhiya

⁶⁶² www.abkhaziagov.org/en/news/detail.php?ID=9024

Saakashvili will be overthrown, we have no doubt."⁶⁶³ The Deputy Min. FA was particularly worried about a scenario where Burjanadze usurped power, as he considered her more aggressive than Saakashvili.

In principle the RA did not support any side in the power struggle – like during the Rose Revolution - but certain officials did voice opinions. Parl. Speaker Nuzgar Ashuba somewhat surprisingly told the press that he wanted Saakashvili to win due to his experience - though he felt Gachechiladze was a "sympathetic person"⁶⁶⁴ and had no trust in Saakashvili.⁶⁶⁵ Gvindzhiya, however, said he would prefer an opposition candidate since such a person would probably roll back military investments and spend money on welfare, while NGO activist and political scientist Leliya Taniya believed Saakashvili's re-election could heighten "the risk of a violent scenario". In any case she brushed off the RG attempt at democracy as "a typical example of a marionette state that exists due to external financial influence".⁶⁶⁶

It should be mentioned that while Okruashvili as an alternative leader of the RG does not give much hope for the RA, there are actually less "hardliner" elements in RG politics. Already in 2005 David Darchiashvili wrote an article that attacked "the widespread view [that] a "good cop — bad cop" position is justified if we want to push the other side into cooperation (...) by threatening the Abkhazians, we will only help Russia to achieve its goals."⁶⁶⁷ Darchiashvili suggested that the RG should commit to only using violence in case of "mass repression" (presumably against AKs); and de-link the difficult IDP issue from all other questions. He also argued that the RG should apologize for bringing "the tanks into Sokhumi" in an attempt to unify Kartvelians against an Abkhaz enemy image.⁶⁶⁸ The latter cause was taken up in late 2006 by a minor opposition party⁶⁶⁹ that was later accused by the RG Gov. of cooperating with Russia.⁶⁷⁰ In 2007 a group of RG NGOs started the campaign "Sorry" with the goal of teaching Kartvelians about Abkhaz culture and making the RG Gov. apologize "for each bullet that was shot and for every word that caused the war". The leaders of the group said that they knew the

⁶⁶³ Author's interview with Gvindzhiya

⁶⁶⁴ lenta.ru/news/2007/12/10/speaker/

⁶⁶⁵ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1206102.html

⁶⁶⁶ abkhaziagov.org/en/news/detail.php?ID=9024

⁶⁶⁷ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

⁶⁶⁸ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=8823

⁶⁶⁹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14304

⁶⁷⁰ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15935.

campaign would be "controversial", among other things due to the large IDP presence in the de facto RG. Despite some negative reactions (among others from Saakashvili, who called the campaign "a stance of capitulation")⁶⁷¹ the network is still active in several cities, among those Zugdidi.⁶⁷² While possibly making some grass root impacts, the campaign has not managed to reduce popular intensity. It serves to prove, though, that there is some internal opposition to the increasingly high RG^{int} — while unfortunately on the Abkhaz side there is to my knowledge not any group that argues the RA should apologize for ethnic cleansing.

9.7. Spring 2008: The Kosovo Effect and the "Drone Wars"

As if chances for renewed negotiations were not narrow enough with the Kodori Crisis, the Sigua case, the problem with ARA and the rivalry over what documents to base negotiations on; Saakashvili after being re-elected renamed the MCR the *Ministry of Reintegration* – a name the RA found so insulting that Shamba said they would never meet with people from these structures even if the RG fulfilled all its duties according to the Moscow Accords.⁶⁷³ In February the RK's declaration of independence and the RF handling of the Georgian statelets' appeal for recognition, caused conflict intensity to increase even more – also between Tbilisi and Moscow, of course. The day after the RK declared independence Shamba openly stated that things were now up to Russia: "The Russian MFA has a few variants. [Soon they] will choose the path which will lead to recognition of Abkhazia's independence."⁶⁷⁴ When the RF decided to formalize relations with Abkhazia, the rest of the GF implored them to reconsider due to the effects this would have on regional stability,⁶⁷⁵ and when not much later the RA/RF started shooting down RG drones, tensions did explode: Saakashvili held a speech "to our Abkhazian and Ossetian brothers and sisters" that at first glance seems an olive branch to the secessionist nations, but could not possibly have been intended as such. The RG Pres. started off by inflating the IDPs' numbers to 450.000-500.000 and expressed sympathy for the Abkhaz and Ossetians who have to "live under the reign of separatist,

⁶⁷¹ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14786 (The organization's homepage: www.apsni.org. Promotional video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5LjxiScnHA. The organization's presentation of itself, and a selection of rather harsh reactions: www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=article&id=2622&lang=en&poll_id=7

⁶⁷² www.apsni.org/index.php?a=detailed&type=1&nid=13&lang=en

⁶⁷³ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1206690.html

⁶⁷⁴ www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207916.html

⁶⁷⁵ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17684

corrupted and criminal groups", who are "forced to watch (...) false reports" on their TVs and are prevented by Russia from choosing Georgia. "It was not your choice to live this way," he asserted. Finally, he defined the secession conflicts as a "global conflict" which he does "not want that even one Abkhazian and Ossetian is involved in" – in other words redefining the entire Abkhazian Conflict as an RG-RF affair or even a NATO-RF affair, and removing all agency from the Abkhaz and Ossetians. Had the current RA leadership been unpopular among the Abkhaz, and Saakashvili a man they trusted – this appeal might have worked. But Abkhazia is not Ajara. Under present conditions such a speech not only raises RG^{int} but also RA^{int}, RF^{int} and RSO^{int}. On May 6 2008 Min. of Reintegration Temur Iakobashvili warned that Russia and Georgia were now "very close" to war" over Abkhazia.⁶⁷⁶

10. Conclusion

In the period under analysis we have seen two periods of detente: A very minor one immediately following the Rose Revolution, and a very long one following the "Tangerine Revolution." In the first case, there was always a certain tension between Ardzinba's Gov. and Saakashvili's Gov, and Sokhumi's trust in the "Rose Revolutionaries" was lowered due to the incorporation of Ajara against the local elite's wishes and subsequent imposition of "nominal" autonomy despite earlier promises; and the subsequent skirmishes in South Ossetia. The marine incident in the summer of 2004 was just the final drop. By comparison, the relationship between Saakashvili's Gov. and Bagapsh' Gov. was much better initially. There were setbacks – notably another maritime incident in the summer of 2005 and the RA's string of provocations in the following fall – but in hindsight this was not all that dramatic: Negotiations were resumed rapidly after the maritime incident, and the statements by Alasania and Lakoba suggest a constructive mood even during the troubled fall. But when real conflicts of interest became to show, the parties faced problems due to their mutual lack of will to compromise. The most problematic issues: IDP return and the CISPK's presence. That the latter issue has led to such problems is particularly unnecessary since that problem actually has its roots in the relationship between the RG and *Russia*, not in the basic RA-RG conflict. The mounting

⁶⁷⁶ www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17775

tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow, coupled with the RA's exclusive trust in – and dependency on – Russia has made it a lot harder for the parties to reach NA than it could have been. The subsequent Kodori Crisis served to end a detente that was constructive though riddled with problems. Who conspired with whom in this situation is difficult to say, but in any case anyone could have foretold that the military path chosen by the RG would increase tensions. The ensuing symbolic-political moves such as renaming Upper Kodori and staging grand patriotic speeches with a distinctive military tang there, and promising IDPs that return to Abkhazia was just around the corner; all seemed almost tailor-made to raise RA^{int} . One may indeed wonder if the RG by this time had really given up "conflict resolution" to the benefit of unconditional "reintegration" – such as the renaming of the MCR would indicate - for how could they expect Sokhumi to accept all this? Assuming that Tbilisi acts rationally, they must have decided that the only thing that works against Sokhumi is lowering RA^{BATNA} – military means being the most accessible way of doing this. Latter symbolic moves are more difficult to explain as rational, unless one assumes them to be aimed at improving RG^S through "success stories" such as moving the ARA headquarters back into Abkhazia and giving the Kartvelians a feeling of steady progress towards return to "holy Abkhazia". Possibly, the RG also believes the RA can be scared into negotiating – which is simply not the case, since the RA can go to Russia for help when conflict with the RG looms. Tbilisi's "drive" against Abkhazia in both rhetoric and action has made the RA willing to even invite Moscow to take full military control over their "country" – despite the breakaway republic being led by a President who came to power fighting uphill against RF involvement.

The RF has done its part to increase Tbilisi's frustration, and provided fuel to their increasingly aggressive stance against the Georgian statelets. Like in the Kodori Crisis, hard facts are elusive when it comes to "UFOs" moving illegally over RG airspace and sometimes even attacking – but assuming that the RG is not putting on a gigantic PR show, then the RF is responsible for making Tbilisi perceive that its most important conflict at the moment is with *Russia*, and that Abkhazia is just an aspect of this greater conflict. And thus, they do exactly what Darchiashvili warned them not to: Treating Abkhazia like it is not really the party Tbilisi needs to talk to. The current situation may be exactly what Russia desires, assuming that its goal is to maximise its control over Caucasian affairs (or at least keep anyone else from becoming the regional hegemon): An

RG that sees the solution to their internal conflicts in Moscow and not Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, and an RA that perceives itself to be under basic existential threat from Tbilisi and has nobody else to borrow power from than Russia.

At present, RA^{BATNA} cannot be said to be unsatisfactory according to the criteria outlined in Ch.2.⁶⁷⁷ RA^D in principle makes the Abkhaz weak vis-à-vis the Kartvelians and even the Armenians, but the Abkhaz remain better off than prior to the war and this situation is in practice safeguarded by the RF promise of defending the RA. The fact that any NA would most likely include a weakened RA^D position weakens the RA's wish to reach NA at all. RA^E has gotten steadily better throughout the period, raising RA^{BATNA} further. This source of growth, however, is also dependent on Russia. RA^M is unilaterally weaker vis-à-vis the RG military now than in 2004, but the RF guarantees their security. RA^R can be said to have gotten marginally better in practice through the RF's "semi-recognition", but all in all this is still the area where the Abkhaz have most to gain from reaching NA – which would most likely provide them with more formal rights to RA^{dU} than is outlined in the Moscow Accords' baseline of Constitution and state symbols. Finally, RA^S had big problems at the outset and reached a dramatic low during the Tangerine Revolution, but at the end of the day has improved because of the victory of the popular pro-democratic bloc. However, there are still major potentials for instability. Thus, the general picture of RA^{BATNA} is that of a status quo that is both acceptable and improving – but still dependent on the RF. This dependency also makes NA less desirable, since current relations between Tbilisi and Moscow indicate that accepting unification with the RG implies breaking with Russia. Since RA^{BATNA} is currently good and getting better, it would be irrational for the RA to actively seek an armed conflict with Tbilisi at this point, but they have very few incentives to negotiate.

RG^{BATNA} , on the contrary, has become unsatisfactory. RG^D makes the current situation difficult due to the IDP presence and the general fear of disintegration, but there has been no change for the worse here. RG^E has been rapidly improving and the tendency does not seem to be stopping. In principle, that should make NA more desirable for the RA, but their ties to Russia and the generally high conflict intensity cancels this effect out. RG^M has been substantially boosted and is set to rise even more, but this does not really

⁶⁷⁷ None or little control over the dU and no or little capability to gain control through military means, and/or an obvious tendency of losing status quo control or potential for seizing control over the dU.

have any positive effects on the conflict for Tbilisi: The RG will never be able to compete with Russia unilaterally, and their military spending and strategic victories heighten conflict intensity. RG^R is in principle as good as it used to be, but Russia's steps towards the Georgian statelets causes worry in Tbilisi, and the RG's words and deeds in the wake of continued RA-RF integration have also served to raise conflict intensity. As for RG^S, this sector was enormously strengthened at the outset of the period due to the popularity of Saakashvili and the UNM, and the incorporation of Ajara - but the discontent that built up and was "released" in November 2007 means the tendency must now be seen as rapidly falling. The RG^S situation has increased conflict intensity as the RG has employed increasingly "hard" rhetoric against the RA since the Anti-Saakashvili rallies. Summing it up; the RG does *not* have the capacity to take full control over RG^{dU} as the self-declared states' territories are withheld from them and they do not have the power to return the IDPs, and there is an obvious tendency towards less control over RG^{dU} in general as social cohesion drops. Their attempt at finding an alternative source of control in NATO has not given them much more muscle in the issues at hand. Seeking to increase control over RG^{dU} through military means would only be rational if the RG truly believes in "Western" assistance during full conflict, and/or that Russia will default on its vows to protect Abkhazia. However, as the RG's social cohesion becomes lower and their fears for losing Abkhazia for good higher – to Russia, as they increasingly perceive it – chances for the RG taking "desperate measures" grow. Saakashvili has committed over and over again to gathering the "lost territories" and returning the IDPs, making both the people and quite a few opposition politicians impatient.

In Ch. 2 I proposed the following general values for different constellations of BATNAs and intensity:

	Intensity rising	Imbalance	Intensity falling
Equally satisfied	Rather unstable	Somewhat unstable	Highly progressive.
Imbalance	Highly unstable.	Dependent on constellation: (B) is somewhat progressive and (A) is somewhat unstable.	Rather progressive.
Equally dissatisfied	Rather unstable	Somewhat unstable.	Rather progressive

I wish to repeat that such an abstract simplification necessarily leaves a lot to be desired since the myriad of important details can never be captured by it, but I feel that the table still manages to say something about this concrete conflict and its development from 2004 – 2008. I find that during the period under analysis, the Abkhazian Conflict has gone through the following constellations:

	Intensity rising	Imbalance	Intensity falling
BATNAs equally satisfactory	5) Kodori crisis – Anti-Saakashvili rallies: RA^{int} and RG^{int} increasing rapidly, but nobody's BATNA is getting worse, despite the RG's capturing of Upper Kodori.	3) Fall of 2005: BATNAs still climbing, RA^{int} and RG^{int} somewhat raised – particularly RG^{int} – but only marginally.	2) From the Tangerine Revolution to the summer/fall of 2005: BATNAs mutually increasing, intensities decreasing 4) Spring 2006 – Kodori Crisis: BATNAs improving, intensities decreasing. The most constructive part of the conflict, though disagreements arose at the end of the period.
Imbalance	6) Anti-Saakashvili rallies – Today: RA^{BATNA} still improving, but RG^{BATNA} falling due to decreased social cohesion and increased RA-RF integration. Mutually increasing intensities.	1) From the outset to the Tangerine Revolution: RG^{BATNA} improving (and thus satisfactory) and RG^{int} quite stable. RA^{BATNA} weakening (and thus unsatisfactory), RA^{int} rising. To follow the generalization this is despite tensions the "somewhat progressive" scenario, since the stronger party is the least intense one.	
BATNAs equally unsatisfactory			

In other words, the Abkhazian Conflict has gone from what I consider to be a less than critical situation (1), via a period where there was high potential for progress (2,4) despite a small temporary "heating" of the conflict (3), but since the Kodori Crisis the tendency has fallen towards the least desirable sectors of the table (5,6) and is today "highly unstable". I hold three structural factors to be the main causes that we have ended up here:

- The RA's complete lack of will to compromise on the IDP issue and the sovereignty issue, which is caused by their high RA^{BATNA} and lacking trust in Tbilisi

(i.e. high RA^{int}). Their constant insistence on having both of these desires fulfilled raise RG^{int} and reduce the RG's incentives to pursue the path of negotiation, as this is increasingly seen as futile. This heightens the RG's incentives to prepare military action - if not for any other reason, then simply in order to have credible threat in the absence of positive responses to offers that they see as generous.

- The increased military spending and activity of the RG, and many unproductive symbolic actions such as moving the GAE into Upper Kodori and renaming the Ministry of Conflict Resolution. This has raised RA^{int} by lowering their trust in Tbilisi and increasing their fears - causing them to seek more integration with the RF.
- The RF's increased sponsorship of Abkhazia, which has raised RA^{BATNA} , lowered RG^{BATNA} and raised RG^{int} . This sponsorship is again linked to increasing rivalry between the RF and USA/NATO, and the RG's increasing orientation towards this latter bloc following the Rose Revolution.

None of these structural factors seem to be disappearing in the moment of writing: RA^{BATNA} is still improving and they recently said no to the best offer they have gotten from Saakashvili so far; the RG's military power and actions, plus their bellicose rhetoric is becoming even more pronounced; and the RF's conflict with the RG is still ongoing. At present, the conflict is completely locked. While the RA may hypothetically come to terms with the fact that ARA is now based in Abkhazia, they can not accept the RG's new strategic position that enables them to move in wit forces from the northeast, the Black Sea and the southeast simultaneously — like Saakashvili even more-or-less openly have threatened. For Saakashvili's Gov, retracting the forces from Upper Kodori is hardly an option under current circumstances: That would fly in the face of all former rhetoric about "returning to Abkhazia", and would be unwise in a situation of low social cohesion — parts of the opposition would seize the opportunity to attack him for this. It is possible that a new RG Pres, with more popular legitimacy and other ideas about the Abkhazian Conflict, is needed to approach the Upper Kodori problem in a new way. But by the time someone like this comes to power in Tbilisi, the RA may already have lost much of its de facto sovereignty to Russia because of the events we are seeing unfold now, that increase their dependence. Then, the RG may *have* to deal with the RF instead of the RA.

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