

**GEORGIAN - ABKHAZ ETHNIC CONFLICT :  
A CASE IN MOSCOW'S NATIONALITY POLICY**

**A THESIS PRESENTED BY Y. MUSTAFA YALÇIN  
TO  
THE INSTITUTE OF  
ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**BILKENT UNIVERSITY**

**JUNE, 1996**

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MUSTAFA YALÇIN

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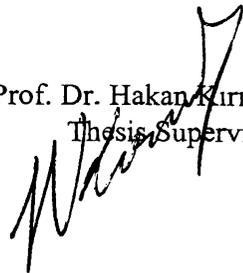
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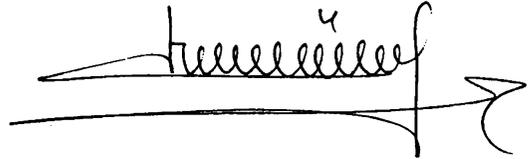
  
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## ABSTRACT

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Transcaucasian region is inevitably doomed to long-term instability and conflict. Newly established states of the region from the ashes of the Soviet Union have been the scene of more or less constant ethnic conflicts that had their origins in the past.

Throughout history, Transcaucasia has suffered much from these ethnic movements and has also been a major intersection of overlapping Ottoman, Persian and Russian interests. The Transcaucasian states, Georgia in particular, have witnessed such ethnic movements in their territories which threatened their territorial integrity for years. Although these movements have been the domestic problem of the region, in the last centuries, Russia, as the only sovereign authority over these territories, considered them as a threat to its security and interests in the region, and was directly involved in these disputes.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict in Georgia which has been a serious nationality issue for Russia during the course of history. Policies mutually adopted by the Tbilisi and Sukhumi administrations for the Abkhaz ethnic movement, and Moscow's response to the crisis regarding its traditional nationality policy and power struggle over the region will be the core subject of this research.

## ÖZET

Sovyetler Birliđi'nin dađılmasıyla, Transkafkasya blgesi kaınılmaz olarak uzun srecek bir anlaşmazlıđın ve belirsizliđin iine dřt. Sovyetler Birliđi'nin klleri arasından yeni bađımsızlıđını elde eden blge lkeleri, kkleri ok eskilere dayanan etnik atıřmalara sahne oluyordu.

Transkafkasya, tarih boyunca etnik hareketlerin sregeldiđi, Osmanlı, İnan ve Rus ıkarlarının keřiřtiđi bir blge olmuřtur. Transkafkasya lkeleri, zellikle Grcistan, toprak btnlđn tehlikeye sokan etnik hareketler ile karřı karřıya kalmıřlardır. Bu etnik hareketler her ne kadar blgenin i problemleri olsa da zellikle son yzyıllarda blgenin tek hakimi olan Rusya, bu hareketleri blgede kendi gvenliđine ve ıkarlarına bir tehdit olarak grmř ve olaylara dođrudan mdahale etmiřtir.

Bu alıřmanın temel amacı, Rusya iin tarih boyunca nemli bir milliyet problemi olan Grcistan'daki Grc-Abhaz etnik atıřmasını incelemektir. Ayrıca, Abhaz etnik hareketine karřı Tiflis ve Suhum ynetimlerinin karřılıklı izledikleri politikalar, Moskova'nın geleneksel milliyet politikası erevesinde bu krize yaklařımı ve blge zerindeki kuvvet mcadelesi bu alıřmanın ana konusu olacaktır.

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## CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

One of the most important intellectual lessons derived from the sudden demise of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) under the leadership of Russian Federation is the need for a deeper understanding of the concepts of "sphere of influence," and "struggle for power" in world politics. The continuing debate on whether the Russian-Soviet empire coming back reflects the persistence of that need.<sup>1</sup> Whether one places the blame on the former republics of the Soviet Union or international community for one reason or another, one can not escape the underlying assumption that Moscow administrations have enjoyed dominant control by force over the territories of the Soviet Union for two centuries.

During the four years of Russia's post-Soviet existence, international community has witnessed contours of a new version of Russian foreign-policy. The main objective of Moscow's foreign-policy strategy today is the reassertion of its hegemony over the former Soviet Union. However, Moscow is exerting its influence not by force which requires much larger political and economic expenditure, but by geopolitical maneuvering. The former Soviet republics, Transcaucasian ones in particular<sup>2</sup>, are being drawn into Moscow's orbit because of the political and economic instability and ethnic conflicts they witness in their territories. Russia's traditional political weight in the region, and the unwillingness or the inability of states outside the region to counter the Russian Federation are other reasons for Moscow's newly elaborated strategy, the "Near Abroad Policy."<sup>3</sup>

As a new Russian foreign-policy strategy of the post-Soviet era, the "Near Abroad Policy" seems to consist of a set of closely related goals which protect Russian

national security and interests in the region. With this strategy, the territory of the former Soviet Union is recognized as Russia's sphere of influence and Russia prevents the use of these areas as springboards for threats to its national security. From the Russian perspective, these areas act as bridges from Russia outward rather than as firebreaks isolating Russia from the outside world.<sup>4</sup>

One can consider this strategy as a Russian version of the "Monroe Doctrine" which ensures Moscow to adopt an interventionist policy toward the former Soviet republics and prohibits the initiatives taken by the international community for intervening in the politics of this region. In most respects, this scenario is deemed to have an neoimperialistic undertone because Russia considers itself to be a great power and the successor to the Soviet Union. From this perspective, the relationship between the Russian Federation and the former republics, most of which are members of the CIS today, is similar to the influence relationships between superpowers and third world states in world politics. The Russian Federation in the core and others in the periphery which are economically, politically and militarily vulnerable to Russian hegemony constitute a form of interdependency.

In international politics, domestic economic and political instability, and external vulnerability place the most serious limits on the exercise of influence by smaller states in their relationship with superpowers. In such countries, regimes in power and sociopolitical forces vying for power are at times inclined to invite, court, and cultivate the power and influence of foreign powers in their own societies as a means of consolidating domestic power and resisting the pressures of perceived domestic and foreign threats.

This has been the case for the newly independent states of Transcaucasia. Indeed, the dissolution of the Soviet Union has created a power-vacuum in the region for some time. During the transition period from the Soviet era to post-Soviet era, Transcaucasian republics of the Soviet Union have exercised some sort of sovereignty which later led them to declare independence. However, establishing national-states is fraught with difficulties and so far the politicians have made little progress towards overcoming them. Their national movements for independence were not completely successful in creating the basis for stable independent states. Vulnerability to Russian economic, political, military strength and ethnic tensions in these territories are said to be the major reasons for this failure. As a result, newly independent states *de facto* accepted the assistance of the Moscow administration which in return consolidated their dependency to the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>

Actually, from this perspective, events in this transition period often seem to reflect the similar inner political, economic and cultural dynamics of incidents which occurred in the transition period from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet era. One can say that the inhabitants of the former Soviet Union are witnessing new versions of old Russian imperial scripts in their territories. However, at this time, Russia is exerting its imperial influence not by military means but by its near abroad policy whereby it achieves the same results of its traditional interventionist and expansionist imperial policy.

An in-depth look at the near abroad policy of the post-Soviet era paves the way for re-examining the nationality policy of Moscow which is considered to be the most crucial pillar of this new strategy. As in the past, nationality problems which have their origins in the diverse ethnic composition of the population have been used as a pawn for Russian interventionist and expansionist policy. It seems that by exploiting economic

dislocations, weak political structures, ethnic tensions and even warfare, Russia intervenes in the domestic affairs of non-Russian republics.

It is ironic that when the Union republics which asserted their right to secede from the Soviet Union, became independent, have refused to recognize any region's right to secede from them. Several newly independent states have one or more regions where smaller ethnic groups are demanding independence. Republics where such secessionist ethnic movements take place are politically, economically and militarily vulnerable to Russian influence. In these cases, the presence of large ethnic Russian communities in the non-Russian former republics have also stirred Moscow to defend those Russians' rights in these conflicts. Thus, in recent years, by playing its nationality card, Russia has tried to employ strategies for diffusing tensions in these unstable governments.<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, one of the most important ethnic crises of the Transcaucasian region, the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict in Georgia has been a serious nationality issue for Russia for which the Moscow administrations devoted much attention and pursue a policy that could stabilize the situation. From the Russian point of view, ethnic conflicts on its periphery have been one way or another detrimental to the national security and interests of the Russian state. This is why it has been a major reason for Russian intervention in the conflict and also directly in the domestic politics of the Georgian state during the course of history. By using ethnic struggles among the peoples of the region, Moscow administrations have applied their imperial tradition of *divide et impera* in these lands. Indeed, the nationality question, and the struggles among different ethnic groups for supremacy in the Transcaucasus have justified Russian involvement in politics of the region. Parties involved in these struggles have been looking at Russian assistance and support for protection against one another. This also

has been an open invitation for Moscow to intervene in these disputes which in return strengthened Russian influence in these lands.

For two centuries, Transcaucasia has been the traditional realm of Russia, and was considered as the Russian outlet to the outer world.<sup>7</sup> As a result of its geographical location constructing a bridge between East and West, and North and South, Russia saw these territories as its natural sphere of influence and formulated its policies accordingly. Russia's traditional political weight, and its military power have prevented other regional actors from intervening actively in domestic politics of the region. Here, it should be noted that the credibility of Russian power including its military, economic, technological, diplomatic and other capabilities, in addition to its willingness to use these capabilities against any state that had desire to involve in politics of these territories was the main reason discouraging other regional actors in interfering in political matters of these regions.

Russia's geopolitical and geostrategic maneuvers in the Transcaucasus have been condemned by many as an unjust policy, however Moscow administrations have continued to employ Machiavellianist strategy-to justify any means to achieve its national goals.<sup>8</sup> It is in this context that Russia has used nationalities as a pawn for its own interests, and acted as an hegemonic power or a sovereign authority to impose order in the territories of non-Russian nationalities.<sup>9</sup> With these moves, Russia as the mere sovereign of the region has created a hegemonic stability<sup>10</sup> in its periphery in the Tsarist and Soviet period. However, as Paul Kennedy indicated in his well-known work The Rise and the Fall of Great Powers<sup>11</sup>, Russia towards the end of 1980s was a hegemon in decline. After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, this time, however, Russia by using the weakness of the newly established states which had economic dislocations, weak political

structures, and ethnic tensions, has intervened in their domestic policy matters as a hegemonic power and a successor to the Soviet Union.

The main concern of this study is to scrutinize the Abkhaz ethnic movement against Georgian administrations within the perspective of Moscow's nationality policy. The reciprocal policies between the Tbilisi government and Sukhumi authorities, and Moscow's response to the ethnic turmoil in Georgia using this as a tool for its imperial tradition will constitute the main structure of this study. The expected result in this research is to stress the similarities of nationality strategies employed by the Moscow administrations in this ethnic conflict during the Soviet and post-Soviet era which consolidated Russian dominance over the region.

From the methodological point of view, this case study is designed as a historical-comparative research using qualitative data from secondary sources. During the interpretation process of the data, maps, charts and tables will be used as an additional evidence to increase reliability and validity. These evidence will help organize ideas and systematically investigate relations in the data, as well as communicate results to readers.

To accomplish the primary aim, the study is divided into six chapters. As an introductory part, the first chapter discusses the scope and primary objective of the study. The second chapter underlines the pre-Soviet period the political conditions of Georgian-Abkhaz conflict by focusing on the origins of the conflict and great power rivalry over the region. The third and fourth chapters explain Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict during the Soviet era and Russian response to the dispute regarding its nationality policy. The fifth chapter discusses post-Soviet era developments in Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and regional powers' approach to the question. Finally, the conclusion chapter is devoted to the overall analysis of the conflict.

## CHAPTER II: An Ethnic, Cultural and Historical Profile of Georgian-Abkhaz Ethnic Conflict in the Transcaucasus

The collapse of the Soviet Union has triggered the rebirth of the problems of ethnicity, national minorities, and self-determination in the territories of Transcaucasia. The present republics of the region have been obliged to deal with strong ethnic drives for separatism. In this context, Georgian nationalism in reaction to Abkhazia's drive for autonomy is a good example in which one can find all the major causes of ethnic strife in the Transcaucasus: the legacy of the national-territorial division of the USSR, the problems of the rights of nations to self-determination, the tension between federalism and unitarism, and the frustrations of peoples subjected to repression.

The ethnic conflict between the Georgians and Abkhaz exerts a direct influence on the situation in Transcaucasia and the Russian approach to the region regarding its regional supremacy policy which views Transcaucasia vital to its own security. For a better understanding of the inner dynamics underlying Georgian-Abkhaz confrontation, and the rationale currently motivating the Russian Federation to reassert its hegemony over the region, one needs to look at history leading up to the crisis.

### **I. Geographical Locations of Georgia and Abkhazia: Impacts on Regional Powers**

Lying at the eastern end of the Black Sea just to the south of the Caucasus mountains, the land known today as Georgia or the Republic of Georgia occupies an area of 26.911 square miles in Transcaucasia. Locating between the Black and Caspian Seas,

Georgia bordered by Russia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, Armenia and Turkey to the south, and the Black Sea to the west. Its capital is Tbilisi, a city spread out along the gorge formed by the Kura river which has long been the center of Georgian political and cultural life (Fig I).<sup>1</sup>

**Fig. I-Map of the Transcaucasus Region**



Source: Encyclopedia Americana 12 (Washington, DC.: Croler International Inc., 1984), 533-534.

Being situated at the junction of Europe and Asia, Georgia has been a homeland for various peoples, and an open target for regional powers. This is why Georgia in the Transcaucasus provides a varied scenario of ethnic discord. The fact that Georgia bordered to the north with the Russian Federation made it open to Russia's expansionist policy. Similarly, its border with Turkey to the south made it physically assessable to the aspirations of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire. And, finally its proximity to Iran from the east made it vulnerable to Persian influence. From this geographical perspective, the territory of Georgia has served as a confluence of world's two great cultures-Christianity from the west, and Islam from the south.<sup>2</sup>

Present day Georgia is the most ethnically heterogeneous state and most densely populated region in Transcaucasia. Although, Georgians are subdivided into a variety of ethnic groups, the Georgians have numerical dominance in the population. They make up about 70.1 percent of the total population of 5,401,000 in the republic. The remaining part of the population is composed of different ethnic groups and nationalities. Some represent the people of neighboring countries, such as the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Russians. Many are members of distinct ethnographic groups speaking dialects of Georgian and living in isolated mountains. The Mingrelians, the Svanetians, and the Laz are among these smaller ethnic groups. Many minorities are associated with specific regions. The Abkhaz in the northwestern part of Georgia, the Ossetians in the north, and the Ajars in the southwest are concentrated principally in autonomous administrative units bearing their names (Table I).<sup>3</sup>

Table I. Statistical Profile of Georgia

Demography

Population: 5.401.000

Ethnic Population:

Georgian	3.787.000	70.1%
Armenian	437.000	8.1%
Russian	341.000	6.6%
Azerbaijani	308.000	5.7%
Ossetian	164.000	3.0%
Greek	100.000	1.9%
Abkhaz	96.000	1.8%
Ukrainian	52.000	1.0%
Kurdish	33.000	0.6%
Jewish	10.000	0.2%
Others	73.000	1.4%

Religion:

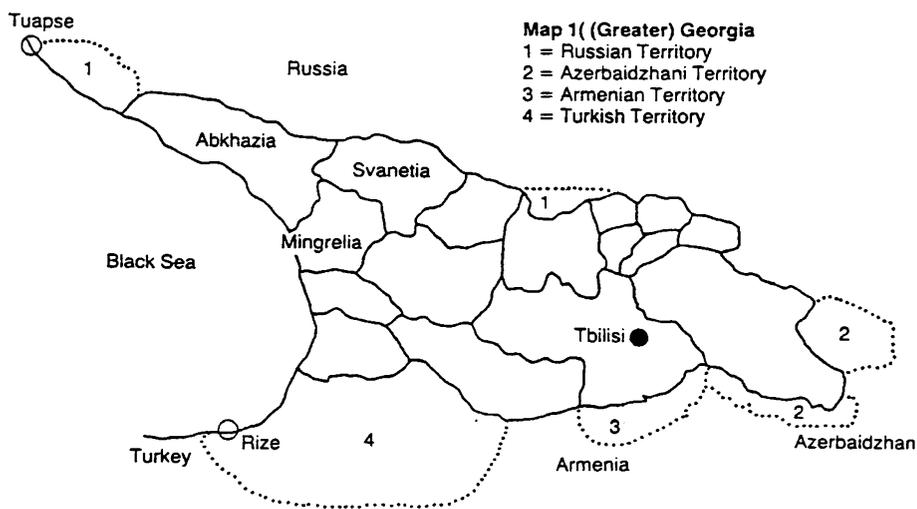
Christianity	90.4%
Islam	8.0%

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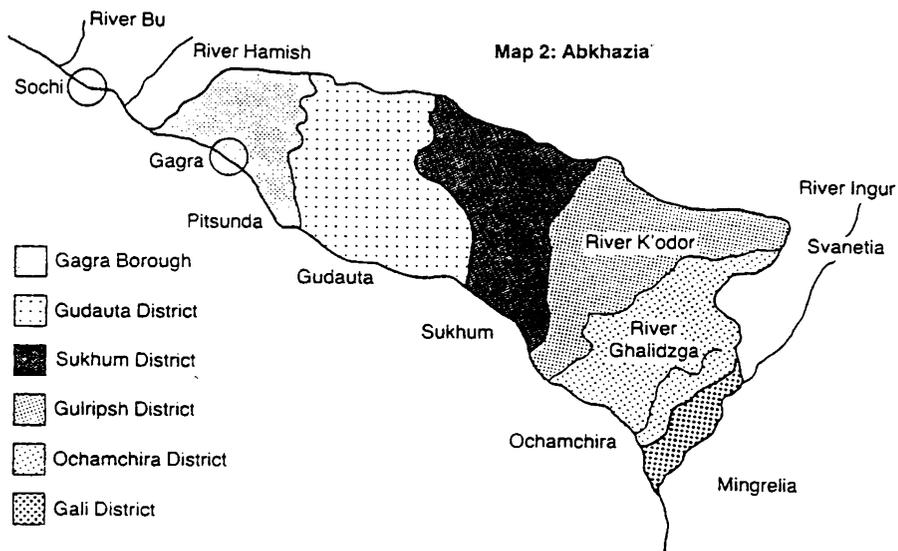
Source: Stephan K. Batalden and Sandra L. Batalden, "Georgia," The Newly Independent States of Eurasia-Handbook of Former Soviet Republics (Canada: Oryx Press, 1993), 111.

With a triangular region of 8.600 square kilometers in the northwest corner of the Republic of Georgia, the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic encompasses a territory that is bordered by the Caucasus Mountains in the north, Svanetia in the East, the Black Sea in the south, and Mingrelia in the southeast. Its capital Sukhumi is the largest and most populous among other autonomous republics (Fig II, III).

**Fig II. Map of Georgia**



**Fig III. Map of Abkhazia**



Source: B. G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership," Central Asian Survey 12(3) (July 1993), 298.

Despite the name of the republic, the Abkhaz constitute a minority in their own republic. They make up 17 percent of the total population of 540,000 in the republic. The other ethnic groups of the republic are Georgians, Russians, Armenians, Greeks, and Ukrainians.<sup>4</sup> Although the diversity of ethnic minorities reflects the cultural richness of Abkhazia, the territories of Abkhazia have been a stage for ethnic conflicts. Being a minority in their own republic, the Abkhaz people have been the most troublesome of Georgia's ethnic minorities. Their ethnic struggle with Georgians who account 45 percent of the population in the autonomous republic have existed for decades.<sup>5</sup>

Belonging to different races, languages, religions, and cultures, but having a common history, each ethnic group considers that it has been victimized and discriminated against by the other. Although Georgians and the Abkhaz accused each other of pursuing discriminatory policies, they also have been an open target for foreign involvement and occupation because of their geostrategic and geopolitical significance. They experienced the similar fates and were often used as pawns by the regional powers for supremacy in the region.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Ethnic Identity of the Georgians and the Abkhaz: Their Ethnic and Cultural Affiliation

Most of the dispute between the parties originate from their ethnic, cultural, and historical claims on one another and over the region they inhabit in the Caucasus. In order to understand the current ethnic dispute between the Georgians and Abkhaz, one should clarify the ethnic origins of these two groups, and understand the roots of this ethnic discontent and claims of the parties against each other.

## 1. The Georgian Ethnic Identity

Scholars of Georgian and Caucasian history agree that "Georgian" is the collective name for the closely related peoples and tribes inhabiting the mountains and plains of southwest Caucasia. They are thought to derive from indigenous inhabitants of the Caucasus region. From the ethnographic perspective, Georgians belong to the South Caucasian Peoples (Kartvelians), and they call their land Sakartvelo. Their language belongs to the southern branch of the Caucasian language family.<sup>7</sup> However, there are problems about determining precisely who is to be correctly described as 'Georgian'. Historians and anthropologists accept that Georgians as an ethnic group are divided into four main groups: 1) the Georgians, inhabiting East Georgia; 2) the Mingrelians of Central West Georgia; 3) the Laz in the southwestern mountains, now largely in Turkey; 4) the Svanetians in the southwest Caucasus, north of Mingrelia.<sup>8</sup> Georgian is the only literary language among them. It is important to note here that up to 1930, the Mingrelians, the Laz, and the Svanetians had a right to designate themselves as Mingrelian, Svan or Laz on their census returns. From that time onwards, there has been a homogenization of these people into the Georgian nationality, and they were required officially to register as 'Georgians'.<sup>9</sup> They are generally Greek Orthodox with their own self-governing church. However, there are small number of converts to Islam and Roman Catholicism. Among them, the Mingrelians and the Svanetians are members of the Georgian Orthodox church and the Laz are Sunni Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

The first group, the Georgians of East Georgia have a multi-ethnic structure. These ethnic groups all have a distinct identity, although their languages are mutually intelligible. The Eastern Georgians are composed of the Kartlis, Kakhetians, Meskhetians, Dzhavakhis, Ingilois, Tushetians, Khevsurs, Psavs, Mokhevs, and Mtiulis. Among them, the Kartlis (Kartveli) who are Eastern Orthodox in religion are the core

ethnographic group around which the Georgian nation was formed. The Kartli dialect became the foundation for the modern Georgian literary language. The Kakhetians are also Eastern Orthodox in religion and are concentrated east of the Kura and Aragvi rivers. The Meskhetians are a complex group. It is accepted that they are the descendants of the Anatolian Turks. Historically, some of them came under Russian influence and converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, while the majority remained faithful to Sunnite Islam. The Muslim Meskhetians (Ahıska Turks) were deported to Central Asia in 1944, while the Christians were allowed to remain in southwestern Georgia. The Dzhavakhis are all Eastern Orthodox in religion. Having strong cultural and linguistic ties to the Azerbaijanis, the Ingilois are Shiite Muslims in their religion. They are geographically concentrated between the Alazani River and the Caucasus Mountains near the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan. The remaining groups, the Tushetians, Khevsurs, Psavs, Mokhevs, and the Mtiulis are all Eastern Orthodox people.<sup>11</sup>

The western Georgians are composed of the descendants of the Imereli, Racha, Lechkum, Guri, and Ajar peoples. The Imerelis (Imeretian) are Eastern Orthodox and live between the Suram and Ajaro-Akhaltsoh mountain ranges and the Tskhenis-Tskali River. The Racha, Lechkums, and the Guris are all Eastern Orthodox in their religion living along the Rioni river. The Ajars who live in their autonomous republics, however, constitute another unique Georgian group. Like the Meskhetians, they are Sunni Muslims, and they speak the Guri dialect, although it is laced with Turkish words. Finally, there is a distinct body of Georgian Jews who speak the Georgian language, rather than Hebrew, and identify themselves with Georgians.<sup>12</sup>

Two other small ethnic groups, the Laz live primarily in northeastern Turkey near the coast of the Black Sea, and the Batsbi people who live in the Tushetia region of Georgia have also close ties with the Georgians. The Laz are Sunni Muslim in religion,

and their language is closely related to Mingrelian. On the other hand, the Batsbi people are closely related to the Chechen and Ingush groups who migrated to the Tushetia region. They are only a few hundred people and identify themselves as Batsbis.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Abkhaz Ethnic Identity

The difficulty in describing the ethnic identity of the Georgians is also similar for the Abkhaz. The ethnic origin of the Abkhaz and their affiliation with other ethnic groups are shrouded in mystery. There are a number of claims about the ethnic origin of the Abkhaz, but no clear evidence exist about their exact ethnic roots. In fact, this is an inevitable outcome of the region's geographical location which has served as a major crossroads of ethnic migrations for more than 3000 years.<sup>14</sup>

Ethnologists and demographers of Caucasia agree that the Abkhaz are indigenous to the region, and are not recent intruders as some extremist Georgian historians and nationalists claim. According to them, the term 'Abkhaz' (Apsua or Apswa in Abkhaz) refers to a northern Caucasian people whose homeland is between the southern reaches of the Caucasus and the Black Sea coast in the northwest corners of the Republic of Georgia.<sup>15</sup>

Some scholars think that the Abkhaz people are descendants of the Colchians, a people who inhabited Western Georgia in antiquity. That may indeed be so, but it does not solve the mystery of the Abkhaz people's origins, because the ethnic origins of the Colchians are also unclear. Moreover, if this theory is accepted, one would argue that the Abkhaz are ethnic Georgians on the grounds that Western Georgia was called Colchis in ancient times.<sup>16</sup>

The Abkhaz, however, consider themselves related to the Circassians, and thus ethnically and linguistically separate from the Georgians. They have close ethnic and cultural ties with northwestern (the Adygheans-the Ubykh), and northeastern (Chechen-Ingush-Daghestan) Caucasian peoples.<sup>17</sup> From a linguistic perspective, as in the case of other Caucasian peoples, the Abkhaz belong to the Indo-European language family. The language of the Abkhaz is not closely related to the southern Caucasian languages of Georgia, but rather is a northern Caucasian language. It belongs to the Abazgo-Circassian language group with more affinities to the languages of the northwestern Caucasian peoples such as the Circassians and Kabardians. From a religious point of view, it seems that the majority of the Abkhaz are Muslim, with a minority of Orthodox Christians. However, according to some scholars, the Abkhaz are not deeply imbued with either faith, and syncretic elements of both Islam and Christianity have been mixed with traditional Abkhaz folklore and social customs.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Claims of the Parties

The ethnic dispute between the Georgians and Abkhaz has mostly been the outcome of the Georgian ethnic, historical, and geographical claims on the Abkhaz people. From the geographical point of view, the Georgian position is quite simple. According to them, the territory which the Abkhaz inhabit today belong to the Kartvelians, and is the part of their land Sakartvelo. Kartvelians have always formed the majority of the population. For them, the Abkhaz people are not indigenous to the region, they are intruders, relative newcomers onto Georgian territory. Georgians have been living in these territories for centuries, but, the Abkhaz had come to these lands only '2-3 centuries ago'. From an ethnic perspective, Georgians also argue that up to the seventeenth century, only Kartvelian tribes who had no genetic affiliation to the Abkhaz

of today were in these territories. The people who designate themselves currently as Abkhaz are descendants of the people who migrated from the North Caucasus only in the seventeenth century, displacing the Kartvelians residing there. Thus, the true inheritors of the territory of Abkhazia are the Georgians, and Abkhazia is an indivisible part of Georgia.

From the Abkhaz point of view, the major rationale underlying Georgian claims is the Georgianization/Kartvelianization of Abkhaz territory. Their claims on the Abkhaz do not reflect the reality. For them, the Georgian and Abkhaz people have been in close contact for a very long time because of their geographical proximity. They have lived as neighbors to the Kartvelians, especially the Mingrelians and Svanetians. At times they had made alliances with Kartvelians in face of common external threats such as Arabs and Turks. Finally, they argue that, as a group of Northwest Caucasian peoples, they have a distinct race, religion and culture apart from the Georgian people, and the territory from Gagra in the north to the Ingur River in the south including Gali district has been the traditional homeland for the Abkhaz people. Thus, self-determination is their natural right.<sup>19</sup>

### III. An Historical Approach to the Region

#### 1. The Historical Settlement of the Abkhaz

The Abkhaz have a history that goes back to ancient times. Although their ethnic origins are shrouded in mystery, one can learn a great deal from the works of a number of ancient authors in the Roman era. As described by the Mingrelian scholar Dzhavanashia, the east coast of the Black Sea from Pitsunda (today's northern Abkhazia)

to Trabzon (in modern Turkey) was the land named 'Colchis' during the 1st century BC. It is in this respect that the Abkhaz can be considered as descendants of the Colchians who inhabited western Georgia in antiquity. Some Roman scholars, notably Arrian, Pliny, and Strabo mentioned the Abasgi or Abasgoi, and the Apsilians (who might be the ancestors of the contemporary Abkhaz) as inhabitants of the coastal region of the northeastern Black Sea. The sixth century Byzantine historian Procopius also related that the Abasgi and Apsilians were the people who lived in these lands, however, in his time they were under the suzerainty of the Laz Kingdom (better known in Georgian sources as the Kingdom of Egrisi). According to him, these people with the Laz Kingdom were under the influence of the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century during the era of emperor Justinian, and accepted Christianization of these lands.<sup>20</sup>

From the historical perspective, the Abkhaz (Apsua or Apswa) nation marks its existence from the seventh century, after the merger of these two very close ethnic groups known as the Apsils and the Abasgins. The Abkhaz themselves use a name of their own, "Apsua," a term which derives from the ancient name "Apsil," while the name "Abkhaz" is a Georgian version derived from "Abasgins."<sup>21</sup>

By the seventh and eighth centuries, Byzantine rule over the Laz Kingdom had become tenuous. During the same period, Abkhazia became independent of Byzantine suzerainty, and formed a principality known as Abasgia or Abkhazia. It was affiliated with the Khazar Empire at about 800 A.D. through the marriage of its prince, Leon II, to a Khazar princess. Later, Leon II promoted himself with the title of the king of Abasgia and established its capital at Kutaisi in western Georgia. His kingdom controlled the principalities of Svanetia, Mingrelia, Guria, as well as parts of Imeretia. However, by the ninth century, the kingdom was threatened by Muslims, and they witnessed Arab occupation from the East. As a result, for a brief time in the early 800s, the kings of

Abkhazia had to pay tribute to the Caliphate of Baghdad. After the second half of the ninth century, Muslim power was in decline, and the Abkhaz kings extended their authority into Kartlia and as far as Armenia until the middle of the tenth century. From that time onwards, Georgian influence in the Abkhaz territories began to be pronounced.<sup>22</sup>

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Bagratids, a Georgian dynasty, began to extend its influence in these territories. As a result of the disunity and anarchy between the principalities, power passed to Bagrat III who was the son of a Abkhaz princess. Abkhazia, some parts of Armenia, and all of the Georgian principalities were controlled by Bagrat and his successors. It is important to note here that, although they were recognized as the kings of all Georgia, their title of king of Abkhazia continued to be important, since Muslims continued to call the Bagratid Georgian Kingdom Abkhazia into the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Bagratid rule in Abkhazia was replaced by an *eristavate*, a feudal principality under the Shavashidze family that subsequently ruled Abkhazia under Ottoman suzerainty. During that time the Abkhaz were Christians, and the language of their liturgies was Georgian.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Ottoman-Iranian Influence and the Islamic Imprint

The sixteenth century was the era of rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Iran for the supremacy in the region. In that century, especially after 1550, western Georgia and Abkhazia gradually came under the influence of the Ottoman Turks who not only converted them to Sunnite Islam, but actively encouraged further colonization of the territory by North Caucasians, who were from several different Adyge ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup> With the treaty signed in 1555 between the Ottomans and Safavids, Eastern Georgia

(Kartlia and Kakhetia) was given to Safavids, while Western Georgia including Abkhazia came under Ottoman control. By 1578, Abkhazia had become a vassal principality under Ottoman suzerainty. The Ottomans ruled in Abkhazia until the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is important to note here that the most significant consequence of Ottoman presence in the Caucasus was the Islamization of a significant portion of the population in the region which has since been one of the important pillars of Abkhaz identity.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Russian Penetration into the Region

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, Georgia and Abkhazia witnessed the inauguration of a new era which would last nearly 200 years in their lands. The third regional actor, Russia, was gradually penetrating into the region with imperial aims. Russian penetration into the region somewhat anticipated the policies employed by Moscow against the Tbilisi administrations during the Soviet and post-Soviet era. Making use of the conflicts in the region and claiming to protect Georgia from other regional powers, Russia entered Georgian territories.

Russian penetration into the region was a result of Georgian request for Russian protection. The Georgian ruler, Irakli II, sought protection from Tsarist Russia against Ottoman and Iranian threat. He invited Russians to the region, and signed the treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, thereby putting Kartlia and Kakhetia under Russian protection. This was the onset of Russian traditional *divide et impera* policy in these lands, and gradually, entire Georgia came under Russian reign. In 1801, eastern Georgia (Kartlia and Kakhetia) were annexed to the Russian crown by Tsar Alexander I, followed by the western regions of Mingrelia in 1803 and Imeretia in 1804. While Georgians did not

fight against the Russians in the nineteenth century, the Abkhaz, by contrast resisted Russian advancement from the time of their first attempted annexation in 1810 until 1864, by which time the occupation of northern Caucasia by the Russians was completed.<sup>26</sup>

Two years later, in 1866, the Abkhaz revolted against Russian rule in response to an attempt by the government to initiate land reform and to assess property for the purpose of initiating a taxation system. However, they were suppressed by the Russians who declared the Abkhaz unfaithful subjects of the Tsar. Following the suppression of the revolt in 1866, a new process started which ended only with the 1917 Revolution: the Muhajir (emigrant) movement. This time it was the colonization of all the northern coast of the Black Sea and northwest Caucasus by the Russians which resulted in the forcible emigration of North Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman lands; the majority of those who were forced to leave were Circassians, including the Abkhaz, Kabardians and Adyges. This period was nothing less than a catastrophe for the Abkhaz and other northern Caucasian peoples of the region. Most of them began to leave their homeland and migrated to various regions of the Ottoman Empire, mainly into the Balkans.<sup>27</sup>

After the deportation, Russian rule was firmly established in Abkhazia, and the region was defined as the "Sukhumi Military Department." From then on, the Orthodox Church, in tune with the imperial policies of the Tsarist rule, started to enforce Christianization and Russification policies over the Northern Caucasian peoples. The defeat of the Ottomans in the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian war renewed the deportation of the Abkhaz towards the Ottoman lands.<sup>28</sup> From 1878 onwards, the Tsarist government started settling Russians as well as Estonians, Ukrainians, and Georgians in Abkhazia so as to turn the Abkhaz into a minority group. Thus, Georgians and the Abkhaz entered the twentieth century under the strict control of Russia.<sup>29</sup>

From the Georgian perspective, although the Georgians were grateful to the Russians for protecting them against their Muslim neighbors, and for regaining their lost territories, they bitterly resented the division of Georgia into separate administrative provinces and the persistent denigration of their culture and language. As a result, by the early twentieth century, this opposition to the Russians had led to the formation of a national liberation movement among the Georgian intelligentsia. In 1890s, the Georgian Socialists who were members of the Menshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party, had created a mass organization with branches all over the country.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, *Mesame Dasi* (the so-called 'Third Group'), organized by young radicals in 1892, became the first Marxist political group in Georgia.<sup>31</sup> Among its leaders were, Nikolai Chkheidze, who was to become the Menshevik president of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917, and Noe Zhordania, the future president of independent Georgia in 1918.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. A Brief Period of Georgian Independence, and the Georgianization Policy of 1918-21

After the collapse of the Tsarist rule, in November 1917, Georgian Mensheviks came to power in Georgia under the leadership of Noe Zhordania, the leader of the Georgian Party organization. He refused to recognize the legality of the October Revolution, preferring instead to lead Georgia to independence.<sup>33</sup> Towards this end, Zhordania gave rise to the Georgian national movement, and prepared the Georgians for statehood. Aware of the risks of becoming independent, the social democratic leadership refrained from declaring Georgian independence in the first year of the Bolshevik Revolution, and sought the best solution to its political dilemmas within the new revolutionary Russia. Meanwhile, Zhordania took the route of aggression and intended to occupy the whole Sochi District as far as Tuapse which had no links with Georgia.

From the Abkhaz point of view, he employed a strategy of 'Georgianization' of Abkhaz territories, and forced upon schools the obligatory teaching of the Georgian language. That was the first attempt of the 'Georgianization' of Abkhazia.<sup>34</sup> On 20 October 1917, Abkhazia, as part of the Union of the United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus signed the union treaty that created the so-called South-East Union which also incorporated some other regions of southern parts of the Russian Empire.<sup>35</sup> It is noteworthy to state here that the Union of Mountain Peoples was the main supporter of the Abkhaz right to self-determination and their national struggle against the Georgians. On November 1917, at a meeting of the Union of Mountain Peoples headed by the Chechen, A. Sheripov, the idea of self-determination for Abkhazia was first expressed by the Abkhaz, and it was supported by the members of the Union. Indeed, the collapse of Tsarist control had increased expectations and hope for the future of the Abkhaz and accelerated Abkhaz national movement.<sup>36</sup>

At the outbreak of the Russian Civil War in March 1918, the Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani National Councils, where the leading role belonged to the Georgian Social-Democratic Mensheviks, the Armenian party Dashnaksutiun, and to the Azerbaijani Musavat (Equality) Party, agreed to secede from Russia to form the Transcaucasian Federation. This was formalized when the declaration of the independence of Transcaucasia was made on April 22, 1918.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Zhordania was struggling against the Bolsheviks for power in Tbilisi, and he was also very active in Sukhumi. By employing an aggressive Georgianization policy, his Menshevik advocates came to power in Abkhazia. However, despite its neutrality, both sides in the Russian Civil War were hostile to Georgia. The Whites sought on several occasions to seize parts of its territory, while the Bolsheviks helped organize uprisings in the national minority areas. In March 1918, following a revolt, Sukhumi was taken over by the Bolsheviks, though the Menshevik armies recaptured the city on May 17 and established

their rule in Abkhazia, and claimed Abkhazia as part of Georgia. Meanwhile, the Batumi Peace Conference between the delegations from the Ottomans and Germans on the one hand, and the delegations from the Transcaucasian Federation and the North Caucasus on the other, was convened on May 11 when the independence of the North Caucasian Mountain Republic (including Abkhazia) was recognized. However, the German delegation left Batumi on the pretext that it did not have the authority to deal separately with the three newly formed Transcaucasian Republics. The Act of the May 11, 1918 gave official sanction to the historical process which began with the century-long fight for independence by the Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus against the Russian Empire.<sup>38</sup> However, ten days after this conference, the Transcaucasian Federation fell apart, and it broke up into the separate republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. By abandoning the class struggle in favor of national unity, Zhordania declared Georgia's independence on May 26, 1918. There was no suggestion that its territory included Abkhazia.<sup>39</sup> On the following days, German protectorate was accepted in Georgia. However, with the defeat of Germans in World War I, Mensheviks tried to gain British support. British response to the Abkhaz requests was the occupation of Batumi which continued until 1920.<sup>40</sup>

In those days, Soviet Russia signaled its readiness to recognize Georgia's independence by signing the peace treaty of May 7, 1920, renouncing Soviet Russia's claim to Georgian territory and any right to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs.<sup>41</sup> But within less than a year, on March 4, 1921, Russia was again appeared on stage by using its fire and sword. On the pretext of suppressing an uprising in the neutral zone of Lore between Georgia and Armenia, the Bolshevik Red Army led by a Georgian, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, invaded all the Georgian territories including Abkhazia, and put an end to Georgia's short-lived independence.<sup>42</sup>

As Firuz Kazemzadeh pointed out, the relations between the Georgians and Abkhaz worsened during the independence period of 1918-21. During that period, many volunteers from the North Caucasus, the Chechens in particular, joined Abkhaz resistance against the Georgians and tried to protect the national interests of the Abkhaz people. However, under Zhordania, Georgian nationalism was on the rise. Georgianization and nationalization became the policies of the new state. The Abkhaz and other minorities, although struggled for their secession from Georgia, they did not succeed in their movements as a result of the discriminatory policies employed by the Georgians.<sup>43</sup> In a speech addressed to the parliament in 1919, the Georgian President Zhordania was expressing the Georgian state's attitude towards minorities:

We are aware of the cultural distinction of the frontier areas (Abkhazia, Ossetia and Ajaria). In these regions, history has generated a completely different set of relations and traditions. Georgia has recognized the autonomy of these frontier areas regarding their internal affairs with one and only one condition: that Georgia's historical and economic unity should be preserved. We are willing to accept all kinds of autonomy demands, however comprehensive. But we can not accept one thing and that is their separation from us.<sup>44</sup>

From the perspective of the Abkhaz, the establishment of Soviet power on March 4, 1921 was a liberation from occupation by the Georgian Democratic Republic and the repressive regime of the ruling Menshevik Party. In the same month, at a conference held by Central Committee of Abkhaz Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Nestor

Lakoba, the independent Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic was declared. Later, the Georgian Revolutionary Committee published a declaration that approved the independence of Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic. On December 16, 1921, a union treaty was signed between the Georgians and Abkhaz. This treaty was very important because it created the first legal instrument between the parties. According to it, they were entering into economic, political, and military cooperation.<sup>45</sup> With all these political moves, it seemed that by the help of Bolshevik Russians, the Abkhaz people had taken further steps towards their independence from Georgia. However, the subsequent events would show that these were Bolshevik maneuvers for power politics over the region which would soon or less draw the Caucasian Republics into Russian influence.

## 5. The Return of the Russians

The following year, a new era began which would last nearly seventy years under Soviet Union's hegemony in the eastern hemisphere. On December 13, 1922, Georgian SSR and Abkhaz SSR with other Southern Caucasian Republics (Armenian SSR, Azerbaijan SSR) joined the Soviet-created Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (SFSR). This arrangement lasted until December 5, 1936, when the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was formally established as a constituent unit of the Soviet Union. Later, on December 30, 1922, Abkhazia with other republics became a Union republic, and was a signatory to the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). With this formation, all the republics were politically, economically, and militarily united under Moscow's umbrella, and handed their sovereign rights to the central authority.<sup>46</sup> Thus, on the eve of 1930s, Georgia and Abkhazia were Union republics of the USSR. Three years later, in April 1925, at the Third Congress of Soviet Abkhazia held in Sukhumi, the constitution of the Abkhaz SSR was promulgated.

According to its fifth article "Abkhaz SSR was an autonomous in its land, and has the right to secede from Transcaucasian SFSR and the USSR."<sup>47</sup> Although this was the case, as a result of the increasing interference of Moscow in domestic politics of the region, this provision was later deleted and Abkhazia became an autonomous republic attached to Georgia in 1931.

CHAPTER III. Moscow's Response to Georgian-Abkhaz Ethnic Conflict  
Regarding its Nationality Policy in the Soviet Era

**I. The Soviet Policy of Georgianization During the Stalin and Beria  
Period**

The political history of Abkhazia during the period 1931-1953 was influenced prominently by the policies of Stalin's close associate, Lavrentii Pavlovich Beria (a Mingrelian born in Abkhazia near Sukhumi) who headed the party in Georgia from 1931 to 1938 and chaired the Transcaucasian Communist Party Committee (including Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) from 1932 to 1937. Even after the Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (SFSR) had been abolished (1937) and he became the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (head of the NKVD-Stalin's secret police) in Moscow on December 8, 1938, Beria maintained his influence over Transcaucasia, having appointed his satraps to command the three republics.<sup>1</sup> From 1933 onwards, he instituted an anti-Abkhaz policy that was maintained and strengthened until the death of Stalin in 1953.<sup>2</sup> In February 1931, the union republic status of Abkhazia was abolished and it was placed under the Georgian SSR as an autonomous republic. Between 1936-1938, Beria launched a purge of Abkhaz officials, who were charged with planning to assassinate Stalin. The Abkhaz Bolshevik Party leader, Nestor Lakoba who was linked to nationalist deviation and his friends who opposed Beria's and Stalin's policies in Abkhazia were executed during the "Great Purge of 1936-1938." Most of them were found guilty of being agents of foreign intelligence services and others were labeled counterrevolutionaries.<sup>3</sup>

The Soviet policy of "Georgianization" from the late 1930s until Stalin's death in 1953, encouraged in particular by Beria and implemented by Georgian officials in Tbilisi, brought about the forced resettlement of other nationalities on Abkhaz territory.<sup>4</sup> Abkhazia experienced a forced importation of Mingrelians and Georgians from western provinces which drastically reduced the ethnic Abkhaz share of the population to below 20% (Table 2).

Table 2. Ethnic Composition of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic  
(in percent)

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1926	27.80	33.60	6.20	12.80
1939	18.00	29.50	19.30	15.90
1959	15.10	39.10	21.40	15.90
1970	15.90	40.00	19.10	11.40
1979	17.10	43.90	16.40	15.10

Source : Darrell Slider, *Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia*, *Central Asian Survey*, 1985  
Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 52.

The Georgianization policy of Moscow can also be seen in the ethnic composition of the Abkhaz Communist Party. The ethnic composition of Abkhazia was reflected in the composition of the Abkhaz Communist Party, since many of the new settlers were party members. The most dramatic reduction in the number of Abkhaz in the party cadres occurred in 1929-1930, from 28.3 to 18.5 percent, and continued to decline steadily from 1936 until the late 1950s, reaching a low of 13.3 percent in 1950. The Georgians on the other hand, have always been overrepresented in the Abkhaz party organization, comprising over 50 percent since 1950 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ethnic Composition of the Members of the  
Abkhaz Communist Party  
(in percent)**

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1923	10.00	40.40	35.00	4.60
1926	25.40	33.30	24.80	6.70
1929	28.30	24.90	24.50	8.80
1931	18.50	25.30	36.80	9.10
1935	17.60	25.00	35.20	11.40
1936	21.80	26.30	29.10	11.20
1937	19.70	26.80	26.10	11.40
1938	16.90	27.20	28.10	11.80
1939	15.60	36.20	22.10	13.20
1940	16.70	42.70	16.70	15.20
1945	14.80	45.20	17.80	12.70
1950	13.30	51.00	15.50	14.00
1955	13.30	54.80	13.70	12.90
1960	14.40	51.30	15.60	12.40
1965	15.50	50.50	15.10	12.40
1970	16.80	50.50	14.40	11.90
1975	17.60	50.30	14.50	11.30
1978	18.20	50.90	14.20	10.50
1979	18.20	51.00	14.10	10.50
1980	18.50	51.20	13.80	10.30
1981	18.90	51.20	13.80	10.10

Source : Darrell Slider, *Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia*, Central Asian Survey, 1985, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 53.

In December 1936, the USSR Constitution (known as the "Stalin Constitution") was put into effect, in which Abkhazia formally became an autonomous republic attached to the Georgian SSR.<sup>5</sup> Later, in accordance with that constitution, the Abkhaz ASSR adopted a new constitution in 1937. In the following year, Moscow issued a dictum that the Abkhaz language which was based on the Latin alphabet should be written in the Georgian alphabet.<sup>6</sup> From that time onwards, the Abkhaz (along with the Ossetian in Georgia's autonomous region of South Ossetia) was forced to adopt the Georgian script until 1953.<sup>7</sup> (In the 1970s, however, Moscow introduced measures to discourage the use

of Georgian as the national language in the republic. These policies did little to reconcile the Georgians and the Abkhaz).

After World War II, pressures on Abkhazia were intensified. The Abkhaz people experienced a harsh campaign launched by Beria which was designed to obliterate the Abkhaz as a cultural entity. Under the name of "the reorganization of educational system," all Abkhaz schools were closed, and students were forced to attend Russian or Georgian schools.<sup>8</sup> Especially, from the mid-1940s, under Kandida Nestoris dze Charkviani's stewardship of the Georgian party (1938-52) with Akaki dze Mgeladze in control in Sukhumi (and subsequently succeeding Charkviani in Tbilisi, 1952-53)<sup>9</sup>, teaching in and of Abkhaz was abolished, and Abkhaz language schools were turned into Georgian language schools. During these events, the Abkhaz radio broadcasts and printed media were banned. District-level newspapers published in Abkhaz were also eliminated.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, thousands of Russians and Georgians migrated to Abkhazia. Special land grants were issued in Tbilisi allowing Georgian collective farmers to settle in Abkhaz coastal districts.<sup>11</sup>

Kremlin's power over the non-Russian peoples of North Caucasia and the latter's ultimate impotence were most tragically illustrated when several small nationalities were physically removed from their homelands. In the midst of the war with Germany, Stalin had ordered the mass deportation of a number of North Caucasian peoples—the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachays, and Kalmyks—as well as the Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars, ostensibly for collaboration with the enemy. Toponyms were changed, maps were redrawn, and "autonomous regions" and "republics" were abolished. Two districts in the former Karachay Autonomous Region, including its capital city, were annexed to the Georgian republic as part of the Klukhori district. More than two thousand Georgians were settled in these depleted lands in December 1943. Four years later about

115.000 Muslims in Georgia, the Meskhetian Turks who lived along the border of Turkey, were deported to Central Asia, and plans were made to exile the Abkhaz as well.<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the war in Europe ended, Georgian influence in Abkhazia was tightened. Moreover, Georgian irredentism changed and led to territorial demands from the neighboring countries in line with the traditional objective of 'Greater Georgia.' In an article written by the Georgian academicians, S. R. Janashia and N. Berdzenishvili, detailing Georgia's irredenta in northeastern Turkey, published in major Soviet newspapers under the heading 'Our Rightful Demands from Turkey', it was said that "Georgian people should take back its lands-Ardahan, Artvin, Oltu, Tortum, Isgira, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, Trabzon, and Giresun from Turkey." According to them, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Ajaria were 'acquired lands.'<sup>13</sup>

The entire effort, which continued for several years, may have been personally instigated by Stalin at the urging of Beria. Nikita Khrushchev reveals in his memoirs how Beria taunted Stalin into taking action against Turkey.

The one person able to advise Stalin on foreign policy was Beria, who used his influence for all it was worth. At one of those interminable 'suppers' at Stalin's, Beria started harping on how certain territories, now part of Turkey, used to belong to Georgia and how the Soviet Union ought to demand their return... He convinced Stalin that now was the time to get those territories back. He argued that Turkey was weakened by World War II and would not be able to resist.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, the whole matter was dropped, and Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, announced in July 1953 that "the governments of Armenia and Georgia deem it possible to waive their territorial claims against Turkey. The Soviet government consequently states that the Soviet Union has no territorial pretensions against Turkey."<sup>15</sup> Although Georgians did not succeed in their claims against Turkey, it is important to point out that the Georgian territorial demands indicated how influential Beria was over Stalin, not only in domestic politics of Georgia but also in foreign policy of the Soviet Union. He managed to control the most important matters of domestic and foreign policy strategy of Stalin. As Khrushchev pointed out "It seems sometimes that Stalin was afraid of Beria and would have been glad to get rid of him but he did not know how to do it."<sup>16</sup>

By the last years of his administration, Stalin decided to curtail Beria's enormous power. The first signal was the replacement of V. S. Avakumov, who had over time come to serve Beria, with S. D. Ignatev, a man hostile to Beria. As Beria's influence over state security was being cut back, Stalin and Ignatev fabricated a police case against officials in the Georgian Republic-the so-called Mingrelian Affair. Mingrelian officials in the Georgian party were removed from service by Stalin's personal orders. As a result of these policies, Beria's power over Georgia was reduced significantly after 1951, however, not eliminated completely until his execution in 1953.<sup>17</sup>

The Stalin-Beria period is supposed to be one of the most destructive years in the history of the Abkhaz people. Soviet patriotism and Georgian nationalism went hand in hand with an aggressive policy toward the non-Russian peoples of the region. One can say that by supporting and permitting the anti-Abkhaz campaign of Beria for discriminating and obliterating the Abkhaz as a political, social and cultural entity, Stalin used Beria as a tool for the Russian imperial tradition of *divide et impera*. As a loyal

client to his patron Stalin, Beria was a temporary man used for the consolidation of Kremlin's power over the destiny of the non-Russian peoples of the region.

During this period, assimilation and annihilation seemed to be the major pillars of the Soviet nationality policy. The deportation of small nationalities and ethnic cleansing were indicators of Kremlin's nationality strategy. In the case of Abkhazia, at first, Stalin applied the Soviet version of the "Georgianization" policy by supporting Beria's so-called assimilation policy against small nationalities and promoting Great Russian chauvinism. Later, when Georgian nationalism suppressed nationalist movements of the inhabitants of the region, it was time for Stalin to strengthen the unlimited authority of Moscow in these borderlands. As a result of these policies, power of command and control from the center to periphery once again proved its superiority and stabilized the internal colonialist strategy of Moscow. Through Beria's firm grip, Georgia came to be just as tightly controlled by Moscow as were the other Soviet Republics.

Here, it should be noted that although Georgia was in full control of the Kremlin administration, it has benefited more from association with the Russians. The Stalin years eliminated once and for all Georgia's basically peasant economy and in one desperate push accelerated the creation of a primarily urban and industrial society. Without gaining the full attributes of political sovereignty, Georgians nevertheless remained a cohesive and conscious nationality in possession of their own territory and prepared, should the opportunity arise, to improve its social, material and cultural life.<sup>18</sup>

## II. Khrushchev's Policy of de-Stalinization and Détente Period in Nationality Issues

Soviet policies of the late 1940s and early 1950s were reversed after Stalin's and his loyal servant Beria's death in 1953. With the Stalin-Beria period coming to a close, a détente period in relations between the Georgians and Abkhaz was in effect.<sup>19</sup> One should know the critical assessment that thawing relations in the post-Stalin period was the essential outcome of the Khrushchev administration policy which insisted on political de-Stalinization. Khrushchev's resentment against the personality cult of Stalin and the crimes of the Stalinist era dictated him to change, leading to a more flexible social order.

Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization was a process of gradual change composed of contradictory movements: decentralization of political and economic decision making as opposed to conservation of the Stalinist command economy; relative intellectual tolerance against repression of deviance and dissent; opening to the West as opposed to maintenance of traditional xenophobia; greater liberty for national and ethnic expression against the containment of such expression within the Stalinist formula "national in form, socialist in content." The major outcome of this drastic change in Soviet governmental policy was the rebirth of patriotism and nationalism. Indeed, within a few years it became apparent that two undesirable developments from Kremlin's position occurred: first, local national elites with a support base in their republics were acquiring independent attitudes and practices with nationalist implications; and second, a new nationalism with overtones of opposition was being articulated more and more openly.<sup>20</sup>

From the political perspective, Khrushchev's policy of political and economic decentralization increased the power of local parties in the national republics. Under

Khrushchev, the central party seemed willing to take the risk of somewhat reduced control over the national republics, hoping that the local parties would be able to gain regional sources of support and provide stable government in the peripheries. Hence, a policy of indirect rule through dependent local elites was replacing the old Stalinist system of direct control from Moscow.<sup>21</sup> In such a setting, it was obvious that the emergence of nationalist aspirations and the increase of *vox populi* against the political interference of Moscow in local politics would be the major outcomes.

While such developments occurred, a new political purge in Georgian politics was on display. Just after the elimination of Beria and his supporters from party politics in Tbilisi in 1953, Vasili P. Mzhavanadze who had long served in the Ukrainian party apparatus under Khrushchev and as a political commissar in the army, was elected first secretary of the Georgian Communist party. Thus, the political purge against Beria sponsored Central Committee which was inaugurated by Stalin, was completed by his successor Khrushchev. Purges continued through the next few months, and by the sixteenth Congress of the Georgian Communist Party in February 1954, the first secretaries of Abkhazia, Ajaria and Tbilisi had been replaced, new elections were held in nearly nine thousand party cells, and over one thousand candidates of the party had been expelled.<sup>22</sup> A new premier, G. D. Javakhivili was elected. This new party leadership, which took power in September 1953, proved remarkably durable, and Mzhavanadze dominated Georgian politics for nineteen years. During his administration, Mzhavanadze aided the establishment of entrenched local authorities who developed their own ethnic political base from which they could negotiate with central authorities.<sup>23</sup>

Khrushchev's policy toward the nationalities was first articulated in the new party program adopted by the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961 where he elaborated the official theory of national development. Soviet nationalities were to continue to evolve

through the "flourishing" (*rasvet*) of their ethnic culture, but this process would lead dialectically to a "drawing together" (*sblizhenie*) of these nations until their "complete merger" (*sliianie*) was achieved, with the creation of a new Soviet people.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the new party program seemed to protect the fundamental rights of Soviet nationalities and defended their cultural developments. However, this did not mean that Moscow authorities supported them to accelerate their national developments which would later lead them to acquire independence from the USSR. It had come to mean that by the help of ethnic-cultural developments of these nations, not individual nation-states, but a new united Soviet people should have been created. This was the ultimate aim.<sup>25</sup>

With the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964, the assimilationist term *sliianie* was eliminated from official statements about the future of Soviet minorities, while the term *sblizhenie* was retained. The new party leader Leonid Brezhnev emphasized that rapprochement among the nationalities would occur through the play of "objective" social forces and not as the result of artificial prodding by the party. As if to underline the sincerity of this new approach, the government decided in 1965 to publish once again the laws of the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium in the national languages of the republics, something not done since April 1960. The chairmen of republican supreme Soviets, councils of ministers, supreme courts, and planning committees became ex officio members of the corresponding all-union organs.<sup>26</sup>

All the constituent peoples of the Soviet Union were affected by the moderate reform years of Khrushchev. The reduction of police terror and decentralization of political power increased the local resistance of republics to imperatives from Moscow. In such a climate where greater freedom was given for national and ethnic expression, non-Russian nationalities fastened their national and cultural developments. However, in

the long-run, Kremlin would understand that growing ethnic consolidation and consciousness created a dangerous situation for the leadership in Moscow.

### 1. Georgian-Abkhaz Relations During the Khrushchev Era

Georgian-Abkhaz relations were heavily affected by the so-called political de-Stalinization and cultural "thaw" of the early post-Stalin era. During this transition period, the Tbilisi administration sought to appease the resentment of the Abkhaz people against the central authority and tried to gain popularity. From 1953 onwards, the campaign of overt cultural discrimination against the Abkhaz ended, and, the prohibitions on Abkhaz language and culture were gradually lifted. In the late 1950s, Georgian authorities adopted a decree for opening Abkhaz schools, and announced a policy designed to expand the training of Abkhaz officials for educational, political and economic posts. These were followed by the re-emergence of Abkhaz-language radio broadcasts and printed media.<sup>27</sup>

While such kind of cultural freedom was given to the Abkhaz people, some political concessions in local politics were also made by the Georgian administration. The Abkhaz people were able to reassert themselves politically, and as the media and radio broadcasts were freed, they began to reappear at different levels of administration. Among local party officials and the apparat, the Abkhaz were overrepresented by the 1960s (Table 4).

Table 4. Abkhaz Representation in Local Party Organs  
(in percent)

PARTY POSTS	1949	1963	1978
Province committee	na	na	39.40
City and district first secretaries	4.00	30.00	37.50
Heads of party departments: province, city, and district	28.00	40.00	45.00

Source: Darrell Slider, *Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia*, *Central Asian Survey*, 1985, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 54.

It can be said that, there was a policy to promote Abkhaz officials at the expense of representatives of other ethnic groups. In April 1973, at the meeting of the Georgian party *aktiv*, Georgian officials criticized the fact that:

in Abkhazia a half-baked 'theory' according to which responsible posts should be filled only by the representatives of the indigenous nationality has gained a certain currency... But no one has been given the right to ignore the national composition of the population or to disregard the continual exchange of cadres among nations and the interests of all nationalities.<sup>28</sup>

Here it is worth noting that, Abkhazia from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, was one of the few non-Russian administrative units in the Soviet Union to have both its first and second party secretaries drawn from the native population.<sup>29</sup>

From the demographic perspective, with the improvement in living standards after the 1950s, the Abkhaz population finally showed a valuable positive trend in the 1970 census. This was the first striking increase in Abkhaz population since the disastrous deportation days of 1877 (Table 5).

**Table 5. The Population of Abkhazia  
(in thousands)**

	1878	1886	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989
<b>Abkhaz</b>	46	59	59	56	57	61	77	83	93
<b>Georgian</b>		4	26	67	94	158	200	213	240
<b>Russian</b>		1	5	13	61	87	93	80	75
<b>Armenian</b>		1	7	26	51	64	75	73	77
<b>Others</b>		4	7	24	55	34	42	37	40
<b>Total</b>	46	69	104	186	318	405	487	486	525

Source: Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği (Ankara: Kafdağı Yayınları, 1992), 17.

While the Abkhaz population increased, so did the Georgian population in Abkhazia. One of the important reasons for the increase in the share of the Abkhaz and Georgians in the population of Abkhazia was the decrease of the Russian population. While there were 93.000 Russians (19.1% of the total population) in 1970, this number decreased to 75.000 (14.2% of the total population) in 1989.

Although there was a gradual improvement in the living standards of the Abkhaz when compared with the Stalin period, one can not suggest that the Georgian administration permitted full autonomy and gave political and cultural freedom to the non-Georgian peoples of the region. While few measures were taken to improve the situation of non-Georgians living in the autonomous regions, the political-cultural

process of renationalization combined with growing Georgian nationalism and ethnic chauvinism were on the political stage in Georgia. Initiated in the early Soviet period and accelerated during the Stalin era, growing Georgian nationalism and consolidation of ethnic consciousness continued to influence the life of ethnic minorities in Georgia long after Stalin's death.

To understand the emergence of this new nationalism concept, it is necessary to look at the inner dynamics of Georgian renationalization-what this political-cultural process has meant for the Georgians. For some nationalities, renationalization meant the creation of an alphabet and written language. For others, it involved the initial establishment of a political framework. For Georgians, renationalization involved the gradual re-establishment of their political control and ethnic dominance over their historic homeland, a process that had barely started during the brief period of independence. From this perspective, one can say that the Georgianization policy of the Stalin years and the renationalization process were creating a new national culture, preserving and revitalizing local traditions, and in a variety of ways preventing the assimilation of the Georgians into an amorphous interethnic conglomerate.<sup>30</sup>

Georgian political and cultural nationalization, combined with the industrialization was creating conditions in favor of Georgians. The application of pro-Georgian political, cultural and economic policies by the Tbilisi administration was the major source of animosity for the non-Georgian nationalities against the central authority. For instance, despite the discriminatory policies of the Stalin era against the Abkhaz, to a degree reversed by the reopening of schools, re-entry of the Abkhaz into local politics and the re-emergence of radio broadcasting and publishing in Abkhaz, all was not well in comparison with the other regions of Georgia in spheres to access to

higher education, backwardness in industrialization, and deprivation to the tune of 40% by the Tbilisi authorities in terms of the local budget as measured on a per capita basis.<sup>31</sup>

As a cultural issue, the language barrier has presented special problems for the Abkhaz which prevented them to receive higher education in the republic. Being the official language of Georgia, Georgian has been used as the chief language of instruction. University entrance examinations in Georgian were put obstacles to Abkhaz students which in return reduced the Abkhaz representation in the republic's institutes and universities. Hence, higher education in Georgia had become a prerogative of the Georgians. With this cultural policy, many Abkhaz students were being forced to seek admission to universities outside of Georgia, especially in the Russian republic. Statistical data available for 1967-81 show that the language problem has had a real impact on the access of Abkhaz students to higher education. Although Abkhaz enrollments increased in 1967, they began to decline through 1977 (Table 6).

Table 6. Abkhaz Enrollments in Institutions of Higher Education

Academic Year	Number enrolled
1967/68	2500
1968/69	2100
1969/70	2200
1970/71	1900
1972/73	1900
1974/75	1800
1976/77	1800
1980/81	2600

Source: Slider, *The Case of Abkhazia*, 56.

Another source for Abkhaz resentment was the underdeveloped and underprivileged economic position of Abkhazia when compared with the rest of the Georgian republic. Georgian economic development has clearly been aided by its link to

the USSR and by the official Soviet industrializing ideology and policy. However, this industrialization policy was not well conducted in Abkhazia as in the other parts of the Georgian republic. Only the agricultural sector was larger in Abkhazia than in Georgia as a whole, and industry was less prevalent. Figures available for 1940-80 show that the overall rate of industrial growth in Abkhazia has been considerably less than that of the Georgian republic (Table 7).

**Table 7. Relative Volume of Industrial Output**  
Base year = 1940

	1940	1965	1970	1975	1980
Abkhazia	1.00	4.10	6.50	8.80	12.00
Georgia	1.00	5.50	8.40	12.00	16.00

Source: Darrell Slider, *Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia*, *Central Asian Survey*, 1985, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 57.

Another issue of concern to the Abkhaz was the inadequate rates of investment in the agriculture, food processing, and tourism sectors. The investment for these sectors has been allocated not directly from Moscow but channeled through Tbilisi, thus Abkhazia had difficulty in finding the necessary investment funds for renewing its technology. The rate of increase in capital investment between the ninth and tenth five year plans (in the 1970s) for Georgia as a whole was 39.3 percent, for Abkhazia the increase was only 21 percent.<sup>32</sup>

All these trends which occurred in the post-Stalin period meant in theory was that the gap between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia was being maintained in most areas, not "drawing together" as dictated by the official goal of Soviet nationality policy. Khrushchev's efforts to reverse the Stalinist policies fell victim to the decentralization of

political and economic authority which permitted a reassertion of national control manifested in the inequitable treatment of local minorities. National autonomy which accelerated nationalization in Georgia had come to mean, on the one hand, resistance to central Russian authorities and, on the other, the exercise of local power against the underrepresented local minorities. However, in the long-run this growing Georgian ethnic favoritism and nationalism which were against the Russian interests would lead the Kremlin administration to change its policy on Georgia.<sup>33</sup> From that time on, one could easily observe that whenever Moscow saw it necessary, it has supported the minorities in their relations with the Georgian authorities which in turn weakened the status of the Tbilisi administration.

### III. The Shevardnadze Period in Georgia During the Brezhnev Era

In the early 1970s, history was generating itself once again and introducing a new leader into the political life of Georgia. By the promotion of Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow, on September 29, 1972, Eduard Ambrosias dze Shevardnadze replaced Mzhavanadze as the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, a post he held for thirteen years until named by Gorbachev to head the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1985.<sup>34</sup> The leading motive for this change in leadership was widespread corruption in the administration that had shown itself both in politics and the economics. Corruption, black marketeering, speculation and bribery seen in Georgia was rampant throughout the Soviet Union in what is referred to as the "second economy."<sup>35</sup> In a speech addressed to the Georgian Central Committee in July 1973, Shevardnadze had warned the people that there would be no mercy for bribe-takers and extortionists. Not only he criticized the corruption but also complained to Mzhavanadze that his regime condoned the flourishing of nationalism in the republic. In one of his speeches, he stressed that "a half-baked

nationalism raised its head in some places in the republic." By these public statements, Shevardnadze was stressing his dissatisfaction about the growing national consciousness of ethnic minorities and nationalist dissent within Georgia. In fact, the national disputes between the Abkhaz and Georgians manifested themselves in 1973, when the communist leadership in the Georgian Republic claimed that elements among the Abkhaz communist leadership in the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic were demanding that preference be given to native Abkhaz in the doling out party and government positions.<sup>36</sup>

### 1. Gamsakhurdia's Nationalist Dissent in Georgia and its Impacts on Moscow and Tbilisi

In the 1970s, Georgia witnessed the appearance of nationalist dissidence in its territories. A small group of students stimulated by Zviad Gamsakhurdia who was a lecturer on American literature and English language at the Tbilisi State University began to complain to authorities about the treatment of various Georgian architectural monuments. In 1972, he and his associates became aware of the theft of religious treasures from the Georgian patriarchate in Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia asked Shevardnadze, then still minister of internal affairs, to investigate the situation. The investigation led to the wife of the first Secretary Mzhavanadze, and though he soon lost his post, an official cover-up of the thefts was maintained.<sup>37</sup>

Gamsakhurdia and his supporters soon publicized their claims and made contact with the Russian dissident movement and the Western press. The major rationale underlying this behavior was to attract the attention of the western world to the events in Georgia. In mid-1974, in order to prevent the illegal and unfair attitudes of Tbilisi government against the minorities and to protest the illegal deportation of Meskhetians

(Abkhaz Turks) to Central Asia, Gamsakhurdia and his advocates formed a Human Rights Defense Group in Tbilisi. Also, after the Helsinki Accords of 1975, a so-called Watch Committee to observe human rights violations was set up in January 1977, in Tbilisi. However, this dissident nationalism did not spread widely in Georgia, and Gamsakhurdia and his longtime friend and colleague, the human rights campaigner Merab Kostava were isolated from the population and sentenced to three years in prison and two in exile.<sup>38</sup>

Gamsakhurdia was unquestionably the leader of the opposition movement, even though there were many other fractions and groups. According to him, the Georgian government was nothing but Moscow's puppet. There were no Marxists in Georgia; even in the party they were all businessmen, hiding behind Marxist and Communist ideas. His assessment of the nationalities question in the Soviet Union clearly reflected his ideas about the central authority. For him, the interethnic conflicts in Georgia, whether with the Abkhaz or with the Ossetians, were orchestrated from Russia as part of "Moscow's imperial policy."<sup>39</sup>

The Gamsakhurdia incident was very significant for the Tbilisi government and Moscow administration. Although it was suppressed, it was the signal of the dissatisfaction of people living in Georgia. Such a nationalist dissident movement included the symptoms of enthusiasm for democratic, independent, Christian Georgia which were detrimental to Moscow's interest in the region. Indeed, nearly a decade later, Tbilisi and Moscow administrations would have witnessed the reappearance of Gamsakhurdia on stage with a powerful tool in his hand: Independence for Georgia.

## 2. The Brezhnev Constitution of 1977 and Kremlin's Nationality Policy

While the Georgian politics was undergoing such dilemmas, the final draft of the new Soviet Constitution was adopted in Moscow on October 7, 1977 in which the embodiment of the state's nationality policy could be seen. The Constitution caused all the hitherto creeping antagonisms to erupt. Possibly because, in the preamble to the document, the Kremlin administration emphasized the existence of a new historical stage-that of an emerging Soviet people-and perhaps also because it threatened a radical integration of the nations within a unitary state, national aspirations were being affirmed.<sup>40</sup> One can say that this formulation regarding Soviet nations aimed at the total deprivation of these nations of their separate national identities in the long-run. On those days, before the constitution was ratified, Brezhnev was expressing his views on this concept;

The Soviet people's social and political unity does not in the least imply the disappearance of national distinctions...The friendship of the Soviet peoples is indissoluble, and in the process of building communism they are steadily drawing ever closer together and their spiritual life is being mutually enriched. But we would be taking a dangerous path were we artificially to step up this objective process of national integration. That is something Lenin persistently warned against, and we shall not depart from his precepts.<sup>41</sup>

The new Brezhnev constitution of 1977, affirmed the right of union republics to secede from the Soviet Union. However, other prerogatives formerly held in law by the

Union republics were abolished in the new constitution. For instance, republics no longer enjoyed the right to possess their own military forces as they had previously by the 1936 Constitution. They also were not allowed to enter into foreign relations with other states directly, and the central government retained the right to intervene in domestic policy matters of union republics.<sup>42</sup> Once again in history, by playing the center-periphery influence relationship card against the union republics, the Moscow government was strengthening the power of command and control of central authority.

### 3. Georgian-Abkhaz Relations During the Brezhnev Era

From the Georgian and Abkhaz political perspectives, the Brezhnev era, 1977-78 period in particular, was a turning point in their relations. In Georgia there were ethnic protests and mass demonstrations in connection with the adoption of the new constitutions for the republic and the autonomous republics, based on the 1977 Soviet Constitution. By revealing Georgian nationalism in the political arena, Georgians held ethnic protests in Tbilisi on behalf of their own constitution for recognizing Georgian as the sole official state language of republic. What seemed obvious in reality amounted to a revolution. It meant that in a minifederated Georgia composed of two autonomous republics and an autonomous region, there would be some limitations on the self-governing status of the minority regions, namely Abkhazia, Ajaria, and South Ossetia. While the Georgians were fighting to be culturally dominant within their state, the Abkhaz people reacted against what they perceived as Georgian interference in their domestic policy matters and Tbilisi administration's failure to foster Abkhaz cultural and economic development.<sup>43</sup>

For the purpose of defending their fundamental rights and freedoms in the republican constitution, in December 1977, 130 Abkhaz intellectuals signed a letter of collective protest listing their complaints against what they considered as the ongoing "Beria-ite" policy of Georgian leaders aimed at Georgianization of their country and despatched it to the Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.<sup>44</sup> In such a climate where public protests increased, in May 1978, twelve thousand people gathered in the village of Lykhny in the Gudauta district to support the signatories of the letter who sought for revisions in the new constitution and to demand that Abkhazia be allowed to secede from Georgia and join the Russian republic (RSFSR), preferring to be a minority in the great multiethnic federation than to be in a small state bent on absorbing small minorities.<sup>45</sup> By doing so, the Abkhaz tended to view the Russian Federation as a guarantor of their autonomy against Georgian oppression, despite the fact that in the past centuries the Abkhaz suffered much from the policies of Moscow.

After being deluged with letters and telegrams in favor of secession, the Politburo considered events in Abkhazia serious enough to dispatch I. V. Kapitonov, at the time leader of Central Committee's Organizational Party Work Department and a secretary of the Central Committee, to Sukhumi and installed a new party leader, Boris V. Adleiba in Abkhazia. At a meeting of the Abkhaz party *aktiv*, concerning discussions on the new constitution, Kapitonov emphasized that the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet had received the complaints of Georgians and the Abkhaz, and came to a conclusion that many of the complaints made by Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate and had a definite basis. However, he rejected two proposals advanced by the Abkhaz party members. One was the provision to the constitution which gave Abkhazia the right to secede from Georgia and attach itself to the Russian republic. For him, this secession was impermissible because it would not conform to the Soviet constitution. Another was the proposal which eliminated Georgian as an official language in Abkhazia. This was also

rejected as contradictory to the Leninist nationality policy. In general, these proposals were an attempt to set one nationality against the other and would create more conflicts in the region. As a result of these developments, the adoption of the Abkhaz constitution was delayed.<sup>46</sup>

In the view of Georgians, the arbitrator position of Moscow heightened the Georgian resentment against the Kremlin administration. Georgian intellectuals accused Moscow of systematically exacerbating the conflict and using it as a pretext to intervene in Georgia and thus reduce the possibilities for national independence. For them, this ethnic conflict was their internal problem and the sole official entity responsible for settling the dispute was the Tbilisi administration.

#### 4. The Abkhazization Policy of Moscow

Although the strong Abkhaz effort in 1978 to secede from Georgia and join the Russian republic failed, Moscow, having seen that the Abkhaz complaints were valid, introduced an "Abkhazization" policy that granted ethnic Abkhaz cultural freedom and a disproportionate share of government posts within Abkhazia. In order to meet the complaints voiced by Abkhaz nationalists, the central government forced Georgian authorities to make a new plan for socio-economic development in Abkhazia. As a result, in Tbilisi and in Moscow, new important resolutions on Abkhazia were issued by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and by the CPSU Central Committee and the Council of Ministers.<sup>47</sup>

From the cultural point of view, the 1978 resolutions included upgrading of Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute to the Abkhaz State University in 1979 and allowance for

Abkhaz students to enter the Tbilisi University. Thus, these measures provided more educational opportunities for Abkhaz students outside of Abkhazia. Enrollment figures for higher education in 1980/81 showed a major increase in the number of Abkhaz students (Table 6). In order to increase the visibility of Abkhaz culture, by constructing new television and radio studios in Sukhumi, Abkhaz television broadcasts began in November 1978. The written Abkhaz media, by increasing the volume of Abkhaz books and journals, started to appear. One should consider these activities as the rebirth of a captured Abkhaz culture.<sup>48</sup>

From the economic perspective, the 1978 program had a special concern to the Abkhaz economic development. New economic funds and investments were channeled into Abkhazia in order to speed up economic development. A large portion of these economic activities was designated for the construction of highways, hospitals, schools, new government office buildings for the Abkhaz republic's officials. In order to prevent unemployment, new funds were given to entrepreneurs. As a consequence of these economic developments, there was a clear increase in the general budget.<sup>49</sup>

The strategy pursued by the authorities was highly conciliatory to the Abkhaz. In essence, the Kremlin administration applied an appeasement policy in this ethnic imbroglio. In order to prevent the dispute from escalating into a civil war, the Georgian leadership was forced to admit that many of the complaints made by the Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate, and thus some political and economic concessions were given to the Abkhaz as a compensation. These measures, however, were resented by the Georgian population of the autonomous republic who thought that the Abkhaz were unjustifiably being shown preferential treatment.<sup>50</sup>

The only side which was disappointed from this three-dimensional process was the Georgians. From a Georgian viewpoint, the Abkhaz had gained a very privileged position. In no other autonomous region or republic of the Soviet Union did such a small minority population as the Abkhaz had a very high rate of employment opportunity in the top jobs, a TV channel or a university. For them, this was especially clear if one compared the Abkhaz with ethnically-related nationalities-Adyges-Kabardians and Circassians-who have been living in their autonomous regions and did not dare to aspire to anything resembling what the Abkhaz obtained. Thus, the events of late 1970s increased the resentment of Georgians against the Abkhaz and stirred up ethnic conflict between them.<sup>51</sup>

From another perspective, one can consider this policy as the containment policy of Moscow towards Georgia. By giving concessions to the Abkhaz, the Kremlin administration somewhat limited the nationalist strivings of Georgians which later would easily turn into a threat to its own interests in the region. Thus, pursuing such a dual-strategy, Moscow, in reality, was consolidating its power in its spheres of influence. By using ethnic turmoil as an opportunity to intervene in the domestic policy of the region, the Kremlin administration was playing its nationality card and acting as a mediator in the settlement of this dispute. Actually, this case proved the hegemony of Moscow in these areas which Russia considered as its back garden. This also strengthened the view that the Soviet authorities, when faced with ethnic tensions that reach the crisis stage, were capable of reacting in ways which prevented crises from becoming political disasters.

The partial changes of 1978-79 in Abkhaz political and cultural life did not bring long-lasting fundamental solutions to the ethnic dispute between the Georgians and Abkhaz. Throughout the 1980s, the crucial decisions regarding Abkhazia were taken by

top-ranked Georgians in the Tbilisi administration where figure-head positions in the government were held by the Abkhaz. All the decisions on crucial questions were taken in favor of Georgians which in turn enhanced Abkhaz resentment against the Georgians. However, the economic and political concessions given by the Tbilisi administration under the shadow of Moscow should, indeed be considered as the accelerator of the inner dynamics for an independent Abkhaz republic.<sup>52</sup>

Chapter IV. The Impacts of Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost'  
Policies on the Nationality Issues

The political developments of the 1980s in the Transcaucasus have been determined mainly by *perestroika* and *glasnost'* policies of Kremlin administration which were the twin reform processes for the Soviet Union initiated by the new leader Mikhail Gorbachev. In order to understand the deep reservoir of antipathy that had developed between the Georgians and Abkhaz, and the emergence of nationalistic, pro-independence movements throughout the 1980s, one should examine the impacts of these reform processes on the nationality policy of the central administration.

When Gorbachev assumed power in Moscow on March 11, 1985, there was a nationality problem inherited from the past, and Gorbachev was the new leader who desired to pay great attention to the nationalities question and to the problems of multiethnic society. Although the official claim was that the problem had already been solved through the policies adopted by the central administrations during the course of history, this did not reflect the entire truth.<sup>1</sup>

Before embarking on his more ambitious reform agenda of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Gorbachev took it upon himself to replace most of the existing leadership in the various republics. For him, the Brezhnev era leaders had been in power for a very long time, and had developed their own personal networks of influence which were largely independent of Moscow. For the purpose of re-consolidating Russian power in the periphery, Gorbachev installed his own people in institutions of power in the non-Russian republics-notably in Politburo and the party secretariat. Gorbachev was displaying a strong bent for centralization by Russification of the system's highest

leadership cadres. However, the new leadership was not knowledgeable of events occurring in the periphery.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the earlier practices, the majority of the representatives of Gorbachev's Politburo were Russians who only knew Russia. Although there were some people representing their own republics, many of the top decision-makers in the Politburo had no authoritative tie to the republics. Thus, they were ignorant of the problems at the periphery. Before Gorbachev, many Soviet leaders had sharpened their administrative skills in various republics before coming to power in the Kremlin and thus had acquired some information about the problems of the periphery.<sup>3</sup>

These two defects in Gorbachev's nationality policy had a devastating effect on the non-Russian nationalities. For the nationalities, a sense of being ignored and even scorned by Moscow led, when conflicts arose, to the certitude that problems could be dealt with effectively on their home lands and by force. With no representatives in Moscow, how could it be otherwise? Members of the Politburo were largely oblivious to the details of the problems posed by the nations. For this reason, the Gorbachev administration did not understand the demands of the non-Russian population and the logic underlying their desire to become independent.<sup>4</sup>

The main objectives of Gorbachev's twin reform processes initiated in 1987 were to revitalize socialism and to make the Soviet system more effective. His aim was not to transform the Soviet federal system nor to disintegrate it. These were rather side effects of his policies of transformation in the economic and political arena where a point was reached when it was not possible to calm the nationalist upheavals and pro-independence sentiments in the non-Russian parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> As Shevardnadze said, Gorbachev remained a convinced socialist until the end.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of the nationalities question, as Helene Carrere d'Encausse pointed out, Gorbachev did not seem to pay enough attention to it. Even in the new party program of 1985 which was adopted by the Twenty-seventh Congress, his major innovation was the use of the concept of the "United Soviet People," previously absent from this kind of an official statement, even if Soviet ideologists had used it widely since 1977. In his rhetoric, he was considering the Soviet people as a new kind of social and international community in which oppression and inequalities had been eliminated and replaced by the friendship of peoples, respect for national cultures, and national dignity for all.<sup>7</sup>

For him, the most important problem was the economic hardships of the Soviet Union, and not the nationalities question. While he gave priority to his economic restructuring program, he was interested in the nationalities question only to the extent to make sure that it would not alter his program. Here, it is obvious that Gorbachev saw the republics as the major tool for the development of a single economic complex in which the general interest prevailed over the special interests of the nations comprising the USSR.<sup>8</sup> However, realizing this goal of a unified economic space required a restrictive conception of national cultural rights.<sup>9</sup>

For the first few years, the optimism of *glasnost* led to expectations that ethnic problems would be solved and an harmonious, stable order would be achieved. However, when these expectations were not fulfilled, in a way, undermined by Gorbachev's disregard of national feelings and his opposition to national favoritism, national movements immediately created their own structures. In fact, the open-criticism period which G. Lapidus called the "cognitive liberation period"<sup>10</sup> created by *glasnost*, served as the accelerator of national consciousness and paved the way for the re-emergence of nationalist sentiments and pro-independence movements in the non-Russian republics that had been suppressed for a long time. It was this period in which

nationalist ideology filled the gap of the failed Marxist-Leninist principles of Soviet ideology.

As *glasnost'* provided the means for people to voice their criticisms and demands, they increasingly began to address the nationalities question and demanded further cultural and linguistic rights. As the central economy got worse, the constituent republics of the Soviet Union decided that they could not be worse off on their own and began to take initiative in the administration of their republics. Thus, the break-up of the centralized economic structure gave rise to further localism and nationalism. While the non-Russians had voiced their demands to the central authority, the Kremlin administration and the republican capitals did not honor their requests. This led to further alienation of the periphery from Moscow, and Gorbachev, while he was trying to gather support through *glasnost'* for *perestroika*, ended up with a loss of popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Gorbachev's miscalculation of the impact of Glasnost and Perestroika on the nationalities question was also seen in the emergence of a variety of associations and organizations throughout the Soviet Union referred to as "informal groups."<sup>12</sup> To understand the inner dynamics of the ethnic tensions, nationalist movements, and political struggles in the *post-glasnost'* and *perestroika* years, the importance of the political groups and movements that emerged during the period 1987-90 should be emphasized. Because, they were the main motives which stirred the masses and awakened them to increase their voice against the central political authority.

The formation of these informal groups, at the beginning, was not perceived as political. The groups were rather concerned with environmental and cultural issues, such as the revitalization of national languages and literature, and the fight against environmental degradation. Although it was contradictory, these movements were

encouraged and even orchestrated by the Communist leadership both in the center and the periphery. In fact, Gorbachev was using these groups in his fight against the conservative forces and the entrenched republican leaderships. However, gradually, the Soviet leadership could not exert its total control over these various groups and movements which it initially encouraged. Thus, this environment opened new horizons for the pro-independence political forces, and new social and political groups were formed.<sup>13</sup>

### 1. The Effects of Gorbachev's Reforms in Georgia and the Re-emergence of the Georgian Dissident Movement

From the view point of Georgian domestic politics, the effects of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* were at first slow to reach Georgia, dripping through the filter of conservative Party opposition until popular opinion began to put pressure on the leadership for faster change. When Gorbachev introduced his twin reforms, Georgia was still going through what could be described as a post-Shevardnadze transition. Jumber Patiashvili, the man suddenly called upon to replace Shevardnadze as First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party when the latter moved to Moscow as Foreign Minister in 1985, was still busy purging the Shevardnadze cadres and putting his own people in key positions in the Georgian bureaucracy.<sup>14</sup>

The period 1985-1987 showed that Georgia was not immune to the changes taking place elsewhere in the Soviet Union. It seems that there was no great enthusiasm for neither *glasnost'* nor *perestroika* within the Georgian leadership although the state's economic and political system had sank into quagmire. Indeed, in April 1987, Patiashvili pointed out that there were more than "a few opponents" of *perestroika* in Georgia, and

added that not all of them were "demagogues, conservatives, and bureaucrats." Rather, he emphasized that there were real clashes of interests and personalities within the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup>

Through 1985-1986, there was little organized opposition to the authorities, partly because many of the most active figures in the dissident movement were still in prison. However, early in 1987, frustration at the slow pace of *perestroika* began to form around a number of key issues, and the political actors of *perestroika*, that is to say the informal groups, began to organize their activities. At the beginning, they were not political in character but were organized for humanitarian purposes which stressed people's needs. The first dissenting voice was raised in April 1987 as an opposition to the plan to build a railway across the Caucasus linking Georgia directly with Russia. The major claim of Georgian dissidents was that constructing such a railway would cause damage to the environment, pollution and destruction of historical monuments. Although this dissident movement was humanitarian in character, this was the first sign of the Georgian national movement and the desire to avoid of Moscow's control.<sup>16</sup>

Another important Georgian dissident activity which was considered as the real evidence of Glasnost was the opposition of the public against the Soviet army's usage of an ancient Georgian monastery, Davitgareja, for artillery practice. Georgian dissidents had been complaining about the Soviet troops for damaging the frescoes and walls of the monastery. For them, this was a symbol of both the physical and spiritual threat posed by Moscow to the survival of the Georgian nation. Here, it is important to note that, Christianity had always formed a central plank in Georgian national consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of 1987, several prominent dissidents began to form political platforms to voice their demands. A mass political awakening was gripping the republic. These

political actors of *perestroika* organized their activities among the people, welded mass support for their pre-democracy movement and defiantly opposed the authorities by proposing alternative political platforms to replace the existing one, and aimed to make Georgia a free, independent state.<sup>18</sup>

Such informal groups which sought political alternatives against the central authority and republican leadership were many in Georgia, but the most influential ones were, the Ilya Chavchavadze Society, the Shota Rustaveli Society, the Caucasian Club, and the National Democratic Party (NDP). A brief look at these informal groups shows us that a linkage had developed early on between the emerging nationalist forces and ethnic conflicts which soon took a violent form. During the early days of the confrontation between the emerging nationalists and other political forces and the existing leadership, Georgia's Communist authorities showed no willingness to compromise with opposition groups. In fact, their first instinct was to ask for help from Moscow in order to subdue them. This was a good indicator of how the leadership in the Tbilisi administration was dependent on Russian assistance in times of crisis.<sup>19</sup>

To understand the ethnic turmoil between the Georgians and Abkhaz which escalated after 1989, the opinions of these dissident informal groups should be expressed. Actually, when these groups were organized, they also carried their ideas to the leadership, proposing Georgian nationalism and undermining nationalist minority movements which deepened the resentment of ethnic minorities against the Tbilisi administration.

The Ilya Chavchavadze Society was founded on October 31, 1987, and was named after the founder of the nineteenth century national liberation movement. Their ultimate aim was Georgian independence and the defence of Georgian language, religion

and fatherland. The Society established a coordinating center with six members, including the noted Georgian dissidents Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Bitter criticism and harsh attacks from the officialdom initially distinguished the society. It finally dispersed in an alliance called Round Table-Free Georgia and would won a victory in the October, 1990 elections. Zviad Gamsakhurdia emerged as the most popular figure who could rally the Georgian people around his alliance and lead them to electoral victory over the Communists.<sup>20</sup>

The Shota Rustaveli Society was an alternative to the Ilya Chavchavadze Society founded and backed officially by communist rulers. Mostly comprised of intellectuals who supported the regime, it espoused the same causes for Georgia's future concerning language, culture and ecology. However, it lost its public credibility in due time.<sup>21</sup>

Another was the Caucasian Club, an organization of unknown origin and composition. It also expressed deep concern about Georgia's future and organized its activities to study and preserve Georgia's historical and cultural heritage. Besides, it stood for harmonious development of the backward areas of the republic, for sociocultural progress and affirmation of the ideals of humanism, democracy and friendship among peoples.<sup>22</sup>

The most radical of all was the National Democratic Party founded by the radical-minded members of the Ilya Chavchavadze Society who wanted to form a separate organization of their own which came to existence on August 30, 1988. The party aimed at forming an independent and Christian Georgia in the form of a parliamentary democracy. Both, Kostava and Gamsakhurdia were supporters of the party program. In the party program, it was stated that the present-day problems of Georgia could be solved only by restoring its independence. By focusing on Sovietization, the program pointed

out how the level of Georgian culture, literature, and language had deteriorated. Their motto was "Georgia for the Georgians", but they declared that this did not mean in any way that the rights of other ethnic groups living on Georgian territory were to be restricted or that their political freedoms were to be limited.<sup>23</sup>

All these informal groups were democratic in nature, but as far as the ethnic minorities were concerned, they had certain nationalistic principles which were for the advantage of the majority. While they rejected Moscow's sovereignty, and declared their right to secede from the Union, Georgian authorities did not dwell on the minorities rights within the republic. Thus, the ethnic minorities of Georgia started to increase their voice against the republican administration and focused on their micro-nationalist movements.

From the Abkhaz point of view, the 'Aydyglara' ('Unity', the Abkhaz Popular Front), and the People's National Front of Abkhazia, were the major Abkhaz nationalist groups in the Gorbachev era. They were more political in character than the Georgian informal groups. While protesting about the discrimination against the Abkhaz people at the hands of the Georgians, they voiced Abkhaz demands for independence from Georgia. The Abkhaz Popular Front (Aydyglara) which was later formed as the 'Abkhaz Popular Party' on November 26, 1991, was the most influential one composed of well-known figures; the historian Vladislav Ardzinba, who in his capacity as a deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet had lobbied for the upgrading of the status of all autonomous territorial formations of the USSR and for legal measures to safeguard the rights of ethnic minorities; Zurab Achba, the deputy chairman of the Abkhaz Popular Front, and Sergei Shamba who was the chairman. This group became the political forum for the Abkhaz national movement for independence. Although the Abkhaz people did not get

any clear response to their demands from the Tbilisi administration, these political formations brought them a sense of unity against Georgian oppression.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Deterioration of Georgian-Abkhaz Relations

In such a complex setting, relations between the Georgians and Abkhaz began to deteriorate in the *post-glasnost'* and *perestroika* years. From the Georgian point of view, the concessions given to the Abkhaz in 1978 had brought devastating effects on Georgians in the following years. Many Georgians were concerned about what they perceived to be cultural and political de-Georgianization of their country. They also claimed that the number of ethnic Georgians had declined in the overall composition of the country's population. They were considering this process as a potential threat to Georgia's political independence, thus, they were calling for re-Georgianization and homogenization of the country.<sup>25</sup>

For the Abkhaz, this kind of claim was highly threatening the existence of the Abkhaz as a minority group which sought independence. With *glasnost'*, although an upsurge was seen in Georgian nationalism, there was also an increase in an Abkhaz separatist movement. Condemning the Georgians of pursuing pro-Georgian and chauvinistic policies in their lands, the Abkhaz were increasing their voice for seceding from Georgia. By virtue of belonging to a different race, culture and language, the Abkhaz were claiming that they were under a serious Georgian nationalist threat and declared that they had a right to secede from the Tbilisi administration. However, the Georgians rejected these claims and demands of the Abkhaz people, and emphasized that the inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity were the main principles of the Georgian state.<sup>26</sup>

The first series of demonstrations by Georgian nationalist groups and the Abkhaz separatists were staged in the period 1988-89. The Georgian nationalist demonstrations reached a climax in late November 1988 when tens of thousands of Georgians congregated in Tbilisi to protest proposed changes to the Soviet constitution that circumscribed the right of the republics to secede from the Soviet Union. The pro-Moscow Tbilisi administration reacted to these demonstrations with a mixture of carrots and bigger sticks: on the one hand, they adopted a law to strengthen the Georgian language as a way of assuaging nationalist passion, and on the other hand, they asked for military support from the center.<sup>27</sup> Once again in history, the Tbilisi administration acting as a weak entity was demanding the assistance of its big brother, Moscow, to suppress political instability within its frontiers which gave Russia an opportunity to intervene in the politics of the region. However, Moscow did not respond positively to the first request for help, but when the Georgian authorities again asked for help after five days of demonstrations, Moscow despatched its military forces on April 9, 1989.

While Georgians held demonstrations, the Abkhaz also fueled their nationalist movements, and in a document addressed to the Twenty-ninth Party Congress in June 1988, they set out their grievances against the Georgian government and proposed the recreation of the original Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic with special treaty ties to Georgia, so that the region would have true self-government for the benefit of all its inhabitants. In the same month, the letter signed by 58 members of the Abkhaz Communist Party which was addressed to the Nineteenth All-Union Party Conference, officially inaugurated the Abkhaz separatist campaign.<sup>28</sup>

The situation sharply deteriorated in January 1989, when the Abkhaz branch of the Georgian Polytechnic stopped accepting Georgian students because of their ethnic origin, and all schools in Abkhazia were ordered to teach a new version of history,

according to which Abkhazia had never been the common name for all Western Georgia and never had anything to do with Georgia. For Georgians, this was an unacceptable condition, because when the Abkhaz State University was opened over ten years ago, it was stated that it was for the needs not only of Abkhazia, but of all Western Georgia, where there was no university. Thus, the Abkhaz attitude of accepting students to the university on ethnic grounds started a long chain of violent student demonstrations both in Sukhumi and Tbilisi.<sup>29</sup>

On February 18, 1989, several thousand people marched in Tbilisi to protest the idea of a secession by the Abkhaz whom they accused of sabotaging interethnic relations by keeping the Georgians out of all leadership positions in Abkhazia. "No to secession" and "An end to discrimination" were the two slogans summarizing the whole way of thinking underlying the activities of the February demonstrators. According to them, a minority that was so small and so dangerous for Georgia's future must be given decision-making authority based on its population figures.<sup>30</sup>

In responding to this Georgian threat to their future status, the Abkhaz broadened their demands and expressed them more emphatically. On March 18, 1989, a rally of thousands of Abkhaz, organized by the Abkhaz Popular Front "Aydyglara" was held at the Lychny village, in the Gudauta region (the only region in Abkhazia which has a concentration of Abkhaz population). Not satisfied with asking secession from Georgia, the Abkhaz added a new demand-an independent status giving them equality with the Georgians-the status of a sovereign republic. They demanded that Abkhazia again be granted the status of a full union republic that it had enjoyed during the Soviet annexation of Georgia from February 1921 to April 1990. A petition carrying this demand was addressed to Gorbachev, and was signed by the First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, B. Adleiba.<sup>31</sup> However,

this demand was inconsistent with the Soviet Union's rules for forming sovereign republics, whose minimum population must be one million. In 1989, Abkhazia's total population was approximately 525.000, of whom the Abkhaz were less than a fifth (Table 8).

Table 8. Transcaucasian Republics and Sub-units Area and Population Density

	Area (square miles)	Population 1989	Population density
Armenian SSR	11,490	3,304,353	288
Azerbaijani SSR	33,430	7,019,739	210
Nakhichevan ASSR	2120	293,875	139
Nagorno-Karabakh AO	1700	189,029	11
Georgian SSR	26,900	5,395,841	201
Abkhaz ASSR	3320	524,161	158
Ajar ASSR	1160	392,432	338
South Ossetian AO	1505	98,527	65
All Transcaucasus	71,820	15,719,933	219

Source: Paul Henze, *The Demography of the Caucasus According to 1989 Soviet Census Data*, *Central Asian Survey*, 1991, Vol. 10, No. 1/2, p. 149.

However, this declaration was very important because it confirmed that the Abkhaz were determined to leave the republic of Georgia by any means. At the time, the Kremlin administration proclaimed that faced with rising national tensions, its duty was to preserve the rights of all minorities whatever their numbers and location.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, this demand outraged the Georgian public opinion and was one of the issues behind the demonstrations in Tbilisi that culminated in violence on April 9, 1989 in which nineteen unarmed Georgian demonstrators were killed by the Soviet Army.<sup>33</sup>

While these anti-Abkhaz and anti-Georgian demonstrations took place in Georgia, there was also hostility against of Russian population in Georgian territories. On April 4, the Georgian National Democratic Party demanded more and more forcefully that the

first stage towards the independence of their homeland was the departure of the Russians from Georgia.<sup>34</sup> In fact, this has been the case for nearly thirty years. According to statistics, in 1959, 408.500 Russians were living in Georgia; in 1970, 397.000; in 1979, 371.608; and in 1989, only 338.645, while during these latter decades, the total population of the republic increased from 4.044.500 to 5.395.841 inhabitants (Table 9).

**Table 9. The Total Population of Russians in Georgia**

	1979	1989	Growth rate (per cent)
<b>Georgian SSR</b>			
<b>Russians</b>	371.608	338.645	-8.9
<b>Ukrainians</b>	45.036	51.472	14.3
<b>Belorussians</b>	5702	8338	46.2
<b>Total Slavs</b>	422.346	398.455	-5.7

Source: Paul Henze, *The Demography of the Caucasus According to 1989 Soviet Census Data*, *Central Asian Survey*, 1991, Vol. 10, No. 1/2, p. 151.

These show us that popular hostility had long encouraged the Russians to leave, and in the last decade this movement had accelerated. For the first time, however, statistics were transformed into slogans, and Moscow was certain to be frightened by them.

### 3. The Black Sunday and the Russian Intervention

The culmination of all these pro-independence movements in Georgia resulted in the interethnic blood bath on 9 April. By the morning of April 9, Georgia was paralyzed by three conflicts: one between the republic's population and the Soviet federation, another between the Georgians of the autonomous republic and the Abkhaz, and yet

another between the Abkhaz and the Georgians. In this three dimensional problem, a conflict had already occurred between the periphery and the center, in addition to interethnic and intercultural conflicts at the periphery. All called on the Russians either to grant Georgia its freedom or to admit Abkhazia into its borders. This combination of conflicts and contending desires created a difficult situation and underscored both the central and local authorities' inability to come up with any mediation or a quick conciliatory response.<sup>35</sup>

During these conflicts, the local authorities were unable to control the situation. The First Secretary of the Communist Party, Jumbar Patiashvili, exhorted the demonstrators to remain calm, and was trying his best to defuse the tension. On 8 April, just one day before the Black Sunday, the party in Georgia met to discuss the course of action to be taken to normalize the situation in the republic and declared that "Georgia has been, is and will continue to be a socialist, sovereign republic in the federal family of peoples of USSR."<sup>36</sup> However, where Eduard Shevardnadze had in 1978 successfully argued that he could play the role of mediator, Patiashvili failed to make himself heard. Deaf to his appeals, the demonstrators increased their separatist activities. The only remedy was to apply to Moscow's assistance in order to suppress the disturbances provoked by the extremists. Thus, the ethnic riots in Georgia led to the intervention of Soviet troops to the conflict, and therefore, directly to the domestic politics of the region.<sup>37</sup> Because of this linkage between the Abkhaz problem and the Soviet military intervention, many Georgians believed that the leading circles in Moscow, with the cooperation of Abkhaz officials, provoked clashes between the Abkhaz and Georgians in order to provide the opportunity and justification for the Russian military to intervene. From the Georgian point of view, high-positioned Russian agitators were stirring up trouble provoking the Abkhaz to this unreasonable behavior.<sup>38</sup> For them, the Abkhaz were used as pawns by some ultra-conservative in Russia to provoke serious ethnic unrest

in order to compromise Gorbachev's *perestroika*.<sup>39</sup> Here, it is important to note that, Russia has a far greater degree of strategic interest in Georgia and its surrounding areas, especially the Black Sea region, which in turn, has led to an even greater degree of Russian involvement in that country's events.

In the early hours of 9 April in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, regular troops which were flown to Tbilisi from Moscow and Gorky, indulged in what British newspapers described as a "slaughter", a "butchery"<sup>40</sup> of young people, unarmed and unaggressive, which left, according to official estimates, 19 people dead and hundreds more injured. Some reports said that the thick cloud of gas which covered everybody was not the ordinary tear-gas used by police forces, but a deadly nerve-gas with long term effects, used by Soviet troops in Afghanistan. As the Minister of the Interior of Latvia explained in an interview, these units were not just Ministry of the Interior's special riot-control detachments, but regular army units which were trained not for riot-control but combat. They were the prime force to fight against national movements across the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup>

With the Russian bloody intervention in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989, Georgian anger was directed not at the Abkhaz, but at the Russians. They accused the Russians of using weapons against unarmed masses and performing an ethnic cleansing in Georgia by provoking the Abkhaz crisis. The ethnic origin of the troops involved in the Georgian tragedy and their bestial behavior made the Georgians point their accusing fingers at Jumbar Patiashvili, who had called for these special troops, and at Moscow which readily sanctioned Patiashvili's request.<sup>42</sup> The popular feeling was that no Georgian could have asked for non-Georgian troops to kill his own people. As a result, Patiashvili quickly resigned from his post and was replaced by Zhivi Gumbaridze, the KGB chief for four months in Georgia. Georgians were also pointing to the insensitivity of the

Minister of the Internal Affairs of Abkhazia-an ethnic Russian-plus contacts between the leading Abkhaz cadres and General Yazov, then the USSR Minister of Defense, and meetings between the Abkhaz officials and Politburo members in Moscow.<sup>43</sup> By doing so, the Georgians were accusing Russians of murdering many innocent people and the Georgian administration for calling Soviet troops to their homeland, and finally the Abkhaz authorities for not taking all the remedies to prevent Russian intervention in this conflict.

From the viewpoint of the Kremlin administration, Russians did not want to intervene in the domestic politics of the Georgian state, but, it was the local leadership which had demanded the intervention of the Soviet Army. In order to justify its actions, Moscow also added that the commander in charge, General G. Rodionov, was in fact "against" it, but had to accept "reluctantly" the will of the Tbilisi administration. By these words, Moscow had expressed its intention to show itself as a mere arbitrator in this conflict.<sup>44</sup>

With the growing anger against the Russians for the massacre in Tbilisi, the Moscow administration decided to investigate the situation and establish a dialogue with the Georgians in order to appease them. For this purpose, the Kremlin despatched Foreign Minister, E. Shevardnadze, to Georgia who seemed most capable of resuming the dialogue between his compatriots and the Soviet system. Canceling all engagements as an active minister for foreign affairs, Shevardnadze came to Tbilisi, accompanied by Razumovsky, the head of personnel of the CPSU.<sup>45</sup> Shevardnadze immediately assumed *de facto* control over Georgia and soon admitted that there had been no necessity for violence at all.<sup>46</sup> Moscow changed its tone too and started talking about "unprovoked violence", promising to punish the "killers", without specifying who they were-the so

called "rioters" or the Soviet Army Soldiers. However, no measures were taken to improve the situation.<sup>47</sup>

Within the context of the Russian intervention in the events of Tbilisi, the main theory of this thesis is proved once again. Russia as the dominant actor of interdependency relationship between the periphery and center intervened in the political and ethnic turmoil in Georgia, and by supporting secretly the Abkhaz against the majority, suppressed nationalistic voice of the Georgian people. As it was stated before, Georgia was in Moscow's strategic sphere of influence as an outlet to the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. Having known the importance of the region, the Kremlin administration using its traditional weight, solved the crisis in its own favor before the crisis reached a point whereby it damage Russian interests in the region.

The Soviet military action was designed to calm Georgian national passions and also demonstrate the central government's ability to attenuate interethnic conflicts. However, it achieved none of these goals, as subsequent events showed. Anti-Russian and anti-Soviet ideas were consolidated in Georgia, and these also accelerated nationalist feelings. Before that date, the Georgians had little love for the Russians-old disputes went back to the incorporation of their country to the tsarist empire in 1801-but they were accustomed to living side by side with them. After April 9, maintaining this common life became a serious problem, and attitudes have been sharply politicized and the demand for independence has spread throughout the society.<sup>48</sup>

What the tragic events of April led to was the deterioration of Abkhaz-Georgian ethnic dispute. The Abkhaz saw the struggle as one for the survival of their culture and language, or, preservation of their separate identity. While the Abkhaz were trying to prove their historical rights over the land and were demanding secession from Georgia,

the Georgians as the majority did not want to lose a piece of land that could comprise an independent Georgia. The result was the escalation of the crisis to a stage where there was no more public demonstrations and protest but an armed clash of ethnic peoples in a civil war.

Three months later, in July 1989, an attempt by the Georgian population to transform the Georgian section of the Abkhaz State University into a branch of Tbilisi State University became a catalyst for two weeks of ethnic violence in which some twenty-two people died in Sukhumi and Ochamchira. Meanwhile, the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia in July 1989 led to the convening of the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. It is important to note here that this assembly had as its objective a peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus at that time, when the USSR with its republics was still intact. Significantly, at the first stage the leaders of all national movements who were members of this assembly took an active part in supporting Russia's leadership. But the hesitation of the Russian government to take the lead because of its own future at the disintegration of the USSR, compelled the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus to take the course of self-determination. That course led to the foundation of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus and gradual expansion of its sphere of influence to the non-mountain peoples, which led in October 1992 to the declaration of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. CPSU Central Committee Plenum on Nationalities

Upon the intensifying nationality issues as a threat to its security and interests in the region, the Kremlin administration decided to discuss the situation. For this purpose, the CPSU Central Committee Plenum on Nationalities took place on 19-20 September

1989. However, no dramatic new direction in nationalities policy was set, the demands of the republics appeared to have had little effect on the wording of the final document, and the status quo was largely preserved. The key-word of the party's new platform on the nationalities policy was "A Strong Center and Strong Republics," and six priority areas of nationalities policy had been listed;

- transformations in the Soviet federation and its investment with real political and economic content;

- the safeguarding of equal rights for every people and the satisfaction of the specific interests of every nationality;

- the creation of the conditions for the free development of national cultures and languages;

- the strengthening of guarantees to rule out the infringement of citizen's rights on the grounds of nationality;

- the renewal of all ideological, political and educational work in the sphere of national relations.<sup>50</sup>

Within the framework of these points, much more space was devoted to relations between the center and the republics, and to defining the limits of national autonomy than was accorded to national languages and citizens' fundamental rights. The sovereignty of the Union republics was still quite explicitly circumscribed; despite fine words on their status as "sovereign socialist states," most significant powers remained with the central authorities. More concessions were made to the autonomous republics and smaller administrative units, though nothing was said on the claims of some ASSRs for upgrading to Union republic status. Besides, the demand for nationality-based Communist parties was resolutely opposed: "The fragmentation of the CPSU by nationality is fundamentally unacceptable." Finally, "the question of the elaboration and

signing of a new union treaty to replace the 1922 Treaty on the formation of the USSR was currently being raised, as is the question of preparing for a new Declaration on the USSR." This was potentially quite a radical step, though in view of its territorial rather than ethnic basis.<sup>51</sup>

Gorbachev, in his speech addressed to the Plenum, reiterated his opposition to any fundamental changes in the Soviet model of federation (though allowing considerably more economic autonomy to the individual republics), and came out against the demand for the transformation of some autonomous republics into Union republics. He was severely critical of extremism in national disputes and threatened the use of force if political solutions failed to achieve the desired goals. On cultural matters, while recognizing the interest of individual peoples in preserving their own languages and traditions, he nevertheless favored a proposal to make Russian the common state language of the USSR. Finally, he once again firmly rejected any federalization of the CPSU, though he was prepared to allow somewhat more autonomy to local republican parties within the overall framework laid down by the CPSU.<sup>52</sup>

With all these characteristics, the CPSU Platform on Nationalities Policy, was a new version of Kremlin's containment policy. Understandably perhaps, in view of the ferment and unrest in a number of regions, the leadership opted for containment rather than radical or far-reaching changes. Some concessions were indeed made to the individual republics to allow them more say in running their own affairs, but "the strong center" was still firmly in control. Behaving so, Moscow had the intention to appease and control separatist nationalist movements in the territories of the USSR.

## 5. Intensification of Georgian Independence Movement and the 1990 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

The year following the April events witnessed a steady, inexorable drive for more autonomy and independence, and was a crucial year in its growing involvement with the outside world. Dozens of political parties were formed in the republics and promptly began squabbling among themselves over the best way to pursue independence. While such political developments were seen in the region, this year was also the beginning of the period when a number of key regional and international actors, notably the United States and other Western countries, plus Turkey and to a lesser degree, Iran and a number of Middle Eastern countries, became actively involved in the region. In turn, the policies of these new actors towards the region and towards developments in Moscow significantly affected Transcaucasia's evolution.<sup>53</sup>

From the political perspective of Soviet Georgia, the subsequent political developments in 1989-1990 were extreme polarization of forces espousing the cause of republican independence.<sup>54</sup> However, the most important characteristic of this period was the emergence of a kind of what Hunter called *modus vivendi* between the new Communist leadership and the emerging nationalist forces. Actually, in Georgia, following the tragic events of April 1989, the opposition was allowed greater access to the media, and the one individual who for the "man in the street" had long personified Georgians' collective latent resentment of Russian hegemony, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was brought into the negotiations by the new Communist Party leader Jumbar Gumberidze regarding new legislation. However, the negotiations did not succeed in determining a common policy because of leadership unwillingness to cooperate with the nationalist forces. The cause of this failure was a steep rise in nationalist and pro-independence tendencies within the republic, mixed with a heavy dose of anti-Russian, anti-

Communist and anti-Gorbachev sentiments. The Communist leadership did not want to take this risk of harsh confrontation with the Moscow administration.<sup>55</sup>

However, it is important to note here that some anti-Gorbachev elements in the Moscow administration were also supporting the nationalist movements in the periphery. For instance, the growing rivalry between Gorbachev and Yeltsin during the period 1990-1991 reflected both the personal ambitions of the two men and their bureaucratic allies, as well as the philosophical clash between those who wanted to completely dismantle the Soviet system and those, like Gorbachev, who merely wanted to reform it. The pro-Yeltsin forces encouraged nationalist, and even pro-independence movements in the periphery as part of their overall assault on the existing Communist establishment and bureaucracy. Thus, nationalist tendencies and their goals were exploited by the opposition in Moscow as an effective device against the leadership.<sup>56</sup>

As a result of all these factors, throughout 1990, the trend towards independence intensified and nationalist forces became stronger. However, there were political confrontations among various individuals leading or guiding the pro-democracy movements in Georgia which centered round three major issues:<sup>57</sup> how to gain full independence for Georgia so that the republic could be master of its own wealth; to boycott the Supreme Soviet elections scheduled for March, 1990, and ask for its postponement; and when independence was achieved, the relationship with various republics of the USSR and with the various nationalities within Georgia. However, they did not dwell on any minorities question and their demands to secede from Georgia. It can be said that all these nationalist forces had a single common denominator: national independence for Georgia, not for the minorities living in Georgia. Thus, these multipolar activities towards independence were accelerating the demands of minorities for independence and their resentment against the Georgians.

While Georgia was experiencing such developments in its domestic politics, the possibility of any political settlement in the power struggle was by way of elections. For this purpose, multiparty parliamentary elections to the Georgian Supreme Soviet were scheduled for March 1990. However, pressure from the opposition forced the postponement of the elections until October and gave time to introduce some changes in the election law to allow multiparty participation for the first time. In the elections, against the Georgian Communist Party under the leadership of Givi Gumbaridze, Gamsakhurdia won 155 of a total 250 seats in the new parliament with his Round Table-Free Georgia coalition.<sup>58</sup> This victory was very important, for Gamsakhurdia's Alliance in the Supreme Soviet elections proved that the people were behind it. It also provided the first-ever opportunity in Georgia under the Soviet rule to form a non-Communist government.<sup>59</sup>

## 6. The Chauvinist Attitudes of Gamsakhurdia toward Abkhazia and the Abkhaz response

The new post-Communist parliament elected Gamsakhurdia chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet at its inaugural session.<sup>60</sup> It became clear, however, that despite his credentials as a human rights activist, Gamsakhurdia's understanding of how democracy functions was seriously flawed and, indeed, that on his personal scale of priorities, democracy was less important than independence at any price. His nationalist activities were turning into blatant chauvinism: within weeks of his advent to power, he annulled South Ossetia's autonomous status within Georgia, directly contravening a pre-election promise to preserve the autonomous status of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia.<sup>61</sup>

Upon the aggressive chauvinist attitude of the Georgian administration towards the non-Georgian minorities, the Abkhaz people were intensifying their efforts towards independence and seeking the support of other Northern Caucasian peoples. On 25-26 August 1990, in Sukhumi, in a gathering held by North Caucasian Republics, the Confederation of Caucasian Mountain People was formed to protect the Abkhaz against the Georgians. The second session of the Confederation convened in the capital of Kabardino-Balkar ASSR, and the Abkhaz people unified under the Abkhaz Popular Front, Aydyglara, and began to produce national policies. On 25 August 1990, by using its constitutional rights, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, in the absence of their Georgian colleagues who boycotted the session, issued an "Independence Declaration", naturally provoking intense reaction from the Georgian administration.<sup>62</sup>

In early December 1990, five weeks after the victory of Gamsakhurdia in the October 1990 Georgian Parliamentary elections, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet elected Vladislav Ardzinba chairman of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. At the same session, by amending certain articles of the republic's constitution, the Abkhaz Parliament passed some legislative acts intended to substantiate the legal basis for separating Abkhazia from Georgia. These included a 'Declaration of Sovereignty' which was described by the Georgians as separatist and violating the Georgian Constitution.<sup>63</sup>

## 7. Weakening of Moscow's Influence over the Periphery and the Last Efforts for Drawing Together the USSR

While the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict was continuing to deteriorate in the summer of 1990, the Kremlin administration faced a very serious political situation in Moscow. As a result of economic instability and growing nationalist attitudes,

constituting republics of the Soviet Union were on the way to independence which in turn posed a serious threat to the very existence of the Union. Lithuania had declared its independence, and Latvia and Estonia had announced their "transition periods" leading to independence.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, the twenty-eighth Congress of the CPSU was convened in July 1990 which determined the distribution of power between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, an ex-Politburo member from Sverdlovsk who was also on the reformist side. Although strong accusations were directed to Gorbachev's reforms by the conservatives, Gorbachev was reelected General Secretary of CPSU on July 10. It is important to note here that Yeltsin had been elected president of the Russian Federation in May 1990, and he believed that the Communist Party was unreformable and that change could come only through other means. Thus, there was an political tension between Gorbachev and Yeltsin.<sup>65</sup>

By the fall of 1990, as a result of the economic unrest and incapacity of the Kremlin administration to overcome these difficulties, Moscow's influence in the periphery was in decline. Many nationalist movements had come to power in the republics, and the prestige of the republican governments was increasing in the eyes of their people. Thus, the dependent periphery was awakening against the center and trying to abolish the strong command and control mechanisms of Moscow. One should also note that the Soviet Army was very dissatisfied with this situation and complaining about the declining prestige of the army.<sup>66</sup>

As a response to the demands of conservatives and the army, at a meeting on November 16, Gorbachev delivered his "state of the union" address. According to it, the Presidential Council would be abolished and replaced with a Security Council, the Council of Ministers would be transformed into a cabinet answerable directly to the

president, and a new vice-presidential post would be introduced. In addition to creating his own security council overseeing the military and security forces, Gorbachev would set up a network of presidential representatives to enforce Moscow's orders around the country. This reorganization plan worried the reformers, because, according to them, the centralization of such power in the hands of Gorbachev could create a new dictator for the USSR.<sup>67</sup>

In the face of such developments, on December 20, Shevardnadze as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and announced that he was resigning from his post.<sup>68</sup> He said he was resigning to protest the onset of a dictatorship and to encourage democrats to resist the reactionary forces that were stirring in the country.<sup>69</sup>

During the spring of 1991, Gorbachev and his advisers focused on negotiations to conclude a new union treaty that would preserve the Soviet Union. To gain support for the new draft and obtain a popular mandate for a renewed union, Gorbachev scheduled an all-union referendum on whether the union should be preserved as a "renewed federation of equal sovereign republics." The referendum was held on March 17, 1991, with 76 percent of voters favoring the proposal. However, only nine of the fifteen republics took part in the referendum (the RSFSR, Ukraine, Belarussia, Azerbaijan, and the five Central Asian republics). As a show of defiance, the Baltic republics held their own referendums in February and early March in which substantial majorities voted in favor of independence. Meanwhile, the RSFSR held a referendum asking whether a popularly elected presidency should be instituted. It received overwhelming support, and Yeltsin was elected to the post on June 12 with 60 percent of the vote. In June, the revised treaty was sent to the republican parliaments for approval, and they all signed the treaty except Ukraine.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, on Monday morning of August 19, 1991, as a result of the growing dissatisfaction about Gorbachev's administration, a right-wing coup against Gorbachev government was on stage. TASS made an announcement that "for reasons of health" (an ominous phrase of the pre-Gorbachev years), Mikhail Gorbachev could not fulfill his duties as president, and the USSR's vice president Gennady Yanayev was assuming power as the acting president. The announcement also declared that a state of emergency would become effective in certain parts of the country and that a State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR had been formed to lead the country out of crisis.<sup>71</sup>

As a result of a strong public resistance to the coup, on August 20, the Armed Forces Chief of the Staff, Mikhail Moiseyev, ordered a halt to troops moving toward the Russian parliament. It should be noted here that, Yeltsin was taking the lead in harnessing public resistance to the takeover and demanding that Gorbachev be released. From that point onward, the coup quickly disintegrated. The next day, Defense Minister Yazov, KGB Chief Kryuchkov, and two other collaborators flew to the Crimea to bargain with President Gorbachev, and later Gorbachev was released from house arrest and returned to Moscow.<sup>72</sup> Under pressure of Yeltsin and Russian republic's parliament who accused him of being the major cause for the coup, and having been incapable of suppressing it, Gorbachev resigned from his post as the CPSU general secretary and called on the Central Committee to dissolve itself.<sup>73</sup>

In the four months following the coup, the USSR gradually disintegrated. The skeleton central government lost its remaining shed of legitimacy and collapsed, the Communist party was banned in most of the republics, and the fifteen constituting republics of the Soviet Union declared their independence. Meanwhile, by burying the old system, Yeltsin was unilaterally seizing control of the central government and party

apparatus, and he declared that the Russian government was assuming all responsibilities of the USSR.<sup>74</sup>

During the fall of 1991, even as the republics declared their independence, the possibility remained that the Soviet Union might somehow reconstitute itself in a confederal arrangement along the basic lines of the union treaty. Yeltsin was calling for the former republics to join an economic community and conclude a political treaty. On December 8, 1991, the leaders of the three Slavic Republics (Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia) met in Minsk and announced the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) under the leadership of Moscow. They stated that the USSR "as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality" ceased to exist. Instead of a separate union government, "coordinating bodies" would be created to oversee common interests in defense, foreign policy, and the economy. Later, on December 21, at a meeting in Alma-Ata, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and five Central Asian republics were officially admitted in the CIS. One year later, on October 22, 1992, Shevardnadze was to sign a decree formally approving Georgia's membership in the CIS.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of all these political developments, Moscow was experiencing a new historical era in its political arena. The red hammer-and-sickle Soviet flag that had flown over the Kremlin for more than 70 years was lowered, and the old white, blue, and red Russian flag was raised. The Soviet Union was officially no more.

## 8. The Independence of Georgia and the Georgian-Abkhaz Relations During the Collapse of the USSR

The winds of change that blew over Moscow also affected the fate of Georgians and its minorities living in autonomous regions. The events of the period 1990-1991 were very significant for the nationalities, thus, it is in this context the political developments between the Georgians and Abkhaz, and the Russian approach to the dispute should be analyzed.

During the period 1990-1991, the relations between the Georgians and the Abkhaz were still continuing to deteriorate; each group was convinced that it has been victimized and discriminated against by the other.<sup>76</sup> While the political developments shook the inner dynamics and fundamental principles of the Soviet system, Georgia in its domestic politics, was witnessing similar political developments. It is ironic that while Georgia tried to break up off its ties with the Soviet Union and sought independence, its minorities living in autonomous regions were acting similarly with Georgia and tried to achieve their independence from the Tbilisi administration.<sup>77</sup>

A major catalyst of tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia during this period was the 17 March 1991 all-Union referendum on Gorbachev's new union treaty. After being elected the chairman of the new parliament, Gamsakhurdia, and the new Georgian parliament embarked on a course of direct confrontation with Moscow, voting to boycott both the March 1991 referendum on the future of the Soviet Union and negotiations on a new union treaty. Moreover, Gamsakhurdia prohibited the population in Georgia from taking part in it. However, the Abkhaz leadership announced that Abkhazia decided to participate in the all-Union referendum.

In March 1991, Gamsakhurdia issued an "Appeal to the Abkhaz People" in which he stressed that from time immemorial, Abkhaz and Georgians had lived together in harmony and accused Ardzinba of seeking a confrontation. In response to this, Ardzinba argued that the Abkhaz parliament still considered Abkhazia to be a constituent part of the USSR, that the recently published draft of the new Union treaty gave equal rights to Union and autonomous republics. As a result, contrary to the Kartvelian approach, 52.4% of Abkhazia's electorate did vote, with 98.4% of these saying "yes" to remaining within a union of sovereign republics. This was, however unacceptable to the Georgians, because the Union republics were due to sign an agreement in mid-August 1991 with the autonomous units like Abkhazia, adding their signatures a few weeks later and thereby gaining equal status with the former republics in a constituted union. This meant that Abkhazia was removing from the control of Tbilisi and gaining equal status with Georgia. As a result, the Gamsakhurdia government kept up its pressure against Abkhaz separatism, and declared that, if Abkhazia signed the treaty, "rivers of blood would flow."<sup>78</sup>

On 9 April 1991, Georgia declared its independence from the USSR and informed that it would not join the new union formation. However, this decision was neither debated nor voted in the parliament. From this perspective, one can say that, it was a good indicator of Gamsakhurdia's autocratic style and the weakness of the parliament. Gamsakhurdia only read the independence declaration to the assembled deputies and they unanimously accepted it. Finally, six weeks later, on 26 May 1991, he defeated five rival candidates and was elected president of Georgia with an overwhelming 86% of the vote.<sup>79</sup>

Here, one should stress the authoritarian and dictatorial policies of Gamsakhurdia towards his own people and the minorities. As it was stated before, although once he

was an human rights activist, after assuming power, he grew increasingly dictatorial and paranoid.<sup>80</sup> His reaction against minority demands, and especially his harsh response to the demands of South Ossetians in January 1991 as part of his nationalist campaign was somewhat a product of his ever more violent and highhanded behavior.<sup>81</sup> He had no tolerance for minority rights which in turn might weaken its authority. Besides, his cruel attitudes towards his political opponents, imposing censorship to the media, and blaming Moscow for any manifestations of dissent were other aspects of his policies. He also abandoned plans for the privatization of land and for economic reform. All these political developments paved the way for his downfall at the end of 1991.<sup>82</sup>

Three events served to alienate the moderate intelligentsia and thereby erode Gamsakhurdia's power base, paving the way for his violent overthrow: the forced resignation in mid-August of Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and Foreign Minister Giorgi Khoshtaria, both of whom would subsequently accuse the president of dictatorial leanings; Gamsakhurdia's failure to condemn unequivocally the Moscow putsch in August 1991; and his orders to the National Guard troops to fire on demonstrators in early September.<sup>83</sup>

His growing unpopularity led moderate and radical political parties to organize a demonstration in Tbilisi to call for his resignation and new elections. Meanwhile, Gamsakhurdia's opponents accused him of having supported the plotters of the coup in Moscow, but he and his associates denied these accusations. For their part, Gamsakhurdia and his allies maintained that these accusations were part and parcel of a conspiracy by Eduard Shevardnadze and his supporters to get rid of Gamsakhurdia and return Shevardnadze to power in Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia responded to the demonstrators by ordering the National Guard to open fire on them. However, a contingent of the Guard under its commander Tengiz Kitovani, together with Gamsakhurdia's former

Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, who had accused Gamsakhurdia of "wishing to create a closed dictatorial state like Albania in which he would reign supreme," aligned themselves with the opposition. From Moscow, Shevardnadze was expressing serious concern and called on the Georgian leadership to engage in a dialogue with the protesters.<sup>84</sup>

While the Georgian administration was dealing with its opponents for power struggle for leadership, in November 1991, the 3rd Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus took place in Sukhumi to raise their voice against Georgian chauvinism on Abkhazia. On November 2, participants ratified a document entitled "Treaty for a Confederative Union of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus", the first article of which proclaimed the new Confederation to be the legitimate successor of the independent North Caucasian Republic (Mountain Republic) created on 11 May 1918. Besides, the Confederation replaced the earlier Assembly and incorporated 16 North Caucasian peoples, including both the North and South Ossetians.<sup>85</sup>

Taking advantage of the Georgian weakness, the Abkhaz were also pushing forward their claims for greater autonomy. Elections to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet could not be postponed any longer. The Abkhaz were reluctant to hold fully democratic elections, because with less than a fifth of the population being ethnically Abkhaz, they would inevitably lose their control of the legislature. In a conciliatory move, Gamsakhurdia agreed to an electoral law for Abkhazia according to which the ethnic Abkhaz would be guaranteed the largest block of seats in the new Supreme Soviet, 28 out of 65, with Georgians receiving 26 and "others" 11. It is important to note here that Gamsakhurdia's move was a temporary measure aimed at stabilizing the situation. At the same time, the draft law stipulated that a two-third majority would be necessary to pass important legislation. This formulation gave both the Georgian and the Abkhaz blocs the

power to veto laws that they considered unfavorable. The elections were finally held in late 1991, and only thirty-eight deputies were elected. Voter turnout was high in two areas with a predominantly Abkhaz population, but in twelve districts where the majority of the population are Georgian no voting took place. Fourteen deputies were elected in a second round of voting on 13 October and a further seven on 1 December. The new Abkhaz Supreme Soviet began functioning at the beginning of 1992.<sup>86</sup>

Until 20 December, pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia demonstrations and armed clashes continued, and on that day the opposition issued a new call for Gamsakhurdia's resignation, which he ignored. As a result, Sigua and the National Guard commander Tengiz Kitovani, together with the leader of Mkhedrioni private militia Joba Ioseliani, and with the tacit if not active support from the Russian military provoked an assault on the parliament building, and the president had gone underground. Later, on 6 January, Gamsakhurdia and his advocates fled first to Armenia<sup>87</sup> and then, after an abortive comeback attempt, to the Chechen capital, Grozny.<sup>88</sup> This action against the Gamsakhurdia government was possibly encouraged by Moscow, because on the same day in the capital of Kazakhstan, Alma-Ata, leaders of other non-member republics of the CIS were formalizing their commitment to membership of the CIS. Behaving so, Kremlin perhaps wanted to intimidate the virulent nationalist policy of Gamsakhurdia and force him to join the CIS. In this way, Russia would have absorbed Georgia into a unified economic and political sphere under its leadership.

CHAPTER V. Moscow's Response to Georgian-Abkhaz Ethnic Conflict  
in the post-Soviet Era

**I. The Georgian Political Developments in the Early post-Soviet Era**

The struggle for power between Shvardnadze and Gamsakhurdia was the prominent feature of post-independent Georgia which had very devastating effects on Georgian political life. This political rivalry also affected the fate of non-Georgian minorities living in various parts of Georgia. It can be said that one of the reasons for the escalation of Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic dispute into a bloody civil war in August 1992, was this political confrontation. Gamsakhurdia's attempt to make Abkhazia a base for recovering power turned Abkhazia into a political arena for these competing powers. This conflict later led to the deterioration of Georgian-Abkhaz political relations and prepared ground for the bloody ethnic war. To understand the bloody war in Abkhazia, it is necessary to look at the inner dynamics of Georgian political developments in the first half of 1992.

After the ouster of Gamsakhurdia from the Tbilisi administration, on 2 January, 1992, the two paramilitary leaders, Kitovani and Ioseliani, who had been involved in fighting against Gamsakhurdia announced the transfer of power to a Military Council, and declared the president deposed.<sup>1</sup> The military Council restored Tengiz Sigua to the post of prime minister, from which he had been forced to resign by Gamsakhurdia last August, and named Giorgi Karkarashvili as military commander. It also imposed a state of emergency and a curfew in Tbilisi. This body then dissolved the parliament, formed a provisional government, and invited representatives of the Georgian political arena to join a Consultative Council, the proclaimed aim of which was to prepare ground for

new elections in the spring. Within days of seizing power, the Council was also arranging for the return to his homeland of ex-Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had been Georgia's Communist Party Secretary from 1972 up until his elevation by Gorbachev onto the international stage in 1985.<sup>2</sup>

While such developments did occur in Georgian political life, Gamsakhurdia fled with his family and supporters to Ijevan in Armenia on 6 January 1992, and called for a campaign of civil disobedience. His official representative in London called on the Russian government to support Gamsakhurdia. In Armenia, the Erevan government offered him right of passage but not asylum. Armenian Foreign Minister Raffi Hovanissian stated that Gamsakhurdia had not been granted safe haven in Armenia but that he would not be forced to leave either.<sup>3</sup>

On 15 January, Gamsakhurdia and his advocates travelled from Ijevan to Erevan. From there the deposed president travelled through Checheno-Ingushetia to the Abkhaz capital Sukhumi, and the following morning reached the Mingrelian capital Zugdidi, in northwestern Georgia, where support for him was strongest. At a rally in Zugdidi on 16 January, Gamsakhurdia called on his supporters to overthrow the ruling Military Council; he then set out for Tbilisi with some 4,000-5,000 armed followers. Pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia demonstrations were held in Tbilisi. Tengiz Kitovani responded by sending National Guard detachments to Zugdidi, Poti, and Samtredia, and tried to suppress the demonstrations. It is important to note that in the western parts of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia was very powerful and had many supporters when compared to the Military Council. Meanwhile, Abkhaz Supreme Soviet chairman, Vladislav Ardzinba announced that he had no prior knowledge of Gamsakhurdia's arrival in Sukhumi from Grozny.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout January, supporters of Gamsakhurdia held protests and demonstrations in the city of Kutaisi, Sukhumi, Zugdudi, Poti, and the towns of Abasha, and Samtredia. Pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia factions clashed in these areas, but later peace talks were initiated. The situation deteriorated with the advance of the Military Council troops from Abasha to Senaki (formerly Tskhakaya) on 22 January, where Ioseliani held inconclusive talks with Gamsakhurdia's supporters from Zugdudi. Meanwhile, Gamsakhurdia himself was reported variously in Grozny, where the Chechen parliament had offered him asylum, and in Gali, where he was said to be receiving medical treatment. Only in Zugdudi, Gamsakhurdia's supporters reached an agreement with the Military Council troops to dissolve the existing local council and replace it with a committee representing opposition parties.<sup>5</sup>

On 24 January, resistance to the ruling Military Council increased and Gamsakhurdia's supporters blew up three bridges near Khobi on the main highway linking Tbilisi and western Georgia. As a result, Vladislav Ardzinba proposed the introduction of a state of emergency in Abkhazia. The same month, the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus stated that the assembly could send troops to Abkhazia to halt the clashes between Gamsakhurdia's supporters and troops loyal to the Military Council.<sup>6</sup>

In February 1992, the situation in western Georgia remained tense. Meetings in support of the ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia was held in Poti and Sukhumi. While such demonstrations took place in Abkhazia, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet was also debating the possibility of seceding from Georgia and proclaiming an independent Abkhaz Republic. On 6 February, Sukhumi was taken by the Military Council troops and this brought an end to the armed phase of opposition to Gamsakhurdia. The Military

Council also issued a general warning to the population that measures would be taken against political forces that sought to destabilize the situation in the republic.<sup>7</sup>

With the Soviet Union gone, on February 1992, the Georgian administration had declared that the existing Soviet constitution and its rules were no longer valid. Instead, the Georgian Supreme Soviet decided to return to the 1921 Constitution of the Georgian Democratic Republic, which made no reference to Abkhazia as a constituent part of that territory.<sup>8</sup> From the Abkhaz viewpoint, the adoption of this constitution, together with Gamsakhurdia's earlier nullification of its border with Georgia was a further downgrading of its already intolerable status. As a result of these anti-Abkhaz moves, the Abkhaz would take a great step towards independence in July 1992 by adopting their own constitution of 1925.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1992, Georgian politics was witnessing the inauguration of a new era under the leadership of a new leader, Eduard Shevardnadze, who was presented as a democratic person. Shevardnadze was brought to Tbilisi on 7 March. At a meeting of the Military Council and the Consultative Council on 10 March, he was named the chairman of the State Council Presidium that superseded the Military and Consultative Councils. Ioseliani, Sigua, Kitovani were appointed to the State Council.<sup>10</sup>

This maneuver was very important for the Georgians and minorities living in Georgia.<sup>11</sup> With this move, the western governments, especially Britain's John Major and Douglas Hurd who took the lead, reversed their policy of non-recognition of Georgia and immediately recognized Georgia as an independent nation. Here, the irony is that this recognition had been denied by the world political actors while Georgia was ruled by the democratically elected Gamsakhurdia who had supported the disintegration of the USSR. However, an illegitimate appointment of a supposedly democratic leader which was

contrary to the political rules, led Western countries to recognize Georgia as an independent nation.<sup>12</sup>

At first, the appointment of a "democratic" leader to the Tbilisi administration raised positive expectations for the future of Abkhazia and other minorities, but the recognition of Georgia as a nation by the Westerners could also be a threat for the Abkhaz. With this declaration, the world was giving the Tbilisi administration a green light to act as they chose to settle their own internal problems within its territories. Territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers which were becoming the major pillars of post-Soviet Georgia, could prove disastrous for the future of the Abkhaz. To confirm these worries, in an interview, Shevardnadze was stating that the "Abkhaz problem could only be solved in Tbilisi, and this problem is a domestic problem of Georgia."<sup>13</sup>

Although Shevardnadze was named chairman of the State Council with full powers, there was a serious question of legitimacy in his position. The Georgian constitution had no provision for the functioning of a State Council, and Gamsakhurdia had not resigned as president. Thus, Shevardnadze's legal position as the State Council chairman was dubious. The only way to achieve legal power was an electoral victory, thereby doing away with Gamsakhurdia's claims that he still enjoyed overwhelming popular support. For this purpose, on 1 May new parliamentary elections were scheduled for 11 October. However, Gamsakhurdia announced that he would boycott them as unconstitutional.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout March and April various demonstrations took place in western Georgia and even parts of Abkhazia, Zugdidi, and Poti. The Gamsakhurdia loyalists accused the new regime of being subservient to Moscow. The appointment of General Sharaseniidze as Defense Minister, with Roman Gventsadze and Vakhtag Razmadze. all

senior communist officials under the old Soviet regime, seemed to give some credence to these allegations.<sup>15</sup>

In June and July, lots of terrorist incidents took place in Tbilisi that were blamed on Gamsakhurdia's supporters. Shevardnadze accused Gamsakhurdia of provoking the public for an uprising against the State Council. On 13 June 1992, two people were killed outright and five died later from injuries received from a car bomb explosion outside the home of State Council Deputy Chairman and leader of the Mkhedrioni, Jaba Ioseliani.<sup>16</sup> On 9 July, Georgian Deputy Prime Minister, Aleksandr Kavsadze, was kidnapped by Gamsakhurdia's supporters in the west Georgian town of Tsalendzhikha, an attack which was to be retaliated with violence against the local population.<sup>17</sup>

In order to diffuse the situation, Shevardnadze announced an amnesty for political prisoners, and called for "national reconciliation." However, Gamsakhurdia's supporters in Mingrelia responded by kidnapping a group of senior government officials sent to negotiate the release of the Georgian Deputy Prime Minister, whom they had abducted on July 9. As a result, Shevardnadze dispatched the National Guard under the now-Defense Minister Kitovani to western Georgia to locate the hostages. However, Kitovani who had been known as the major opponent for any autonomous status within Georgia be it in Abkhazia or in South Ossetia, on 14 August 1992, directed his route towards Abkhazia and marched his men into the capital Sukhumi. It is important to note here that during these events, Abkhazia was the main base used by the Gamsakhurdia's supporters against the Tbilisi administration, and the majority of the terrorists were located in Sukhumi.<sup>18</sup> From that time onwards, the ethnic conflict between the Georgians and Abkhaz escalated into a bloody war posing a great threat to regional peace and security which later led the regional actors actively intervene in the dispute.<sup>19</sup>

## II. The Escalation of Georgian-Abkhaz Ethnic Conflict into a Bloody War

The major reasons for the escalation of this dispute into a bloody war in August 1992, were the rapid political developments which occurred between the Georgians and Abkhaz. When the new Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia began functioning at the beginning of 1992, the Georgian deputies began to announce that the Abkhaz pursued a policy of discrimination against them, and by early June they boycotted its sessions. The major theme underlying this behavior was the objection to the decision to create an Abkhaz National Guard composed exclusively of ethnic Abkhaz that would be subordinate directly to the presidium of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet. In response to that, at the beginning of June, the Georgian Ministry of Defense decided to set up units of Georgian National Guard in Abkhazia and a tourist base near Sukhumi was taken over. This move highly agitated the Abkhaz reaction against the Tbilisi authorities.<sup>20</sup>

As it was stated before, with the Georgian decision to adopt its constitution predating the establishment of Soviet rule in 1921, the legal status of Abkhazia became ambivalent because it had no reference to Abkhazia. In order to clarify its status, in June 1992, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet submitted to the Georgian Council a draft treaty providing for federative or confederative arrangements between Abkhazia and Georgia and the preservation of Georgia's territorial integrity.<sup>21</sup> This was a highly conciliatory move from the Sukhumi administration, though no response came from Tbilisi. As a result, on July 23, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, by a simple majority, thirty-five of the sixty-five deputies, restored the 1925 Constitution which described Abkhazia as a sovereign republic. Thus it declared *de facto* independence of Abkhazia on the grounds that Georgia had restored its own constitution of 1921. Meanwhile, Zurab Achba, the deputy chairman of the Abkhaz Popular Front, *Aydgylara*, stressed that this move should

not be interpreted as an attempt to secede from Georgia but that Abkhazia wished to become "a federal republic." The Supreme Soviet also adopted a national flag, national emblem, and formally named the autonomous republic the Republic of Abkhazia. Sukhumi authorities also stressed the hope that Abkhazia's relations with Georgia should be reconstituted in the form of a federation.<sup>22</sup>

On the pretext of searching for the hostages taken by supporters of Gamsakhurdia, and to protect rail and road communications with Russia which had no connection with the Abkhaz, the units of the National Guard of the Georgian State Council moved into Abkhazia on 14 August 1992.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note here that on 11 August 1992, Georgia's State Council approved its presidium's decision to impose a state of emergency on the railroads in western Georgia for one month as of 15th August. This decision was taken in connection with the continuing acts of sabotage on railroads which linked Tbilisi to Sukhumi. Moreover, the kidnap of the Georgian Interior Minister Roman Gventsadze by the anti-government forces in the village of Kakhora on the territory of Abkhazia, accelerated the Georgian march into Sukhumi.<sup>24</sup> It is very likely that Shevardnadze had approved Kitovani's attack on Sukhumi on the assumption that the Georgians' numerical superiority (3.6 million Georgians against 100,000 Abkhaz, a ratio of 36 to 1) would guarantee a military victory which would consolidate his superiority in the runup elections. However, Shevardnadze stated that Kitovani had acted without his knowledge or approval in attacking Sukhumi.<sup>25</sup> On the same day, the parliament of Abkhazia asked Russia to protect Abkhazia from the Georgian army.<sup>26</sup>

The official reason for sending troops was to put an end to ongoing sabotage and looting, particularly on the railway line, and to search for, and free, Georgian officials kidnapped by the supporters of ousted Georgian president Gamsakhurdia. Abkhaz officials maintained that both reasons were pretexts to impose military control over

Abkhazia. They stated that with few exceptions, sabotage and looting occurred elsewhere in Georgia, outside Abkhazia, and to their knowledge the hostages were not being kept in Abkhazia. Several days later, the Defense Minister Kitovani explained that the goal of the military operation was to put an end to the "secessionist" moves of the Abkhaz parliament.<sup>27</sup>

The Abkhaz parliament protested the incursion of Georgian troops, calling it an "invasion" and "occupation." The parliament also termed it a violation of agreement made in April 1992 with Kitovani and other Georgian officials, by which Georgian troops would be allowed to enter Abkhazia only with the prior permission of the Abkhaz authorities. Shevardnaze maintained that it was Georgia's sovereign right to "relocate" troops within its territory. On the other hand, the Abkhaz pointed out that even under the repressive Soviet Constitution of 1978, military units could not be brought into the territory of an autonomous republic without the consent of the Supreme Soviet of that republic.<sup>28</sup>

On 18 August, Kitovani, by demanding Abkhaz parliament chairman Vladislav Ardzinba's resignation, ordered Georgian guards into Sukhumi and occupied the parliament building.<sup>29</sup> During this move, many people were killed as a result of armed clashes between the Georgians and Abkhaz. An eight-men military council was set up to run the autonomy's administration. Meanwhile, Ardzinba and the Abkhaz deputies fled to the nearby coastal town of Gudauta to organize resistance.<sup>30</sup> On 19 August, Abkhaz Parliamentary deputy, Zurab Achba, warned that the Abkhaz Parliament was preparing a campaign of armed resistance to the Georgian "occupation." The same day, the Georgian Deputy Prime Minister, Aleksandr Kavsadze, who was abducted by supporters of Gamsakhurdia in July, was freed. The following day, Georgian troops began to withdraw from Sukhumi, but two days later Shevardnadze said that troops would remain

in Abkhazia to safeguard the transport links.<sup>31</sup> Within a week, Georgians were up to the Russian border and had the Abkhaz bottled up in three cities: Sukhumi, Ochamchira, and Tkvarchel, with only a region around the town of Gudauta truly in Abkhaz control.

Throughout August, armed clashes between the Georgians and Abkhaz continued, and many people were killed. On 30 August, Shevardnadze sent a message to the members of the Abkhaz leadership in Gudauta requesting that a plenary session of parliament be convened with Georgian and Abkhaz members, in order to avert further bloodshed. In this message, he also placed great hopes upon the Russian-Georgian-Abkhaz meeting planned for 3rd September.<sup>32</sup> In response to this, Ardzinba expressed his willingness to participate in the forthcoming talks in Moscow between Yeltsin and Shevardnadze on condition that representatives from Abkhazia and from the North Caucasus were also invited to attend.<sup>33</sup>

With the intensification of armed conflict in Abkhazia, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus issued a decree instructing all the confederation's bodies to send volunteers to Abkhazia "to offer armed resistance to the Georgian aggressors." However, Shevardnadze reiterated that negotiations with the Abkhaz leadership could begin only after the withdrawal from Georgian territory of irregular military units subordinate to the Confederation of Mountain Peoples.<sup>34</sup>

While Georgian troops took control of Sukhumi, Russians seemed to be on the side of Georgians. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the developments which preceded the tensions in Abkhazia; the seizure of hostages, in particular, were aimed at destabilizing the situation in Georgia on the eve of parliamentary elections. Russia denounced and would denounce all acts of terrorism and solution of political problems by force. Col-General Valeriy Parikeyev, the commander of the troops of the

Transcaucasus Military District, also stated "the troops are living according to their usual regime and maintaining strict neutrality with regard to the events in Abkhazia."<sup>35</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry also warned the parties to settle the dispute peacefully, and added that they would ensure the safety of Russian citizens.<sup>36</sup>

### III. The Abkhaz Advance and the North Caucasian Support

While the ethnic civil war intensified in Abkhazia, volunteer armed units from the North Caucasus made up of various ethnic groups distantly related to the Abkhaz traveled to Abkhazia to fight alongside the Abkhaz. About half of the volunteers owed allegiance to the Confederation of the North Caucasian Peoples which united a number of groups in the autonomies of the Russian border regions. In addition, Cossacks and Russians went to Abkhazia to support their kinsmen. The Circassians who consider themselves as a close kin to the Abkhaz entered the war. The Chechens too, who believed that the North Caucasian civilization was once again threatened and saw an opportunity to gain glory in the eyes of the rest of the North Caucasus, sent volunteers and aid. The South Ossetians, on the other hand, remembering their own sufferings and the aid offered to them at that time by the Abkhaz, joined the battle with a national brigade. As a result, the Georgian expansion in the territories of Abkhazia was curbed.<sup>37</sup>

While Georgians called for the withdrawal from Abkhazia of all irregular units from the North Caucasus, the involvement of Confederation of Mountain Peoples in the Abkhaz conflict also received the reaction of Moscow administration. A statement issued by the Russian Ministry of Justice on 25 August, condemned the actions of the Confederation as a gross violation of the Russian Constitution, and argued that there

were grounds for the Russian prosecutor-general to investigate its activities and those of its leaders.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the fact that the Russian Ministry of Justice has instituted criminal proceedings against the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus for unlawful actions in contravention of the Russian Federation constitution, the confederation's activity in Abkhazia continued. According to Musa Shanibov, the president of the confederation, what happened in Abkhazia was a genocide. Therefore, they could not abandon the Abkhaz in their misfortune, nor, incidentally, the other peoples belonging to the confederation. He also stressed that above all, the major aim was the unification of the mountain peoples ethnically, politically, and economically. If the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict grew further, the confederation would place several thousand volunteers under arms for defending the rights of the Abkhaz against the aggressors.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV. Russian Mediation Efforts to Settle the Georgian-Abkhaz Dispute

On 3 September 1992, with the mediation of the Russian Federation, a cease-fire agreement was signed<sup>40</sup> by President Boris Yeltsin, Shevardnadze, the Abkhaz Parliament Chairman Vladislav Ardzinba, and representatives of the peoples of the North Caucasus. According to it, Georgia would withdraw virtually all its troops from Abkhazia, leaving only a small contingent to guard roads and railways. The cease-fire was to begin at noon local time on 5 September, and it was decided to create a joint Russian-Georgian-Abkhaz commission to monitor it. Shevardnadze admitted that the cease-fire agreement would be difficult to implement; Ardzinba said that he was not happy with the accord but expressed the hope that "Yeltsin will not permit the annihilation of the Abkhaz people."<sup>41</sup>

According to the final document of the cease-fire, Russian troops stationed in Abkhazia would not participate in the initial stage of the settlement of the conflict in Georgia. As the Russian Defense Minister stated, "Russian troops maintained strict neutrality but they could later engage in guarding enterprises and other important productional facilities." After the signature of the cease-fire, the leaders of Russia and Georgia agreed to create a commission which would deal with the problems of providing security in Abkhazia, including the protection of railways and other major objects.<sup>42</sup> However, the cease-fire collapsed when Kitovani, who steadfastly opposed any degree of autonomy for Abkhazia, refused to comply with the requirement that he withdraw his troops as a precondition for resuming negotiations on a federal agreement. Thus, the National Guards of Georgian State Council continued to attack the Abkhaz.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to note here that while the negotiations took place between the parties, the UN also offered to Georgia to send a mission to Abkhazia in order to have an impartial view on the situation in the region. This was announced at a press conference in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by Vladimir Petrovskiy, under-secretary-general of the UN for political matters.<sup>44</sup>

The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet appealed to Boris Yeltsin to act to make the Georgian State Council comply with Article 10 of the final cease-fire document, which stressed the need for a full withdrawal by all Georgian armed forces from Abkhazia, and accused Shevardnadze of "mass killings" in Gudauta, Gagra, Sukhumi, Ochamchira. Moreover, at a press conference in Moscow on 18 September, Zurab Achba, deputy chairman of the Abkhaz Parliament's commission for legal issues, called for greater Russian involvement in the region. Ardzinba also sent a telegram to Yeltsin calling on him to help remove Georgian troops from Abkhazia. On the other hand, Shevardnadze

complained to Yeltsin about cease-fire violations, and stressed that the Abkhaz side was not observing the conditions of Moscow's cease-fire agreements.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, interesting plans for settling the dispute were voiced by the opposition in Moscow. One of them was Zhirinovskiy's plan for settling the conflict in Abkhazia. According to V. Zhirinovskiy, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, the conflict in Abkhazia could be resolved only within the framework of a unitary state-Russian Empire. He believed that the Transcaucasian republics might be given the status of Russian province-the Tbilisi, Baku, and Erevan provinces. Otherwise, there would be no end to the war in Abkhazia and the whole region would become a second "Lebanon."<sup>46</sup>

## V. Russian Intervention in the Georgian-Abkhaz Ethnic Dispute

The events occurred in Abkhazia in 1992 provided a ground for Russia to intervene actively in this ethnic war once again. Before going into details of the Russian response to the turmoil, one should analyze the reasons of Russian intervention in this ethnic conflict. First, this ethnic conflict was a potential threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Given the numerous autonomous republics in the Russian Federation, the Abkhaz conflict could raise popular demands for independence within the Russian Federation itself. As Akhsarbek Galazov, chairman of the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet pointed out, such a "fratricidal war" could spread to the southern rim of the Russian Federation and therefore Russia should use its international authority to settle the conflict.<sup>47</sup> Thus, with the perception of this danger, Russia would seek the territorial integrity of Georgia.

Second, the national interests of Russia drew into this conflict. Being within the traditional Russian sphere of influence, after the demise of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia retained its strategic significance along the Black Sea coastline and as a region adjacent to Russia's vulnerable southern flank in the northern Caucasus. Thus, Russia would never permit such an important place to be under the control of another power.

Third, ethnic Russian minority living in Abkhazia would be another reason for involvement, forcing the Russians to consider the issue of the Russian Diaspora in the "near abroad."<sup>48</sup> Georgian chauvinist attitude not only against the Abkhaz but also against other minorities, Russians in particular, led Moscow turn its face towards Abkhazia. In order to protect the rights of Russian minorities, perhaps Russia would intervene actively in this dispute.

Another reason was that the Russian troops which remained stationed in Abkhazia and Georgia, as well as the airborne division that arrived on 16 August 1992 to protect these units and to assist in the evacuation of Russians, quickly became a target for armed raids for any party who wished to draw Russia into the conflict.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, the major reason for Russian involvement was the Abkhaz demand for Russian assistance. Throughout 1992, in their struggle with the Georgians, the Abkhaz people saw Russia as they previously did the Soviet Union as a guarantor of their autonomy against Tbilisi. Just as they turned to Russia for support in 1978, Sukhumi authorities appealed to Russia "to intervene actively" when Georgian troops marched into Sukhumi in 1992. An Abkhaz declaration of 18 September stated that the Russian government had accepted the role of the guarantor of stability in the region and the Russian citizens were involved in the clashes; therefore Russia should find a solution to

the conflict.<sup>50</sup> By making such a statement, the Sukhumi administration was officially demanding Russian assistance to overcome the Georgian threat in their territories.

From the Russian viewpoint, although the Soviet Union ended and Georgia was now an independent state, this ethnic conflict should have to be considered within the framework of Moscow's traditional nationality policy. Being the successor state of the Soviet Union, and the leader of the CIS, the Russian Federation was the only actor to settle the dispute. The Abkhaz demand for Russian assistance against the Georgians was an open cheque for Russia to reexert its influence in the region. For the purpose of settling the dispute, Russia once again would consolidate its hegemony over the region and could create a traditional dependency relationship with the periphery. However, this time Russia would not use its traditional way of suppressing the disputes by military means in its sphere of influence, instead, it would prefer political maneuvers between the conflicting parties.

When one takes into consideration the Russian response to the political ethnic turmoil of 1992 in Abkhazia, it was clear that at first Moscow had no clear-cut policy towards the conflict. With the Soviet Union suddenly gone, the Russian Federation was dealing with its political, economic problems in the center. It was also trying to prepare grounds for the former republics to join the new Union formation, namely the CIS. However, the ethnic conflict in the territory of Georgia between the Abkhaz and Georgians was somewhat posing a threat to Moscow's national strategic interests. At that time, Georgia was not a member of the CIS, thus, this turmoil could be an opportunity to intervene in the domestic politics of the region which would later pave the way for Georgian membership in the CIS. As a result of this membership, Georgia would be directly put under Moscow's sphere of influence. Thus, the Abkhaz card was an

important tool for the Moscow administration for drawing Georgia into the CIS and Russia.

During the first days of the armed struggle, Russia seemed to be a neutral part of this conflict by issuing a mild caution to all the peoples of the North Caucasus to remain patient and stop destabilizing the situation. The subsequent events, however, showed that Russia was for the territorial integrity of Georgia, considering that Abkhaz independence from Georgia would pose a threat to its own national interests. On 3 September 1992, as it was stated before, in a cease-fire agreement, Abkhazia was recognized by Moscow within the internationally established borders of Georgia. However, as the fighting became more intense, Yeltsin declared that Russia would take steps to defend its citizens in this conflict. During this trilateral meeting in Moscow, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Georgii Khizha stated that the Northern Caucasus constituted a zone of particular interest for Russia and therefore Russia could not remain passive. Just after the Moscow agreements, on 8 September, the Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev reiterated Yeltsin's policy, stating that the Transcaucasus was a traditional realm of Russian interest and that Russia had no intention of abandoning the region.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, all these official statements can be considered as the repercussions of Russia's traditional policy which sought dominance over the region.

At the beginning of October, the Abkhaz and Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus troops launched a successful attack on the Georgian-held coastal town of Gagra, splitting the region into an Abkhaz controlled part in the north and a Georgian one in the south. On 2-4 October, while the Abkhaz forces were occupying Gagra, Georgian armies withdrew from the city. During these days, Shevardnadze<sup>52</sup> claimed that Abkhazia was receiving substantial support from "reactionary and terrorist forces in the Russian Parliament,"<sup>53</sup> and accused Russia of arms supplies to the Abkhaz. In fact,

this claim might be true, because several deputies were urging greater support for Abkhazia, and defending the withdrawal of all Georgian troops from Abkhazia as a prerequisite for a settlement. Also, the Russian Supreme Soviet "denounced the policy of the Georgian leadership" and held Georgian State Council troops fully responsible for the military conflict. It seemed that on this issue, there was a distinction between Yeltsin and the parliament. While Yeltsin was favoring the territorial integrity of Georgia, the Supreme Soviet believed that Georgians were the major perpetrator of this armed conflict.<sup>54</sup>

While such events did occur in Gagra, the supporters of ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia stepped up their anti-Shevardnadze demonstrations in Georgia in view of the coming October elections to the Georgian Parliament. According to him, 11th October elections would give no legitimacy to the current Georgian leadership, and he would never recognize the elections since they contradicted the republic's constitution and international law.<sup>55</sup>

After the occupation of Gagra, the Abkhaz forces were advancing on Sukhumi. It was obvious that Sukhumi would be a stage of strong military operations. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council welcomed on 8 October the decision of the Secretary-General to send a mission to Georgia and expressed great concern over the aggravation of the situation in the country. The Security Council called on the conflicting sides to cease-fire and observe the provisions of an agreement signed in Moscow on 3 September. On 13 October, a UN mission headed by UN Under-Secretary-General Antoine Blanca arrived in Tbilisi to study the situation in Abkhazia.<sup>56</sup>

On 11 October 1992, Georgian Parliamentary elections were held, and Shevardnadze received approximately 90% of the votes cast in the election. No voting

took place in nine constituencies in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and western Georgia. More than 40 observers from 10 western countries visited virtually all areas of the republic on the election day. They concluded that the elections in Georgia had passed in keeping with law and democratic norms.

The Russian military intervention was increasing steadily through the Fall while violence intensified. For the aim of protecting Russian army units stationed in Abkhazia and evacuating Russian citizens trapped there, the Moscow government sent an airborne division to Abkhazia in October. During this move, the Tbilisi authorities accused Moscow of supplying the Abkhaz with T-72 and T-80 tanks through its base on Bombora. The Russian Defense Ministry, however, insisted that its troops had remained strictly neutral.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, the Russian media was getting increasingly vocal against Georgia, saying that Russia should take a strong interest in the conflict since one-tenth of those killed were ethnic Russians. The Russian security interests were rooted in the Soviet interests and these could not be altered by contemporary political winds.<sup>58</sup> Yeltsin was also heard reinforcing these views in his speech to the Civic Union coalition on 28 February 1993. He stated:

Russia is vitally interested in the cessation of all armed conflicts in the territory of the former USSR. And, the world community is increasingly coming to realize that the moment has arrived for authoritative international organizations, including the United Nations, to grant Russia special powers as the guarantor of peace and stability in the region.<sup>59</sup>

This statement was very significant for the world community. With this statement Yeltsin was leaving his policy on Abkhazia which he had voiced at the beginning. Now, he was insisting on global recognition of Russia's intrinsic right to play a leading role as a guarantor of peace and stability in the region. It was obvious that Russia considered itself as the major regional actor for intervening in this dispute. With this move, Yeltsin stated that from that time onwards Russia would play a more vital role as the major authority responsible for settling the dispute in this region.

Towards the end of 1992, fighting between the Georgian and Abkhaz intensified in Ochamchira and Sukhumi. On 26 October, the Abkhaz forces captured the town of Ochamchira (located in the south of Sukhumi), and maintained their position. However, fighting was still continuing in Sukhumi. In such a climate, Ardzinba stated that Abkhazia would fight to the end. Parallel to Ardzinba's views, Shevardnadze also expressed that a peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia was no longer possible; only military means could solve the issue and that this would have to happen soon.<sup>60</sup>

During the period between December 1992 and January 1993, there came armed clashes between the Georgians and Russians in Abkhazia. As a result, General Pavel Grachev, Russia's Defense Minister, ordered Russian troops to defend their weapons and property from Georgian attacks, issuing an appeal to all former Union republics to guarantee the safety of Russian troops remaining on their soil. By making reference to the events in Georgia, Grachev was underlining the importance of the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus for the Russian army, stating that Russia should take all steps necessary to ensure that its troops remained in the area. Accordingly, Russia had a right and duty to defend Russian-speaking communities outside the Russian Federation. With these policy adjustments, the Russian government wanted to legitimize its role as the mediator to intervene in the crisis.<sup>61</sup>

## VI. Increased External Involvement: The Return of Traditional Regional Powers

With the Soviet threat suddenly seemed to be gone after the demise of the USSR, the traditional regional powers which had strategic aims over Caucasia for centuries had appeared on the political arena. The growing perception that a political and ideological vacuum was emerging, accelerated the competition for influence in the region. The onset of Glasnost and Perestroika had already ended the near isolation of the region and had led to an expansion of cultural, economic exchanges between the Transcaucasian republics and their immediate neighbors. Among them, the major regional powers which adopted a very active approach towards events in Transcaucasia were Turkey and Iran.<sup>62</sup>

### 1. Turkey's Approach to the Question

As far as Georgia and the Abkhaz people were concerned, Turkey's geographical proximity and its historical ties with the people of the region led Turkey rather than Iran to get involve actively in power politics of the region.<sup>63</sup> At an official level, Turkey was keenly interested in Georgia most notably for its potential as an export market. With its weak economic structures, Georgia needed Turkish economic assistance through which Turkey could easily establish commercial links with Tbilisi administration. From the Georgian point of view, Turkey was very important for Georgia as an alternative land link to Europe apart from transiting Russia. However, the Abkhaz conflict was posing a great threat to Georgian-Turkish economic and political relations.<sup>64</sup> Having close historical, cultural, religious, and ethnic ties with the Abkhaz people, Turkey automatically was emerging as the protector of the Abkhaz people against the Georgians in the eyes of the Sukhumi administration.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the Muslim Ajars, who also

have their own autonomous republic on the Georgian-Turkish border also look to Turkey in their demands for greater autonomy, especially as there are also Ajars who live on the Turkish side.

Here, one should stress that the Ankara government, during the formation of the Georgian state and the subsequent ethnic conflict between the Georgians and Abkhaz, has employed a realist policy. While condemning Georgians for their violent activities towards the Abkhaz people, Turkey was defending the territorial integrity of Georgia.<sup>66</sup> At first, this approach of Turkey would seem to be meaningless. However, Turkey did not want to confront Russia in this ethnic dispute. The Ankara government knew that if Turkey was actively involved in this dispute as the protector of the Abkhaz, Georgians would look for Russian assistance to balance the situation which would once again draw Russia into the territories of Georgia. As a result, Russia would come to the Caucasus and pose a great threat for Turkey as in the past.

Armenia was another factor for Turkey to defend the territorial integrity of Georgia. In Transcaucasia, Armenia has been a traditional opponent of Turkey since the former's emergence. By behaving so, Ankara seemed to pursue a containment policy against Armenia in Transcaucasia. Turkey's intention to defend the unity of Georgia, and establish close economic relations, was creating ground for Georgian-Turkish friendship in the region. In this way, Turkey hoped to encircle Armenia politically and economically, from the north by Georgia, and from the east by its natural ally, Azerbaijan. Such a move would raise Armenian vulnerability to Turkish economic and political power in the Transcaucasus.

What the Turkish administration did, was unofficial, tacit assistance to the Abkhaz to overcome the Georgian threat, and bring the dispute to the agenda of the

international political community. While the Georgian invasion took place, several Turkish citizens of Abkhaz origin volunteered to join the Abkhaz resistance from Turkey. Meanwhile, just a week after the Georgian army entered Abkhazia, on August 22, members of forty-one associations active in various provinces and districts of Turkey met in Istanbul upon the call of the "Caucasian Culture Association Board" (KAF-KUR), and established the "Caucasian-Abkhaz Solidarity Association" which aimed at the organization of solidarity with and aid to Abkhazia. From that time onwards, it has acted as an Abkhaz lobby and as an pressure group in Turkey, and tried to influence government's policy towards the region.<sup>67</sup> While the dispute was going on, the Turkish Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, at a meeting with the representatives of the Caucasian Culture Association Board, and Caucasian-Abkhaz Solidarity Committee mentioned that the incidents in Abkhazia which violated the Abkhaz's rights caused discomfort in Turkey, and added: "We condemn the blood-shed in Abkhazia. We hope that this situation in Georgia and the Caucasus will not create another Sarajevo issue. The Turkish Republic has made the necessary warning to the parties involved, and Turkey is carefully following the situation in Abkhazia."<sup>68</sup>

By making diplomatic and political maneuvers, Turkey as a Muslim country was declaring its desire for the territorial integrity of Christian Georgia. This policy, however, received the reaction of opposition parties and some pressure groups. For them, Turkey could be actively involved in this dispute and not see Georgia as its Christian ally while its Muslim brothers were killed by the Georgians. Thus, various informal groups tried to awaken nationalist, pan-Turkist, and Islamically-oriented elements in Turkey for the full support of the Abkhaz. However, Turkey knew that, although the Soviet threat had gone, Transcaucasia was the traditional sphere of influence of Russia. Russia would never permit any regional or international actor to become militarily involved in this dispute on the side of the Abkhaz. For Georgia, Turkey

represented a counter-balance to Russia as well as a potentially important economic partner. The new relationship was sealed by Georgia's enthusiastic participation in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization.<sup>69</sup>

## 2. Iran's Influence in the Region

Throughout history, Iran has been one of the major traditional powers which struggled for supremacy in the Transcaucasus. Despite its political, economic, and military weight in the region, it seemed that Iran played a passive role in Georgia while it was very active in Armenia and Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period. This was a natural outcome of some strategic and security concerns in the region.

Iran's geographical location in the region put obstacles for Iran to establish close political and economic relations with Georgia. Its geographical proximity to Azerbaijan and Armenia led Iran to give priority to its relations with these states. While Iran established close political and economic relations with these countries, its approach to Georgia has mostly been for economic reasons. As an energy-rich country, it looked at energy-poor Georgia as a potential market for its own vast natural gas reserves. Behaving so, Iran was appearing on stage as a main potential source of energy supplier to the area. While Iran represented a useful counter-balance to Russia and Turkey, and was potentially just as important an economic partner as Turkey, the rise of the Iranian influence was inevitably regarded with suspicion by the West, and by the United States in particular.<sup>70</sup> Here, the western animosity towards Iran led the Tbilisi administration to be reluctant to antagonize the West by moving closer to Iran.

In the post-Soviet era, while Georgia was reorganizing its state structure, Turkey was the major actor which provided a democratic secular state model that was highly convenient for Georgia. On the other hand, Iran was threatening the region with its so-called Islamic fundamentalist approach in state affairs. This reason also prevented Georgia from establishing close political links with Iran.

During the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the Tehran administration tried to mediate between the parties. However, the Georgian fear of incurring Russian displeasure guided the Tbilisi government to remain quiet on Iran's mediation efforts. Russia wanted to be the main arbiter of regional politics, and did not favor the development of close ties between its former possessions and their neighbors. All these economic and political factors prevented Iran to play an effective role in domestic politics of Georgia in the post-Soviet era.

## VII. Reassertion of Russian Hegemony in the Region and the Mediation Efforts to Settle the Georgian-Abkhaz Dispute

The events occurred between the Georgians and Abkhaz after 1993 were heavily determined by the new Russian foreign-policy strategy which permitted growing Russian involvement and reassertion of Russian hegemony over the region. Within two years after the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia, by considering itself to be a great power and the successor to the Soviet Union, was actively intervening in this ethnic conflict, and tried to establish its old center-periphery relationship within the framework of its traditional Caucasus policy.<sup>71</sup>

But, what were the dynamics that enforce Russia to adopt a new foreign-policy doctrine? The first factor was supposed to be the intensification of ethnic and regional conflicts with the potential to harm Russia's security interests. In the case of Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict, this dispute posed a great threat to Russia's traditional sphere of influence in the Caucasus which would later let Moscow actively intervene in this turmoil for settling it in favor of its interests.<sup>72</sup>

A second factor was the emergence of rivals to Russia, notably Turkey which enjoyed Western support in its pursuit of a more active role. The Western support for Turkey's prominent role in the Transcaucasus, Central Asia, and the Black Sea region was viewed to be in contradiction with Moscow's foreign policy strategy, and also it was challenging Russia's role in the region. It may be added that the participation of some former Soviet states to the regional cooperation organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone initiated by Turkey, undermined Russians' faith in the inevitability of the voluntary return of former Soviet Union members to Russia.<sup>73</sup>

A third factor, was the role of the military. The military was bitter about the loss of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union's position as a superpower. They wanted to return to the glorious days of the Soviet Union. Also, Russia's insistence that it alone had the responsibility for peace-keeping and peace-making operations in the former Soviet Union was partly derived from this concern.<sup>74</sup>

### 1. The Russian Monroe Doctrine and its Near Abroad Policy

The combination of these factors gradually led to the development of a new doctrine of Russian foreign policy. By mid-1992, a so-called "Russian Monroe

Doctrine" which ensured only Russia as the sole authority to intervene in the politics of the region by rejecting any regional or international involvement, was already emerging. In an interview, Kozyrev was underlying the importance of this new policy by stating that "no international organization or group of states can replace our position and our peace-making efforts in this specific post-Soviet space."<sup>75</sup> Indeed, these statements had a neoimperialist undertone which reflected the traditional imperial desires of Russia.

By 1993, a new version of Russian foreign policy had taken shape and was affecting the country's behavior; the priority of the former Soviet Union or the so-called Near Abroad. According to it, the security of Russia is linked with the security of its Asian periphery, and Russia should maintain its predominance in these territories.<sup>76</sup> For this purpose;

- a. Russia must be a bridge between this region and the outside world;
- b. No other country should be allowed to establish a presence in this region that could rival Russia;
- c. Russia should never permit these areas to become a threat to its vital interests;
- d. Russia is the only authority responsible for peace-making and peace-keeping in the region;
- e. Greater Russian involvement is necessary in the immediate neighborhood of the Near Abroad, including Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf region, in both political and economic sense;<sup>77</sup>
- f. Rivalries among neighboring countries of these regions, notably Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, should be manipulated in an effort to prevent any of them from acquiring undue influence, thereby maximizing Russia's own power.

The new strategy towards the region was colonialist in the classic sense. In fact, with this policy, Russia had a desire to keep the territories of the former Soviet Union as its sphere of influence. Moreover, Moscow was declaring its intention to intervene actively in the domestic politics of the neighboring countries in order to prevent their harmful activities towards the region. Under these circumstances, one should analyze the impacts of this new strategy for Transcaucasia. As applied to relations with Transcaucasia, Russia had a desire to pursue the following strategy:

- a. Reintegrating the Transcaucasian region into the CIS;
- b. Establishing pro-Moscow leaderships in these countries;
- c. Preventing the Transcaucasian countries from making close relations with the neighboring countries, and regional and international organizations;
- d. Manipulating Transcaucasian centrifugal forces as a way of keeping central governments weak, encouraging the creation of federal and confederal systems and keeping them all subservient to Moscow; and
- e. Reintroducing Russian troops and/or maintaining them in the region partly under the pretext of conflict resolution and peace-keeping operations.<sup>78</sup>

As it is seen, with this policy Moscow was reasserting its influence in the region, and trying to consolidate its power in the Caucasus. It is in this context, one should scrutinize the political developments of Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and Russian response to the turmoil.

## 2. Georgian-Abkhaz Relations in 1993

Georgia entered 1993 under the presidency of Shevardnadze who won the new parliamentary elections on 11 October 1992 as the chairman of the Parliament. However, this victory did not completely resolve his legitimacy problem. Gamsakhurdia was still the most popular figure in Georgia, and his supporters especially in the province of Mingrelia were continuing their armed resistance against Shevardnadze. There were also some disagreements between Shevardnadze and the people who had brought him to power. One such figure was Tengiz Kitovani, and because of the disagreements over the handling of the Abkhaz issue, Shevardnadze dismissed him from his position on 6 May 1993, and appointed Giorgi Karkarashvili as Defense Minister.<sup>79</sup>

While Georgian domestic politics dealt with such dilemmas in its power circles, the ethnic strife in Georgia was worsening. At first, it was hoped that Shevardnadze would be able to put an end to ethnic war in Abkhazia. This expectation was based on the assumption that a deal had been struck between Yeltsin and Shevardnadze, according to which Russia would withdraw its support from the Abkhaz rebels. However, the dispute continued to worsen. It is noteworthy that, Shevardnadze's failure to solve the dispute was as a result of his mistaken policies toward Russia and Abkhazia. While he was dealing with the dispute, he accused Moscow of exacerbating the conflict by giving support to the Abkhaz. Combining Russian military's hatred of Shevardnadze, whom it viewed as the main architect of the Soviet Union's dismantlement, Moscow's anti-Shevardnadze policies increased in the region. As Hunter pointed out, the Russian military knew that Shevardnadze was the best they could hope for Georgia, and thus never went so far as to actually remove him from power. Rather their strategy was to weaken and humiliate him first and then to use him to achieve their own goals. The

instrument used was the manipulation of Georgia's ethnic problems, especially the war in Abkhazia.<sup>80</sup>

Throughout January 1993, fighting between the Abkhaz and Georgians continued to deteriorate. After Gagra, and Ochamchira, the new target for Abkhazia was Sukhumi. While the Abkhaz were intensifying their attacks on Sukhumi, on 29 January 1993, the chairman of the Georgian Committee for Human Rights and Interethnic Relations, Sandro Kavsadze, asked the UN Security Council to deploy UN peace-keeping troops along the Russian-Georgian border to prevent further deterioration of the situation in Abkhazia. With this move, Georgia requested the international community to put an end to the civil war in its territories. The UN Security Council chairman, Yosio Hatano, registered concern at the situation in Abkhazia, and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and compliance with the 3 September cease-fire agreement.<sup>81</sup>

It is noteworthy that, although the western powers recognized the independent Georgian government and Georgia's territorial integrity, their policies towards Georgia seemed to be Russo-centric. After Shevardnadze assumed power, the West tried to mediate between Russia and Georgia, as occurred during the summit meeting between Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin in Vancouver in February 1993.<sup>82</sup> The US intervention helped to reduce tensions between the Georgians and Russians, but the West's basic message to the Tbilisi administration was that it had to make its peace with Russia and be responsive to Russia's security interests.<sup>83</sup> With this statement, the West was recognizing Russia as the sole authority in the region, and Georgia as the Russian sphere of influence. This move also symbolized the international community's intention to recognize the new Russian foreign-policy strategy.

While the Abkhaz were continuing their attacks on Sukhumi to recapture the city, the Georgian-Russian relations were also deteriorating. During February, Georgians shelled Russian units in Abkhazia on the pretext that Russians gave aid to the Abkhaz. The Russian seismology laboratory in Eshera, a suburb of Sukhumi, was bombed by the Georgian fighters despite the fact that it was still guarded by the Russian 901st paratrooper battalion. Shevardnadze accused Russia of waging an undeclared war against Georgia, and insisted that all Russian troops leave Georgian soil immediately. In response to this, on 20 February, Russian warplanes held an air raid on Georgian military troops in Sukhumi in retaliation for Georgian shelling of a Russian unit. Shevardnadze condemned the raid as "barbarous" and vowed that Georgia would make "an adequate response."<sup>84</sup>

On 22 February, the Russian Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev, published a statement that the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus was held for the Russian army and stated that Russia should take all steps necessary to ensure that its troops remained in the area because otherwise Russia would lose the Black Sea. The next day, Grachev asserted that the Russian army was actively attempting to settle ethnic disputes because it was the only unit of the former USSR competent to undertake practical tasks, and he added that Russia had a right and a duty to defend the communities of Russian-speakers outside Russia. With these statements, Russia wanted to justify its involvement in the dispute.<sup>85</sup>

From the Abkhaz point of view, an achievement of a military success against the Georgians, particularly in Sukhumi, would force the Tbilisi administration to join the negotiations, and provide an advantageous position to the Abkhaz. Thus, throughout March and April, they advanced their attacks on Sukhumi. While they fought with Georgians, they also sought international assistance for the settlement of the dispute. On 4 April 1993, Vladislav Ardzinba, called on the international community for assistance.

arguing that organizations such as the UN should protest human rights violations by Georgia. He stated that Abkhazia was ready for peace on the condition that Georgian forces withdrew from the region, and reiterated that Abkhazia merely wanted a federal treaty with Georgia similar to that concluded between Russia and its autonomous formations.<sup>86</sup>

While such statements were published by the leaders, Yeltsin won a referendum victory in Moscow, and on 14 May, he tried to establish his role as a mediator at a meeting with Shevardnadze in Moscow where they discussed a cease-fire agreement which would begin on 20 May. Meanwhile, Ardzinba stated that the Abkhaz forces were ready to cease-fire "unconditionally" provided all Georgian troops withdrew from Abkhazia. However, this cease-fire was violated by the Georgian troops which bombarded Abkhaz positions along the Gumista River, near Sukhumi. Once again, there was no cease-fire to speak of.

On 19-20 May 1993, Russian President Yeltsin sent his special envoy, Boris Pastukhov, to Abkhazia. Following his meeting with Ardzinba, Pastukhov stated that he considered the deployment in Abkhazia a tripartite Russian-Abkhaz-Georgian peace-keeping force "unrealistic" at the present time, and proposed an alternative either CSCE or UN peace-keeping troops, which could include a CIS contingent.<sup>87</sup>

At the beginning of June, Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, reiterated Russian support for Georgian territorial integrity, recommended that a trilateral commission under UN auspices guarantee the cease-fire, and said that Russia would impose economic sanctions in response to violations of future cease-fire agreements.<sup>88</sup>

While Russians pointed out their plans to settle the dispute, on 25 June 1993, UN Secretary-General, Butros Butros Ghali, called on all sides in the conflict to observe the cease-fire agreement reached on 14 May in Moscow, and expressed great anxiety concerning the escalation of armed conflict in Abkhazia.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet Chairman, Vladislav Ardzinba, appealed to the Russian Supreme Soviet to become either a constituent part, or a protectorate, of the Russian Federation. With these statements, Ardzinba was explicitly requesting Russian assistance to settle the dispute.<sup>90</sup>

Another plan for settling the dispute was laid down by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Sergei Shakhrai, at a meeting on 13 July 1993 in Sochi, with the heads of Caucasian republics and regions devoted to problems in the North Caucasus. He proposed using a trilateral peace-keeping force to settle the Abkhaz dispute in a similar manner to that employed in South Ossetia, where Russian, Georgian, and North Ossetian troops were deployed one year ago. According to him, Russia could act as guarantor of Abkhaz autonomy within the Georgian state.<sup>91</sup>

As a result of a very heavy Russian pressure, the so-called "Sochi Agreement", negotiated by 20 May was put in place by 27 July.<sup>92</sup> This provided for disarmament by the Abkhaz and Georgians, to be accompanied by a prompt withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia, and the return of the legitimate government to Sukhumi. It also stipulated that trilateral groups stationed in Abkhazia would cooperate with international observers when they arrived.<sup>93</sup> This agreement was once again confirming Russian dominance over the region and consolidating its role as a mediator in settlement of this ethnic dispute.

Towards the end of July, Gamsakhurdia's supporters were again on the Georgian political stage. The armed contingent loyal to Zviad Gamsakhurdia under its commander Loti Kobalia, and the Georgian National Guard under the former Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani, seized the towns of Senaki, Abasha, and Khobi in western Georgia. They seized the towns in order to prevent the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia under the terms of the cease-fire, because, according to them, the cease-fire agreement was a sellout of Georgian national interests.<sup>94</sup>

However, the cease-fire did not last long. On 27 September, the Abkhaz forces launched a massive attack on Sukhumi and gained control, and threw the Georgian troops out of the city which was considered a clear breach of cease-fire.<sup>95</sup> In response to it, the Moscow administration imposed an economic embargo against Ardzinba's regime and helped Shevardnadze leave Sukhumi.<sup>96</sup> Shevardnadze blamed the fall of Sukhumi partly on the failure of forces loyal to the ousted president Gamsakhurdia to join the defending troops, and partly on Russia's failure to intervene. On the same day, Ardzinba stated that Abkhazia might now hold a referendum on independence from Georgia, and then ask for protection from the Russian Federation.<sup>97</sup>

On the following days, the Abkhaz forces advanced eastward and on 29 September took control of Tkvarcheli, and on 30 September, they occupied Gali, the last Georgian-held town in Abkhazia. Meanwhile, Zviad Gamsakhurdia reappeared on the Georgian political arena from his exile in Chechnia by returning to his native Mingrelia, and began to fight against Shevardnadze's troops.<sup>98</sup>

After the loss of Sukhumi, and with the intensification of Gamsakhurdia's fight against Shevardnadze, the Tbilisi administration started to make some concessions to Russia. On 14 October, the Georgian Foreign Minister Aleksandr Chikvaidze stated that

Georgia might cede to Russia control of some military bases in return for military help.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, on 18 October 1993, Shevardnadze supported the views of his minister by saying that Georgia's army "has practically disintegrated" and that Georgia could not regain control over Abkhazia without military help from Russia.<sup>100</sup> These statements were the first signs of Georgia's need for Russian assistance to settle the dispute in its territorial borders.

Meanwhile, the international community was approaching the problem with great concern. On 19 October, the UN adopted Resolution 876, sponsored by the United States, Britain, and France which condemned the Abkhaz for breaching the cease-fire, and reiterated support for the territorial integrity of Georgia. To control the cease-fire and report the violations to the General-Secretary, the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was sent to the region.<sup>101</sup> With all these political developments, it seemed that the international actors, with a growing concern, began to intervene in the domestic politics of Georgia which later would cause a reaction from the Moscow administration, and lead Moscow to employ the Russian version of the Monroe Doctrine in these territories.

Having perceived the significance of the incidents in Georgia, Shevardnadze, in order to protect his country and his power, unwillingly invited Russian assistance. In fact, it was a most favorable condition for Kremlin to impose its strategic agenda and enforce Shevardnadze to join the CIS. Having no choice under these circumstances, on October 22, 1993, Shevardnadze signed a decree formally approving Georgia's membership of the CIS. In trying to justify his decision after so many months of publicly resisting just such an eventuality, Shevardnadze declared that CIS membership was the last chance to save the country from civil war and economic disintegration.<sup>102</sup> Earlier, on October 8, the Georgian leader had a multilateral meeting around an oval

table in the Kremlin-on one side were the Kremlin team consisting of Yeltsin, Chernomyrdin, Kozyrev, Grachev, and on the other side, sitting rather like exam students, were Aliyev, Ter Petrosyan, and Shevardnadze. Pictures of this meeting that appeared in the press were a clear instance of the familiar saying that a picture is worth a thousand words.<sup>103</sup> As a result, Georgia agreed with the Russian government that Russian troops would be deployed along the most important railways in the west of the country to protect Georgia's vital transport links. By stressing the necessity of this step, Jaba Ioseliani pointed out that "the West helps only with words so we have no way out."<sup>104</sup>

### 3. UN Exerts its Efforts to settle the Conflict and the Russian Response

An overall look at 1994, reflects the mediation efforts of the Russian Federation, and the UN for the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict. Although, the international organizations tried to maintain stability and peace in the region, the Russian Federation was the sole authority to speak the last words on the future of the region. With its new foreign policy strategy, Russia was the leading side in the mediation efforts, and peace-keeping operations.

For this purpose, between November 30 and December 1, 1993, a meeting assisted by the Russian Federation, and supervised by the UN on a possible settlement for the Abkhaz-Georgian dispute was held in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Eduard Brunner, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Georgia. The first round of negotiations resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides. It was agreed that the parties to the conflict would

exchange POWs "all for all" within 20 days after the signing of the Memorandum. This exchange took place on 19 December 1993. After this exchange, POWs were again taken by both parties as intermittent hostilities continued.<sup>105</sup>

While such political developments did occur for the settlement of the dispute, Zviad Gamsakhurdia mysteriously died. His wife claimed that he had committed suicide in a village in western Georgia on 31 December 1993, as an act of defiance against the current Georgian leadership. On the other hand, Mkhedrioni, the Georgian paramilitary organization, claimed that Gamsakhurdia had been wounded in fighting in Chechnia on 31 December and died on 5 January 1994. Whichever claim was true, it was obvious that one of the pages of the Georgian history was closing.<sup>106</sup>

The second round of negotiations on a comprehensive settlement was held in Moscow on 10 January 1994.<sup>107</sup> In these negotiations, Russia was participating as a "facilitator," and the CSCE as an observer. The main conclusion reached was the commitment by the parties not to use force and/or the threat to use it. The sides were also appealing to the UN Security Council to ensure that there would be no resumption of hostilities. They spoke in favor of deploying UN peace-keeping forces, expressing their mutual consent for the use of a Russian military contingent in such forces. They also reached an agreement on the creation of a demilitarized zone along the river Ingur which formed the border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, Georgia was signing treaties with Turkey and the Russian Federation. A few weeks after signing a declaration of cooperation with Turkey on 13 January 1994, and stressing the sympathy and friendship embedded between the two nations, Shevardnadze reached an agreement on terms of a treaty of friendship with Moscow on 3 February 1994. On that occasion, Kozyrev stated that Russia viewed the treaty as a

"symbol for settling the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, solving the problem of the republic's Russian-speaking population." According to that treaty, Russia was to install some military bases in Georgia within the framework of CIS Collective Security Treaty, especially on the Georgian-Turkish border. In this commentary, Shevardnadze said that the package of Russian-Georgian agreements represented the joint interests of the parties and explained that the reason for the existence of joint troops on the Georgian-Turkish border was the fact that Georgia alone did not possess sufficient resources. He said that this was a compromise agreement between Moscow and Tbilisi, and the former would assist Georgia in building its own army. He also reassured Ankara of the consequences of the treaty, asserting his personal belief that the involvement of Russia as the main actor was needed to solve the Georgian-Abkhaz problem. In fact, as a result of this treaty the Russian military installation in Georgia had been completed and Russia consolidated its presence in the region not only politically but also militarily.

On 3 February 1994, the Abkhaz Prime Minister Sokrat Jinjolia, parliament chairman Vladislav Ardzinba protested the Russian-Georgian friendship treaty and stated that the treaty would give Georgia access to Russia's military arsenals. Meanwhile, a group of Russian deputies, including the State Duma chairman, Ivan Rybkin, and the former first deputy Prime Minister Egor Gaidar sent a letter to the Russian President and expressed that signing of the Russian-Georgian Friendship Treaty could destabilize the entire Caucasus.<sup>109</sup>

The third round of UN-sponsored negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz dispute was held on 22 February 1994 in Geneva. However, it ended without substantive progress on conditions for the return of the Georgian refugees who fled the region in September, 1993, or on the future status of Abkhazia within Georgia.<sup>110</sup>

In April 1994, the UN Secretary General Butros-Ghali paid a visit to Moscow, and as a result the two sides signed a declaration for a political settlement of the conflict and quadripartite agreements on the voluntary return of the refugees. The declaration also called for the deployment of UN peace-keeping troops in Abkhazia. It is important to note here, although the UN acted as a mediator between the parties, it had no desire to send UN peace-keeping troops to the region. In an interview with Georgian television on 22 March 1994, Shevardnaze expressed his concern on UN's role in the region and argued that since the UN Secretary-General Butros Ghali stated on 21 March that the time was not yet ripe for deploying a UN peace-keeping force in Abkhazia, if necessary Russia could send peace-keeping troops to the region without UN appeal. Georgia was again seeking for Russian assistance in its territories to settle the dispute.<sup>111</sup>

The fourth round of talks was held in Geneva and ended without agreement on 22 April. However, the Georgian and Abkhaz sides decided to meet again in Moscow on 10 May 1994, to consider a UN proposal on a federal agreement that would maintain Georgia's territorial integrity. Meanwhile, one of the Abkhaz negotiators stated that the Abkhaz parliament would shortly adopt a new constitution specifying that Abkhazia was a sovereign state.<sup>112</sup>

In the same month, Russians also brokered an agreement<sup>113</sup> between the Abkhaz and Georgians, according to which Abkhazia was granted its own constitution, flag and other trappings of the statehood. The question of Georgia's territorial integrity was not unequivocally mentioned in the agreement, but references were made to the UN Charter and those Security Council resolutions that particularly stressed this principle.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, if carried out completely, the agreement would mean the effective separation of Abkhazia from Georgia. The agreement also confirms the theory that

Russia intends to weaken the central governments of the regional states and to create loose federal structures, thereby, creating a situation that would better enable it to exert a controlling influence in the area. However, successful implementation of the agreement was far from assured.

As could be expected, there was strong opposition among the Georgians to the provisions of the treaty which undermined Georgia's territorial integrity, which later led to increased political opposition to Shevardnadze's leadership. Also, the status of the Georgian inhabitants of Abkhazia who were forced to leave the country was another practical barrier for the implementation of the agreement. Nevertheless, a major step towards the stabilization of the situation would be taken with the dispatch of 3000 Russian military personnel to the region in May 1994.<sup>115</sup>

On 14 May, Russia, once again, appeared on the political arena of the Caucasus as a mediator and peace-keeper between the conflicting sides. The Abkhaz and Georgians mutually signed a peace accord whereby Russia would deploy 3000 CIS peace-keeping troops, primarily Russians, along both sides of the traditional boundary between Abkhazia and Georgia proper, the Ingur river. With this move, Russia became successful in its efforts to gain international accreditation as the regional gendarme in the territory of the former Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup> On 9 June, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree ordering the Russian government to create a peace-keeping force for deployment in Abkhazia. The force would be composed of three battalions from the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus. On 24 June, the Russian peace-keeping troops were deployed along the security zone, the Ingur river.<sup>117</sup>

It is worth noting here that while UNOMIG was established after the escalation of the conflict in Abkhazia, many looked at this mission as preparing the way for a UN

peace-keeping operation in Georgia. The long awaited UN peace-keeping mission in Georgia failed to materialize however, and instead, after months of inertia, the Council gave the green light for a Russian peace-keeping operation in Abkhazia. Today, as the headquarters of the Russian Transcaucasian Forces, there are around 20,000 Russian troops stationed in Georgia, as well as 3,000 troops in "peace-keeping" roles in Abkhazia.

While Russia sent its soldiers under the name of CIS peace-keeping troops, it also called for UN cooperation in the region, and demanded the prolongation of UNOMIG's mission which officially would end on 30 June 1994. As a result, with the UN Resolution 937, dated 21 July 1994, the Security Council prolonged UNOMIG's mission period until 13 January 1995. Here, it is evident that with these political moves, Russia wanted to justify the deployment of its troops on the pretext of helping the UN in the region.<sup>118</sup>

Meanwhile, a friendship and cooperation treaty was signed on 17 August 1994 in Kazan between the Abkhaz and Tatar. The Tatar President, Mintimir Sheimiev, stated that two countries recognized each other as "subjects of international law," as contravening the Russian-Georgian Friendship Treaty signed in February 1994. Moreover, the first deputy chairman of the Abkhaz Parliament, Stanislav Lakoba, argued that since the Russian-Georgian treaty had not yet been ratified, the Abkhaz-Tatar treaty did not violate it. It was obvious that, this treaty constituted a threat to the territorial integrity of Georgia and the Russian Federation.<sup>119</sup>

Subsequent developments for political settlement of the dispute brought no clear solution to the parties. The Georgian side has insisted upon the recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity by denying the independence of Abkhazia, and demanded the massive repatriation of refugees. On the other hand, having won the war, Abkhazia persisted in

the recognition of its independence status. These mutual irreconcilable attitudes brought deadlock to the negotiations. However, every day that passed strengthened the de facto status of Abkhazia as a fully functioning state.

Finally, on 26 November 1994, the Abkhaz Parliament adopted a new constitution proclaiming the Republic of Abkhazia a sovereign state, historically established on the basis of the right to self-determination. The chairman of the Abkhaz Parliament, Vladislav Ardzinba was elected the first president of the Republic of Abkhazia. Although, the Abkhaz authorities pointed out that the adoption of a new constitution would not affect the ongoing negotiations with Georgia on Abkhazia's future status, the Georgian Parliament chairman Eduard Shevardnadze rejected the move as an act of defiance that sabotaged hopes for a peaceful solution to the conflict.<sup>120</sup>

Through the end of 1994, Russia and the world community were drawing their attention to another crisis in the Northern Caucasus—the so-called Chechen resistance against the Kremlin administration. The eruption of such a secessionist movement in its southern territories led Moscow to turn its face towards Chechnia away from the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic dispute. By considering the anti-Russian events that occurred in Chechnia more harmful to the very existence of the Russian Federation, and to its interests in the region, for the first time after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Moscow employed its traditional military policy in Chechnia. At this time, the crisis was in the territories of the Russian Federation, not in the territories of its neighbors. If Russia was not able to control the secessionist anti-Russian attitudes in the northern Caucasus, it was obvious that the events would easily spring to other regions of the Federation. In this respect, the political settlement for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was somewhat postponed to another time.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

In the face of historical realities, the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict in Georgia has served as a test for understanding the major causes of ethnic disputes in Transcaucasia. Moreover, it has been a political experiment in which the parties involved in this dispute could be able to examine their political objectives over the region. What this case shows, is the direct influence of ethnic turmoil on the situation in the Caucasus and Russia.

An overall analysis on the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict, indeed, underlines the major causes of ethnic strife in the Transcaucasus: the legacy of the national-territorial division of the USSR, the problem of the right of nations to self-determination, the principle of the territorial integrity and the inviolability of frontiers, the tension between federalism and unitarism, and finally, the frustration of peoples subjected to repression. In the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic struggle, one can find all these factors which determine the relations between these two nations.

It is obvious that the major confrontation appeared as a result of the contradiction between the two universally accepted principles of international law: the principle of the inviolability of frontiers and the territorial integrity of states, and the principle of the right of nations to self-determination. Indeed, the major reason for this ethnic dispute was the Georgian desire to preserve Georgia's territorial integrity as a unitary state, and the Abkhaz intention to use their right to self-determination for becoming an independent state.

From the Abkhaz point of view, the Georgian occupation of the Abkhaz territories on August 14, 1992, was a new version of "Georgianization" policy which they experienced in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, they were waging a liberation war against an aggressor who had imperial aims on Abkhazia. On the contrary, according to the Georgians, the events that occurred in Abkhazia were not an act of Georgian aggression, but they were the redeployment of the Georgian troops in the territories of Georgia. Moreover, the Tbilisi administration claimed that the Abkhaz-Georgian struggle was neither an ethnic conflict nor an Abkhaz liberation war. This was only an Abkhaz plot against the Georgians. As it is seen, there was no consensus on the reasons for the eruption of this conflict. This was the most important reason for the escalation of this dispute to an armed conflict and the prevention of a political settlement for the dispute.

The economic interests of Georgia have also played an important role in this interethnic dispute. For the Georgians, Abkhazia is one of the major outlets to the Black Sea, and Sukhumi is the main port which the Georgians can easily use for commercial purposes. Furthermore, the railway that links Tbilisi to Novorossisk which permits the Russian-Georgian economic relations, is located in the Abkhaz territories. Thus, from the Georgian point of view, the Tbilisi administration's attitude towards Abkhazia can be seen as a reasonable policy.

As it is stated above, the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic dispute has affected the situation in Caucasia and Russia. In Caucasia, the major outcome of this ethnic dispute was the formation of the Confederation of the Northern Caucasian Peoples. This was a very important political development in the region that would affect the future status of the Transcaucasus. This Confederation was not a confederation of states or governments, but a confederation of peoples represented by local community rather than government

leaders. Its main objective was to unite the North Caucasian peoples, promote cultural cooperation, and provide an avenue for the peoples to help one another in case any one of them was under attack. This Confederation, particularly the Chechens, supported the Abkhaz against the Georgians, and played a significant role while the Abkhaz were recapturing territories from the Georgians. It is important to note here that the Chechens had the intention to establish a North Caucasian Republic in the region where Sukhumi would be its capital. From the Russian and the Georgian point of view, the formation of such a united front in the northern Caucasus would pose a threat to their security and interests in the region. Thus, throughout the conflict, the Russians and the Georgians reacted to the Confederation's participation in the conflict, and tried to prevent the assistance of these people to the Abkhaz; however, they failed. Today it appears that the Russian policy of *divide et impera* is being revived in a significant way to prevent the various peoples of the region from forming a united front against Russia. Furthermore, today's rapprochement between Russia and Georgia against the Chechen rebellion is the result of a fear of the formation of a united front in the northern Caucasus.

This case has also been a good example for examining the Russian nationality policy in the Transcaucasia during the Soviet and post-Soviet era. It shows the significance of ethnic disputes in formulating Moscow's nationality policy regarding its power strategy in the regions where such conflicts take place. This ethnic conflict has been used as a tool by the Russian administrations to consolidate Russian control in the northern Caucasus. The ethnonationalist struggle between the Georgians and the Abkhaz has enabled Moscow to exploit the dispute in order to justify Russian hegemonic and expansionist behavior in the region. By employing different nationality policies to suppress the ethnic turmoil, Russia has intervened in the domestic policy matters of the region and established its control over these territories.

In this respect, the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict has been one of the major determinants of the Russian nationality policy towards the northern Caucasus. Although the Russian approach to the crisis varied from time to time, and was shaped by different factors during the Soviet and post-Soviet era, all the Russian policies were the same in nature. The major rationale underlying the Russian response to the crisis has been the consolidation of Russian hegemony, and the formation of weak periphery vulnerable to the power politics of the strong center.

Being one of the important outlets of Russia to the entire Caucasus, and the Black Sea, northern Caucasia has been the traditional Russian sphere of influence in which Moscow devoted much of its interests to keep the region under the control. Thus, the conflict between the Georgian and the Abkhaz has constituted ground for Russian intervention in the domestic political matters of the region. On the pretext of settling the dispute, and defending the parties to the conflict, Russia has played one people against the other, and followed a *divide et impera* policy over these territories.

No doubt, the northern Caucasus has been the traditional realm of Russia in every period of history. However, the Russian approach to the question has varied from time to time depending upon the political conditions of the region. During the Soviet period, being the only major power of the region, Russia did not permit any kind of armed conflict between the Georgians and the Abkhaz. By using nationality policies, Moscow administrations tried to suppress the nationalist aspirations of parties to the conflict. From time to time, Russia supported one side against the other, and wanted to balance the situation by its strict command and control system. The preservation of political stability in the northern Caucasus was Russia's main purpose. From Moscow's perspective, political instabilities in the region were posing a great threat to the Russian security and interests in the region.

An overall analysis on the Russian attitude towards the conflict in the Soviet-era shows that in the first years of the Soviet period, Russians have supported the Georgians and pursued a "Georgianization" policy against the Abkhaz. By behaving so, Russia wanted to preserve the stability in these regions by supporting the strong side against the weak, because these were the first years of the Soviet Union and such a conflict would pose a threat to the very existence of the Union. However, as time passed, this Russian approach created a strong Georgian nationalism in the region, and reached to a level that threatened the Moscow administration. From that time onwards, Russia started to give significant concessions to the Abkhaz, and supported them against Georgian nationalism by applying a "Abkhazization" policy in the region. At this time, Russia wanted to prevent the expansion of Georgian nationalism by supporting the weak side against the strong. As it is seen, although the Russian strategy varied from time to time, the major aim underlying the Russian approach to the question was the same: the preservation of stability, and the consolidation of the Russian hegemony in the Transcaucasus.

However, the Russian policy of preserving the political stability in the northern Caucasus seemed to change after the withdrawal of Russia from the region. From that time onwards, the major aim of Russia has been the creation of political instability in the region. For this purpose, Russia has implicitly supported ethnic tensions in the newly established states of the post-Soviet era. With this new version of Russian strategy, the nationality problems which have their origins in the diverse ethnic composition of the population have been used as a pawn for Russian expansionist and interventionist policies. By pursuing such a new strategy, Russia created a ground to be invited to Transcaucasia for settling the dispute.

With the escalation of the Georgian-Abkhaz ethnic conflict to a war in 1992, the inhabitants of the northern Caucasus have witnessed the new versions of old Russian

imperialistic aims in their territories. However, Russia did not pursue a clear-cut policy by supporting one side or another in order to suppress the conflict. On the contrary, Russia explicitly supported each side to escalate the dispute, which in turn, prepared the ground for Russian intervention in the conflict as the guarantor of peace and stability in the region. When compared with the Soviet period, Russia exerted its control not by military means but by political maneuvers in which it easily achieved the same results of its traditional *divide et impera* policy in the region. At this time, Russia, upon the request of the parties, acted as a mediator for settling the dispute by sending CIS peace-keeping troops, the majority of whom were Russians. As a result, the Russian military power has been reinstalled in the Georgian territories which gave Russia an opportunity to consolidate its political and military power in Georgia.

It is paradoxical that while the Russian troops entered the territories of Georgia under the name of the CIS peace-keeping troops, the international community did not take radical steps to prevent the Russian penetration to Georgia. Moreover, they recognized the Russian peace-keeping role in the region, and supported the Russian maneuvers to settle the conflict. With this move, the international community confirmed that northern Caucasia was a traditional realm of Russia, and Russia had the right to intervene in these conflicts as a regional guarantor.

From another point of view, one should think that this case was very important for the future status of the Russian Federation. As it was stated before, it constituted a threat to Russian interests in the Transcaucasus, but it was also a potential threat to the territorial integrity of Russia. If Russia would not be able to put an end to the war in Georgia, the war could spread to the southern Russia. The Russian Federation has numerous autonomous republics within its borders, thus the Abkhaz nationalist movement could raise popular demands for independence within the Russian Federation

itself. By suppressing the conflict, Russia sent a message to the non-Russian nationalities to be loyal to the Moscow administration. Nobody knows whether the non-Russian nationalities received Moscow's message, but the eruption of the Chechen crisis late in 1994 proved the Russian concern right about the expansion of popular demands for independence in the northern Caucasus. From that time onwards, as the legacy of the past, the Russian Federation turned its face to a separatist ethnic conflict in its own territories which threatened its territorial integrity. It is obvious that the Abkhaz struggle against the Georgians has increased the Chechen nationalist feelings against the Russians. Perhaps, the Chechen resistance against the Moscow administration is the second step for the formation of the North Caucasian Republic.

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## NOTES

### NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

- <sup>1</sup> For further discussions on that debate, see, Dimitri Simes, "The Return of Russian History," Foreign Affairs 73 (January/February 1994), 67-78.
- <sup>2</sup> The term 'Transcaucasian states' refers to the countries of the Caucasus including Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- <sup>3</sup> Suzanne Crow, "Russia Asserts Its Strategic Agenda," RFE/RL Research Report 2 (December 17, 1993), 1-8.
- <sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of Russian Foreign-Policy Strategy formulation during this period, see, Suzanne Crow, The Making of Foreign Policy In Russia Under Yeltsin (Munich: RFE/RL Research Institute Monograph Series, 1993); and also see, Martin Klatt, "Russians In the 'Near Abroad'," RFE/RL Research Report 3 (August 19, 1994), 33-44.
- <sup>5</sup> For discussions of the transition period from Soviet era to post-Soviet era, see, Jonathan Aves, Post-Soviet Transcaucasia (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993), 1-3.
- <sup>6</sup> Martin N. Katz, "Nationalism and the Legacy of Empire," Current History (October 1994), 327-331.
- <sup>7</sup> Crow, "Russia Asserts Its Strategic Agenda," 4.
- <sup>8</sup> For further discussions on Machiavelli's thought, see, Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince and the Discourses, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XXV-XXVII.
- <sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion on the subject 'hegemonic power', see, Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1974), 113-120.
- <sup>10</sup> For further discussions on the theory of 'Hegemonic Stability', see, Robert O. Keohane, "The Theory of Hegemonic Stability and Changes in International Economic Regimes," in Change In the International System ed. Ole Holsti, Randolph Siverson, and Alexander L. George (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 131-162; Suzan Strange, "The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony," International Organization, 41 (Autumn 1987), 551-574; Isabelle Grunberg, "Exploring the 'Myth' of Hegemonic Stability," International Organization, 44 (Autumn, 1990), 431-477.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Kennedy, The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers (New York: Random House, 1987), 112-158.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> For further geographical information on Georgia and Abkhazia, see, Encyclopedia Americana 12 (Washington, DC.: Croler International Inc., 1984), 533-534; Encyclopedia Britannica 7 (London: William Benton Publisher, 1978), 1132-33; Richard B. Dobson, "Georgia and the Georgians," Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities, ed. Zev Katz (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 161.

<sup>2</sup> P.L. Dash, Travails of Perestroika-The Breakaway Syndrome (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1992), 233-234.

<sup>3</sup> Stephan K. Batalden and Sandra L. Batalden, "Georgia," The Newly Independent States of Eurasia-Handbook of Former Soviet Republics (Canada: Oryx Press, 1993), 111-112.

<sup>4</sup> Lee Schwartz, "USSR Nationality Redistribution by Republic, 1979-1989: From Published Results of the 1989 All-Union Census," Soviet Geography 32 (April 1991), 215-216.

<sup>5</sup> "Abkhaz," An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, ed. James S. Olsen, (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, "Mediators for Transcaucasia's Conflicts," The World Today (May 1993), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Wixman, The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1984), 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> "Georgia," An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, ed. James S. Olsen, (London:Greenwood Press, 1994), 240-41.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that although the Georgian is the only literary language among them, Mingrelians have an original language which is part of a separate branch of the Southern Caucasian group of Ibero-Caucasian family. It is also spoken by the Muslim Laz who live in the Ajar Autonomous Republic.

<sup>10</sup> Olsen, Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Olsen, Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, 241-42. For more information on ethnic groups of Georgia, see, Dobson, "Georgia and the Georgians," 163-169.

<sup>12</sup> Wixman, The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook, 24.

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- 13 Wixman, The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook, 24-25.
- 14 Shireen Hunter, Post-Soviet Transition in the Transcaucasus: Regional and International Implications (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 1994), 55-56.
- 15 On the origins of the Abkhaz and their dispute with Georgians, see, Ann Sheehy, "Recent Events in Abkhazia Mirror the Complexities of National Relations in the USSR," RFE/FL Research Report 141 (26 June 1978), 1-3; Georg Amicba, Ortaçağ'da Abhazlar, Lazlar, translated by Hayri Ersoy, (İstanbul: Nart Yayıncılık, 1993).
- 16 John Colarusso, "Abkhazia," Central Asian Survey 14 (1) (March 1995), 75-77; B.G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership," Central Asian Survey 12(3) (July 1993), 267-275.
- 17 Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği. Abhazya Gerçeği (Ankara: Kafdağı Yayınları, 1992), 5-6; for further discussions on the origins of Circassians, see, H. Ersoy and A. Kamacı, Çerkes Tarihi (İstanbul: Tüm Zamanlar Yayıncılık, 1990), 8-23; H. Ersoy, Dili, Edebiyatı ve Tarihi ile Çerkesler, (İstanbul: Nart Yayıncılık, 1993); Şerafettin Terim, Kafkas Tarihinde Abhazlar ve Çerkeslik Mefhumu, (İstanbul: Murat Yayınevi, 1976).
- 18 Olsen, An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, 5-7.
- 19 For further discussion on the claims of the parties, see, Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 267-277.
- 20 For further discussions on the views of these authors, see, Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 269-270; see Olsen, An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires, 6.
- 21 R. Klimiashvili, "What Happened in Abkhazia: A Georgian View Point," Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle 8 (October 1989), 8-9.
- 22 Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 7-8.
- 23 On Abkhazia and the Abkhaz within the history of Georgia, see, W.E.D. Allen, A History of the Georgian People: From the Beginning Down to the Russian Conquest in the Nineteenth Century (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1932), 25-43.
- 24 "Troubles in Transcaucasia: The Abkhazian Unrest," Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle 8 (May 1989), 1.
- 25 Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 8.
- 26 Colarusso, "Abkhazia," 77.
- 27 Klimiashvili, "A Georgian View Point," 9.
- 28 It is estimated that there are currently 400,000 Abkhaz people living in Turkey, see, Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 9.

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- 29 "The Abkhazian Unrest," 1.
- 30 J.W. Robert Parsons, The Emergence and Development of the National Question in Soviet Georgia, 1801-1921 (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1987), 522-526.
- 31 Later, Ilya Chavchavadze, Georgian poet and essayist, and his advocates became known as *Pirveli Dasi* (First Group) to distinguish them from the more radical *Meore Dasi* (Second Group) founded in 1869 by Giorgi Tsereteli, poet and publicist. Both of these circles were more moderate than *Mesame Dasi*. For more information on these political groups, see, David Marshall Lang, A Modern History of Soviet Georgia (London and New York: Thames and Hudson and Praeger, 1966), 109-129.
- 32 In 1898, the militant wing of *Mesame Dasi* gained adherence of a former student of the Tbilisi Theological Seminary-Josef Dzhughashvili, the future Stalin. On Stalin's childhood and youth, see, Bertram Wolfe, Three Who Made a Revolution (New York: Dial Press, 1961).
- 33 Parsons, National Question in Soviet Georgia, 1801-1921, 527.
- 34 Gueorgui Otyrba, "War in Abkhazia: The Regional Significance of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict," National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia, ed. Roman Szporluk (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 284.
- 35 The Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was founded in May 1917 and became in November 1917 the Mountain Republic, see Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 278.
- 36 Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 278-279.
- 37 The peoples of the North Caucasus believed that the Transcaucasian Federation of the South Caucasian Peoples could not exist as an independent state without links with the territory of the peoples of Daghestan and the North Caucasus. According to them, it was very dangerous to divide the region into separate states, using only ethnic differences in the strictest sense as a basis. Thus, from the start of the Revolution, the people of the North Caucasus directed all their efforts towards creating a united Caucasian Federation, made up of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and the North Caucasus. However, as a result of their internal problems, and tense relations between themselves, the idea of bringing these peoples closer together became unsuccessful. Moreover, the occupation of the North Caucasian territories by the White Army in 1919, and later by the Red Army put an end to this idea.
- 38 For further discussions on North Caucasus after the Bolshevik Revolution, see, Vassan-Giray Jabagi, "Revolution and Civil War in the North Caucasus-End of the 19th-Beginning of the 20th Century," Central Asian Survey 10(12) (1991), 119-132; see also, Haidar Bammate, "The Caucasus and the Russian Revolution: From a Political Viewpoint," Central Asian Survey 10 (4), 1991, 1-29.

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- 39 For a detailed account on events during the Zhordania era, see, Parsons, The National Question in Soviet Georgia, 1801-1921, 500-533; Dash, The Breakaway Syndrome, 237-243; Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 277-278.
- 40 For further discussions on British occupation of Batumi, see, Briton Cooper Busch, Mudros to Lausanne: Britain's Frontier in West Asia, 1918-1923 (New York: Albany, 1976), 106-123.
- 41 C. Kandelaki, The Georgian Question Before the Free World (Acts, Documents, Evidence) (Paris: Toulon Press, 1953), 182-190.
- 42 Parsons, The National Question in Soviet Georgia, 1801-1921, 541; for further information on Russian advance to Georgian and Caucasian territories, see, Stephan Blank, "The Soviet Conquest of Georgia," Central Asian Survey 12(1) (1993), 33-46; Stephan Blank, "The Formation of the Soviet North Caucasus, 1918-1924," Central Asian Survey 12(1) (1993), 13-32.
- 43 Firuz Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-1921 (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 203.
- 44 Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 12.
- 45 Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 281,
- 46 Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 13.
- 47 1925 Constitution of the Abkhaz SSR is comprised of twenty-one sections and one hundred and sixteen articles. On 23 July 1992, parliament of the Abkhaz ASSR adopted a resolution and 'Soviet' and 'Socialist' epithets were removed from 1925 Constitution, and it was approved as the Constitution of Democratic Abkhaz Republic. For a detailed account on 1925 Constitution, see, Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 31.

### NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

- <sup>1</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd Publishers, 1989), 262-263.
- <sup>2</sup> Suny argues that Beria's power stemmed from his personal relationship with Stalin and the services he was able to provide his patron. While there were so many senior and orthodox party members on the scene, he was appointed by Stalin to run Transcaucasia. He may have been chosen precisely because he would be able to break through the family circles in Transcaucasia and guarantee that the Kremlin's writ would prevail in the republic. As a loyal client of his patron Stalin, Beria actively and enthusiastically involved himself in the

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- development of Stalin's cult. For more information on Beria, see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 263-265.
- <sup>3</sup> Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği. Abhazya Gerçeği (Ankara: Kafdağı Yayınları, 1992), 14; for a detailed discussions on the 'Great Purge', see, J. Arch Getty, Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Robert Conquest, The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties (London: MacMillan, 1968), Chapter I.
- <sup>4</sup> Catherine Dale, "Turmoil in Abkhazia: Russian Responses," RFE/RL Research Report 2 (August 27, 1993), 49.
- <sup>5</sup> For further discussions on Stalin Constitution, see, J. Stalin, Marksizm ve Ulusal Sorun ve Sömürgeler Sorunu (Ankara: Sol Yayınları, 1976), 383-391, During Brezhnev period, a new constitution was put into effect in 1977. However the status of Abkhazia remained the same. In accordance with this constitution in 1978, the new constitutions of Abkhaz ASSR and Georgian SSR were adopted and remained effective until the 1992.
- <sup>6</sup> The shifting emphasize from Georgianization to Russification can be seen even in the alphabet used for written Abkhaz. In 1928, the Latin alphabet was first used to create a written alphabet. The Georgian alphabet was substituted in 1938 (at a time when Cyrillic was being introduced as base for the writing system of all the 'young written languages') and this was replaced by Cyrillic (the Russian alphabet) in 1954, see, B. George Hewitt, "Abkhazia: A problem of Identity and Ownership," Central Asian Survey 12(3) (July 1993), 281.
- <sup>7</sup> The official language of Georgia is Georgian, not Russian, and this presents special problems for the Abkhaz, Abkhaz is a language unrelated to Georgian or Russian. Relatively few Abkhaz speak Georgian-only 1.4 percent according to 1979 census. Ever fewer Georgians living in Abkhazia know Abkhaz, 0.3 percent. Instead, both groups tend to learn Russian as a second language. Fully 75 percent of the Abkhaz claim a fluency in Russian, while 56 percent of the Georgians in Abkhazia had the same facility. It is obvious that 25 percent of the Abkhaz and 44 percent of the Georgians living in Abkhazia are unable to communicate with one another. In line with the ethnic composition of the population, the Abkhaz republic has three official languages-Abkhaz, Georgian, Russian. For more information, see, Darrell Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia," Central Asian Survey, 4(4) (September 1985), 55.
- <sup>8</sup> Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 53.
- <sup>9</sup> Beria's replacement in Georgia was Kandida Nestoris dze Charkviani, who served both as head of the party and the Tbilisi Committee. It is difficult to determine what his connections with Beria were once the old leader left for Moscow. Later developments suggest that Charkviani acted as a client of Beria, maintained the personality cult of Beria in Georgia. Akaki dze Mgeladze was a full member of the Georgian Central Committee. In March 1952, the First Secretary since 1938, Charkviani was replaced by Akaki dze Mgeladze. See, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 288-290.

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- 10 B. G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia: A problem of Identity and Ownership," Central Asian Survey 12(3) (July 1993), 281.
- 11 Valter Kolarz, Russia and Her Colonies (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), 237.
- 12 For a full account on these events, see, Aleksandr M. Nekrich, The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and the fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War (New York: Norton, 1978), 42-105.
- 13 Ibid., 287. This article was published first in a Communist newspaper in Tbilisi on 14 December 1945, and in Pravda on 20 December 1945. For the Turkish translation of the full document of this article, see, Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği, Abhazya Gerçeği, 42-50.
- 14 Strobe Talbott, trans. and ed., Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), 295-296.
- 15 This was announced in Pravda on 19 July 1953; cited in Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 285.
- 16 Talbott, Khrushchev Remembers, Vol.1, 250.
- 17 Politburo members in Moscow arrested him in June 1953 and had him shot. The elimination of Beria's supporters in Tbilisi was completed in September 1953; see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 287.
- 18 For further discussions on Stalinist period's impact on Georgia, see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 290-292.
- 19 Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 54.
- 20 For a full discussion on Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy, see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 292-295.
- 21 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 301.
- 22 John Ducoli, "The Georgian Purges," Caucasian Review 6 (1958), 58-59.
- 23 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 301.
- 24 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 294.
- 25 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 305.
- 26 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 294.
- 27 Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 54.

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- 28 Richard Dobson, "Georgia and the Georgians," Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities (New York: Free Press, 1975), 185.
- 29 Helene Carrere d'Encausse, Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt (New York: Newsweek Books, 1979), 144.
- 30 For a detailed description on Georgian nationalism, see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 295-300.
- 31 Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 282.
- 32 Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 58.
- 33 Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 58.
- 34 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 306.
- 35 Gregory Grossman, "The Second Economy of the USSR," The Problems of Communism 26(5) (September -October 1977), 25-40.
- 36 For the full account of these events, see, Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 306-308.
- 37 For Gamsakhurdia's dissent nationalism in Georgia, see, Nadia Diuk and Adrian Karatnycky, New Nations Rising (England: John Wiloy& Sons Inc., 1993), 147-148.
- 38 Ronald Grigor Suny, "Transcaucasia:Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society," The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society, ed. Mark Beassing (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 241-244.
- 39 Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation, 308-309.
- 40 Helene Carrere d'Encausse, The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of the Nations trans. Franklin Philip (New York: A New Republic Book Basic Books, 1993), 76.
- 41 E. Bagramov, trans., "A Factual Survey of the Soviet Nationalities Policy," Reprints from the Soviet Press 27(5) (September 15, 1978), 49.
- 42 A. Shtromas, "The Legal Position of the Soviet Nationalities and their Territorial Units According to the 1977 Constitution of the USSR," Russian Review 37(3) (July 1978), 271.
- 43 d'Encausse, The Triumph of the Nations, 76.
- 44 Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 282.
- 45 For 'Lychny Declaration', see, Kafkas Kültür Derneği. Sürgünde Kafkasya (İstanbul: Kafkas Kültür Derneği, 1990), 6-17.

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<sup>46</sup> Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 60-61.

<sup>47</sup> Catherine Dale, "Turmoil in Abkhazia: Russian Responses," RFE-RL Research Report 2(34) (August 27, 1993), 49.

<sup>48</sup> R. Klimiashvili, "What happened in Abkhazia: A Georgian View Point," Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle (October 8, 1989), 9.

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Abkhazization policy from the perspectives of economics and politics, see, Slider, "The Case of Abkhazia," 62-64.

<sup>50</sup> Dale, "Turmoil In Abkhazia," 49.

<sup>51</sup> Klimiashvili, "A Georgian View Point," 10.

<sup>52</sup> Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 282-283.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Daniel C. Diller, ed., Russia and the Independent States (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993), 108.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on reorganization of the leadership in Gorbachev era, see, d'Encausse, The Triumph of the Nations, 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> In Gorbachev's administration team, except the Georgian, Eduard Shevardnadze; the Azerbaijani, Heidar Aliyev; Viktor Chebrikov, the head of the KGB in 1987 who at one time worked in Ukraine; and General Yazov, the Minister of Defense who for a short time commanded the military district of Central Asia, no member of the Politburo and no Secretary had had any experience in the border countries of the USSR. For a detailed account on the composition of the Politburo, see, d'Encausse, The Triumph of the Nations, 10-12.

<sup>4</sup> d'Encausse, The Triumph of the Nations, 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the objectives of Glasnost and Perestroika, see, Diller, Russia and the Independent States, 108-111.

<sup>6</sup> See the interview with Shevardnadze published in the Sunday Times Magazine (November 28, 1993), 16.

<sup>7</sup> d'Encausse, The Triumph of the Nations, 6-8. For more information on the nationality question during the Gorbachev era, see, R. Pearson, "Nationalities: Decolonising the Last Empire." The

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- 71 Later, at a press conference, the coup plotters were explaining the reasons for this coup. The members of the eight-man Emergency Committee were Yanayev, KGB Chairman Kryuchkov, Prime Minister Pavlov, Interior Minister Pugo, Defense Minister Yazov, Communist Party Central Committee Secretary Oleg Baklanov, and Central Committee members Vasily Starodubtsev and Aleksandr Tizyakov. Yanayev was stating that the situation had "gone out of control in the USSR," and that the group had no alternative but to take resolute action to stem the slide into disaster. The committee, he continued, was determined to restore law and order immediately. See, Diller, Russia and the Independent States, 129-130.
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- 84 Fuller, "Eduard Shevardnadze's Via Dolorosa," 18; "Georgian National Guard in Conflict with Gamsakhurdia," Report on the USSR, 3(35) (August 24, 1991), 76.
- 85 Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 288; this confederation composed of Abkhaz, Abazinian, Avar, Adyge, Auxov-Chechen, Dargwa, Kabardianian, Lak, Ossetians, Cherkess, Chechen, Shapsugh peoples. For further information on the provisions of 'The Treaty for a Confederative Union of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus', Hewitt, "Abkhazia," 304-309. A Kabardianian, Musa Shanibov, was elected president of the confederation on November 3; Yusuf Soslambekov, the Chechen deputy chairman of the rebel Executive Committee of the All-National Congress of the Chechen People, was chosen as chairman of the Caucasian Parliament. He also heads the Defense Committee of the Caucasus. The congress came out

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unambiguously in favor of the independence of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus and Abkhazia and gave its support to the Chechen "revolution." "Confederation of Mountain Peoples of Caucasus Proclaimed," Report on the USSR, 3(46) (November 15, 1991), 33.

<sup>86</sup> Fuller, "Eduard Shevardnadze's Via Dolorosa," 19; Elizabeth Fuller, "Abkhazia on the Brink of Civil War," RFE/RL Research Report 1 (35) (September 4, 1992), 3-4.

<sup>87</sup> Keesing's Record of World Events, 38(1), 38731; Keesing's Record of World Events, 38(2), 38774.

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## NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> Keesing's Record of World Events, 38(1), 38731.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, "Eduard Shevardnadze's Via Dolorosa," RFE/RL Research Report 2(43) (October 29, 1993), 18; FBIS/SOV (November 3, 1992), 68.

<sup>3</sup> "Gamsakhurdia's Status in Armenia Unclear," RFE/RL Research Report (January 17, 1992), 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> "Gamsakhurdia Returns to Georgia," RFE/RL Research Report (January 24, 1992), 71.

<sup>5</sup> "Fighting Continues, Limited Cease-Fire Reached," RFE/RL Research Report (January 31, 1992), 69. It has been pointed out that one reason for Gamsakhurdia's support of Chechen President General Dzhakhar Dudaev was that the Georgians and the Ingush had a common enemy in the Ossetians. In addition, Gamsakhurdia and Dudaev both stood to gain from the creation of a Caucasian commonwealth that included Georgia; and both men had reason to feel personally betrayed by Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) President Boris Yeltsin. See, Ann Sheehy, "Power Struggle in Checheno-Ingushetia," Report on the USSR, No. 46, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> "Violence in Abkhazia," RFE/RL Research Report (February 25, 1992), 72.

<sup>7</sup> "Warning to Gamsakhurdia's Supporters," RFE/RL Research Report (February 21, 1992), 69.

<sup>8</sup> Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. 38, No. 2, 38774.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Dale, "Turmoil In Abkhazia: Russian Responses," RFE/RL Research Report 2 (34) (August 27, 1993), 49.

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- 12 Elizabeth Fuller, "Georgia Since Independence: Plus Ça Change," Current History (October 1993), 343. Georgia became a full member of the CSCE on 24 March 1992. Keesing's Record of World Events, Vol. 38, No. 3, 38827. It became a member of the UN on 31 July 1992, see, Summary of World Broadcasts (August 6, 1992), SU/1452, B/7.
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- 16 RFE/RL Research Report 1(26) (26 June 1992), 79.
- 17 Fuller, "Eduard Shevardnadze's Via Dolorosa," 19.
- 18 Neil Macfarlane, "Crisis and Opportunity in the Republic of Georgia," Canadian Foreign Policy 1(1) (Winter 1992/1993), 46.
- 19 Fuller, "Eduard Shevardnadze's Via Dolorosa," 19.
- 20 Jonathan Aves, Post-Soviet Transcaucasia (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993), 51.
- 21 Fuller, "Plus Ça Change," 344.
- 22 Aves, Post-Soviet Transcaucasia, 41.
- 23 Aves, Post-Soviet Transcaucasia, 41.
- 24 Summary of World Broadcasts (August 15, 1992), SU/1460, B/11.
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- 26 Summary of World Broadcasts (August 17, 1992), SU/1461, C1/5.
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- 39 Summary of World Broadcasts (September 4, 1992) SU/1477 C2/2
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- 41 RFE/RL Research Report 1(37) (September 18, 1992), 74-75.
- 42 Summary of World Broadcasts (Septembr 5, 1992), SU/1478 C2/3.
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- 48 For a detailed discussion on ethnic Russians in the 'Near Abroad', see, Martin Klatt, "Russians in the 'Near Abroad'" RFE/RL Research Report 3(32) (August 19, 1994), 33-44; also see, Pal Kolsto, "The New Russian Diaspora" Journal of Peace Research 30 (May 2, 1993). 201-204.

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- 58 Dale, "Turmoil In Abkhazia," 52-53.
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- 60 FBIS/SOV (December 31, 1992), 69.
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- 63 On Turkey's relations with Georgia, see, Paul Henze, Transcaucasia In Transition (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1991), 5-20; see, also Peri Pamir, "Turkey, the Transcaucasus and Central Asia," Security Dialogue 24(1) (March 1993), 24-30.
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- <sup>83</sup> Hunter, Post-Soviet Transition In the Transcaucasus, 87.
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- <sup>85</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(10) (March 5, 1993), 8.
- <sup>86</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(16) (April 5, 1993), 7-8.
- <sup>87</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(23) (May 24, 1993), 9.
- <sup>88</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(24) (June 10, 1993), 5.
- <sup>89</sup> RFE/RL Research Report, 2(28) (July 2, 1993), 6.
- <sup>90</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(28) (July 2, 1993), 7.
- <sup>91</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(30) (July 16, 1993), 6.
- <sup>92</sup> Keesing's Record of World Events, 39(7), 39569; Elizabeth Fuller, "Russia's Diplomatic Offensive In the Transcaucasus," RFE/RL Research Report (October 1, 1993), 31.
- <sup>93</sup> For further discussions on 'Sochi Agreement', see, Colarusso, "Abkhazia," 91.
- <sup>94</sup> RFE/RL Research Report, 2(32) (August 6, 1993), 8.
- <sup>95</sup> Hürriyet, September 17, 1993, 17; Marguerite Johnson, "Power Play," TIME, September 27, 1993, 33.
- <sup>96</sup> On Shevardnadze's last days in Sukhumi, see, John Lloyd, "Georgia Suffers Another Martyred Moment," Financial Times (September 29, 1993), 5.
- <sup>97</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(40) (October 1, 1993), 8.
- <sup>98</sup> Lloyd, "Another Martyred Moment," 9.
- <sup>99</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(43) (October 15, 1993), 7.
- <sup>100</sup> RFE/RL Research Report 2(43) (October 22, 1993), 8.
- <sup>101</sup> Dennis Sammut, The Birth of the Georgian State: Giving Georgia A Second Chance (London: VERTIC, 1994), 11; FBIS/SOV, September 17, 1992, 54.
- <sup>102</sup> Colarusso, "Abkhazia," 92. On 1 March 1994, the Georgian Parliament ratified Georgia's membership of the CIS.

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- 105 For more information on this Memorandum, see, Pauline Overeem, "Report of a UNPO Coordinated Human Rights Mission to Abkhazia and Georgia," Central Asian Survey 14(1) (1995), 153-154.
- 106 RFE/RL Research Report 3(3) (January 5, 1994), 11.
- 107 Sammut, Giving Georgia A Second Chance, 6.
- 108 Colarusso, "Abkhazia," 92.
- 109 RFE/RL Research Report 3(4) (February 4, 1994), 8.
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- 115 Hunter, Post-Soviet Transition In The Transcaucasus, 127-128.
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