

SERGEY MARKEDONOV

no

7

XENOPHON PAPER

THE BIG CAUCASUS CONSEQUENCES OF THE “FIVE DAY WAR”, THREATS AND POLITICAL PROSPECTS



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CONTENTS

Preface	7
<i>Dimitrios Triantaphyllou</i>	
INTRODUCTION	9
Chapter 1. A SPECIAL REGION IN EURASIA	11
Chapter 2. REGIONAL CONFLICTS: RECIPROCITY	15
Chapter 3. AN AREA OF GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION	19
Chapter 4. GEORGIAN – RUSSIAN CONFRONTATION: FROM LOCAL SKIRMISHES TO A CONFLICT OF GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE	25
Chapter 5. FAREWELL TO THE NINETIES.....	31
Chapter 6. NEIGHBOURS: DIFFERENT REACTIONS	35
Chapter 7. GEORGIA: THREATS OF SEPARATISM OR GROWTH OF REGIONALISM?	39
Chapter 8. AZERBAIJAN: THE CHALLENGES POSED BY DIVIDED ETHNIC GROUPS	43
Chapter 9. ARMENIA: PROMOTER OF SEPARATISM OR GUARANTOR OF SELF-DETERMINATION?.....	47
Chapter 10. THE RUSSIAN CAUCASUS: HAS A NEW SEPARATIST CHALLENGE EMERGED?	49
Chapter 11. ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA: NEW POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND TASKS FOR RUSSIA	53
Chapter 12. THE WEST’S APPROACH TO THE CAUCASUS: CONTRADICTIONS AND DIFFERING VIEWS	57
Chapter 13. TURKEY’S “REDISCOVERY” OF THE CAUCASUS.....	61

Chapter 14. IRANIAN INTEREST63

CONCLUSIONS

Crisis in the Caucasus: International Consequences..... 65

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....69

ANNEXES73

• Annex I. About the Author 73

• Annex II. Abbreviations 74

PREFACE

Clashes over borders and identities within the independent post-Soviet states of the Caucasus have been an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their subsequent development and the prospects for resolution or resumption of the ethno-political conflicts have been shaped by the political trajectories of the states involved as well as the profound transformation of the geopolitical dynamics that have taken place during the last years in the region. The war of August 2008 between the Russian Federation and Georgia marked this ongoing process of the decomposition of the post-World War II global construct while sending, at the same time, a strong signal to regional and extra-regional actors concerning the security processes affecting stability in the Caucasus.

Sergey Markedonov, a prescient analyst of the Caucasus, assesses in this *Xenophon Paper* the possible implications of the August 2008 “five day war”. He initiates a discussion on the region’s “unfreezing of the conflicts” and provides an in-depth description of the existent non-recognised state entities and the other ethno-political conflicts with which the Caucasus is ridden. The author also explores the perspectives of major regional and extra-regional stakeholders in the area and the ambitious policies they deploy at the moment: the Russian stabilisation project, the American “Greater Middle East” project and the European Union social and economic (soft security) project.

The significance of the swift recognition of South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence by Moscow is also extensively discussed since this recognition has the potential of setting important precedents for the future. Most importantly, the implications of these issues are assessed not only in the context of the separatist movements in Georgia, but in the wider framework of the “Big Caucasus”. This perspective also takes into account the complex security interactions between the three South Caucasus states and the existing constituencies of the Russian Federation on the territory of the North Caucasus, while also considering the reaction of two other significant regional stakeholders – Turkey and Iran.

In the twilight zone between war and peace, the author sheds some light on the most recent developments taking place in the Caucasus region, by explaining both the dynamics leading up to the “five day war” and the significance that it has in the re-shaping of the political and security realities in the “Big Caucasus”.

While the author’s assessment and conclusions might not find some scholars of the region in agreement, it should be stressed that Sergey Markedonov is one of the few experts from the Russian Federation that is always willing and able to expound in open debate the Russian foreign policy position. As such Sergey’s important contribution is part of the ICBSS’ constant effort to make the *Xenophon Paper* series as diverse and representative as possible of the many existing perspectives on issues of relevance to the wider Black Sea area.

Dimitrios Triantaphyllou
Athens, May 2009

INTRODUCTION

In August 2008, the Caucasus region became the focal point of international relations. This is true even if it may sound exaggerated. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 when borders between the republics of the former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) were defined and admitted as interstate boundaries the principles of the so-called “Belovezh’e nationalism” (derived from the Belovezh’e Agreement on the USSR dissolution) were not applied in the South Caucasus for the very first time. Thus, the first precedent of a revision of borders between the former USSR republics was established here. For the first time in Eurasia and particularly in the Caucasus region, partially-recognised states had emerged – their independence is denied by the United Nations (UN), but it is recognised by the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the UN Security Council. After the “five day war” in South Ossetia, August 2008, Moscow demonstrated its willingness to play the role of a revisionist state for the first time since 1991. Until 2008, the foreign policy of Russia was the policy of a country whose top priority was to defend the existing status quo. Moscow’s attempt to change this approach incurred changes to its relations with the West [the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU)]. However nowadays this problem is not limited by rhetorical figures unlike Boris Yeltsin’s public performances at the Istanbul OSCE Summit (18 November 1999) and Vladimir Putin’s at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (10 February 2007).

Thus, the South Caucasus has formed the stage for the development of a new status quo, not only for this region alone but also for the entire post-Soviet area. That is why this region has attracted a great deal of attention. Will the “five day war” be the starting point of a new confrontation between Russia and the West? Will it trigger new inter-ethnic conflicts within Georgia, in the neighbouring countries, and between the states of the Caucasus region? Will the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia set a precedent for ethno-political self-determination in the Russian North Caucasus? Will the Russia – Georgia conflict impact on other regional conflicts (for example, on the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh)? Will Moscow allow the partially-recognised republics to build their own statehood and what influence will Russia exert on the internal political situation in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia in general? These are the basic questions prompted by the events of the “hot summer” of 2008. In order to answer these questions it is necessary to consider the main challenges posed to the security of the “Big Caucasus”.

CHAPTER 1

A SPECIAL REGION IN EURASIA

Since the first days of its existence as an independent state, Russia pointed out the importance of the South Caucasus as an area crucial for its priority of strategic interests. The Russian Federation has claimed a special role in the Caucasian geopolitics not just – and at the same time not so much – in its capacity as a successor of the USSR. Despite the lack of any relevant official doctrine, Russia's policy clearly suggests the above (e.g. peacekeeping activity, interference in internal problems of Georgia and Azerbaijan in the beginning of the 1990s). Moscow's perseverance to preserve its domination over this part of the post-Soviet area is perplexing.

In other places of the post-Soviet space Russia acted in the 1990s – early 2000s in accordance with the approach which experts define as "Primakov's Doctrine".¹ This doctrine posits that in a situation where the state is not ready for a tough confrontation with the biggest international players (US, EU, regional powers), international law can serve the interests of Russia, and Russia can benefit from referring to its predecessor – the USSR – which had actively taken part in shaping the international legal framework. "Primakov's Doctrine," which had not been conceptualised or even verbalised, became the practical approach of the Russian policy regarding the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This explains not only Russia's intention to contain the UN, the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) within the international legal framework, but also its will to refrain from a revision of the state borders between the former Soviet Republics, and to minimally interfere with the domestic affairs of the new post-Soviet entities. Russia's passive stance in the CIS, highlighted by many Russian experts, is founded exactly on this premise. According to the well-grounded remarks made by the Head of the Russian representation of the World Security Institute, Ivan Safranchuk, "in the 1990s Russia constantly reiterated the thesis that the CIS constituted the highest priority in its foreign policy, but in practice these declarations were not supported by real steps."²

However, there was one exception to "Primakov's Doctrine": the South Caucasus. In this region, Russian diplomacy tried to expand its political and economic presence. Russia actively took part in the internal political processes of Georgia (the struggle of the supporters of the first Georgian President, Zviad Gamsakhrdia, and of the next President, Eduard Shevardnadze, in the early 1990s) and of Azerbaijan (counter-action against the policy of the People's Front in 1992-93). Russia contributed decisively to the cessation of the armed hostilities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh and to the "freezing" of the conflicts. In the early 1990s, Russia renounced

1 Ivan Safranchuk, "The Russian Policy on the Post-Soviet Space" [in Russian], *Bolshaya Igra* 7, no. 2 (2007): 13.

2 Ibid., 13-14.

without long hesitations any territorial claims to Ukraine or Kazakhstan, although from an ethnic and a cultural point of view Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan and Crimea are much closer to Russia than the South Caucasus. Much more passive was the Russian policy regarding the Baltics despite the existence of important Russian communities in Latvia and Estonia. According to Anatol Lieven, British historian and expert in Russian and Soviet affairs, "before the Soviet Union collapsed, most Western observers confidently predicted that the Soviet establishment and the Russian people would fight to the death rather than allow Ukraine and other areas to become independent. Nothing of the sort occurred."³

Russia has been involved in the political processes of Central Asia to a much lesser extent (than in the South Caucasus). In 2001, Russia "agreed" to the American "invasion" in the region, and it does no longer put up any serious resistance to the "opening up" of the region by the Chinese. In the case of Transnistria the Russian Federation is ready to allow the internationalisation of the conflict settlement (there have been two guarantors of the peace process from the very beginning – Russia and Ukraine). But, the South Caucasus is a different case. Here, Russian diplomacy, in an effort to preserve its exclusive role in the settlement of the "frozen conflicts" and not to allow other "honest brokers" into this process, is prepared to the least possible extent to make compromises and concessions.

However, Russia's domination in the South Caucasus does not aim at its "imperial resurgence". Ensuring stability in the former Soviet Republics of Transcaucasia is a prerequisite for Russia's peaceful domestic development and for the preservation of its integrity.

Although it may sound exaggerated, Russia is a Caucasian state. Seven constituencies of the Russian Federation (Adygeya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia and Chechnya) are immediately situated on the territory of the North Caucasus and four other subjects (the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories, the Rostov region and Kalmykia) are situated at the steppe foothills of the Caucasus, while the Black Sea shore of the Krasnodar territory and the region of the Caucasian Mineral Waters of the Stavropol territory are part of the Caucasian region. The territory of the Russian North Caucasus is bigger than the three South Caucasian independent states. However, in the 1990s the region of the Big Caucasus (the Russian North Caucasus plus the three independent states of the South Caucasus) became the most unstable region of the entire former Soviet Union.

"'Security' is a word that has a private and public dimension. In the recent years security in both spheres has collapsed in the Caucasus region."⁴ It is difficult to disagree with this comment by Tom De Waal, expert at the War and Peace Institute in London. The notions of "Caucasus" and

3 Anatol Lieven, "To Russia with Realism: The White House Senselessly Risks a New Cold War," *The American Conservative*, 26 March 2007, 3.

4 Thomas De Waal, "Threats to the Caucasus Security" [in Russian], *Vestnik Evropy VII-VIII* (2003):8.

“conflicts” (as well as “Caucasus” and “war”, “Caucasus” and “refugees”) have become interwoven as demonstrated by the late Soviet and post-Soviet history. Five out of the six armed inter-ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet area took place in the Caucasus region: the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Georgia – Abkhazia, Georgia – South-Ossetia and Ossetia – Ingush conflicts, and finally the war (wars, to put it correctly) in Chechnya. None of these armed inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus have been settled up to the present. The conflict settlement in Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and the Prigorodny District of the Republic of Ossetia has not become an irreversible process. Beside the ongoing (“open”) conflicts in the Caucasus region, some latent (“hidden”) conflicts are also brewing here, from time to time escalating into the “open phase”. The Caucasus region has become a “supplier” of non-recognised state entities in the post-Soviet area (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in 1991-94 and 1996-99). Out of the four non-recognised states in the post-Soviet area three are situated in the Caucasus. Besides, there have been territories which have been left completely unchecked (“grey zones”). Some actually still exist in the Caucasus and are deprived of even non-recognised state institutions – for example the Kadar zone in Dagestan in 1998-99, the western parts of Georgia in the early 1990s, the Kodori Gorge (“the Abkhazian Svanetia”) up to the summer of 2006.

Moreover, over the past four years an “unfreezing” of the conflicts has been going on. Thus, it becomes clear that the “five day war” in August 2008 was not at all a manifestation of a newly emerging trend. Instead, it was the consequence of a series of changes that violated the status quo. Today the use of the expression “frozen conflict” to describe the situation in the South Caucasus is no longer correct. A “frozen conflict” presupposes the absence of any dynamics in its development (both positive and negative). However, there are such dynamics in the Caucasus region, albeit impossible to call them positive. The expression “unfreezing of the conflicts” denotes the change of the format of the conflict resolution (or the attempts to change it), and also the aspiration to destroy (or to infringe at least) the legal base which was created for the prevention of armed conflicts. Such attempts have been undertaken in South Ossetia since Spring/Summer 2004, in Abkhazia since 2006, and have resulted in violence. In Nagorno-Karabakh, in 2007 alone, the amount of violations of the ceasefire (which was declared in May 1994) increased threefold, while on 4 March 2008 we witnessed the heaviest fighting between the parties since the beginning of the ceasefire.

The Caucasus has also become one of the most militarised regions not only on the territory of the former Soviet Union, but also in the whole world. The independent states of the South Caucasus possess military capabilities which can be compared to the capabilities of an ordinary European state. The manpower of the Azerbaijani army numbers 95,000 men and the armed forces of Armenia are 53,000-strong. The maximum manpower of the Georgian army in 2007 numbered about 30,000 men.⁵

5 Anatoliy Tsyganok, “The Powderkeg of Eurasia: Militarization of the Caucasus is Fraught with Dangerous Consequences” [in Russian], *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 2 September 2009.

Apart from the military capabilities of the recognised states of the South Caucasus, three non-recognised state entities also have their own armed forces, comparable to those of the recognised states: the Abkhazian armed forces are 5,000-strong; the South Ossetian ones are 3,000-strong. From the point of view of their fire combat ability those armies are almost equal to the Georgian army. Georgia has about 100 tanks, Abkhazia has 60 tanks, 116 armored vehicles, 13 war planes and South Ossetia has 87 tanks; the number of heavy weapons (with calibre above 122 mm) is 117, 239 and 95 respectively. The Nagorno-Karabakh army (integrated with the Armenian military system) numbers 18,500-20,000 men, including citizens of Armenia serving there.⁶

Before August 2008, apart from the military capabilities of all recognised and non-recognised actors of the Caucasian “big game”, there were also peacekeeping forces in the region. In the area of the Georgia – Abkhazia conflict, Russian forces were deployed by virtue of a mandate by the Council of the Heads of the CIS states, and in the area of the Georgia – South Ossetia conflict the Russian military was acting on the basis of the four-party Dagomys agreements of 1992 (Georgia – Russia – South Ossetia – North Ossetia). After the “five day war” Russia has put an end to its peacekeeping operations. Having recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Kremlin transformed the military presence in those entities. Now Russia doesn’t play the role of an objective mediator. It’s the military-political patron of Abkhazia and South Ossetia proposing the Russian bases deployment. Thus the combined conflict potential of the North and South Caucasus can be compared to the Middle East conflict.

In the Russian North Caucasus the main challenge to regional security is posed by illegal armed formations (Chechen separatists), acts of sabotage, and terrorist jamaats in some other North Caucasian republics (*jamaats* “Shariat” and “Jennet” in Dagestan, *jamaats* of Karachay-Cherkessia, *jamaats* “Yarmouk” in Kabardino-Balkaria). In addition, there are various paramilitary groups (from militiamen, guards and security services of some high-ranking officials in the ethnic republics to neo-Cossack units in the “Russian Caucasus”).

6 Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

REGIONAL CONFLICTS: RECIPROCITY

Practically all ethno-political conflicts in the South of Russia are closely connected with conflicts in the former Soviet republics of Transcaucasia. This refers not only to open but also to latent conflicts. Nowadays, Tbilisi continues to dramatise the problem of Georgian (or rather, Megrelian) refugees from Abkhazia, but keeps quiet about the exodus of Ossetians from Georgia in the early 1990s. In pre-war Georgia, about 100,000 Ossetians lived outside South Ossetia, whereas in the former South Ossetian Autonomous District they numbered 63,200 (according to 1989 statistics). Ossetians were the fifth largest ethnic community in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, after Georgians, Armenians, Russians, and Azerbaijanis, while their overall number exceeded the number of Abkhazians who lived in concentrated settlements (according to the 1989 nationwide poll, there were 93,000 Abkhazians). Before the 1990-92 hostilities, Ossetians lived mainly in Tbilisi (33,318), Tskhinvali (31,537), Gori (8,222), and Rustavi (5,613).⁷

Today, there are about 30,000 Ossetians in Georgia. It is very difficult to make judgments about their real situation since no monitoring has been conducted for the past few years. However, there is no reason to trust Tbilisi's statements that the rights and freedoms of Georgia's ethnic Ossetians are fully guaranteed. Meanwhile, almost all refugees from Georgia's inland regions (including South Ossetian residents) have settled down in North Ossetia, which is a part of Russia (including in the Prigorodnyi District, which is being claimed by neighbouring Ingushetia). This section of North Ossetia's population became susceptible to the nationalist rhetoric of North Ossetian political leaders in the early 1990s.

During the Ossetian – Ingush conflict of 1992 (the first armed conflict on Russian soil), residents of Georgia's inland regions and South Ossetia played a rather active role. This accounts for the strong reaction of Russian leaders whenever Tbilisi undertakes any indiscrete actions or uses militarist rhetoric (for example, the statement by former Defense Minister, Irakly Okruashvili, about “celebrating the New Year in Tskhinvali”).⁸ New waves of refugees to North Ossetia would only serve to worsen Ossetian – Ingush relations.

The forcible displacement of Kvareli Avars from Georgia in the early 1990s created trouble spots in the north of Dagestan. The Avars, who were moving to the Kizlyar and Tarum areas of

7 International Crisis Group, “Georgia – South Ossetia: Refugee Return the Path to Peace,” *Europe Briefing*, no. 38, 19 April 2005, 4.

8 See “Okruashvili Intends to Celebrate the New Year in Tskhinvali” [in Russian], *Strana Ru.*, 2 May 2006, <http://old.strana.ru/stories/04/06/01/3507/280404.html>.

Dagestan, were confronted by ethnic Russians and Nogays. This resulted in a substantial outflow of Russians from the northern parts of Dagestan. The settlement of the “Chechen issue” is to a considerable degree contingent on the settlement of the situation in Georgia’s Akhmeta District (Pankisi Gorge). Therefore, establishing security in the Russian Caucasus is impossible without achieving stability in Georgia. The problems of the ethno-national development of the Dagestani people in Azerbaijan (Lezgins, Avars) have attracted special attention from/ are in the centre of attention of the power elite of Dagestan. During the 1990s, the “Chechen factor,” as well as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh seriously aggravated Russia–Azerbaijan bilateral relations.

The Russia – Georgia conflict, which reached its peak in August 2008, confirms and raises again the political role of the North Caucasus republics. The Chechen battalion “East” – just as the structural unit of the Russian Army – took active part in the offensive against the Georgian military forces. The representatives of the Circassian ethno-nationalist movements of the North Caucasus (first of all in Kabardino-Balkaria) were prepared to send their volunteers to the conflict zones. It was similar to the Georgia – Abkhazia war of 1992–93 when the victory of Abkhazia was achieved by the forces of the Confederation of the Caucasus Highland Peoples, consisting of representatives of movements of the North Caucasus republics. Last August, the participation of volunteers was not left unchecked. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs), capable of launching an appeal, made it explicit that they would not proceed without coordination with the Russian federal centre. But it became evident that the ethno-national regions of South Russia still possess significant potential to mobilise the population both at a political and a military level.

A different stance on the events in South Ossetia was adopted in Ingushetia (against a backdrop of general instability in the republic). On 16 August 2008, the well-known website the *Caucasian Knot* (Kavkazskiy uzel) published an article with the eloquent title “The war in South Ossetia reminded the inhabitants of Ingushetia of the tragic events of the Suburban (Prigorodnyi) District conflict”. This article referred to “inhabitants of Ingushetia with whom it had been possible to have a talk concerning the military events in South Ossetia and a stream of displaced immigrants to the Southern regions of Russia”. It stressed that people from Ingushetia did not express special sympathy for the inhabitants of South Ossetia, recalling the events of the Ossetian – Ingush conflict of 1992. It is necessary to note that refugees from South Ossetia did not arrive in Ingushetia, unlike in most other Russian regions. In addition, the correspondent of the *Caucasian Knot* quoted statements by several inhabitants of Ingushetia. Many of them are rather eloquent: “Now Russia feels regret for South Ossetia, but not for the Ingushs who suffered in 1992”, said 19-year-old Inessa from Nazran, recollecting the murders of Ingushs in the Prigorodnyi District and pointing out that “nobody regretted the victims of that conflict” and “nobody interceded for them”.⁹

9 See “The War in South Ossetia Reminded Residents of Ingushetia about the Conflict in the Prigorodny District” [in Russian], *Caucasian Knot*, 16 August 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/140550>.

It is equally necessary to take into account that refugees from South Ossetia had also settled in the Suburban District in the beginning of the 1990s (today there are about 7,500 people in this territory). This is another aggravating factor in the mutual relations between the two North Caucasian republics. We are referring again to the article of the *Caucasian Knot*:

Issa, 39 years, inhabitant of the Suburban District, has a negative opinion about Ossetians in this area. He believes that the local government has prepared the ground for the settlement of inhabitants of South Ossetia for a long time. 'And we knew it, every Ingush could confirm it. The Terk, Chernorechenskoye and Yuzhnyi settlements were prepared to this end. The conflict in South Ossetia was a planned one. Everything was unfolded for a long time. The authorities created a catastrophe of several thousand refugees from South Ossetia, but the 60,000-70,000 Ingushs from the Suburban District were forgotten. Nobody talks about them like they do nowadays about the Ossetians. Inhabitants of South Ossetia have lived in the Suburban District since 1992. North Ossetian authorities gave them the houses of the expelled Ingushs. I know for sure that some families have lived in the Yuzhnyi settlement since the conflict of 1992.'¹⁰

Thus, ensuring stability in the Russian Caucasus is unthinkable without and indivisible from achieving stability in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is the reason why, since the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation has taken on the burden of the geopolitical leadership in the South Caucasus. Russia's increased interest in the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia follows on from that. Stabilisation of the situation in these territories, considered *de jure* Georgian, but being *de facto* independent states (possessing all required attributes – army, parliament, structures of the executive power, and police), corresponds to Russia's national interests. However, defining "stabilisation" and deciding which methods of "reintegration" of these territories into Georgia can be considered acceptable is another matter.

10 Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

AN AREA OF GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

Since the late 1990s the South Caucasus has ceased to be the Russian Federation's geopolitical "property". Since that time both regional and extra-regional actors (although for different reasons) have stopped considering Russia as a source of legitimacy for the newly independent South Caucasian states, an exclusive peace-maker or the only political centre of gravity for Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In the early 1990s, Russia could actually shape political regimes in the three South Caucasian states without any serious external intervention (Eduard Shevardnadze's case in the beginning of 1992 and Heydar Aliyev's case in 1993). Russia was considered by all parties to the ethno-political conflicts in the region as the main – and the only possible sponsor of a peace settlement. It would be fair to stress Russia's decisive role in putting an end to the bloodshed in South Ossetia (1992), Abkhazia (1993-94) and Nagorno-Karabakh (1994), stopping the Georgian civil strife (1993) and providing for peacekeeping operations in Georgia. And it is Russia that shaped the political and legal formats of the peace processes in the "hot spots" of the South Caucasus: the Dagomys Agreements on South Ossetia (1992), the Moscow Agreements on Abkhazia (1994), the Bishkek Protocol and Cease-Fire Arrangement terminating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

However, despite its significant advantage over the US, the EU, Turkey, and Iran (as a result of the language factor, the Soviet past, long-standing social and economic ties, personal contacts between representatives of the elites) Russia has been unable to offer any attractive modernisation project to the South Caucasian states, confining itself to a "stabilising" role. In the "hot spots" this role could have been justified, but Moscow made a serious mistake by concentrating only on the "freezing" of the conflicts. The socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres, as well as the problems of modernisation were not addressed. Actually, Kremlin's policy focused entirely on the consolidation of the political regimes and on supporting the ruling powers in the South Caucasus. Towards the end of the 1990s the Russian policy was associated with archaism, while after 2000 it was connected with attempts at a Soviet *revanche*. As a result of such mistakes the South Caucasus was intensively internationalised; this process was not only in the interests of the US, the EU or Turkey, but also of the South Caucasian states. In the early 2000s the de facto states of the South Caucasus – Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic – admitted their interest in the process of "internationalisation". Political elites in Sukhumi, Stepanakert and to a lesser extent in Tskhinvali understood that their chances for recognition would significantly increase if their foreign policy was not confined just to the Russian vector.

As US political scientist Ariel Cohen correctly noted, it is necessary:

to understand that the Caucasus and Central Asia have ceased to be a sphere of Russian influence after the collapse of the Soviet Union... Four centuries of Russian expansion to the south have finished. In post-Communist Russia there is no intention of the society or the military establishment to revive the Empire by means of an open use of military force. The US has got much more freedom for manoeuvring in Eurasia than ever before, and it is the first time in history that the US and its allies have access to Eurasian internal areas and huge economic resources, available there.¹¹

New actors have emerged in the South Caucasus. Indeed, the territory of the three former Soviet republics of the Transcaucasus has become an arena of economic and geopolitical competition and the playing field of various national states, international structures and unions.

Meanwhile, at least three big projects are currently competing in the South Caucasus. First, there is the Russian stabilisation project. Some years ago the Russian "stabilisation" project was mainly based on the "USSR nostalgic resource". However, the energy factor has recently become a priority. In general, the principle of "marketisation" (in other words, the dominant role of the rule of market prices, even in relations with friends) is gradually becoming the "cornerstone" of Russia's relations with the South Caucasian states. At the same time, the change of resources (the "nostalgic" resource gives way to the energy resource) does not result in any serious change of the political priorities. It is important for Russia that revolutionary shocks are avoided ("colour revolutions" or emergence of new non-system politicians in the political arena). Thus, the "freezing" of the internal political processes has become the basic goal of the Russian stabilisation project both in the recognised South Caucasian states and in the de facto entities.

The second project is the American "Greater Middle East". By its style it is the direct opposite of the Russian stabilisation project. Today, the US presence in the South Caucasus is a political reality, whether we like it or not. These are the facts demonstrating the intensified activity of Americans in this stretch of the post-Soviet space: the US – Georgia strategic partnership (training of Georgian military and border-guards, political support within the framework of NATO where Washington is Tbilisi's main "lobbyist"); support to Armenia, which until recently was the second biggest recipient of American financial aid after Israel; the intensified development of oil projects in cooperation with Azerbaijan – the famous political pipeline "Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan", which according to George Bush Senior should encourage the independence of all Caucasus countries and strengthen their economical potential.¹²

11 Ariel Cohen, "US Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Building a New 'Silk Road' to Economic Prosperity," *Backgrounder*, no. 1132 (Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 24 July 1997).

12 See "Baku – Ceyhan Pipeline: Unexpected Pluses of Russia's 'Political Loss'" [in Russian], *Prime-Tass*, 26 May 2005, <http://www.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?id=535&ct=articles>.

The year 1997 marked a watershed for the American policy on the Caucasus. Since then the South Caucasus has experienced three waves of "Americanisation". Up to 1997 American diplomacy had not regarded the former Soviet republics of the South Caucasus as an area of special strategic interest and it recognised the leading role of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space. As early as in 1996, the well-known American diplomat David Mark insisted on the necessity of "pursuing such a policy that would consolidate the stability of all the regimes in the South Caucasus, not challenging the obvious Russian domination and *not assuming any political obligations* [italics added by author]".¹³ After 1997 the US included the Caucasus region into its geopolitical priorities.

The second wave began after the tragedy of 11 September 2001 which reinforced the US in its intention to increase its presence in the post-Soviet East as a whole, and in the South Caucasus in particular. In April 2002 the US and Georgia signed the "Train and Equip" Agreement, which enabled the training of 2,000 Georgian special forces. The impact of the US on the domestic policy of the former Soviet South Caucasian republics had started to grow. The US Administration supported the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia in 2003 and its winning team of "Young Georgians", headed by Mikhail Saakashvili. In Azerbaijan, the US endorsed the change of power and the electoral success of Ilham Aliyev. As an alternative project to the CIS the US backs the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM which includes two of the three South Caucasian states (Georgia and Azerbaijan).

The third wave of "Americanisation" of the South Caucasus was linked to the Iraqi campaign. First, the invasion of Iraq was viewed as part of the global American plan of the "Greater Middle East." Initially, the system of control over the macro-region was conceptualised in Washington in strong interaction with its closest allies – Turkey and Israel. According to the authors of the project, the practical realisation of the "Greater Middle East Project" would successfully address a host of problems, from Israel's security concerns to the control over the main energy resources of the region. The South Caucasus is the rear of the Greater Middle East, and unlike the "front line" it should be stable and quiet. However, the source of such stabilisation is seen by the US (unlike Russia) in the building of "sustainable democracy" and market economies. Of course, the US is not always deprived of its sense of realism. Besides being busy with the "democratisation" of Georgia, it has quite consistently criticised Armenia for "shortcomings in building democracy". At the same time, the US has some reservations concerning the prospects of establishing "an open society" in Azerbaijan, as it probably realises that today nearly 60% of the Azerbaijani population supports a military solution of the Karabakh problem, and that the relatively quiet "rear" of the Greater Middle East would be thrown into turmoil should the popular will in this country be freely expressed.

The third project is European: the European Community (since 1993, the European Union) became in the 1990s one of the main actors in the South Caucasus. However, the EU's policy

13 David Mark, "Eurasia Letter: Russia and the New Transcaucasus," *Foreign Policy* 105 (Winter 1996-97): 141.

on the Caucasus, unlike the American one, lays greater emphasis on the social and economic spheres than the military and political ones. The second priority direction for the EU is stability in the region as well as compliance with the "European standards" for the protection of human rights and democratic freedoms. In 2004, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan were included in the project of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The adoption of the ENP Action Plans by the South Caucasian states on 14 November 2006 marked a new stage of "Europeanisation" of the region. The European policy on the Caucasus has become much more coordinated and "integrated". Since January 2007 the Black Sea region has become a border of the EU. Turkish analyst Mustafa Aydin fairly noted that having included Bulgaria and Romania into its ranks, the EU, unlike the US, became a regional actor both in the Black Sea and the South Caucasus.¹⁴

Today, there are three projects within the framework of one: the ENP, the "Black Sea Synergy" and "the Eastern Policy". The latest of above-mentioned projects is a Polish initiative – a result of the growing influence of newcomers to the EU. The initial goal of all those projects is to bring the South Caucasus closer to Europe, as well as to transfer the European experience of good neighbourly relations (which has been developing since 1945 and has accelerated EU integration) to the Caucasian ground.

Meanwhile, up to the present both innovative projects for the South Caucasus (the American and the European one) have either been ignored by Moscow or considered an annoying challenge that prevents Russia from maintaining its dominating role in the region. Alarmist discourse was not lacking, but was not used by leading politicians, although it has been wielded by the Russian establishment in periods of exacerbation of Russia – US and Russia – EU relations. Instead, Russian diplomacy and the expert community were lacking the discernment to carefully and objectively determine the real degree of threats arising from the competing projects, as well as the possibilities of a constructive cooperation with the Europeans and the Americans. And in this sense it seems that it is necessary to differentiate the American interests from the European ones, and to understand that there has never been and still does not exist a "unified West" or a "Western policy" regarding the Caucasus. As early as in 2004, the EU official representative, Anthony Gooch, commenting on the prospects of the American project of the "Greater Middle East", said that it is better to use already existing wheels than inventing a wheel anew.¹⁵

Europe is not willing enough to endorse the forced "introduction" of democracy in the East, including in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Let us, for example, look at the different approaches

14 Mustafa Aydin, "Europe's New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider European Neighbourhood," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 2005): 257.

15 See "Group of Eight: Bush Has not Managed to Build 'The Greater Middle East'" [in Russian], *Polit*, 11 June 2004, <http://www.polit.ru/news/2004/06/11/broader.popup.html>.

of the NATO member states to Georgia's North-Atlantic prospects. At the same time, US representatives criticise the idealism and naiveté running through the European project. On 11 April 2007, the European Commission published a Communication entitled "Black Sea Synergy: A New Regional Cooperation Initiative". Point 3.3 of the Report defines the European approach to the problem of "frozen conflicts". According to the Communication, the European Commission "advocates a more active EU role through increased political involvement in ongoing efforts to address the conflicts."¹⁶ However, the question of who will really separate the conflicting parties, guarantee security to the population living today in the areas of the conflicts, as well as to the refugees who wish to return, remains unanswered. Who will suffer losses for the sake of enforcing the bright ideals of peace? Thus, both the American and the European projects suffer substantial shortcomings – in theory and when it comes to their practical implementation in the Caucasus.

Meanwhile, the Western projects, the American and the European one, are already a reality in the South Caucasus, whether the Russian elite likes it or not. Today the EU is the biggest international donor delivering aid to the countries involved in the ethno-political conflicts in the Caucasus. The European Commission has been allocating humanitarian aid (11 million Euros) to the victims of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since 2002. On 14 December 2006 it pledged an additional two million Euros. It is necessary to note that the ethnic origin of the victims of the conflicts is not a determining factor in the distribution of aid. As already mentioned, Armenia was until recently the second biggest recipient of American aid after Israel. And if we analyse the import – export structure of the economy of Armenia (Russia's strategic partner), then it becomes clear that Russian exports to Armenia make up only 16% of the total exports to this country (by way of comparison, Dutch exports account for 18%). Armenian exports to Russia make up 13% of the total imports of that country. Today, the second biggest recipient of American aid is Georgia. These facts clearly illustrate that the economic "westernisation" of the Caucasian states is a *fait accompli*.

Another question (which is more important for the Caucasus) is the settlement of the conflicts. In this instance, abstract democratic theories and generous funding alone will simply not deliver the desired result. It is impossible to imagine the "pacification" of the region without Russia's will and political involvement. But in order to make Russia's voice heard, first it is necessary to master the American – European political language and to learn how to defend vital national interests using that language which is comprehensible to the European and American political and legal thought. Second, it is necessary that we ourselves become engaged not only in the consolidation, but also in the progressive development of the South Caucasian states, acknowledging that it is

16 Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, COM (2007) 160 final, Brussels, 11 April 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf.

impossible to maintain stability without fostering progress. Third, Russia can teach the Europeans how to combine legal schemes with political pragmatism and realism – which constitutes a *sine qua non* of a serious and lasting pacification in the Caucasus.

Thus, the most serious crisis of recent times, the “five day war” in South Ossetia, occurred at a time when the unfreezing of the ethno-political conflicts (not only in Georgia) was unfolding, and the intensive “internationalisation” of the Caucasian region (which became an area of competing geopolitical interests) was in progress.

CHAPTER 4

GEORGIAN – RUSSIAN CONFRONTATION: FROM LOCAL SKIRMISHES TO A CONFLICT OF GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE

The long-simmering conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia escalated to a five day war in August to become the third armed confrontation between Georgia and South Ossetia in the past 17 years. South Ossetia is legally a part of Georgia, a fact that Russia had acknowledged until 26 August. However, the latest fighting differed markedly from the two previous conflicts, because it directly involved Russian armed forces.

Unlike individual Russian servicemen who acted spontaneously in the Georgian – Abkhazian war of 1992-93, Moscow did not merely support the Russian army's operation. The Kremlin called it "an operation to compel Georgia towards peace" aimed at saving the Ossetian people from a full scale humanitarian catastrophe. The US and the EU took an active part in the conflict unlike in previous Georgian – Ossetian confrontations (in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 2004). Ukraine played a role as well: its tough stance on Russia's Black Sea Fleet – which participated in the operation – was an impediment to its movements.

For the first time Tbilisi was simultaneously fighting its two separatist provinces – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – on two fronts. The events in and around South Ossetia made the international headlines. At the outset of the five day war, the UN Security Council met three times to discuss the situation in the Caucasus. For the first time since the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991-94, the mass media published alarming forecasts regarding the possibility of the Caucasus becoming a launch pad for a new large war.

But the most important consequence of the five day war was Moscow's official recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The two autonomous republics of Georgia have thus joined the group of partially-recognised states, such as Taiwan, Kosovo and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. They have not become countries recognised by the UN, but have established full-fledged relations with a country that is a member of the nuclear club and wields veto power at the UN Security Council.

The Georgian – Ossetian conflict was the first ethnic confrontation in post-Soviet Georgia that escalated into full-scale fighting. The South Ossetian Autonomous Region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic – the precursor of the unrecognised state of the Republic of South Ossetia – was established on 20 April 1922. The territory of this nation-state made up 6.5%

of the total territory of Georgia (3,840 square kilometres). According to the Soviet census of 1989, there were 98,500 people living in South Ossetia at the time (63,200 Ossetians; 28,500 Georgians; 2,100 Russians; and 900 representatives of Jewish ethnic groups). The number of Ossetians in Georgia totalled 165,000 as of 1989, or 3% of the population. Some 100,000 Ossetians lived in inland Georgia, with the largest communities living in Tbilisi, Gori and Rustavi. The legal status of South Ossetia in the pre-crisis period was regulated by the law on the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, adopted in 1980.¹⁷

The conflict passed through several stages: from a local confrontation that was little known and of little interest to the world community, to an event of international significance. *The first stage* (1988-89) might be called ideological. During this period, the conflicting parties identified their claims against each other and composed plausible ethno-political guidelines of a future conflict. For example, Georgian historians and journalists began describing Ossets as “the strangers on the Georgian land” originated from the North Caucasus. Their Ossetian counterpart intensively exploited the thesis about the “common Alan heritage” of the two Ossetias (the North Ossetia in Russia and the South Ossetia in Georgia).¹⁸ *The second* was a political-legal stage (1989-91) that marked two years of a law-making (“status”) war between Georgia and South Ossetia.

On 20 September 1989, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic published draft laws infringing upon the rights of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Two months later, on 10 November 1989, a session of People’s Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region promoted the region’s status to an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. Tbilisi was outraged at the move which unilaterally gave South Ossetia a higher status. On 16 November 1989, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic annulled the decision of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region Council. A week later, thousands of Georgian nationalists marched to Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, in a reprisal that claimed the first casualties.

The event that followed next played a key role in the escalation of the conflict. On 11 December 1990, Georgia’s Supreme Soviet declared the South Ossetian Autonomy null and void. Simultaneously, the Soviet authorities declared a state of emergency in the South Ossetian Autonomy, while the Georgian leadership imposed a blockade on South Ossetia.

During *the third stage*, armed fighting broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia (between January 1991 and July 1992). On 6 January 1991, Soviet Interior Ministry troops left Tskhinvali

17 Alexander Skakov, “South Ossetia: Demography, Economy, Policy” [in Russian], *Georgia: Its Problems and Perspectives II* (2002): 167.

18 Artur Tsutsiyev, *Atlas of the Ethnopolitical History of the Caucasus (1774-2004)* [In Russian] (Moscow: Evropa, 2006), 111-117.

for their barracks and a six-thousand-strong unit of Georgian militants entered the city, causing destruction and killing civilians.

The capital of South Ossetia suffered three assaults in the course of the hostilities (in February and March of 1991, and in June 1992). North Ossetia, a Russian region in the North Caucasus, was dragged into the conflict. It was flooded with 43,000 refugees from South Ossetian and Georgian districts. The Kremlin could not directly control North Ossetia's actions. Moreover, Vladikavkaz insisted it would sign a federal treaty on the condition that Moscow supported South Ossetia (in one form or another). In late May 1992, North Ossetia blocked the pipeline running to Georgia.

On 24 June 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze signed the Dagomys (Sochi) accords on the principles of settling the Georgian – South Ossetian conflict. A peacekeeping operation began on 14 July as Russia, Georgia and North Ossetia deployed their peacekeeping contingents in the area, and the Joint Control Commission (JCC) was set up to monitor the ceasefire arrangements. One hundred villages were burned and more than 1,000 people were killed in the fighting. The armed conflict was thus “frozen” and this signified the beginning of *the fourth stage*, which continued until May 2004.

Unlike Abkhazia, South Ossetia never saw large-scale ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population. Georgians and Ossetians lived peacefully side by side until August 2008. The Constitution of the self-proclaimed Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia recognised Georgian as a minority language. Exchanges of fire, blockades and provocations stopped, and a relative peace set in. There was a direct bus link between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali until 2004; there were markets where Georgians and Ossetians traded together, such as Ergneti; and Georgia and South Ossetia mutually recognised licence plates on cars from both countries.

It should be noted that in the post-war conditions smuggling made up the backbone of the economy of the territory with a “deferred status”, and that both ethnic groups were involved in smuggling. This shadow economy strongly attached South Ossetia to Georgia, and was also a major – albeit informal – confidence-building measure for the two conflicting communities.

North Ossetia's President, Alexander Dzasokhov, who was elected in 1998, can be credited with playing a key role in easing tensions, often through direct informal contacts with Eduard Shevardnadze, who was a colleague of his from the former Politburo and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Moreover, a considerable positive potential in the settlement process had built up over 12 years' time. First, the peacekeeping mission was jointly run by Russian and Georgian battalions and second, important documents were signed providing for the rehabilitation of the conflict territory. Of special note is the “Memorandum on the Security and Confidence-Building Measures” between the Parties to the Georgian – Ossetian Conflict dated 16 May 1996, and a Russian – Georgian intergovernmental agreement, dated 3 December 2000, on Interaction to Rebuild the Economy in the Zone of the Georgian – Ossetian Conflict, and on the Return of Refugees.

The fifth stage can be described as “unfreezing” of the conflict. It began with attempts by Tbilisi to revise the balance of forces in South Ossetia and the political-legal format of the settlement. The “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in October-November 2003 and Mikhail Saakashvili’s landslide victory in the presidential election in January 2004 (he got a stunning 97% of the votes) were all stimulated by a “patriotic resource”, as was the case in the 1990s. In their speeches, Saakashvili and his associates appealed for rebuilding one Georgia and taking revenge for the “national humiliation” in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

On 31 May 2004, Georgia sent 300 special task force fighters to South Ossetia on the pretext of combating smuggling, but without consulting the JCC. The JCC participants branded the move as a breach of the Dagomys accords of 1992. Georgia then accused the Russian peacekeepers of ethnic bias and crimes. On 20 July 2004, the Georgian president publicly stated that he did not rule out a revocation of the Dagomys accords: “I’m not prepared to recognize those agreements which prohibit us to host our national flag in the Centre of Georgia. If the Shevardnadze’s signature is under them I’m ready to scrap them and to realize their termination”¹⁹ Saakashvili’s statement indicated three goals he was striving to achieve: i) internationalise the Georgian – Ossetian conflict by involving the US and European countries in its settlement; ii) reformat the conflict from Georgian – Ossetian to Georgian – Russian, and present it as a manifestation of Russian neo-imperialism; iii) reject Russia’s role as the exclusive guarantor of peace in the region.

It is the realisation of these goals that became the quintessence of the fifth stage of the Georgian – Ossetian conflict. A second war broke out in South Ossetia on 8-19 August 2004. The parties did not use only small arms in this confrontation, but also artillery. Although the warring sides had stopped fighting briefly by the end of the month, August (a fateful period in the conflict) 2004 marked the beginning of a new wave of shelling, attacks, provocations and blockades of vital lines of communications. From that time onwards, the tactics of “small incidents of overreaction involving the military” became daily routine in South Ossetia.

This brief war (which has been forgotten and eclipsed by “the hot August” of 2008) was a turning point in the Russian policy towards the region. Until 2004, Moscow had been anxious to remain unbiased and neutral, and maintain the status quo which it regarded as the best way out. After 2004, Russia, realising that the security of the entire North Caucasus depended on the situation in South Ossetia, de facto took the side of the self-proclaimed republic. First, Moscow began to view Tskhinvali as an instrument to influence Tbilisi – which, by then, had embarked not only on a very pro-American, but also on an anti-Russian path. Second, the loss of South Ossetia was seen as a threat to Russia itself. The Ossetian – Ingush conflict, which remains unresolved, was closely linked to the situation around the self-proclaimed republic.

19 See “Georgia Threatens to Withdraw from the Treaty on Ossetia” [in Russian], *BBC Russia*, 20 June 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/russia/newsid_3911000/3911101.stm.

In 2005-06, the Georgian parliament adopted a range of resolutions (“Regarding the Current Situation in the Conflict Regions on the Territory of Georgia and Ongoing Peace Operations”, 11 October 2005, “On the Current Situation in the Former Autonomous District of South Ossetia and Ongoing Peace Process”, 15 February 2006, “On the Peacekeeping Forces Located on the Territory of Georgia”, 18 July 2006) describing the Russian peacekeeping mission as “extremely negative”, and actions of the Russian Federation as “permanent efforts aimed at annexation of this region of Georgia”.²⁰

In the autumn of 2006, Tbilisi launched the project of “an alternative South Ossetia” led by Dmitry Sanakoyev, a former prime minister and defence minister of this non-recognized entity who did not have any support in Tskhinvali-controlled areas. The purpose of the project was to reformat the negotiating process (by actually circumventing direct dialog with Tskhinvali).

In March 2007, Tbilisi created a provisional administration in the territory of South Ossetia, a move which effectively terminated the talks with Tskhinvali. Tbilisi tried to secure the international legitimisation of Sanakoyev (he took part in forums in Strasbourg and Brussels, and was viewed as a “positive/cooperative” representative of the Ossetian side, unlike Eduard Kokoity).

The policy of “unfreezing” culminated in the transfer of the Georgian peacekeeping battalion under the control of the Georgian Defence Ministry (it was formerly under the command of the JCC), and repeated calls by Georgia’s Reintegration Minister, Temuri Yakobashvili, to withdraw from the existing formats of peaceful settlement. In addition, in July 2006, Georgia – in violation of the “Basic Moscow Agreement on the Ceasefire and Disengagement”, dated 14 May 1994 – deployed army and police units in the upper part of the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia, which the Moscow agreement declared to be a demilitarised zone. The status quo was therefore breached there as well. The conflicting parties quit negotiating.

Georgia’s tough (and not always adequate) actions in 2004-08 can hardly be explained without taking into account an external factor, albeit not a decisive one. In 2003, a frustrated Georgian society, disillusioned by the Shevardnadze era, came up with a bid for a stronger country which was understood as territorially integral. But support of Tbilisi mainly from the US (military-technical assistance, diplomatic patronage and rapprochement with NATO) led the Georgian leadership to believe that the West would approve of any of their actions.

20 See Parliament of Georgia, *Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia Regarding the Current Situation in the Conflict Regions on the Territory of Georgia and Ongoing Peace Operations*, Tbilisi, 11 October 2005, http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=98&info_id=7268; Parliament of Georgia, *Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the Current Situation in the Former Autonomous District of South Ossetia and Ongoing Peace Process*, Tbilisi, 16 February 2006, http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=98&info_id=9732; Parliament of Georgia, *Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the Peacekeeping Forces Located on the Territory of Georgia*, Tbilisi, 18 July 2006, http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=98&info_id=13089.

Tbilisi was feeling increasingly confident as the US and its allies turned a blind eye to the violations of peace accords with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and reacted half-heartedly to the backtracking from democratic standards inside the country: such as a crackdown on the opposition on 7 November 2007, and the use of administrative resources to fight the opposition during elections in Adzharia in 2004 and during municipal elections in 2006.

In 2008, Moscow also contributed to the “unfreezing” of the conflicts in Georgia. On 21 March, the State Duma adopted a statement which set out two conditions for a possible recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia’s accession to NATO and the use of force against the two self-proclaimed republics).²¹

In April, Vladimir Putin, as the outgoing Russian president, instructed the federal government to provide “substantive assistance” to the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The instruction envisioned, among other things, the establishment of direct contacts between Moscow and Tskhinvali and Sukhumi. The West, whose response was immediate and tough, said that Georgia’s territorial integrity was its priority.

Nevertheless, the status quo was disrupted in South Ossetia, and to a lesser extent in Abkhazia as well, before 7 August 2008. During the armed clashes four years ago, some 70 people died (today these casualties have simply been forgotten), while in subsequent years the number of deaths on each side (according to different estimates) totalled 100. Quantity evolved into quality in August 2008. The tactics of the escalation of violence led to an assault on Tskhinvali and a tough response from Russia (which apparently was unexpected for both Tbilisi and the West). Therefore, Saakashvili’s military-political adventurism and Russia’s direct intervention in the Georgian – Ossetian conflict stemmed from the preceding “conflict unfreezing” stage.

21 See “The State Duma Made the Statement on Russia’s Policy to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria” [in Russian], *Regnum*, 21 March 2008, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/975032.html>.

CHAPTER 5

FAREWELL TO THE NINETIES

The new spiral of confrontation in South Ossetia did not just reconfigure, politically and legally, two hot spots in the CIS and change the setup of forces; it also seriously affected the entire ethnic-political situation in Eurasia. According to Ukrainian researcher Vitaly Kulik, “the system of regional security, which was formed after the breakup of the Soviet Union, is unable to effectively respond to new challenges. Therefore, the territory of the former Soviet Union acutely felt a lack of security”²²

From this time on, the Caucasus (and possibly the entire Black Sea region and even the CIS in general) has seen the old rules of the game ceasing to function. References to agreements and legal standards, reached in the early 1990s, are absolutely unavailing. Of course, these can and will be referred to, but they will no longer have the legitimacy acknowledged by various players both inside and outside the CIS.

Using the jargon of programmers, we can claim that August 2008 saw a final reloading of conflicts in Eurasia. A very important precedent was established as legal and political agreements that maintained the status quo and a static situation no longer apply. Neither Georgia – which fully rejected the Dagomys and Moscow agreements on Abkhazia and South Ossetia – nor Russia, whose leadership now takes a broader view of peacekeeping operations, abide by them. A simple arithmetic addition of the naval crews in Abkhazia’s Black Sea zone, involved in the operation to force Georgia to make peace, clearly shows that the quota of peacekeepers has been exceeded.

One cannot fail to notice the use of special task forces in the conflict zones, who, by definition, are no peacekeepers; or the advance of Russian troops beyond the geographic borders of the security zones stipulated by the agreements of 1992 and 1994 (Gori, Poti and Senaki). Of course, many Russian actions were a reaction to the “unfreezing of the conflict” started by Georgia and, moreover, to the escalation of the conflict. In any case, they objectively work against the earlier rules of the game.

In 2008, confrontations within the CIS attained a qualitatively new level. Although in the early 1990s they were primarily caused by the breakup of the Soviet Union, today they are no longer motivated by inertia of the past, but by the current dynamics of the development and construction of new nation-states. While clashes in the early 1990s were “deferred payments” on the debts of the “evil empire”, the present-day clashes are new claims of payment. “Frozen conflicts” are a thing of

22 Vitaliy Kulik, “The Trap of ‘Humanitarian Intervention’ for the Post-Soviet Space” [in Russian], *Politika* +, 24 October 2008, http://politika.org.ua/cgi-bin/b2.pl?sh=pub_singl&num=1754.

the past decade, which disappeared together with Yeltsin's generation. Now conflicts are conceived and resolved by the post-Soviet generation of politicians, who work out new rules as the game progresses. We will see quite soon what kind of configuration will come out of this.

In 2008, not only states in the South Caucasus, but also Ukraine signalled their wish to scrap earlier agreements. Kyiv's attempt to not allow Russian Black Sea Fleet warships access to their base in the Crimea deals a blow to the whole range of Russian – Ukrainian accords. Obviously, the agreement on Russia's naval presence in Ukraine implied a dedicated use of Russia's task force, and in Russian national interests.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first revision of borders of a once common state occurred. This was not necessarily viewed as legitimate. The breakup of the Soviet Union along the borders of the Soviet republics – which appeared logical – triggered a controversial response within formerly autonomous areas, which never viewed the independence of former Soviet republics as their ideal. Thus, ethnic conflicts were fuelled, which inevitably involved winners and losers.

A number of states, displeased with the results of the "first revision", were looking for a rematch, and so they attempted "a second revision" with the help of various external forces. The losers hated the status quo after the "freeze-up of the conflict", and changing it by any means necessary was seen as a priority. The political-legal groundwork guaranteeing this status quo was of little concern.

Today, politicians and experts do not know the precise number of casualties that occurred in South Ossetia during the five day war. These figures are political math for the interested parties. The war effectively destroyed the infrastructure of "unrecognised citizens" rather than "Kokoity's regime". Without Russian intervention, the former autonomy within Georgia would have suffered the same fate as the Republic of Serbian Krajina, which was smitten by Croatia (since it was fighting for territorial integrity) together with the Serbs who lived there in 1995. Southern Russia saw an influx of thousands of Ossetian refugees – their numbers are estimated at 20,000 to 30,000. This makes up half of the population of the self-proclaimed republic.

The five days in August turned into a veritable catastrophe for Tbilisi as well. The "One Georgia" project ended up in complete failure. The new spiral of violence (in South Ossetia in particular) made a peaceful reintegration of the breakaway republics impossible. After the war – the third in the past 17 years – "the unrecognised citizens" are not likely to listen to any of Tbilisi's proposals. Moreover, Georgia received a new portion of some 20,000 refugees, this time from South Ossetia where, unlike Abkhazia, Georgians lived side by side with Ossetians even after the first war of 1991-92. Now the Georgian community of South Ossetia suddenly found themselves the outcasts.

At the same time, one cannot fail to see that in 2004-08 the villages of the so-called Liakhvi corridor (four Georgian villages: Tamarasheni, Kekhvi, Achabeti and Kurta, located on a 30-kilometer stretch of the highway between Tskhinvali and Dzhava) were equipped with stationary concrete

fortifications, and armed. Georgia also installed radar equipment there. It is these villages that blocked Tskhinvali, cutting it off from supplies and the Trans-Caucasian highway.

In 2008, the Georgian population of these villages had to pay for Tbilisi's adventurism. Alas, as is often the case, not only those who attacked South Ossetia, but also innocents had to pay. The Georgian population of the former autonomy suffered the same fate as Abkhazia's Georgians. As one of Georgia's opposition politicians aptly noted, "It's a misfortune that the life and health of thousands of people were sacrificed to the adolescent complex of the commander-in-chief."²³ Judging by formal criteria, Russia looks like having emerged victorious. Its actions, taking into account the interrelation between the security of the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, were justified in many ways. Russia succeeded in preventing the total destruction of the military-political infrastructure of South Ossetia. Furthermore, it blasted during the military operation such Georgian strongholds posing a threat to the self-proclaimed republic as the villages of the so-called Liakhvi corridor.

Russia briefly controlled the town of Gori, the outpost for the Georgian onslaught in the past two years. Tbilisi had built in Gori a military hospital, a morgue with a capacity far beyond the needs of the town in peaceful times, and logistics facilities. The Georgian units were driven out from the upper part of the Kodori Gorge, which they entered two years ago.

Moscow's actions therefore also contributed to the "defrosting of the conflict" and the dismantling of the status quo. The benefits from the confrontation with the West are not yet obvious, while the losses are all too clear. International attempts to interfere will step up as security collapses in the Caucasus. The success of the military campaign may create an illusion in Moscow that complex problems can be resolved by force, without protracted negotiations or complicated procedures. (Was it difficult to convene the Federation Council to legalise the actions of Russian troops?)

Recognising the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will set a precedent that can be used against Russia. Former US Republican presidential candidate John McCain suggested, during his campaign, revising the approaches of Washington and its allies towards the self-determination of Chechnya and republics of the North Caucasus.

23 Ivlian Khaindrava, "For Western Europe Countries Saakashvili Turned into 'Enfant Terrible'" [in Russian], *News-Azerbaijan*, 19 August 2008, <http://www.newsazerbaijan.ru/analytics/20080819/42446221.html>.

CHAPTER 6

NEIGHBOURS: DIFFERENT REACTIONS

Russia engaged in military actions beyond its territory for the first time in years. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russian military and border guards took part in containing two civil wars, in Tajikistan (1992-97) and Georgia (1993). Later, the Russian army only fought on its own territory. In 2008, the format of the Russian army's operations abroad differed dramatically from the experience of both the imperial and Soviet periods. Russian troops did not want to resolve ideological differences (as was the case with the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1849; and during the events in Budapest in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968). The purpose of the operation in Georgia was not to expand its territory, which Tbilisi keeps insisting was Moscow's objective. The action "to compel Georgia towards peace" was meant to ensure in the first place the safety of the North Caucasus. Had Russia remained passive during the attack on South Ossetia, some forces in the North Caucasus might have tried to replay, for example, "the conflict over North Ossetia's Prigorodny district".

The Kremlin's ineptitude and unwillingness to spell out its national interests (for fear of looking weak and vulnerable) is another matter. In any case, Moscow staked out its role in the post-Soviet terrain in a similar way to the US role in Latin America, the Israeli role in the Middle East, Australia's in Oceania, and France's in the former colonies of "Black Africa". It was an entirely new designation of a zone where Moscow had vital and legitimate interests.

The CIS project has apparently failed, which was also one of the most important results of the five day war. It is not just a matter of Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS and Ukraine's readiness to follow suit. It is a matter of how CIS members feel about this alliance. Even Kazakhstan, which has a reputation of being Russia's main Eurasian partner, "refrained" from taking a clear position on this issue. Armenia, Russia's other ally, also took a break. Representatives of the Armenian Defense Ministry hastened to state on 10 August 2008 that air raids against Georgian air bases had not been launched from the Russian base in Armenia. Uzbekistan did not say much despite Russia's support during the events in Andijan in 2005, neither did Tajikistan, whose territorial integrity Russia defended in 1992-97. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev said that "conflicts such as the one that occurred between Russia and Georgia should be resolved solely on the basis of international law and only through political and diplomatic means";²⁴

24 Vladimir Mukhin, "Farewell, Illusion: The South Ossetia's Events Revealed Crisis in the Military-Political Relationship of Russia with the Closer Allies" [in Russian], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 August 2008.

The Council of Defense Ministers of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Yerevan on 21 August 2008 was unable to come up with a consolidated view of the situation in the South Caucasus. A majority of CIS members have their own “separatist skeletons in the closet”, and, therefore, fear Russia’s excessive strengthening, seeing in it a hypothetical threat to their unity. It follows that the CSTO is no good as an instrument for working out common approaches and common methods of settling conflicts. Admittedly, GUAM – an alternative to the CIS made up of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova – also failed to demonstrate effectiveness and unity in their positions.

Ukraine, through its president, took a pro-Georgian position although opinions within the country differed greatly. A statement by the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry on 8 August 2008 in support of Georgia’s territorial integrity was hailed by Georgian diplomats. It contained general phrases on the conformity of the Georgian operation to “international law”, but did not have a follow-up. Baku, unlike Tbilisi, has not built its foreign policy on a tough confrontational basis: rather, it views Russia as a counterbalance to the West, with which Azerbaijan’s relations are not as unequivocal as Tbilisi’s.

Baku is also afraid of being dragged into the Iranian game, in which it would play the role of a runway, or a territory used to accommodate a retaliatory strike by Iran. Hence the drive to appreciate the mostly friendly, albeit complicated relations with Russia. The same caution underlies the position of Moldova; for the sake of establishing control over the self-proclaimed Dniester Moldovan Republic it is ready to accept important Russian conditions, such as refusing to join NATO, neutrality and the recognition of Russian property on its territory.

A special issue raised by the five day war is self-determination of the self-proclaimed republics. In the early 1990s, they were viewed as an annoying burden for Russia. But, seeing a correlation between these breakaway regions with security in the North Caucasus, the Kremlin adjusted its positions. Having frozen conflicts in the early 1990s, Russia gave its consent to the existence of these regions as the main result of these conflicts. The “frozen status” involved delaying a solution to the conflict until things got better, such as reaching a more advantageous political situation or a compromise between the parties.

In such a situation it would have been unwise to discuss the status of disputed territories. Therefore, the tentative status of the de facto states reflected the political reality of the previous decade. The reality implied maintaining the status quo and the lack of active military action (however, such attempts were made in Abkhazia in 1998 and 2001, though their scope never matched Tskhinvali in 2008). It raised hopes of a future agreement between the parties in one form or another.

Mikhail Saakashvili dramatically upped the ante in the “land collecting” game, having forgotten that the cause of Georgia’s “territorial castration” was not the territories per se, but the people living there. Self-determination of the unrecognised states has thus become another instrument of Russian influence, which cannot fail to cause apprehension among its neighbours.

The territory of the former Soviet Union changed on 26 August 2008 with the establishment of a precedent in redrawing the borders of former Soviet republics. The format of the post-Soviet space, as was shaped after December 1991, has collapsed. Two new states have emerged on the map of the former Soviet Union.

The Russian president's decree on the recognition of Abkhaz and Ossetian independence did not merely signal a political decision and demonstration of will by the new head of state. First and foremost, it was a symbolic act; 26 August marked a turning point dividing the history of post-Soviet Eurasia in two parts: before and after this landmark date. The two ex-Georgian autonomous regions will no longer be unrecognised or self-proclaimed entities. There is now a country which is ready to recognise their independence, and their international political and legal personality. Thus, the first precedent of a revision of the interstate borders after the disintegration of the USSR was set.

The argument that only Russia has recognised them does not essentially change anything. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was recognised only by Turkey back in 1983, yet for 25 years it has been a factor in the Black Sea – Mediterranean policy. This de facto state recognised the independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and it was a much tougher opponent than Turkey of the 2003 US decision to launch a military operation in Iraq.

One might claim that Dmitry Medvedev's decision to recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia was too emotional. Admittedly, he could have waited until he had found at least a couple of allies before making his statement. Perhaps Moscow should have taken into account the possible repercussions of this decision, such as attempts to turn the Abkhazian – Ossetian precedent against Russia. But Medvedev had little room to manoeuvre after the "hot August of 2008". He could either show weakness – and provoke political instability in the North Caucasus – or legally fix the new reality and defend Russia's legitimate interest. The Russian president chose the second option.

Immediately after recognising their independence, Moscow established diplomatic relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (on 9 September 2008), appointed ambassadors (on 24 October 2008) and became the guarantor of their security. Both chambers of the Russian parliament ratified Agreements on Friendship and Cooperation between Russia on the one hand and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other. Moscow, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali also agreed on the deployment of Russian troops. The "hot August" events brought about a profound transformation of the geopolitical landscape not only in the South Caucasus region but also in the post-Soviet space as a whole: they raised some fundamental questions for the international community.

After 26 August 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia achieved an elevated status. They have joined a group of partially-recognised entities, such as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Taiwan, the Saharwi Arabian Democratic Republic and Kosovo. But what is more, the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is recognised by a country which is a member of the "nuclear

club’ and also a permanent member of the UN Security Council wielding the power of veto. It is a country which also brings serious influence to bear on such issues of global policy, as the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, “the Iranian question”, the peace process in the Middle East, the fight against terrorism, the military operation in Afghanistan and the security issues in Central Asia. Nevertheless, after 2008 a differentiation of the unrecognised republics of Eurasia occurred. Two of them (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) are now partially-recognised while Nagorno-Karabakh and the Dniester Moldovan Republic continue to be considered de facto entities whose independence is not recognised.

Successful self-determination of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (from their national elites’ point of view) raises a host of problems. Will it establish a precedent for separatist or nationalist movements on the territory of the Big Caucasus? In order to answer this tricky question, it is above all necessary to accept a number of fundamental theses. First, the existence of separatist movements is practically inevitable in any multi-structured state. Separatism exists in Spain, Britain, France, Belgium and many other countries which are considered “civilised”. But these movements are not necessarily prevalent and are not supported by the overwhelming majority of representatives of the ethnic group, in the name of which the separatists are acting.

Second, the ideology and practices of separatism are not a constant. Its popularity (or conversely its non-popularity) is influenced by many external and internal factors. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Russia (meaning the Russian Caucasus) a multitude of uneasy ethno-political problems persist, taking on new urgency in the aftermath of the “five day war”.

CHAPTER 7

GEORGIA: THREATS OF SEPARATISM OR GROWTH OF REGIONALISM?

For Tbilisi, Abkhazia represents an important national symbol. In many respects, it underpins Georgia's post-Soviet identity. In this connection, it is difficult for Tbilisi to accept the fact that the Armenian community of Abkhazia has consented to the process of state-building in Abkhazia which takes place outside the political-legal boundaries of Georgia. Many Abkhaz Armenians have been awarded the highest order of this republic (the order of Leon) and are considered heroes of Abkhazia. Many people fought in the confrontation of 1992-93. The battalion named after Marshal Hovhannes Bagramyan fought in the Georgian – Abkhazian war against Georgia. Some researchers have pointed out the presence of Armenians in the ranks of the Georgian forces.²⁵ But they were not structured, unlike Bagramyan's battalion, and were not well-publicised politically. Moreover, those were isolated cases that did not reflect the general disposition of the Armenian community of Abkhazia. However, during 1993-2008 no large conflicts or any armed conflicts for that matter broke out between the two almost equally-sized communities (Armenians and Abkhazians). Furthermore, prominent representatives of the Armenian community are also members of the Abkhazian elite.

However, Abkhazia is far from constituting the unique problem afflicting the Georgian – Armenian bilateral relations. The situation in Samtshe-Javakheti, a region with a large Armenian community, is another matter of common concern raising hopes and fears both in Tbilisi and in Yerevan. "The Armenian question" unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia is currently an issue of minor public interest in Georgia. Nevertheless, the problem of Samtshe-Javakheti (Javakhk in the Armenian way of spelling) is actually a critical one. Any exacerbation of the Armenian – Georgian confrontation could prove much more dangerous than a new Georgian – Ossetian or even Georgian – Abkhaz campaign. As was the case with Nagorno-Karabakh, it is necessary to understand that any interethnic conflict involving the ethnic Armenians automatically involves the "Armenian world," a Diaspora drawing on powerful resources and enjoying lobbying access in the US, Russia and the European countries. The "Georgian world" cannot possibly boast similar resources today.

The region of Samtshe-Javakheti is situated on the crossroads of the Georgian, Armenian and Turkish borders. The administrative-territorial unit of Samtshe-Javakheti resulted from the

25 Vicken Cheterian, "The Face of the Caucasus," *Armenian International Magazine* 5, no. 3 (2000): 39; Bruno Coppieters, "Federalism and Conflict in the Caucasus" [in Russian], *Carnegie Moscow Center Working Papers*, no. 2 (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment, 2002), 26.

union of Samtshe and Javakheti. Samtshe comprises the Adigeni, Aspindzi, Akhaltsikhe and Borzomi districts, while Javakheti is made up of the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts. In Samtshe, Georgians form the majority of the population but in Javakheti about 95% of the local population is made up of Armenians. In the region as a whole, Armenians comprise almost 56% of the population.²⁶

It is noteworthy that even in Abkhazia in the beginning of the 1990s Abkhazians made up approximately a modest 17.8% of the population.²⁷ In the early 1990s Georgian sovereignty was not really imposed on Javakheti. The local population did not accept the Georgian officials appointed by Tbilisi. A self-proclaimed government, the provisional Council of Representatives (24 members) and the Presidium of the Council (7 members) were established. However, under Edward Shevardnadze's presidency the "Javakheti separatism" has ceased to be a politically topical call. But demands to devolve autonomy to Javakheti within unified Georgia have persisted and are occasionally/regularly voiced. On 19 August 2008, the Council of Armenian NGOs of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli made a declaration, stating that "in order to resolve the ethnic conflicts in an objective, just and legal manner, Georgia should have a federal state structure, composed of territorial units and a central government."²⁸

Armenian leaders have on many occasions declared that they oppose a military solution that would lead to secession from the Georgian state. However, Tbilisi perceives any bid for an autonomy status negatively, regarding it as manifestation of separatism. According to Khachatur Stepanyan, an activist of the Armenian movement, "the application of federalism principle is the single way to keep the territorial integrity of Georgia."²⁹ The main motto of the Armenian advocates of autonomy is "integration, but not assimilation". In an interview to the correspondent of the widely-known Internet portal the *Caucasian Knot* (Kavkazskiy Uzel), the Deputy Director of the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute, Sergey Minasyan, pointed out that the most important problem in Javakheti is the lack of positive motivation and incentive among Armenians to study Georgian. Among the factors that hinder the integration of the Armenian minority, Minasyan named the limited opportunities for professional growth as the key impediment to integration of the Armenian minority in

26 See "Karapetyan: Armenians in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia Suffer from Economic Problems" [in Russian], *Caucasian Knot*, 10 December 2007, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1203406.html>.

27 International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia Today," *Europe Report* 176, 15 September 2006, 9.

28 Noyan Tapan, "Armenian NGOs of Javakheti Consider Formation of Federal State as Only Way to Solve Ethnic Problems in Georgia," *Javakheti*, 20 August 2008, <http://www.djavakheti.com/detail.php?r=0&id=5614&l=en>.

29 See "Khachatur Stepanyan: Georgia Must Grant Autonomy to Armenians and Azeris" [in Russian], *Yerkramas*, 14 November 2008, <http://yerkramas.org/news/2008-11-14-1946>.

the Georgian society. It should be noted that closely-knit Armenian communities also live in Adjara and in Tbilisi itself (about 7% of Armenians).³⁰ They too have undergone an uneasy process of adaptation to the new Georgian statehood, but have experienced it less painfully than Armenians in Javakheti.

Kvemo Kartli represents another complicated “knot of problems”. This region is populated by Azeris. They live compactly in four districts, their centres being Gardabani, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Marneuli. Ethnic Azeris comprise 98,245 of the 118,221 population in Marneuli, 49,026 of 74,301 in Bolnisi, 18,716 of 28,034 in Dmanisi, 49,993 of 114,348 in Gardabani.³¹ According to the official census (2002) the Azerbaijani community in Georgia totals about 285,000 people. Compared with the last Soviet census (1989) the number of Azeris in Georgia decreased (those times their number was 308,000 people).³² Moreover, some leaders of the Azerbaijani NGOs consider this number abigger (more than 600,000 people).³³

After the breakup of the Soviet Union the problem situations in territory of Kvemo Kartli took place. During the process of conflict resolution, representatives of the Azerbaijani community aired the following grievances against the Georgian authority:

- i) discrimination of Azeris in employment, lack of career prospects for them in Georgia;
- ii) discrimination in the distribution/redistribution of land plots;
- iii) closing down of Azeri-speaking schools;
- iv) abuses by Georgian border and customs officers.

Mainly social, economic and legal problems occupy the foreground of their requests. But from time to time leaders of some Azerbaijani NGOs demand the concession of the official language status to the Azeri language. The National Assembly of Azeris of Georgia also considered federalisation

30 See “Torosyan: Armenians of Georgia Hope for Sarkisyan’s Help” [in Russian], *Caucasian Knot*, 1 October 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/142310>.

31 Statistics Georgia, “Ethnic Groups by Major Administrative – Territorial Units”, http://www.statistics.ge/_files/english/census/2002/Ethnic%20groups.pdf (accessed 18 February 2009).

32 Arif Yunusov, “Ethno-demographic Processes in the South Caucasus in the Post-Soviet Period” [in Russian], *The Caucasus Collection* 2, no. 34 (2005): 270-271; Yunusov, *Azerbaijan in the Early 21st Century: Conflicts and Potential Threats* [in Russian] (Baku: Adyloglu edition, 2007), 154-155.

33 See “Dashgyn Gyulmamedov: NAAG Demands to Grant Official Language Status to Azeri Language” [in Russian], *ИЦ BAGIN*, 21 January 2009, http://bagin.info/default.asp?Lang=_Ru&NewsID=2273&SectionID=1&PagePosition=1&search=Дашгын%20Гюльмамедов&mode=anywords.

(con-federalisation) of Georgia as the best way for the ethnic problems' resolution.³⁴ Tbilisi, as well as local authorities, repeatedly put forward the following counter arguments:³⁵

- i) Azeris are poorly integrated into the Georgian society;
- ii) the reason their career opportunities are very limited is because they do not want to learn Georgian;
- iii) Azerbaijani schools are closed down only because the number of pupils is small;
- iv) curbs on the distribution of land plots in the border area are explained by the need to preserve the territorial integrity of Georgia.

According to the leaders of the Azerbaijani movement of Georgia, "Geyrat", and the Azerbaijani mass-media [the newspapers *Mirror* (Zerkalo) and *Echo*] in the 1990s Azerbaijani villages in Georgia became the final destination of intensive flows of migrant Svans from the mountain areas of Svanetia. This process led to numerous inter-ethnic confrontations. In November 2002, the inhabitants of the Gardabani district demanded that the Georgian authorities take urgent measures for the fight of organised criminal groups that engaged in robberies on motorways. On 22 November 2002, the National Parliament of Azerbaijan addressed a letter of protest to the Chairman of the Georgian Parliament, Nino Burjanadze, regarding the problem of criminal attacks on Azeri citizens of Georgia. From the viewpoint of the Azerbaijani deputies criminal actions against Azeris are ethnically motivated. In any case, Azerbaijani Diaspora is an important factor that will be used by Baku to its advantage. Besides, Heydar Aliyev's presidency has acknowledged the Azerbaijani unity all over the world as one of its strategic foreign policy goals.

34 See "Facts on Discrimination of Georgia's Azeris Became More Frequent: NAAG" [in Russian], *Regnum*, 19 January 2009, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1112073.html>; "Georgia Must Be a Confederation: NAAG" [in Russian], *Regnum*, 9 February 2009, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1122283.html>.

35 Valery Tishkov, ed., *Migrations and New Diasporas in the Post-Soviet States* [in Russian] (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, 1996), 154.

CHAPTER 8

AZERBAIJAN: THE CHALLENGES POSED BY DIVIDED ETHNIC GROUPS

As far as Azerbaijan is concerned, the “Lezgin” and the “Avarian” questions raise serious concerns. Both Lezgins and Avars (belonging to the Dagestani language group of the Caucasian language family) are “divided” ethnic groups. Lezgins live mainly in the South of Dagestan, as well as in the north-eastern part of Azerbaijan. Although this group was the fourth largest in Azerbaijan before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, after 1989 (when the last population census in the USSR was carried out) the situation changed. Following mass deportations of Armenians and Russians from Azerbaijan, Lezgins became the second largest ethnic group. According to the 1999 population census in Azerbaijan, their number totals 178,000 (thus, making up 2.2% of Azerbaijan’s population which is the largest in the South Caucasus). However, estimations by experts report a different figure (250,000).³⁶

In the cases of Azerbaijan and Dagestan (a republic of Russia), there is no coincidence between ethnic and state borders. Representatives of the same ethnos are divided between different states; they have one ethnic, but various civil-political identities. Hence, the objective conditions that could lead to possible conflicts are there. As opposed to the problem of Abkhazia, Ossetia or Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani – Dagestani issues have not crossed the “red line” and have not turned into clashes. At the same time though, they have forced Moscow and Baku, as well as the republic’s authorities in Makhachkala to find ways to deal with serious challenges. Dagestani representatives solved many thorny questions “on the ground” in the 1990s and continue to do so nowadays by means of forging appropriate approaches without Moscow’s assistance. Meanwhile, many political figures in Azerbaijan relate the nascent debates on the “divided ethnic groups” to peculiarities of the Russian policy towards the Caucasus. The statement by political scientist Vafa Guluzade, former adviser of the Azerbaijani president, is quite indicative of this mindset: “Russia purposely inflates the ‘Lezgin’, ‘Avarian’ and other questions”. Besides, the conference about “the Lezgin problem” organised by the Lezgin national-cultural autonomy in Moscow in late May 2008 provoked an outcry by Azerbaijani mass-media. It was viewed by a number of journalists and influential experts as almost marking the opening of the second anti-Azerbaijani front after Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁷

36 Arif Yunusov, “Ethno-conflicts and Migration Processes in the South Caucasus” [in Russian], *New Eurasia: Russia and Near Abroad Countries*, no. 13 (Moscow: Russia’s Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002), 76-78; Yunusov, “Ethno-demographic Processes in the South Caucasus”, 270-271; Yunusov, *Azerbaijan in the Early 21st Century*, 154-155.

37 See “Guluzade: Russia Blackmails Azerbaijan Using the National Question” [in Russian], *Caucasian Knot*, 19 June 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1223687.html>.

In the early 1990s, the activity of the Lezgin movement in Baku was quite often associated with the Armenian special services. The first ethnic parties were founded in Azerbaijan in 1992-93 (the Talysh People's Party, the Kurdish Party of Equality, and the Lezgin Party of Azerbaijan). Among the leaders of the Lezgin movement the question of the unification of their ethnic areas that were divided by new state borders was brought up. The idea of a unified Lezgistan was also being discussed. The thesis that in the beginning of the 19th century Lezgins had not joined Azerbaijan but instead had directly become part of the Russian empire – which leaders of the Lezgin movement perceived as the predecessor of the modern Russian state – was very popular. "Lezgin extremists" were accused of an act of terrorism committed in Baku's underground in 1994 (12 persons were arrested and convicted in spring 1996). However, in the mid 1990s the "Lezgin question" lost its former topicality. According to many leaders of the movement, the idea of a united Lezgistan was "indefinitely put on hold". Then, an article bearing the telling title "Does Sadval deny territorial claims to Azerbaijan?" was published by the influential Baku newspaper *Mirror* (Zerkalo).³⁸ However, the question mark at the end of this title reveals that even today – 14 years after the Baku act of terrorism – any attempts to initiate a public debate on the Lezgin ethnic problems (even inside the Russian Federation) are perceived as attempts to revive the early 1990s.

The number of Avars living in Azerbaijan is not as great as the number of Lezgins; however, many inter-ethnic problems facing them are equally topical. This can be probably ascribed to the role which Avars have played inside Dagestan (home to the largest Avar population, while influential Avar representatives can also be found elsewhere in Russia). And although Mukhu Aliiev, the president of Dagestan, emphasises the need to adhere by all means to the ideas of interethnic peace and unity within the republic, it is not possible to turn a blind eye to his ethnic origin (he is an Avar). On the eve of Aliiev's visit to Baku on 18 June 2008, the Executive Committee of the Avar National Council addressed to him a special appeal.³⁹ The main claims included in the appeal centred on the conditions and status of Avars living in the Belokan, Zakataly and Kakh districts of Azerbaijan. At the top of the list featured the policy of "Azerbaijanisation" involving the renaming of Avar place names, the active migration of Azeris (in particular, refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh and the neighbouring areas), and the lack of equal civil and human rights protection. The Avar National Council especially pointed out that Makhachkala has not been actively involved in the protection of Dagestanis living in Azerbaijan.

However, Dagestani authorities (in this case specific personalities matter less than institutions) have limited powers to see to the complaints concerning discrimination against Dagestanis living in Azerbaijan. First of all, such problems fall under the jurisdiction of the Russian federal state. Second, public debate on such thorny issues can cause undesirable excesses inside

38 Yunusov, *Azerbaijan in the Early 21st Century*, 154-155.

39 See "Avars of Azerbaijan Ask President of Dagestan to Defend them from the 'Azerbaijanization'" [in Russian], *Caucasian Knot*, 18 June 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1223420.html>.

Dagestan itself. All in all, such course of action would not contribute to the improvement of the situation in the Big Caucasus as a whole. At the same time, though, it is impossible to brush off considerations arising from existing issues. A matter of the utmost importance is how well ethnic minorities can be integrated into the political and economic fabric of Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation (Republic of Dagestan). However, confidential meetings and negotiations are held for the purpose of discussing thoroughly these problems. Today, both the Dagestani (as well as the Russian elite as a whole) and Azerbaijani political elites are confronted with a host of shared problems demanding an urgent response. These problems are cross-border criminal activity – which is not affected by ethnic borders – , Islamic radicalism – also appealing to the not ethnically tinted sentiment – , and terrorism. They require effective bilateral cooperation, if they are to be successfully addressed. Effective cooperation on these problems would foster progress on such controversial tasks as the integration of ethnic minorities and help to create a propitious environment for dealing with problems in a pragmatic way avoiding populist tactics. It seems as though a real alternative to such a pragmatic approach to the Russian – Azerbaijan cross-border problems does not exist.

CHAPTER 9

ARMENIA: PROMOTER OF SEPARATISM OR GUARANTOR OF SELF-DETERMINATION?

Ethnic separatism does not pose a threat to Armenia, as it does to Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenia is the single most mono-ethnic country in the South Caucasus and in Eurasia as a whole (all ethnic minorities of Armenia combined make up about 3% of the population). Despite its strategic partnership with Russia, Armenia refused to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nowadays, alongside with Iran, Georgia represents a “window to the world” for Armenia. Almost 75% of Armenia’s foreign trade is conducted with Georgia. This explains Yerevan’s extremely cautious position-taking during and after the “five day war”. At the same time, though, Yerevan acts as the political patron of the separatist unrecognised Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Nagorno-Karabakh is not a side to the negotiations in the Armenian – Azerbaijani settlement; instead, its positions are represented by the Armenian diplomacy. However, this entity is very different from other de facto states on the territory of the CIS. Its leaders have never aspired to closer military and political cooperation with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria and have desisted from participating in the forums of the “parallel CIS”: Nagorno-Karabakh is not a member of the Community for Democracy and Peoples’ Rights (group informally known as the CIS-2 or Anti-GUAM, created in Sukhumi, 14 June 2006).⁴⁰ Karabakh has only observer status. Presidents and diplomats of Karabakh have preferred to consider their struggle for self-determination in a European context – together with Kosovo and Northern Cyprus – rather than in the post-Soviet one, differentiating their case from the cases of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. The foreign policy of Nagorno-Karabakh as opposed to that of other de facto states in Eurasia is diversified. This unrecognised republic has representations in the US, France, Australia, and in the Middle East. It is the only entity among similar CIS entities that receives funding from the US Congress. For its part, the Kremlin, which is interested in a partnership with Baku, never considered the “Kosovo precedent” to be applicable to Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, Moscow has not taken any steps towards granting Nagorno-Karabakh a special status that would allow it to participate in the Armenia – Azerbaijan negotiations. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue has been considered by Moscow exclusively in the context of conflict resolution.

All efforts by the Kremlin regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, directed at demonstrating readiness not only to “impose peace” but also to resolve conflicts, have raised a multitude of questions among pundits and the political elite in Armenia. Is Russia considering “exchanging”

40 See The Community for Democracy and Peoples’ Rights [in Russian], http://www.community-dpr.org/about_country/index.php.

Karabakh for the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia? These fears have also been heightened as a result of Turkey's activity in the Caucasus. At the same time, Russia – Turkey relations have improved against a backdrop of negative dynamics influencing relations between Ankara on the one hand, and the US, the EU on the other. The views voiced in Armenia regarding the intensification of Russia – Azerbaijan relations are very ambivalent. Moscow actively supported the official Azerbaijani authorities during the Presidential campaign held in October 2008, thus contributing to the international legitimisation of Ilham Aliyev's power. Many political figures and analysts in Yerevan (whose opinions may also be irrational or exaggerated) consider the "silence of Azerbaijan" during the "five day war" a sign of Moscow's agreement to certain concessions that will benefit Baku in the framework of the conflict resolution process in Nagorno-Karabakh. In any case, today, Yerevan views the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of the Armenian community's pursuit of ethno-political self-determination in the disputed region, which should be protected.

CHAPTER 10

THE RUSSIAN CAUCASUS: HAS A NEW SEPARATIST CHALLENGE EMERGED?

The challenge of ethnic separatism in the Russian Caucasus is a particularly topical issue. Russia itself has suffered the experience of struggle against separatism and regional particularism. The landmarks of this struggle have been the two military campaigns in Chechnya (1994-96 and 1999-2000) and the Ossetian – Ingush conflict of 1992, which has not been fully settled yet. The existence of the de facto state of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (six years in total), and a “special Islamic territory” in three Dagestani villages during 1998-99 put into question the political and military presence of the Russian Federation in the Northern Caucasus. Over the past two decades, Russia also had to address such challenges, as the legislative “isolation” of Adygeya (where in the early 1990s a specific period of residence and the obligatory knowledge of the Adygeyan language were introduced as qualifying criteria for eligibility for head of the republic), the attempts to divide Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia along ethnic lines, and the exodus of the Russian population from the entire North Caucasian territory. In this context, it is reasonable to fear that the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia could cause a “domino effect” inside Russia. For example, the present instability in Ingushetia or Dagestan must not be viewed as a manifestation of separatism. Not every explosion, kidnapping, act of sabotage, or simply a protest against the authorities is an indication of separatism. Political violence is not the “prerogative” of ethno-nationalist ideologies, which use it to achieve their goals; above all, it is imperative to identify those forces, people and ideas which lie behind instances of political violence in the republics of the North Caucasus.

The lack of powerful centres of ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus is no ground for complacency. Islamic religious radicalism (especially when on the rise) is not a less dangerous challenge, but it creates a qualitatively different set of problems. Moreover, the existence of separatist ideas in the country is not a synonym of wars or conflicts. In the early and mid 1990s, apart from Chechen separatism other ethno-nationalist movements in the North Caucasus were also brandishing the idea of “self-determination up to secession”. At the same time, the Caucasian separatists put forward projects of secession not only from Russia, but also from the republics in which representatives of the given ethnic groups were included. There were irredentist projects as well (for example, creation of a unified Lezgistan on the territories of Azerbaijan and Russian Dagestan). For instance, in Dagestan, the largest North Caucasian republic, the Party of Independence and Revival of Dagestan was active in the early 1990s. However, it did not play any substantial role in the Dagestani political life, while the main political motto of the Republic became some time

later the words of Rasul Gamzatov: "Dagestan did not become a part of Russia voluntarily and it will not secede from Russia voluntarily either."⁴¹

In Karachay-Cherkessia, in 1991 alone, five entities proclaimed themselves (including two Cossack ones)! In Kabardino-Balkaria, in 1991-92 and 1996, an intensive process of division of the republic along ethnic lines was undertaken (with appropriate polls, the organisation of a referendum and "land delimitation"). The Confederation of the Caucasus Highland Peoples was also actively promoting the idea of a "Common Caucasian Home" (naturally, without Russian input).

Thus, Chechnya was simply the most remarkable example of ethnic separatism. The other separatist and irredentist projects have not developed into open confrontations. As Charles King, professor at Georgetown University and author of *The Ghost of Freedom* – a study on the ethno-political development of the Caucasus – correctly put it, with Putin's coming to power the autonomous and separatist intentions in the region fell silent.⁴² Some clarifications ought, though, to be made: the "silence" King refers to came about not thanks or not only thanks to Putin's will and the political system built by him. The point is that ethnic nationalism suffered a historic defeat (occasioned by a set of objective conditions). It is possible that this defeat proves temporary. Especially, if the federal centre does not pursue a qualitative policy, some "reversal movements" are plausible. But, today's reality is that radical protest movements, aimed against the central Russian or republican power, prefer to use Islamist instead of ethno-national (or separatist) language. Even the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was dissolved by the so called president Doku Umarov, who declared the Caucasian Emirate.

The popularity of ethnic nationalism reached its peak in the beginning – first half of the 1990s. The rise of ethnic nationalism in the early 1990s was fuelled not only by the "weakness of the state", but also by objective circumstances. First, the disintegration of any imperial state is accompanied and accelerated by a quest for the "roots" of the constituent parts that will lead to a new identity being forged. Second, for 70 years the republics of the North Caucasus within the Russian federation had been part of the Soviet state, which, on the one hand, pursued a policy of state atheism, and on the other hand, promoted the legal institutionalisation of ethnicity. Religiousness was prohibited, while ethnicity was cultivated. In the beginning of the 1990s, there were simply no skilful preachers of "pure Islam" in the region. This is why in the early 1990s the movement of Islamic "radicals" emerged in the North Caucasus, in an effort to combine religious rhetoric with ethnic nationalism.

However, with the course of time the popularity of ethnic nationalism and ethnic separatism started to falter and then to decline. First of all, it is necessary to point out that because of the marked

41 Alexander Belai and Gamzayev Khaji-Magomed, "Dagestan Is not Separable from Russia: A Conversation with the Representative of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan on the Recent Military Events" [in Russian], *Moskovskiy Zhurnal*, 1 November 1999.

42 Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

ethnic diversity in the North Caucasus, the persistent ethno-nationalism (and separatism as its ultimate phase) is fraught with conflicts. Many such conflicts broke out in the 1990s: the Ossetian – Ingush and Russian – Chechen conflicts are just the most violent ones, and therefore, the most salient ones. Ethnic nationalism failed to solve a number of urgent problems faced by the ethnic elites (in particular, it did not fulfil their hopes of territorial rehabilitation). The ethnic elites which then came to power also engaged in the privatisation of political power and property, brushing aside their pledges to the representatives of “their people”. The popularity of ethnic nationalism and separatism has also waned because of the failure of the “Ichkeria” state experiment. The latter should not be put down to the Russian military intervention (although this move forced many to weigh the costs of secession). They failed to build up an effective state in the de facto independent Chechnya (at least comparable with Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh). What’s more, Ichkeria under Dudaev and Maskhadov acted very aggressively towards its neighbour republics. It created among them the image of Russian State, if evil, but less than that compared with “free Ichkeria.”

At the same time in the mid 1990s, a radical Islamist environment was being shaped in the North Caucasus, in which a new project was developed for the region. The “Pure Islam” project for the Caucasus was different from the Soviet experience, failed processes of democratisation, or ethnic nationalism. It did not emerge as a result of the interference of external forces (Saudis, Pakistanis or “Washington Obkoms”), but was fostered above all by the internal environment.

This project gained massive popularity not because of the illiteracy of the local population or their alleged native “provincialism”. The radical Islamists invoked a world religion (freed from local “distortions” and traditions), and universal values (beyond ethnic groups, wirts, tarikats, clans).⁴³ It was accentuated to egalitarianism, the fight against corruption and social injustice. The ideologists of “pure Islam” also skilfully used psychological methods of influence (appealing to disenchanted sections of the young population who were deprived of opportunities for career growth or receiving quality education). And all those things were shaped in the conditions of the lacking any exact social, economic, political development of the North Caucasus.

As a result, radical Islam started to spread not only across the eastern part of the region, i.e. Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, but also across its western part, where the religiousness of the population had traditionally been less strong. The tragic events that took place in the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria on 13 October 2005 were a product of this development. It is also necessary to note that those who consider themselves defenders of “pure Islam” do not constitute such a homogeneous group as it might be expected. Among them there are people who have committed crimes; others consider “pure Islam” a fashion, or affection. Some people have been disoriented or have just lost their path. At any rate, it might be a big political mistake to dismiss them all under the blanket characterisation

43 *Tarikat*, the Turkish word for Persian *tarigah* or Arabic *tariqah*, means “way, path, method” and refers to an Islamic religious order in Sufism; it is conceptually related to “truth”, the ineffable ideal that is the pursuit of the tradition. Wirts are religious communities inside tarikats (different in size and in ritual practice).

as “enemies of Russia.” It is necessary to keep in mind that every world religion adapts itself to local conditions. And if the famous Imam Shamil spread by force the Tarikat Islam in Dagestan and Chechnya in the 19th century, this precise form of Islam is now actually considered “traditional Islam” in the eastern part of the Caucasus. It should be noted that this form of Islam, which is supposed to be pro-Russian and loyal to the state, incorporates its own radicals as well.

Most probably, the so called “Wahhabi” form of Islam will undergo a complicated transformation and become more “traditional” and less radical. But it will require colossal work not only on the part of the authorities of the North Caucasian republics, but also on the part of Russia as a whole (authorities, experts, society) to differentiate between terrorists and those who would be ready to pledge political loyalty to the state.

It would also be very wrong to label the whole protest movement in the Northern Caucasus as Islamist. There is also a secular opposition in Ingushetia and Dagestan, and its criticism is rather levelled against the republican authorities. While in Ingushetia the opposition unites people who have very different political backgrounds and views but share a common dislike of the present regional power, in Dagestan the opposition brings together activists of a number of all Russian parties. Although in 2007-08 their might and influence were seriously weakened, they remain active. Moreover, one should also bear in mind the so called intra-apparatus opposition in all the entities of the region. This form of opposition does not use public slogans neither holds open debates, but its role in the administrative decision making should not be underestimated.

Today, therefore, the agenda in the North Caucasus is different. It is not better or worse than it was in the early 1990s; it is different. Today the main challenge to the security of the State is no longer posed by ethnic separatism, but radical Islamism. One should keep in mind that this political movement is fuelled by such shortcomings of both the central and regional Russian authorities as nepotism, lack of openness, incompetence, and unwillingness to hold a dialogue with opponents. However, the situation has not become irreversible. And should the “Russia” project suddenly fail and the USSR’s downfall be repeated, it would not be due to the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but rather to the inability to adequately assess the internal situation and shape quality domestic and confessional policies.

It is also necessary to note that the dynamics of separatist movements are first and foremost determined by the domestic situation and not by factors related to external recognition (or by external forces). In the beginning of the 1990s, the Gagauz movement in Moldova, the Polish one in Lithuania (Shalchininkai District) and the Russian movements both in Latvia and Estonia were very active. But this kind of activity abated when autonomy was awarded to Gagauzia in 1994. As for the Baltic countries, there were no de facto states, ethnic violence and bloody conflicts. The same goes for Kazakhstan. There, powerful separatist activity proved unsuccessful not because of the recognition (or conversely the non-recognition) of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but because of an effective nation-building strategy. Kazakhstan never tried to build its statehood solely for the ethnic Kazakhs.

CHAPTER 11

ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA: NEW POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND TASKS FOR RUSSIA

Recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence by Russia has changed everything, while changing nothing. All the problems that existed before remain unresolved. By taking the responsibility for the former Georgian autonomies upon itself, Moscow also took new risks. In this context, it is extremely important to understand what kind of problems and challenges Moscow will be faced with under the conditions of the new status quo.

First, it is absolutely necessary to do away with the vision which the propagandists who are affiliated with the official authorities actively tried to impose on the Russian society. Its main idea is the following: with recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia Russia will be entering a new stage where the risks to security and stability in the Russian South will be diminished. However, the events of autumn 2008 in South Ossetia and especially in Abkhazia confirmed the famous poetic metaphor "a battle is eternal, and peace is just a dream". A series of murders and explosions in the Gali region of Abkhazia and in Western Georgia bears witness to the fact that if the opposing sides are not ready to compromise, military clashes will take place. The enmity between Tbilisi and its former autonomies most probably will not be limited with the disputes for the Geneva negotiations. This, however, does not at all mean that Russia should renounce the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In general, in our point of view, the issue of the formal recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence has been overestimated both by the supporters of the two partially-recognised republics and their opponents. What has actually changed since 26 August when Dmitry Medvedev issued the presidential decrees? Just like before, Georgia has kept considering Abkhazia and South Ossetia part of its territory (Tbilisi had a secondary interest in their population). Just like before, the Georgian authorities have been ready to conduct sabotage and guerrilla war on the "disputed" territories.

Medvedev's decision was historic, because Moscow changed its role in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian affairs. The Kremlin then simply formalised this change legally (unlike Turkey, which continues calling its soldiers in North Cyprus "peacekeepers"). Russia might as well have changed its role without formal recognition of the former autonomies' independence. The crux of the matter is that the four-year process of "unfreezing" the conflict, initiated by Georgia, pushed Russia towards a revision of its position as a "side that keeps justifying itself". The "five day war" has finally shattered the status quo and turned Russia into a party to the conflict. Russia

transformed from a peacekeeper into a political protector of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and this change of its status has neither good nor bad connotations. It is nothing but endorsement (confirmation) of the fact. Neither Georgia, nor the outside world would have not fully recognized the new realities. Russia, of course, has not found itself in isolation (which would be difficult to imagine, considering its international weight and in general the implications of the global financial and banking crisis). However, when it came to the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia's voice was crying in the wilderness. With all its consequences, as they say. This means that escalations in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian frontlines should have been expected. It is necessary to note that in this situation the choice was not between escalation and peace. The real choice was between the recurrences of the scenario of "The Serbian Krajina – 95" ⁴⁴ in Croatia. Time should presumably work against Georgia, but until the appearance of its own Djindjic or Tadic, Tbilisi will be suffering ethno-political turbulence.

Consequently, Moscow needs to craft an effective policy that will ensure security guarantees (in the broadest context) for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. An alternative course of action will cause frustration among the population of these entities, who sincerely hoped that formal recognition of their independence would entail establishment of peace. For the time being, it has only marked the end of their "Georgian history". Another difficult part is yet to follow: building their own statehood (a task which however will be complicated by the complex political and economic realities), and elaborating an optimal format for Russia's military presence. In the Western expert and political circles opinion on the phantom statehood in Abkhazia and South Ossetia dominates absolutely. It seems as disguising Russia's annexationist aspirations. Therefore, Strobe Talbott's opinion is indicative of the West's perception (as deputy Secretary of State, he was an important figure of the Clinton administration covering CIS issues in 1994-2001). In his mind (presented to the Russian famous newspaper *Vremya novostey*) most of the world perceives the Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence as a result of Russian territorial expansion,⁴⁵ but beyond Western objections it is also possible to identify objective disagreements between Moscow and the partially-recognised entities, which are not publicised, but exist in a latent form.

In South Ossetia, it is a financial contradiction between Moscow's intention to control sharing of resources and the local elite's intention in command finances, allocated from Russia. Another

44 In August 1995, the Croatian army swept into the Serbian Republic Krajina, a small enclave that had been created by local Serbs in 1991. The international community's reaction was flaccid. Before this operation the US provided one-sided technical and intelligence assistance to Croatia. As a result Croatia restored its territorial integrity but hundreds of Serbs were forced to flee.

45 Strobe Talbott, "I Hope the Next US Administration Would Return to the Idea of the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty" [In Russian], interview by Peter Cheremushkin, *Vremya*, 1 November 2008, <http://www.vremya.ru/2008/204/5/216248.html>.

issue is that Moscow and Vladikavkaz will try to “help” Eduard Kokoity by providing staff, while the President of South Ossetia will prefer to rely on “his own” loyal and tested people. Possible disagreements could arise on the unification of the “two Ossetias”: The North Ossetian elite is far from being excited with the prospect of giving up its leadership role to the ambitious “Kudar people” (all Ossetians, who are of South Ossetian origin, and those, who come from inner Georgia, are called “Kudars” in North Ossetia, which academically is not entirely correct).

In South Ossetia, Moscow sticks to its old domestic and foreign political course which consists exclusively in supporting the official leadership. It is obvious that South Ossetia is not Ukraine or an average European country endowed with democratic institutions and procedures, but there are political figures who are dissatisfied with the internal policy. There are also people of South Ossetian origin who were forced to leave the republic and work in North Ossetia or in Moscow. By the way, they do not support Dmitry Sanakoyev or the Georgian choice. We can name among them Oleg Teziyev, former Prime Minister and Minister of Defence (currently, head of “The Civil Initiative”, a North Ossetian foundation) who is an extremely fierce critic of Kokoity. In his opinion, “Kokoity created the system when every person who criticises the Supreme Commander⁴⁶ is accused as almost traitor. The Republic is in the warfare and in this moment somebody undermines its fighting capacity.”⁴⁷ He also considers the role of the South Ossetia’s leader in the “August 2008 events” as overestimated: “People know Tskhinvali was held not on the defense system built by Kokoity but on certain commanders like Barankevich.”⁴⁸ In the beginning of the 1990s, he was one of the founding fathers of South Ossetia’s unrecognised statehood. The incumbent president of South Ossetia is also criticised by Anatoly Barankevich himself. During the “five day war”, he personally set two Georgian tanks on fire.⁴⁹

In Abkhazia the objective contradiction is between the stated goal of creating a “neutral demilitarised democratic republic” and the presence of Russian military bases, especially when considering the prospects of withdrawal of the Black Sea fleet and its land infrastructure from Ukraine after 2017. An important issue – especially for Abkhazia – is the presidential elections and the electoral procedures in general: the political landscape in South Ossetia is more homogeneous while in Abkhazia it is more diverse, allowing thus some pluralism and competition.

46 The Supreme Commander is the President of South Ossetia.

47 See “The Country of Peacekeepers” [in Russian], *Ossetia.ru*, 7 July 2008, <http://www.ossetia.ru/analytics/strana-mirotvorzev>.

48 Anatoly Barankevich worked as Secretary of South Ossetia’s Security Council in 2006–08. See “The Tskhinvali Defenders Were not Pleased with Eduard Kokoity” [in Russian], *Kommersant*, 20 August 2008, <http://www.kommersant.ua/doc.html?docId=1013343>.

49 Anatoliy Barankevich, “No Place for this President in South Ossetia: The Former Secretary of the Republic’s Security Council Speaks about the Conflict with Eduard Kokoity” [in Russian], interview by Olga Allenova, *Kommersant*, 4 December 2008, <http://kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1089120>.

Will Moscow want to repeat the experience of 2004 in Abkhazia? Will it impose the model of “sovereign democracy”, or vice versa, will it not impede those small sprouts of democracy, which are available there now? The answers to these very questions depend not only on the success of the new statehood, but also on the attitude towards Russia. Another urgent problem – which is met both in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia – is the containment of radical “patriots”, who are prepared to keep up the fight against Georgia even if this harms Moscow’s interests.

That is why Moscow should strike a balance between interfering into the internal political processes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and ensuring Russia’s national security in the Big Caucasus. Otherwise, the USSR’s history in Eastern Europe could more or less repeat itself.

CHAPTER 12

THE WEST'S APPROACH TO THE CAUCASUS: CONTRADICTIONS AND DIFFERING VIEWS

The war in South Ossetia demonstrated that the concept of a unified West is not well-grounded. It does make sense to some extent when we look at the relations between NATO or EU member states (or the US and Europe) and Russia, but at the same time it does not reflect the complex reality. The world's leading states, measured by their economic potential and political influence, have diverse approaches towards the Russian Federation. On the basis of socio-economic and socio-political criteria alone, Turkey should not be attached to the West. At the same time, though, military and political parameters point to the opposite, as Turkey is the most important part of the Western world, a NATO member state, and the second biggest army (measured by manpower) among the member states of the Alliance. The "five day war" highlighted the differences between the views of the leading powers of the West (US, NATO, EU), as well as the internal disagreements among the members of each organisation. Evident are the differences in the approaches to the current Caucasian geopolitics among such members of the EU, as France and Lithuania, or such NATO member states, as Turkey and Poland. And even inside "new Europe", the positions of the Czech Republic and Slovakia did not coincide with the Estonian, Latvian or Romanian approaches.

The US, the countries of Old Europe and the EU's new members have no consolidated position: the limits of the West's resources to adequately influence the situation are too obvious. They have not demonstrated enough pragmatism. Instead, their approach has been rather emotional, ridden with ideological and old stereotypes. As Russian political scientist Andrei Ryabov rightly said comparing the political potential of the West in the Balkans and in the Caucasus: unlike its Balkan policies, "the Western community has ideas regarding the South Caucasus, and these ideas are increasing in number, but its resources – diplomatic, political and economic – are apparently insufficient to influence the opinion of the parties to the conflict and to make them agree with the West's view of the problem."⁵⁰ Instead, they have excessive ambitions and inadequate ideas about how we should handle the Caucasus.

For the US, the consistent and unwavering support of Georgia was based on the conceptions of the geopolitical role of the Caucasus in the promotion of the American national interests. For the US the Caucasus is a part (the rear part) of the Greater Middle East project. Thus, it is

50 Andrei Ryabov, "The Conflicts' Division" [in Russian], *Gazeta.Ru*, 23 July 2008, <http://www.gazeta.ru/column/ryabov/2790424.shtml>.

seen as a territory for projecting force, as a geopolitical springboard. At the same time, the South Caucasus is part of the Wider Black Sea, which is already considered part of Europe after Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the EU. For the Europeans, this region does not hold above all military-strategic importance. It is viewed as a fertile ground for the dissemination of European values; thus, in the approach of the EU the emphasis is laid on "soft security". This is the reason why Europeans appear to be more prepared to make compromises and concessions to Moscow and refuse to apply sanctions against Russia striving to understand the motivations of the Russian leadership.

This is why in December 2008 the European Commission drew up a document on the basic directions of the "Eastern Partnership" (EaP) which also covers three states of the Caucasus.⁵¹ For the period 2007-10, Armenia should receive within the framework of this project 98.4 million Euros in financial aid; Azerbaijan 92 million Euros; Georgia 120.4 million Euros (additional funding of up to 500 million Euros will be available for Georgia to help it overcome the consequences of the "five day war"). A special focus within the EaP is placed on the means to overcome the consequences of the "five day war". The EU lays particular emphasis on "energy security" issues. It aims at including chapters concerning energy interdependence in the Association Agreements with the countries of the EaP. Those chapters should enhance the energy security of the partner countries, and also of the EU. The EU firmly supports negotiations on the membership of Ukraine and Moldova in the Energy Community and also conclusion of memoranda of understanding on energy issues with Georgia and Armenia. The EU is going to intensify its political engagement with Azerbaijan as the only partner country exporting hydrocarbon to the EU. The EaP has already been compared to similar agreements that were concluded between the EU and Lithuania and Poland on the eve of the EU's enlargement in 2004. However, there are some nuances and basic differences. The Caucasian countries are not directly invited to join the EU, though their leaders try to interpret "partnership" as a herald of accession to Europe.

NATO as well adopted a much more constructive and careful approach (as compared with the US) towards Russia, although this may seem like a paradox. The recent events demonstrated that NATO should not be identified with the US. All statements by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and spokesperson James Appathurai were made in a much more "politically correct" vein than the statements by representatives of the US State Department. On 16 September, during a visit to Tbilisi, the Secretary General of NATO said that "judging Russia" is not a goal of his organisation.

Meanwhile the Russian propagandist machine ignored the positive messages from NATO [e.g. the NATO, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) resolution, adopted in Valencia on 18 November 2008, on restoration of the military and political cooperation with Russia]. Thus,

51 See Commission of the European Communities, *Eastern Partnership: Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*, COM (2008) 823 final, Brussels, 3 December 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/index_en.htm.

the position of the whole block (far from being pro-Russian, but not as black and white as the US approach) was identified with the views of the US leaders. As a whole, during the summer/autumn of 2008 Russian diplomats and politicians, instead of working on making explicit the differences in the views held by the West, were busy with its excessive “demonisation” and they objectively helped Mikhail Saakashvili by drawing the attention of the European politicians away from the aggressive aspirations of Georgia’s President.

In any case, the multi-faceted “West” (with its various states, blocks and structures) is not ready for a new “Cold War” with Russia. Today, a new “Cold War” is impossible and this is yet another outcome of the crisis in August 2008. If Moscow’s “special interests” in the South Caucasus (which are primarily driven by security problems in Southern Russia) had been recognised, Russia would have put a curb on its anti-Westernism. There are no ideological disagreements between Russia and the “West”, Moscow has not exported socialism to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and has not defended anybody’s dynastic interests there. There is, of course, a conflict of interests, as well as substantial misinterpretation in their understanding; some stereotypes and phobias of the past still hold sway, but there are much more serious challenges – the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the challenge posed by Iran and North Korea, energy, international terrorism – requiring joint efforts and mutual engagement if they are to be successfully addressed. All this raises some faint, but nevertheless real, hopes that in the near future efforts will be made to establish a set of common rules of world order.

CHAPTER 13

TURKEY'S "REDISCOVERY" OF THE CAUCASUS

The "five day war" has increased Turkey's role in the Caucasus. Ankara came across as a possible arbitrator and mediator for the settlement of the conflicts in the region, which raised, especially in Armenia, the spectre of a revival of the "Ottoman Empire". On the fourth day of the conflict in South Ossetia, on 11 August 2008, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, declared the necessity of a "Caucasus Alliance", which would ensure regional security. Two days later, on 13 August 2008, Erdogan visited Moscow, where he had a meeting with the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. On that occasion, the idea on the necessity of a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" was voiced, which according to Erdogan should bring together five states (the Russian Federation, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey). It is noteworthy that despite the confrontational relations between Russia and Georgia, and the ongoing Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict, four Caucasus states have approved the Turkish initiative. The "Caucasus Platform", alongside such projects as the "New European Neighbourhood Policy", the "Black Sea Synergy" and the "Greater Middle East", aims at providing a conceptual framework that will serve the purpose of region-building. Almost at the same time, the historic visit of Turkish President Abdullah Gül to Yerevan marked the beginning of an Armenia – Turkey interstate dialogue.

Unlike the US and the EU member states, Turkey is not a "freshman" in the "big game" taking place in the Caucasus. In the 16th-18th centuries, the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor of the Turkish Republic, fought over domination in the Caucasus with Persia, and later with the Russian Empire. The great area of the South Caucasus used to belong to the Ottoman Empire or was moving in its military-political orbit over various time periods in the past. Nowadays, Turkey features among the 20 biggest economies worldwide, while being one of the most economically advanced countries in the Islamic world. However, naming Turkey Islamic does not do justice to Kemalist secularism. The secular character of the state was set by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a basic premise for the formation of the Turkish Republic and is now guarded by the national army. This army is the second biggest in NATO (after the US army) measured by manpower and quantity of military hardware. Most of the Turkish military hardware (especially in the infantry) is outdated and does not meet contemporary requirements. At the same time, the army is highly qualified in combat training and has significant fighting experience obtained through long-running battles with Kurdish insurgents. What matters most is that the army is held in very high esteem by the society and that it plays an extremely important role both in domestic and foreign affairs.

While the geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus was still defined by the old status quo (existing before the "five day war"), Turkish penetration in the region was out of the question. Today, Ankara is interested in actively taking part in the creation of a new security paradigm in the

Big Caucasus. Having declared European integration as one of its strategic goals, Turkey under Erdogan also tries to come across as an “outpost of the EU”⁵²

Today, the cooling on the one hand of US – Turkey relations as a result of the war in Iraq and of their divergent approaches to the Kurdish question, and on the other hand of EU – Turkey relations (due to the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU and delays to Turkey’s accession process) objectively facilitates a rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara. Russia and Turkey share similar views on issues of the Black Sea region. Both states are interested in minimising the presence of extra-regional actors in the Black Sea region. During his visit to Moscow in August 2008, Erdogan stated that “now, Russia is Turkey’s number one foreign trade partner, and, hence, it matters immensely to us”⁵³ However, it is not wise to idealise the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey. The fact that yesterday’s contenders (both the Russian and the Ottoman Empires survived 11 wars in 44 years) hold common views on many issues is certainly encouraging. At the same time, it is impossible to turn a blind eye to Ankara’s fears of a unilateral and unbalanced expansion of Moscow’s power. Such fears have dictated Turkey’s actions for the promotion of a “Caucasus Platform”. Ankara would like to counterbalance Moscow’s successes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (possibly through different regional projects, in which they would participate). In any case, it is important to acknowledge that in the summer of 2008, Turkey initiated a qualitative “rediscovery” of the Caucasus.

52 European bureaucrats were not very effective in their undertakings; therefore, they saw benefits in Ankara’s peacemaking initiatives which they supported under the banner of a “united Europe” and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) principles.

53 See “On the Working Visit of R. T. Erdogan in Russia” [in Russian], <http://www.turkey.mid.ru/hron/hronika171.html>.

CHAPTER 14

IRANIAN INTEREST

The Turkish initiative for the creation of a “Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform” did not include Iran in the project. Nevertheless, it triggered significant interest in Tehran. The Islamic Republic responded to Ankara’s initiative by proposing its own one. Iranian diplomat Kamal Zareh noted that the non-participation of Tehran in the “Caucasus Platform” makes it “inadequate”. According to Zareh, the participation of an actor like Iran will allow the project to realise its full potential. Iran proposed its own “Stability Platform” including the three republics of the South Caucasus, as well as Russia, Iran and Turkey.⁵⁴ During a visit to Baku on 13 September 2008, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manucher Mottaki, discussed Ankara’s initiative with Azerbaijani counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov. Armenia – for which Iran is a window to the external world given its blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan – is interested in Iran’s active participation in the project (as a counterbalance to Turkey). On 17 September 2008, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Edward Nalbandyan, visited Tehran where he discussed the Turkish initiative. According to Stepan Safaryan, member of the Armenian National Parliament and political analyst, “Iranian diplomats and scholars consider that if Turkey is to play such an active role in the Caucasus, Iran has much stronger reasons to do so.”⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Iran shares a 660 km long border with Armenia and Azerbaijan. By way of comparison, Turkish – Armenian border is 325 km, the Turkish – Azerbaijani border is 18 km, the Turkish – Georgian 276 (together, they make almost 620 km). Iran also has an output on Nagorno-Karabakh, de facto state of the South Caucasus. Today, the focus of attention of politicians and experts from all over the world is on Iran. The nuclear programme of Iran, alongside Kosovo, the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and energy security, has risen to the top of the international political agenda. The 2006 Israel – Lebanon war demonstrated the increased potential of Iran as an actor in the Middle East “big game”. Iran’s military-political success (the first defeat of Israel since its foundation) brought home to the whole world Tehran’s skills and abilities to strike its main geopolitical opponents by waging a successful “proxy war”.

In this context, such an issue as Iran’s “Caucasian strategy” is perceived rather indifferently. The long-standing US – Iran confrontation has also manifested itself in the South Caucasus. The post-Soviet Azerbaijani elite is oriented towards Turkey (a traditional partner of the US and Israel) and the US. Here, the political influence on Iran is not so great. Moreover, throughout the past

54 See “Iranian Foreign Minister to Arrive in Baku”, *Trend News*, 13 September 2008, <http://news.trend.az/print.shtml?newsid=1293699&lang=EN>.

55 See “The ‘South Caucasus Platform’ without Iran is not Profitable to Armenia – Experts Consider” [in Russian], *Caucasian knot*, 21 September 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/141900>.

17 years, Azerbaijan – Iran relations have been fraught with high conflict potential. Azerbaijani leaders have regularly criticised Iran for supporting the radical Islamist forces inside Azerbaijan and for fomenting attempts to overthrow the secular model of power. The question of Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan is another sore point in their mutual relations. Today, 25 to 35 million ethnic Azeris (according to different sources) live on Iranian territory. They make up almost a third of Iran's population. Since the foundation of independent Azerbaijan, its official ideology and historiography have been dominated by the view that Azerbaijan's united historical territory was artificially divided in two parts by the great Empires. Thus, Azeris consider themselves a nation "divided" between Iranian Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani Republic.

In recent years, the escalation of the US – Iran confrontation forced Baku to adopt a more weighed and reasonable approach towards Tehran. In November 2004, following a decade of inconclusive negotiations a General Consulate of Azerbaijan was allowed to open in Tabriz. In January 2005, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Tehran. As a result, arrangements were made on a simplified set of rules for border crossing. In 2006, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad paid an official visit to Baku. On the other hand, the Armenia – Iran bilateral relations have developed more successfully during the post-Soviet period. On the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Islamic republic has kept equal distances and has advocated a political resolution of the conflict. Iran played a significant role as a mediator for the settlement of the Armenia – Azerbaijan confrontation in 1992-94. Given the country's blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, Iran constitutes for Armenia a corridor to the external world. Thus, the Iranian mass media diffused the news on the destruction of Armenian medieval monuments on the territory of the Azerbaijani exclave Nakhichevan (Old Julfa) in late 2005.

As for the Russian North Caucasus, Tehran emphasises in every possible way that the religious radicalism – which is rife there – is ideologically connected with Wahhabism (Salafism) and not with the Shia Islam, officially supported by Iran. In the Islamic world, Iran is viewed as the religious and political opponent of "Salafist" Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the radical Islamic groups that are financed by Iran worldwide (Hezbollah, for example) perceive the Chechen Republic and Dagestan as fighting on the same side in the "Jihad". Religious extremists from these republics are represented as "fighters for pure Islam". This fact further besets the problematic strategic cooperation between Tehran and Moscow. In any case, Iran is an important actor in the Big Caucasus and its interests need to be taken into consideration by all countries and international organisations. Most probably, Tehran will not manage to successfully lobby on its own for the alternative Caucasus project. In any event, it is not possible to brush off the opinions of such a neighbour as Iran. The events of August 2008 in the South Caucasus have raised a lot of important questions not only on regional safety, but also on world politics.

CONCLUSIONS

CRISIS IN THE CAUCASUS: INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

The “five day war” marked the conclusion of another process, which unfolded in a global, rather than just Eurasian framework. It demonstrated the impossibility of an impartial, and most importantly, effective and legitimate international arbitration. This is simply a consequence of the deep crisis of international law and, more precisely, its Yalta-Potsdam model. At the same time, it is a consequence of the failure of the unipolar world which was established in the late 1980s after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Most experts and politicians identified a crisis of international law right after the end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany, as well as the collapse of the USSR and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). However, the events that took place in 1989-91 marked only the “beginning of the end”. With recognition of Kosovo and Russia’s response in the form of recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Yalta-Potsdam model of international law ceased to exist as a legitimate and universally recognised set of norms. Recognition of Kosovo’s independence in the beginning of 2008 became a demonstration of power in a unipolar world. The US unilaterally declared the former Serbian autonomy “a unique case of ethno-political self-determination” and initiated its formal and legal legitimisation.

However, on 26 August, in response to the challenge posed by Washington and its allies, Moscow broke the “monopoly of recognition”. Now, the individual centres of power, short of a common approach or common criteria, go on to recognise (or not) any entity they want. In February 2008, a number of UN member states, among which three permanent members of the UN Security Council, recognised the independence of the former Serbian autonomy. Then, in August 2008, Russia, another permanent member of the UN Security Council, as well as member of the “nuclear club”, recognised the sovereignty of Georgia’s former autonomies. At the same time, Russia conspicuously refuses to recognise Kosovo, while even after August 2008 the US and the EU member states are not willing to give up the principle of Georgia’s “territorial integrity”.

Thus, common rules, standards and criteria do not work. Instead, world policy is forged on the basis of political expediency. Naturally, this was initiated some time ago. In 1991, Croatia, Slovenia, and the USSR republics were recognised in violation of the principle of territorial integrity; meanwhile the “unity” of the former SFRY republics was decided to form the basis of the 1995 Dayton Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The principle of the “indivisibility” of the former Yugoslav republics started to break down in 1991 culminating in the recognition of Kosovo’s independence in February 2008. In August 2008, Russia, following the example set by the US and the EU half a year earlier, proclaimed itself a new centre of power in the world, entitled to recognise on its own any states it wanted. The “five day war” highlighted the ongoing process of demolition of the post-Second World War model of world structure: today, the organisation of the UN is formally functioning, but the international law is referred to by

both – the US and Russia. However, in reality, it has turned into the mixture of controversial theses and appeals, “double standards” applied by both Washington and Moscow. Thus, the main actors of world politics are faced with the problem of devising a new model of world order. In a vacuum of a new model, the alternative will be the creation of “international jungles” and the assertive demonstration of force. The fact that other actors besides Russia are taking such steps is a matter of great concern.

In this connection, Moscow has the opportunity to intensify the process of elaborating the fundamentals of the new European and global security architecture. From the viewpoint of the Russian diplomacy, the August 2008 events were a consequence of the failed realisation of the “unipolar world” model which emerged from the Yalta and Potsdam ashes and ensured domination of only one world power – the US, while ignoring other “centres of power”.

On 8 October 2008, speaking at the international forum in Evian, France, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev put forward his vision of the new security architecture in Europe and the world as a whole. He reiterated that “the former security system has become obsolete and ineffective. The current agreements are not reflecting the changes in the real global situation. Developments in Iraq, Kosovo, the Caucasus and Afghanistan clearly show this”. In Medvedev’s opinion the current situation represents an acute phase of the continuing crisis of the entire Euro-Atlantic policy brought about by the “unipolar syndrome”. At the same time he stressed on the need to find a way out of this crisis together with the West. Medvedev also advocated the necessity of concluding a new European Security Treaty. He singled out five key points of that treaty:

- i) respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of states;
- ii) inadmissibility of the use of force;
- iii) reasonable limits on military build-up;
- iv) no exclusive rights to any European state or international organization for maintaining peace and stability in Europe;
- v) equal guarantees of security for all.

He said any new security arrangements should be based on “pure” national interests, not skewed by ideological motives, while organisations operating in the Euro-Atlantic region should also have the opportunity to join.⁵⁶ This idea was then reiterated in the President’s first address to the Federal Assembly of Russia on 5 November 2008.⁵⁷

56 See “Russian President to Promote New Security Treaty for Europe”, *RIA Novosti*, 7 October 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20081007/117507229.html>.

57 President of Russia, “Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” Moscow, 5 November 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/11/05/2144_type70029type82917type127286_208836.shtml.

The new initiatives of Moscow have given rise to different views and comments. Much in them seems to be inconsistent with Kremlin's actions (the thesis on the necessity of supporting the territorial integrity of the states is at odds with the unilateral recognition of the independence of the two former Georgian autonomies). However, sincere zest runs through Dmitry Medvedev's initiatives. Unilateral actions – whether it is the recognition of Kosovo, or Abkhazia and South Ossetia – pose a threat to the stability of specific regions (the Balkans or the Caucasus) and of Europe as a whole, as well as to global security. Hence, it is imperative to promote effective cooperation, and therefore establish common criteria, standards and general approaches for the assessment of the various national interests and aspirations. In any case, we have got an entirely new Caucasus region.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX I

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ANNEX II

ABBREVIATIONS

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Clashes over borders and identities within the independent post-Soviet states of the Caucasus have been an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their subsequent development and the prospects for resolution or resumption of the ethno-political conflicts have been shaped by the political trajectories of the states involved as well as the profound transformation of the geopolitical dynamics that have taken place during the last years in the region. The war of August 2008 between the Russian Federation and Georgia marked this ongoing process of the decomposition of the post-World War II global construct while sending, at the same time, a strong signal to regional and extra-regional actors concerning the security processes affecting stability in the Caucasus.

Sergey Markedonov, a prescient analyst of the Caucasus, assesses in this *Xenophon Paper* the possible implications of the August 2008 “five day war”. He initiates a discussion on the region’s “unfreezing of the conflicts” and provides an in-depth description of the existent non-recognised state entities and the other ethno-political conflicts with which the Caucasus is ridden. The author also explores the perspectives of major regional and extra-regional stakeholders in the area and the ambitious policies they deploy at the moment. In the twilight zone between war and peace, the author sheds some light on the most recent developments taking place in the Caucasus region, by explaining both the dynamics leading up to the “five day war” and the significance that it has in the re-shaping of the political and security realities in the “Big Caucasus”.